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THE MERV OASIS

VOL. II.

THE MERV OASIS

TRAVELS AND ADVENTURES EAST OF THE CASPIAN

DURING THE YEARS 1879-80-81

INCLUDING

FIVE MONTHS' RESIDENCE AMONG THE TEKKÉS OF MERV

BY

EDMOND O'DONOVAN

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT OF THE 'DAILY NEWS'

With Portrait, Maps, and Facsimiles of State Documents

IN TWO VOLUMES

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I HAD come to Meshed chiefly to recover my health after the severe attack I had in Kuchan, but I found my stay prolonged much beyond my original intentions by the action of the Persian Government. Either from fear of being held responsible in case of any accident happening to me, or out of complaisance towards the Russians, who naturally disliked any independent observation of their movements, the authorities threw every obstacle in the way of my intended departure for the seat of hostilities. Immediately on my arrival, the chamberlain of the Prince Governor called on me and conveyed to me an order to proceed at once either to Shahrood or Seistan, the latter being

far to the south even of Herat. I indignantly refused; whereupon a guard was placed over my house to prevent my setting out in any other direction. I wrote at once to Teheran to remonstrate against such treatment, and after considerable delay I succeeded, through the action of the British Minister, in getting the order revoked. No sooner was this done, however, than the principal Minister, Hussein Khan, was removed from office, and the Governor of Meshed declined to give me a passport for the frontier without receiving instructions from the new minister. This involved a fortnight's delay, with, however, an odd prohibition, namely, that I was *not* to be allowed to go to Seistan. Having no intention of visiting that locality, I made no objection to the limitation; nor, indeed, was I in a hurry to leave Meshed. I found it a very convenient place for gathering information respecting General Skobeleff's movements in the Turcoman country; and, besides, I needed rest after my illness. In spite of the continuous raids along the borders, Turcomans both of Merv and of Akhal Tekké came and went freely to and from Meshed. They sold their skins and carpets, and purchased tea and sugar in the bazaar, like any other strangers. The Merv traders usually came in caravans to guard against the danger to their merchandise from their wilder kinsmen of the desert, but the Akhal Tekkés made the journey in threes and fours. I learned that, with the exception of sending some volunteers to aid the defenders of Geok Tepé against Skobeleff, the tribes of Merv were but little concerned by the danger threatening their neighbours. They were too far from the scene of hostilities to dread any immediate danger; and so they lived much in their usual fashion, with occasional cattle-lifting among themselves as a matter of course, and having every now and then a brush with the still wilder tribes to the west and south of their own territory. I was inclined to

pay them a visit such as I afterwards made; but a Merv merchant, with whom I proposed to travel, strongly objected, on the ground that my presence might attract the attention of some of the more lawless tribes, and cause an attack on his caravan.

From Shahrood I had already opened communications with Makdum Kuli Khan, the head chief of the Akhal Tekké and commander at Geok Tepé. He was much inclined to set me down as a Russian spy, as my character as a newspaper correspondent was a little beyond his comprehension, and I had taken care to repudiate all diplomatic character. A moullah, whom I got to write to the chief, mixed matters up by describing me as a major-general, and thus excited his suspicions. However, Abass Khan, the British agent in Meshed, having vouched for my nationality, the chief finally consented to meet me at Askabad, where he would judge, after a personal inspection, of the propriety of letting me advance any further. All these negotiations consumed time; but I gathered enough information to convince me that active operations would hardly be attempted before the close of the year (1880) by Skobeleff's forces. The bulk of the fighting men of the Akhal Tekkés were concentrated at their fortress; but so little fear had they of an immediate attack that parties of them occasionally relieved the monotony by forays on Persian territory. The Shah's Government had some time previously been in negotiation with the Merv chiefs. He offered to pay them a subsidy for the suppression of brigandage on the frontier if the Merv people would send fifty heads of families to reside in Persian territory as hostages. These conditions the Merv embassy declined to accept, and brigandage went on pretty much as usual.

During my stay I had an interview with an envoy of Makdum Kuli Khan, who came into Meshed with a message.

He supposed I was a political agent, and ran into a long list of the wants of his compatriots. He said that if they had guns, even old-fashioned muzzle-loaders, they would have no fear of the Russians. As it was, not one in six possessed a gun, though nearly all had sabres. Indeed since the repulse of the Russian attack in the previous year fire-arms had been more plentiful among the Tekkés than ever before. This seems to be borne out by the statement of Russian officers present at that attack who spoke of the troops in the Tekké sortie being in great part armed with swords and clubs. For the rest, my informant said his countrymen were resolved to struggle to the last rather than submit to Russian domination. They had seen the Turcoman khanates one after the other practically deprived of their independence, and their own immediate brethren, the Western tribes of the coast and intermediate plain, become Russian subjects, and now even arrayed in arms against themselves. Russia assailed them; the Persian Government refused to accept them as subjects or tributaries, or give them any protection; their friends the Osmanlis were powerless to help them; neither could the Afghans give them any aid. It seemed quite natural to him that in the order of things the protection and suzerainty of the nomads should revert to the British Empire. By the British Empire he meant the Indian Government. Of England itself or any other of its possessions he had not the slightest idea. He spoke of the Government as the 'Coompani,' his information on political subjects with regard to India not coming down to the present day.

He was sorely puzzled when I pointed in the direction of England. He could not understand how it could be in two diametrically opposite directions at the same time. He laid great stress on the point that, should the Tekkés be subdued, one day or other they would find themselves sup-

plying soldiers to the Russian army for the invasion of Afghanistan, and subsequently India. He pointed out that while his nation remained independent, it would be impossible for Russian troops to advance in the direction of Herat. In view of all this he said he could not understand the apathy displayed by Englishmen in not coming to the aid of the Tekkés. 'But,' I said, 'what could they possibly do for you, even if they were inclined to come to your aid?' 'They might,' he answered, 'send us some of those very large cannon I hear they can make.' He seemed to have an idea, which for a person who must have had a considerable experience of practical warfare was rather stupid, that a couple of very large guns mounted on Geok Tepé would be quite sufficient to blow the Russians from Beurma into the Caspian. When I explained to him that England was not at war with Russia, and that even if she were there would be no possibility of sending supplies to Tekké land, in view of the fact that all Russia, Persia, and Afghanistan intervened, he said, 'Well, they could at least send us some money' (here he looked in the direction of my valise); 'two or three men might carry in their saddle-bags all the gold we want, and no one need know anything about it, and there are plenty of arms to be purchased in Afghanistan and Bokhara.' I told him that this would be a breach of faith with a friendly Government; but he could not, seemingly, look at things from my point of view. He then went off into a long talk about the difficulty they experienced in getting gunpowder. That which they were able to purchase in Bokhara, or Afghanistan, or to make themselves, was, he said, well enough when plenty of it was put in a long musket. With a pistol it was useless. One might as well throw stones at a man as fire at him with a pistol loaded with such powder.

I translated for him the Russian telegrams about the

action in front of Geok Tepé. He appeared to think the Russians had explained their defeat away in a manner too satisfactory to themselves to be believed. It was true, he said, that they came within a couple of miles of the place, because the Tekkés had fallen back, thinking that the entire Russian army was coming to attack them. In the end, however, a small Tekké cavalry force compelled them to retire in spite of their artillery, and pursued them up to Bami itself. I believe this to be the more correct version of the affair, which, after all, was little more than a skirmish. When on the point of leaving, he said he hoped to see me shortly at Geok Tepé. I would be very welcome there, he said. The Khan was anxious I should come. 'There are a great many poor people there,' said he, 'who have scarcely anything to eat; we know all Englishmen are rich. When you arrive all these poor people will come to you to be fed.' This was a startling piece of intelligence, for which I was not prepared, and which frightened me considerably more than the risks of the road or the chance of a stray Russian shell reaching me. I tried to laugh the affair off, but it was no use; the belief in the plethoric saddle-bags was too strong. I was very much afraid that this idea of my wealth would get me into trouble. A band of Kurds or freelance Turcomans might think fit to waylay and plunder me; and then, finding nothing worth their trouble, might carry me off bodily and hold me to ransom, as was done with the Shah's photographer, who was only released on his master's paying down ten thousand tomans (four thousand pounds sterling). Apart, however, from such a consideration, the Turcomans are very avaricious. You cannot, if you are a person of any consideration, having a reputation for means, approach a khan or chief for the first time without making him a respectable present. You can scarce despatch your servant with your compli-

ments to ask after his health without sending four or five pounds, or something to that value, as an *anam*. I knew that my field-glass or revolver would have to go the moment I reached Geok Tepé, and it was hard to decide which I could best spare. A Turcoman will not scruple to ask you to make him a present of a valuable ring, your watch, or even one of your garments, if it take his fancy, especially if you be under any obligation to him. No one should come out here on his travels without half-a-dozen Geneva watches, some cheap revolvers, and a number of other similarly attractive articles, to give away as presents.

From various sources I was able, during my stay in Meshed, to gather considerable information respecting Skobeleff's movements. Pending the final attack on the Turcoman stronghold, that general, unlike his predecessor Lazareff, only brought a small portion of his forces, just enough to protect the dépôts, on the ground. Meanwhile he spared no effort in the accumulation of ample stores along the line of march. Large supplies of grain especially were drawn from the Persian frontier districts. During my stay, two agents, passing as Armenian merchants, arrived from Dusolum with an escort of Cossacks. The greater part of the Cossacks remained at Budjnoord, but a few came with the agents to Meshed. The latter were in reality the celebrated Eastern travellers Colonels Denikoff and Grodekoff, the latter the author of the well-known 'Ride to Herat.'[1] Luckily for the Russians, the harvest in this part of Persia, especially along the Upper Atterek, was extremely good that year, and the supplies which they obtained were proportionately large. Indeed, so extensive were the purchases made in Meshed, that in the course of three days the price of corn rose seventy per cent., to the dismay of the population at large. Indeed, I believe had matters

[1] So I was informed by Abass Khan. I did not see either of them myself.

continued in the same condition a week or two longer, there would have been a bread insurrection among the poorer classes. A peremptory order from Teheran forbidding the sale of grain to Russian agents almost immediately restored prices to their former standard. This timely interference of the Government was highly politic, and not for this part of the country alone. It was monstrous that while people in the districts near Turkey were dying of starvation, and the Shah himself sending money to their relief, food in enormous quantities should be leaving the country on the eastern side. Though this prohibition diminished the export, however, it was only for a time. Grain and flour continued to be exported along the border; and a couple of weeks later I was informed by an old acquaintance that all the sacking in the bazaar had been purchased by the Russians to supply bags for the flour on whose manufacture all the mills along the frontier were engaged. If this fact does not prove the powerlessness of the Teheran Government, it can only denote its insincerity in issuing the prohibitory orders. The Russian agents had taken care to distribute presents extensively, such as repeating rifles, revolvers, watches, field-glasses and similar novelties, among the chiefs and officials along the border, and with their connivance the export went on freely.

The immense accumulations of stores, and also the construction of the railroad towards the seat of war, which I learned was in progress, convinced me that Skobeleff meant something more than to merely capture Geok Tepé and then return. The stores already accumulated I knew were enough for such a design, but still the Russians were adding to them with all their energy. The building of the railroad which has since been completed to Bami is of immense advantage to an army advancing into the Tekké

territory, and it was absurd to think it would be pushed on there for commercial purposes merely. All these circumstances made me sure that the Russians intended to permanently hold the Akhal Tekké territory once they should have taken Geok Tepé. Neither Geok Tepé nor Askabad, when taken, would be ever let go by Russia. As for Merv, I felt equally sure that no attack would be made on it in force for a very considerable period, unless the people of the place should adopt an uncompromising aggressive policy. I knew what heavy expenditure of blood and money the advance had already cost, and in view of the difficulties of transport it might almost be said that the difficulties of the expedition increased with the square of the distance from its base of operations. Between Geok Tepé and Merv the distance is as great as that which separates the former from the Caspian, and the country is still more desolate. Merv itself is a sort of Mecca for the fiercest of all the Turcoman tribes, and, if openly attacked, would possibly be defended even more fiercely than Geok Tepé. The cost, too, of maintaining a sufficient force in so distant a position, would weigh seriously with the Russian Government, and was likely to make them think twice before undertaking the capture of Merv just then. The amount expended in Persia for stores to supply Skobeleff's army was very considerable, and Russian gold 'imperials,' worth about twenty-one francs each, became very plentiful in Meshed during my stay there.

I was also informed by a Turcoman that the Russians had used great efforts to buy the adhesion of at least a part of the Tekkés by promises and money, but, up to that time, in vain. The Turcoman race is extremely greedy of money, and would go any lengths for it usually. So this incorruptible patriotism, in face of Skobeleff's gold, showed a determination to fight for liberty to the last. At the same time their conduct in other respects was marked by thoroughly

barbarian recklessness. Raids were of constant occurrence on both the Persian and Afghan territory, even while the bulk of the warriors were engaged watching the Russian advance on their national stronghold. When I left Meshed the Khan of Kuchan was out with four hundred men making an extensive 'chappow' or foray on the Tekké territory, in reprisals for one made on his district by the nomads. A short time previously, thirteen Turcoman heads were sent to the city by the governor of Budjnoord, as trophies of a fight with twenty-five marauders who had attempted to plunder the villages near Shahrood. These raids naturally disposed the Persians to sympathise with the Russians in their invasion of the Tekké territory. Indeed, the conquest of these inveterate robbers promises to have an immense influence on the destinies of central Asia. With a regular European military government substituted for the lawless sway of the Tekkés, the plains from the Oxus to the Caspian will be rendered secure for commerce, and will doubtless again be traversed, as of old, by caravans from the far East. Krasnavodsk, now a mere military station, will undoubtedly become a great commercial emporium, whether or not the Oxus shall be connected with the Caspian. It is hard, indeed, to say what limits shall be put to the prosperity of the districts east of the Caspian whenever a railroad crosses the steppes.

During a residence of nearly three months in Meshed my health had become sufficiently restored for me to think of renewing my attempts to get into the Tekké country. I was by no means free from misgivings as to my safety among its brave but savage people, especially at such a time; but I felt too desirous of witnessing the course of hostilities around Geok Tepé to let such considerations keep me back. On November 8, I called on the Shah Zadé, as the Prince Governor of Meshed is styled, to take my leave,

there being no further obstacles put in my way, at least openly. I had to procure a pass to the limits of the Persian dominions on the north, wherever they might be. The last was a hard point to determine. I remember once at Teheran asking Hussein Khan, the acting Prime Minister, for a passport to the frontier. He said he would give it willingly, but added that he could not be responsible for my safety outside the kingdom. I made no objection to that, as may well be imagined, but merely asked his Highness if he could tell me the boundary lines of the Shah's dominions in the direction which I proposed taking. After a moment's reflection he replied: 'Perhaps on that point I had better refer you to your own Ambassador.' I mentioned the conversation to the British Minister, who was highly amused, as he could no more inform me than the Sipah Salar Aazem could to what exact point the sway of his Persian Majesty extended.

I called on the Prince, accompanied by the British native agent, Abass Khan, of whose kindness I have had already reason to speak. We traversed numerous corridors and endless arcades with only occasional signs of life in them, when the sleepy guards sprang up and presented arms with a noise apparently intended to make up for long inaction; and after climbing many of those extraordinary Persian stairs with steps two feet high, at length found ourselves in the audience chamber. Heavy purple curtains covered the entrance, but there was a superabundance of doors and windows all around the room. I never could understand how the Persians can bear the draughts from the numerous openings in their rooms during the winter season. The Prince entered a few minutes after our arrival, shoeless like ourselves, such being an essential rule of Persian etiquette. He was a handsome but somewhat heavy-looking man of five-and-thirty, and extremely courteous, as most Easterns

of rank are. I believe he is connected by marriage with the Shah himself. We spoke in Turcoman on different subjects, especially on the difficulties between Turkey and Montenegro and Greece on the boundary questions. I then mentioned my expedition, which the Prince treated as a piece of lunacy, but nevertheless he finally granted me the desired papers. I next asked permission to see the Turcoman heads which had been sent by the Governor of Budjnoord a short time before. His Highness carelessly replied that they were thrown around somewhere. I then backed out of his presence in Court fashion. Outside I renewed my request for a view of the heads, and was conducted to a courtyard where a company of soldiers were on guard. Some shapeless objects, looking like dirty lard bladders, were dragged out of a cellar. These were the skins of the raiders' heads, stuffed with grass, four ugly gashes marking the place of eyes, noses, and mouths in each. I asked what had become of the noses, and a horse laugh from the guard was my only answer. I said gravely, by way of rebuke, 'Our own heads in a few years will be in as bad a plight,' a remark which drew forth exclamations of admiration at its profound wisdom. When I had examined the heads they were tossed back into the cellar to rot or be eaten by the rats. As I walked away from the uncanny place, I could not help musing disagreeably on the signs of the times afforded by those heads coming from the direction in which I was about to set out. I felt sure that at night I should have visions of my own cranium stuffed with hay and minus the nose.

As I walked homewards I was struck by the number of Afghans in the bazaar. Many of them were in the uniform of troops of the line—a queer mixture of the modern Asiatic and the old-fashioned English military dress. A scarlet tunic, with short heavily braided skirt, something like that

worn by the Highland regiments when last I saw one, was supplemented by wide, baggy trousers, and crossed with broad belts of black leather with heavy brass buckles. The head-dress was a very large turban, having one end of the cloth turned up in front like a cockade, and the other hanging down over the back of the neck. These were probably members of Ayoub Khan's partially disbanded forces. They pointed me out to one another as I passed, and I heard them often use the word 'Ooroos' (Russian). They probably took me for one of the Russian agents employed in buying supplies here. There were also many Afghans in other costumes, whose presence might be accounted for as belonging to the train of some of the Afghan chiefs residing here since the troubles began in their own country. One old chief, Mir Afzal Khan, was, for some reason or other, in receipt of a very liberal pension from the Shah.

My Persian servants were greatly terrified at the idea of accompanying me among the Turcomans, and only one of them could finally be induced to come. It was with no small delight, after all these obstructions had been removed, that I ultimately left Meshed. My setting out was quite imposing. A Turcoman guide who was to accompany me to Derguez led the way; three soldiers, and as many servants, sent as a guard of honour by my friend Abass Khan, followed, after whom came my own people and horses. A dozen dervishes, and a crowd of beggars of both sexes, young and old, all bawling prayers and petitions for alms, brought up the rear. At the city gate I parted with my escort, military and mendicant, and rode away with a light heart on the road to Radcan, or, as it is pronounced, Rathcan.

My road for four or five miles lay between walled gardens, planted thickly with mulberry and poplar. These

garden walls were regular fortifications, with projecting towers, and generally a fort stood in the middle of each garden. In addition, the whole open country was covered thickly with towers of refuge, sometimes not over fifty yards apart. As we entered the Kurd country the head-dress of the men changed from the grey felt egg-shell shaped hat of the Persian peasant to low shakoes of black wool with cloth crowns, or to the regular turban worn very low over the eyes. The Kurds have all a close family resemblance, so as to make it hard for a stranger to distinguish one from another. On the whole they are a good-looking race, with full oval faces, straight noses, and black beards, and contrast favourably in expression with the races around them. Their villages dot the whole of this wonderfully fertile valley in extraordinary numbers. They are too numerous, in fact, to find a place on any map under a scale of six inches to the mile. All are fortified, and are styled *kalas*, or forts, and, indeed, every farm-house is a fortress in itself. In travelling through this part of Persia, I could not help thinking that the estimates which put the whole population of the kingdom at six or seven millions were far below the truth. I say this, making full allowance for the fact that a very large portion of the centre of the country is a barren, uninhabited salt desert.

Passing the ruins of Kakha, eight miles from Meshed, I reached those of Toos, once the capital of North Persia, but now supplanted by Meshed, from which it is about sixteen miles distant. Though deserted at least four centuries, Toos still retains many traces of its vanished splendour. The circuit of the walls is about four miles. The whole space within the ramparts is filled with small mounds, and strewn with broken brick and blue limestone, the remains of former houses. The citadel, and part of the ramparts, especially those of the eastern side, are in

pretty good condition. I should imagine from the plastering on the outside of the citadel stone walls that it has been used as a fort up to a comparatively recent period. The Keshef Rood runs close by the walls of Toos, and is crossed by a high bridge of several brick arches. This river passes to the north of Meshed, and joins the Herat river south of Sarakhs. The united streams, under the name of the Tejend, finally lose themselves in the great swamp of the same name lying northward in the Turcoman desert.

Exactly in the centre of the town stands the only remarkable object of the place—the tomb of the poet Ferdusi. It is a large domed structure of brick-work, with doorways in the four sides, and pilasters at the slightly flattened corners. Springing from the northern side of the building is what appears to have been a small chapel, or the dwelling of the guardian of the tomb. The entire structure is ruinous, both within and without, having, to judge from the cracks in the walls and dome, suffered from an earthquake shock. It had originally been plastered over, both on the inside and outside, to the depth of two inches, with a fine grey sand concrete, much of which is still adhering even to the exterior. This had been in turn covered with adhesive white plaster. Both concrete and plaster are quite as hard as the bricks which they overlie. The architectural mouldings and other ornamentations, when on a large scale, were rudely fashioned by the placing and chipping of the brick, the details being given in concrete and plaster, which were apparently moulded, as in the case of the arabesques and decorative inscriptions in many old Arab structures, and notably so in that of the Alhambra, at Granada. Within, the building presents one unbroken space from wall to wall, and from the floor to the centre of the cupola. The height of the latter above the ground

cannot be much under seventy feet. It is on the inside hemispherical, the exterior being modified by a step reaching to one-third its height. Formerly an interior gallery seems to have run round the base of the interior of the dome, if one may judge by the remains of wood beams and the spaces sunk in the walls. In the centre of the floor lie the two fragments of a stone coffin which has been rudely smashed in a longitudinal direction. The top and sides are covered with finely-executed inscriptions, verses of the Koran. My guide, an old Turcoman, told me that this coffin had been broken open only two years previously by some Russian travellers who visited the place, and who also carried away with them two inscribed marble tablets which had been inserted, one in the northern, the other in the southern wall. I saw myself the two vacant spaces in which these tablets had been, the wooden pegs at the rear still remaining; but the demolition of the coffin, to judge from the appearance of the edges of the fractured parts, was of remote date, probably effected by the fall of some portion of the building during the earthquake shock which ruined it. It is now completely empty, and there are marks, evidently of a recent date, as of an iron wedge forced in after some preliminary chipping with a chisel. This old domed structure is visible for at least twenty miles on every side. In its immediate vicinity the inhabitants of the neighbouring villages have made excavations with a view of obtaining building materials, and extensive foundations are visible on all sides. Lying among them I found numerous fragments of old, highly-coloured pottery, some of them displaying the *reflet métallique* so prized by the lovers of keramic ware.

I spent so much time examining the ruins of Toos that I could only ride four miles further before night overtook me. On the road I was often met by numbers of families of the

natives, travelling together. I noticed that whenever there were not animals enough to carry all, it was invariably the women who were mounted, while their male relatives trudged gaily on foot, musket at back, and poniard in girdle. The very opposite custom prevails among the Sclavs of Herzegovina and Montenegro. There, burthens of all kinds are packed on the wife's back, while the husband marches in front armed with pistols, daggers, and yataghan, and decked out in the finery which Westerns consider is the particular appanage of the fair sex. I make this remark for the benefit of the sociologists, and in no invidious sense. A small Kurdish *kala*, named Sarasiab, was my lodging for the night. It was a village typical of those that studded the plain so thickly. A turreted mud wall surrounded a sort of yard, having a gate-house on one side, through which a large double-valved door, like that of a coach-house, gave access to the interior of the enclosure. A couple of rooms over the gate served as a residence for the chief of the little community, not numbering over thirty persons. This abode was ceded to me for the night, thanks to the representations of my Turkish guide, who described me as a great personage from Frangistan. I mounted to it by a flight of stairs, partly mud and partly stone. The first chamber, which served as a living room for the family, was very small, and crowded with boxes, sheepskins, and bundles of wool, as well as with various articles of household furniture, among which was a sort of spinning wheel for reeling silk into skeins. The inner chamber was somewhat larger, but still more crowded. Two corners were filled with heaps of dung, intended for winter fuel, and the rest of the floor was covered with cucumbers and melons. It was only by piling these up in a corner that I made room enough to spread my carpet. A large window, reaching from the floor to the ceiling, was closed by an

ill-fitting shutter, which allowed the wind to enter freely. Partly for this reason, and partly through fear of attracting some of the insect pests so numerous here, I had to eat my supper in semi-darkness.

The tarantula is very common in this valley, and, at the time of the year at which I was travelling, they are often as large as a half-grown mouse. They frequently make their way into the houses, especially at night, and if a candle be left, a couple of them will generally be seen making their way towards it as if they were expected anxiously. They are covered with black hair, and have shining black fangs like a crab's mandibles, and about a quarter of an inch long. Their bite is considered more venomous than that of even the largest scorpions. Poisonous snakes, too, are found here. On the day I quitted Sarasiab, my guide killed one of a beautiful silvery white, with deep orange longitudinal stripes. The head indicated its poisonous character sufficiently. My guide considered the killing of this snake as a very happy omen for the day's journey. Eight miles from Sarasiab we stopped to breakfast by some rapidly flowing streams of clear cold water which form a small pond close to their source, and afterwards fall into the Keshef Rood. The pond is literally crammed with fish and fresh-water crabs. The latter are of a delicate purple colour, and exactly the shape of sea crabs. According to popular tradition these streams gushed from the rock at a touch of Ali's thumb. A native also informed me that the pond was unfathomable, though the bottom was plainly visible at a depth of ten or twelve feet. It is named Chashma Gilas. After breakfast we resumed our journey, and reached Radcan before nightfall.

CHAPTER XXXI.

DERGUEZ.

Radcan—A village wiseacre—Erudition—Blowing up with strychnine—A Homeric draught—A remarkable building—Nadir Shah's cruelties—Cairns and sacred trees—Meeting a caravan—Feminine curiosity—The Allah Akbar range—Ghastly trophies—The Derguez—Military colonists—Mehemet Ali Khan—Border raids—A picnic with an exciting end—Persian dress fashions—A Turcoman inroad—A distracted land—Sports of the border—Cattle lifting as a national diversion—Attempts to subdue the nomads—The Persian expedition to Merv—Prospects of Central Asia—The Persian frontier line—The Turcoman captives.

THE little town of Radcan, pronounced Rathcan, is one of the most cheerful places in this corner of Persia. It is clean, and well supplied with good water, unlike Meshed, where one has to drink a mixture of twenty different kinds. The numerous trees within the town add to its pleasant appearance. The population of about three thousand is almost exclusively Kurdish. It has the usual curtain walls and flanking towers, beyond which a belt of houses has sprung up, a rare occurrence in these parts. A deep ditch has been dug on the outside to protect them. The chief industries of the place seem to be dyeing calico and tanning black sheepskins for the manufacture of hats. There is a small bazaar of some fifty booths, principally for the sale of groceries and provisions. In it, also, are to be found two shoemakers and a coppersmith. The inhabitants all speak Kurdish; but Persian and Turkish are generally understood.

The Kurds of the valley are very civil and obliging,

contrary to what I had been led to expect, or what I should have judged from the wolfish-looking horsemen whom I had met among the Shahrood hills. I made the acquaintance of one very amusing character, a leading man of the town, short, stout, and merry-eyed, who passed as a local Solomon. He invited me to his house, to meet a select circle of his friends. I crossed several blank courtyards, and traversed numerous corridors, before I reached the reception-room. Orientals deem it a point of dignity to have the inhabited portion of the house as remote as possible from the entrance-gate, just as, in the reception-room, the place of honour is that remotest from the door. I found my friend, with some other notables, waiting for me. There was no ceremony of introduction; everyone being supposed to know who the guest is. The inevitable water-pipe was brought in and handed to me, with the usual greeting, *Bismillah* (in the name of God). After a few puffs the smoker pulls off the top holding the lighted tobacco cup, and, having inhaled the smoke remaining above the water, offers the apparatus to his neighbour. To pass it without thus clearing out the smoke would be as unpardonable a breach of etiquette as if in Europe one were to put a spoon in his mouth and then offer it to his neighbour at table.

After the pipe came tea, which, highly sweetened, was drunk from small glass tumblers. While all this was going on my host was talking incessantly, changing his subjects with bewildering rapidity. He entertained us with dissertations on philology and science. The English language, of which he knew but two words—'to go'—he said closely resembled the Kurdish. He informed his auditory that, with the exception of the Shah and the Emperor of Russia, all the sovereigns of the world were controlled by councils (*medjlis*). He had picked up a

number of scientific words somewhere, and brought them into his conversation in the strangest way on every possible occasion. Thus he told his guests of an attempt to blow up the Emperor of Russia with strychnine! On one occasion a friend of mine, an English-speaking foreigner, related to me how during a quarrel somebody tried to 'blow him down with a pitchfork'; but this 'blowing down' was plain sailing compared to the Kurdish gentleman's idea of the process supposed to have been tried on the Czar.

My host was full of traditional lore touching the district. The old town of Radcan, the ruins of which stand about a mile to the south of the modern one, had been, he said, removed to its present site some hundreds of years ago, owing to an epidemic caused by certain foul drains and cesspools in the neighbourhood. One would have thought it easier to remove the cesspools than the town and population, but they do things differently in Persia. The old town, he further informed me, was the only one in the entire district which escaped the ravages of Zenghis Khan's army on its westward march.

During the dinner which followed I was introduced to a table drink, quite as odd in its way as the Homeric draught compounded for the delectation of the 'divine Machaon,' which we are told was composed of a 'large measure of the Pramnian wine' flavoured with goat's-milk cheese and sprinkled with flour. The Kurdish beverage consisted of sour thick milk diluted with water, highly flavoured with salt and black pepper, and thickly strewn on the surface with finely-grated mint leaf. It was contained in a huge bowl of tinned copper, standing among the dishes, which were, of course, on the floor. Each person helped himself at pleasure by means of a large, curiously-shaped spoon of carved boxwood, which floated in the bowl, and was used in common by the company. This

singular drink is termed *doug*, and is said to be very wholesome.

In the afternoon I rode out a few miles to the south-east of the town to visit an old conical-roofed building which had attracted my notice on the way. My Kurd friend and my Turcoman gholam stated that it was the palace of a certain early Mussulman sovereign who flourished before the foundation of Toos, the former capital of Khorassan. It is a cylindrical structure, built of flat, brownish-red bricks, and having a conical roof of the same material, the vertical section of which would be an equilateral triangle. The entire height I should estimate at about eighty feet, and its extreme diameter at about forty-five feet. Within, the diameter is thirty feet. The foundation is of large unhewn stones of hard brown grit, from the neighbouring mountains. The base of the building, to a height of eight or nine feet, is octagonal, the upper part of it being circular, and ornamented with pilasters about two feet in diameter, at intervals of eight inches, the whole built of flat bricks. Just under the roof are four windows, looking towards the cardinal points. Twenty-five feet lower down, exactly under these, are four loopholes, opening between the pilasters on the outside, and measuring four inches wide by twelve in height. On the interior they are splayed to a breadth of two feet and a height of three. There are two doors on a level with the ground, at opposite sides of the building, looking east and west. It is impossible to determine their original appearance, owing to the removal of the brick jambs by the neighbouring peasants for building materials, so that they are now mere openings in the wall. A cornice of slight projection surmounts the entablature, which is about seven feet deep, and was originally covered with enamelled tiles of a beautiful deep blue relieved by vertical bands of a fine stucco moulded with quatrefoil

ornaments. Both tiles and concrete had almost disappeared from the north-western half of the entablature, but enough remained on the opposite side to indicate the original design. Immediately under the cornice the blue tiles have ornaments in relief something like an elephant's head and trunk, seen from above. This was the first instance I had met with of these old tiles being otherwise than perfectly flat. The capitals of the pilasters are flat, and in outline something like the lotus flower of Egyptian architecture. The arrangement is such that the space between each capital has a form resembling that of the heraldic fleur de lis. Within the brick edgings the capitals were also covered with blue tiles. The general effect of the combined syenite tint of the brick with the bright azure of the tiles was very pleasing. Scattered about the base of the wall I found some fragments of particoloured tiles, very deep blue and white, with delicate brown tracery, which must have belonged to the doorways or to the interior of the building, as such minute patterns could hardly have been placed in the entablature fifty feet from the ground, and necessarily out of sight. With the aid of a powerful field-glass I carefully examined the upper portions of the building for traces of an inscription, but found absolutely none. Neither were there any inside. The building had been much injured, apparently by an earthquake shock. A large crack, traversing the larger southern window, passed upwards, winding spirally round the roof. The structure is out of the perpendicular, inclining slightly to the southward. Within, it was evident from the joist holes in the walls that the interior had three stories—one on a level with the ground, an intermediate one, and a third immediately beneath the roof, which on the inside is dome-shaped. In the thickness of the wall, and close to the western doorway, was a spiral staircase, extending from the middle to the

upper story. It reached to the springing of the roof, where there were remains of a landing-place, whence wooden stairs, winding around the interior of the dome, led to the opening at its summit. The interior of the building was octagonal in plan, each side corresponding with four of the exterior pilasters. There was no trace of pavement, though doubtless such originally existed, probably of coloured tiles. What the use of this building may have been, I am at a loss to guess. In form and proportions it resembled structures at Kars, Erzeroum, and in the Trans-Caucasus, which were universally stated to be tombs. They, however, were little more than one-third the height of the building here, they had no aperture in the top, and the single doorway in each was situated seven or eight feet above the ground, while in their basements was a vaulted chamber, with central aperture giving access from above. Round their entablatures, too, were Kufic inscriptions, pointing to their Mahomedan origin. This Radcan edifice can never have been a dwelling. Its singular shape and exceedingly badly-lighted interior would forbid such a supposition. Neither was it a tomb. It is probably some primitive form of mosque, from the summit of which the *muezzim* announced the hour of prayer to the worshippers, as is still done at some places in the Trans-Caucasus.[1]

On leaving Radcan the traveller ascends a gently sloping road, rising towards the ridge which separates the head waters of the Atterek from those of the Keshef Rood. A mound some fifteen feet high near the road is known as Nadir Tepé, from the great conqueror of that name, who had it erected, shortly before his death, to mark a stage of

[1] The inhabitants of the locality say that this singular structure was a hunting lodge built by some early sovereign, and state that the tradition still exists that from a platform on the summit a red flag was displayed to recall the huntsmen.

his march into Derguez. The district had rebelled, and at this point Nadir received a tribute of two thousand human eyes, which he had exacted from the rebels as a peace offering. Such is 'a vigorous government' in Persia. Near the Nadir Tepé is an ancient tomb held in high veneration. At different points within view of this tomb are cairns of stones, each passer-by adding one as a salute to it, saying *salaam*, as the expression is. A similar tribute is paid to an ancient lignum vitæ tree not far off, and in its case the peasants also attach a fragment of their dresses to the sacred tree. In the Kurd districts of Anatolia I have noticed a similar custom, which forcibly reminded me of the practice of the Irish peasants of the south and west in the vicinity of holy wells.

I passed the night in a small village, where I was struck by the peculiar lamps in use. They resembled the chalices used in Roman Catholic worship, but were of copper tinned over, and filled with oil extracted from the *Palma christi* bean that grows in the neighbourhood. In the morning we resumed our way northwards along the bank of the Atterek, which flows through Yussuf Khan Kala. The stream was very full, indeed it had at this point quite as much water in it as is to be found in its channel at Chatte during the hot dry months. For a mile and a half its course is from the east; thence the path along its banks turns northward, flowing through a splendid gorge, flanked by vertical rocks, from one hundred to four hundred feet high. Where the rocks were far enough apart, there were meadows, which, however, must be entirely flooded at certain times. At intervals, on rocky heights, were the remains of old Kurdish castles, dating from the time of the early occupation of the district by that race. In its passage through this gorge, the Atterek forcibly recalls the course of the Bidassoa, about Enderlaza, between France and Spain.

I passed a lonely cemetery belonging to a village of which only a few ruined walls remained. The inhabitants had all perished during a Turcoman raid a few years previously. Still, here and there one saw a half-dozen pebbles laid on the flat tombs, showing that the memory of some of the dead still lived. There is one village, named Bath Kur, which brings one back at once to the Middle Ages. There is the fortified hill with the houses clustering round it, like a flock of sheep around the shepherd. The towers are well repaired, and the state of the loopholes shows that they are meant for action. One's approach is signalled; and long before the village is gained the entire population is on the ramparts. After this village, that of Tabari is reached—a formidable-looking fortalice just at the foot of a terrible precipice. Here we make anxious inquiries about a party of seven horsemen, who have been hovering about the place for some days. A cautious-looking shepherd, who evidently takes myself and my following for persons of the same 'ilk' as the seven suspicious horsemen, replies that the party alluded to lit their fires on certain crags, which he indicates, and supposes they breakfasted there. Further he knows nothing. He is evidently greatly relieved by our departure without levying toll on his flock. When we are well into the glens formed by the huge fallen rock masses, my old Turcoman calls a halt, and proceeds to argue the question. He says, 'They haven't descended into the valley —therefore they are not strong; the seven men are not an advanced guard; they are the main body. We are five. The odds are not sufficiently great. They won't attack. *Bismillah*, in the name of God, let us ride forward.' And we go forward, or rather upward, for the incline of the mountain is so outrageously steep that it takes one's breath away to look at it. Road there is none. We have our choice of a series of stony gullies flanked by huge boulders. Riding is

out of the question, and our steeds' obstinacy forms no small item of our difficulties. In this country, once you are off his back, a horse considers himself his own master, and declines to be led. It takes no inconsiderable amount of trouble to make him proceed, especially up a mountain side. When one has been accustomed to much riding across plains, there is nothing so trying as going up a hill on one's own legs. The custom of the country is to hold on by your horse's tail, and thus get dragged over the mountain. This is well enough with a good-tempered horse; for my part, I preferred a little exertion, coupled with personal safety, to the presence of a pair of Damocletian heels ever menacing me.

Half-way up the slope of the mountain we overtook a caravan coming from Nishapur, and proceeding to Muhammedabad. It consisted of about fifty men and women, driving asses and mules. The men, with their voluminous turbans, closely resembled the Kurds of Kurdistan proper—much more so than those I had seen in the Meshed Valley. They have a very bad reputation, my guide told me. A solitary wayfarer, meeting such a caravan, would be certain of being pillaged, if not murdered. However, they let us alone, probably in view of our formidable armament, though they cast longing eyes at my saddle-bags, which their Oriental imaginations doubtless painted as crammed with gold tomans. Some of the girls were very pretty; but the women of twenty-five or thirty years, though formerly evidently good-looking, all bore that weary, half-sad, half-cross expression which mars even the best features—a result of their hard and toilsome life. They made no pretence of concealing their faces, even from an infidel. I was sitting on a boulder, smoking, and awaiting the arrival of my baggage horse, whose load had tumbled off, when a group of half a dozen girls came up, and, stationing themselves about

six feet away, commenced looking curiously at me, as if I were some odd, inanimate object. One or two, to be at perfect ease in making their observations, sat on the ground. They freely commented on my personal appearance, and some of their remarks were the reverse of flattering. One of them was kind enough to say that I had grey eyes, the same colour as those of 'Shaitan.' In the midst of their observations an elderly female came rushing furiously up, hurling large stones at the young ladies. One, whose mother she apparently was, she seized by the hair, demanding how she dared to stand looking at a Ferenghi. The young lady thus rudely accosted replied promptly that she was not looking at the Ferenghi, but at the curious pipe he was smoking; my short briar-root evidently being a novelty in these parts.

The descent from the mountain, which is called the Meyduhan, is still more abrupt than the ascent on the northern side. The climbing up one side of this mountain and sliding down the other is extremely disagreeable and toilsome. Owing to the nature of the road, we could only make twenty miles between sunrise and sunset. The end of the day found us at a village called Derbendi, in a valley between the two great mountain ridges. The chief of the place is charged with the surveillance of the road, and is supposed to see that no raiders pass. His village is inhabited by sixty families, and he has fifty horsemen at his disposal. Next morning, at daybreak as usual, we had to face the Allah Akbar (God is great) range, which we got over after five hours' hard work. Near the top is a shallow valley, where graves are numerous, and the piles of little stones placed by the passers-by flank the road at short intervals. The graves are those of the murdered travellers who have perished during centuries.

From the mountain top the entire expanse of Persian border territory lay like a map at my feet. The summit

on which I stood is, I think, about six thousand feet above the level of the sea. Twenty miles away was the ridge which divides the Derguez; far away to the right were the dim hills of Kelat, so far off that I should have deemed them clouds if not otherwise informed. The colours of these mountains were brighter than I had supposed possible in nature. The lights were all rose and amber, and the shadows of aërial lapis lazuli tint. Light and shade in the form of *chiar'oscuro* there were none. It was the opposition of colour. It made one believe in Raffaelle's painting a red shadow to a roseleaf in sunshine. Backing up the view was a vast spread of vague distance reaching away to the horizon —the dim, terrible Turcoman waste over which my road lay. At the height at which I stood the scene was panoramic. Hill and dale, rock and plain, stood out with a stereoscopic distinctness which recalled the luminous image of a camera lucida. Camel trains wound like worms along the thread-like roads. Here and there buffaloes were ploughing; and parties of horsemen rode to and fro. There were all the evidences of life, save that of sound, as we gazed over the huge, silent expanse. As I turned away from the mountain peak on my downward journey, I paused again and again to contemplate the unaccustomed scene, and more than once the thought recurred, whether it were not a picturesque grave which lay before me.

As I rode down, my thoughts were not brightened by the appearance of two horsemen, each with a Turcoman's head slung at his saddle-bow. They were carrying their ghastly trophies to the Prince Governor of Meshed, as a present from the Khan of Derguez. Evidently the Turcomans could hardly be more ferocious savages than the people among whom I was sojourning. Riding across the plain in this frame of mind, I reached Muhammedabad, the capital of the Derguez, that evening.

The population of the Derguez is of Turkish origin, imported to these districts as military colonists by successive sovereigns of Persia. They hold the ground by feudal tenure, and beyond a present of about six thousand tomans (two thousand four hundred pounds) made annually to the Prince Governor of Meshed, the province pays no tribute. The Khan is expected to keep up a force of irregular cavalry, numbering about a thousand men, to guard the frontier. These he mounts, arms, and furnishes with food when on service, but not at other times. Each soldier has a piece of land allotted to him in return for his service. The office of the Khan is hereditary in one family, and in many respects he is practically independent of any superior. I called on him shortly after my arrival, and was received very courteously. Somewhat to my surprise, I found him by no means so enthusiastic in favour of the Russians as were the generality of the borderers. He laughed at the notion, entertained by many of the peasants, of a Turcoman invasion of the Derguez in case the Russians should be defeated at Geok Tepé. He seemed to think he and his people were quite capable of protecting themselves against any force the Turcomans could bring in this respect, his ideas being very unlike those generally entertained by the Persians of pure blood near the borders. The slowness with which the Russian advance was conducted surprised him, and he remarked that the Tekkés seemed more ready to fight than their opponents. I suggested that the Russians were desirous of securing their communications, and that thus, although the whole invading force consisted of twelve thousand men, not over five thousand were probably available for action. 'Pshaw,' said the Khan, 'with five thousand of even my own cavalry I would undertake to sweep the Akhal Tekké from end to end.' This was probably a rather sweeping vaunt, but it

showed that my host had none of that abject dread of his neighbours which is universally entertained by the native Persians. In fact, I found before leaving the Derguez that its population were fully as ready for a foray into the Tekké country as the Tekkés could be to raid on them. Raids on both sides were taking place almost daily, and it was quite impossible to say whether the nomads or the Derguezli subjects of the Shah were more frequently the aggressors. The Khan, though nominally an official of the Shah, was constantly engaged in lifting the cattle and capturing the heads of his Tekké neighbours, though these amenities seemed to make no serious obstacle to the intercourse constantly going on between his subjects and the nomads. Small parties were constantly sent out to plunder, and a large part of the Khan's income was derived from these expeditions. Heads to be sent to Teheran, much as wolves' heads were sent to the old Saxon kings of England as an acceptable tribute, and prisoners to be held for ransom, were booty as eagerly sought as the cattle and sheep of the Tekkés. I have no hesitation in saying that these border subjects of Persia were more barbarous in their warfare than even their wild neighbours, and I cannot say whether in point of fact the latter were more sinned against or sinning in the interminable forays that formed the chief occupation of both parties.

A few days after my visit I was invited to accompany the Khan on a pleasure excursion to an enclosed garden of his, some distance from the city. A crowd of servants were sent to escort me, in Persian style, to the place of meeting at the city gates. I found the chief riding slowly outside the walls, escorted by about thirty men. I soon learned the importance of this precaution, which seemed at first a mere formality. The Governor had also several led horses with him, all wearing heavy silver collars set with

blue and red stones, to distinguish them as being reserved for his own mounting. The ornament lavished on the trappings of his horses was in striking contrast to the plainness of his own dress, which was hardly distinguishable from that of his principal attendants. External luxury in attire is here regarded as womanish, and Persians of the higher class invariably dress, except on extraordinary occasions, with almost studied plainness. Gold rings are never worn, though occasionally you may see a valuable gem set in a silver one, which is always of the lightest possible kind. The Prince Governor of Meshed wore a diamond, worth at least a hundred pounds, set in a plain silver hoop. As for the male Turcomans, they scorn ornaments of any kind, except the signet rings used by the chiefs, whose duties sometimes require them to append their seals to various documents.

After riding round in the plain for about an hour, we made for the Khan's grove. There was a kiosk in the middle, in which a carpet was spread, and the Khan, some of his brothers and nephews, and myself, sat down. Excessively strong green tea was served to us, according to the invariable custom. The requisites for the meal, like the ordinary travelling equipage of the chief, were carried with us by one of the servants in two cylinders, slung at each side of his saddle like kettle-drums, and covered with embroidered crimson cloth. A round case of the same colour, slung on his back like a Kurd buckler, contained the tin plates and dishes. We amused ourselves for a while in the kiosk by scanning the country with field-glasses belonging to the Khan, and by inspecting the fire-arms, of which he had a most miscellaneous collection, picked up I know not how or where. Shooting at a mark was also tried, and the Khan made half-a-dozen very good shots at about a hundred yards distance.

We were riding leisurely homewards, after dinner, when a mounted trooper dashed up and announced that the Turcomans were out and sweeping off the cattle from the plain. We immediately noticed peasants driving their cattle with frantic haste towards the town, and presently we were able to make out the raiders, who numbered about a hundred and fifty, wheeling in scattered groups and circling round like falcons. The nearest were not a mile from us. The Khan issued a few rapid orders, and sent half-a-dozen messengers to carry them in different directions, and then we pushed briskly towards the city. In a few minutes beacon columns of smoke were shooting up from the watch-towers around, summoning all the scattered retainers of the Khan to mount and ride to the city at once. Within an hour about six hundred troops were gathered in the town. I could now understand the meaning of the endless field-towers and walls which I had thought extravagantly numerous at first sight. The Khan despatched between three and four hundred men after the marauders, who had swept off sixty oxen and over a hundred sheep, and were on their way to the desert with their spoil. The Tekkés, however, had a good start, and while a few men drove the cattle off by short cuts impracticable for cavalry, the main body showed fight and covered their retreat successfully.. The pursuers, finding small chance of anything but hard knocks, returned after some skirmishing, having captured four horses from the invaders. This was a large party for a Tekké foray, twenty or thirty being the more usual number in these districts. The Khan seemed to take the whole affair as an every-day occurrence, but it gave me a lively impression of the insecurity of life and property in this border territory.

Indeed, until I came to this district I had no adequate idea of the real state of things. Within a few days of my arrival three more or less successful raids were made by the Turco-

mans nearly up to the gates of the capital of the province. One can scarce venture half a mile, in some cases not even so far, from the fortified villages, without risking capture by the seemingly ever-present Turcoman bands. How grazing or any other kind of farming can be carried on passes my comprehension, even though herds and tillers be protected by the watch-towers which stand over the plain like nine-pins in a skittle alley. Making and repulsing raids seemed the daily and never-failing occupation of the able-bodied male population on both sides.

The Tekkés generally made their descents with a view of carrying off cattle, horses, and camels; but human prisoners did not come amiss to them. Still, systematic man-stealing was not pursued to anything like the extent which prevailed previously to the closing of the slave-markets of Khiva and Bokhara by the Russians. In a Turcoman household slaves are not required, and men were only carried off with a view of being held to ransom. This, however, is no longer a very paying speculation. The border peasants are not rich, and a considerable time may elapse before even a small sum is offered by a captive's family or friends. In the meantime prisoners may have cost their captors, in food, more than the amount of their ransom. They are entirely useless as shepherds, as their facilities for escape would be too great, so that it is necessary to keep them in confinement, and heavily chained. Very often, when the Persians hold numerous prisoners, the Turcomans carry off a number of Derguezli, with a view to exchanging them against their friends. At the time of my visit there were in Muhammedabad half-a-dozen Turcomans, captured at different periods, and awaiting redemption. They were all heavily fettered, each having an iron collar round his neck, and a hoop of the same material encircling his waist. From both depended chains, composed of links a

foot long, like those worn by French galley-slaves, and attached to the wrists and ankles. These irons are worn night and day. One of the prisoners, a stalwart young man, had been in captivity over two years, and although only thirty tomans (twelve pounds sterling) were demanded for his ransom, none of his people had come forward to pay the amount. Another, a native of the town, had been caught by the Turcomans many years previously, and had settled and married among the Akhal Tekké. In his capacity of naturalised Turcoman he had taken part in a foray into Persian territory, and, having been captured, was held to ransom like the others.

I asked the Governor of Derguez whether anyone was held responsible for those forays, or whether he ever made complaints to the Turcoman chiefs of the incursions of their followers. He replied that he often did so, and that sometimes, after some heavy raid, the chieftains whose men were most directly concerned in the thing would send him presents of horses or carpets in compensation. In strict justice, however, he did not think the chiefs were responsible for the acts of their tribesmen, who made the incursions to suit their private inclinations, without troubling their respective Khans for permission. The idea of holding chiefs responsible for such acts was evidently by no means to the Governor's taste, and he much preferred the system of raiding in return upon the other party. Indeed, one of his people afterwards assured me that it would be a bad day for both himself and the Khan if the system should be put an end to by the Russian conquest. He acknowledged that the Turcoman raids inflicted considerable loss on his own people, but he thought, on the whole, the latter managed to be quits by return expeditions. Just before my arrival in Muhammedabad, the Derguezli had made a sweep of about fifteen thousand sheep, which were being sold at eight or ten francs

a head throughout the province. Such a booty more than made amends for the later Turcoman depredations, even if the compensation was not altogether equally apportioned. In fact, the Khan got all the ransom money of the prisoners, and no small share of the other booty, while the losses fell on the country people—a state of things which the Khan's own followers thought quite satisfactory. The Khan, he said, would lose at least three thousand tomans of his income were marauders suppressed.

Such being the ideas of Persian officials, it is hard to see why the Tekkés should bear any especial blame for the marauding which so hampers the progress of Central Asia. To speak plainly, both sides cordially approve of the practice. Cattle lifting and its attendant fighting are, in the minds of both Turcomans and Persian Turks, fully as respectable and much more exciting pursuits than is fox-hunting in an English sporting county. The chiefs could no doubt keep their people quiet, with the help of the central Government, but they show no inclination to meddle with the popular tastes. Among the Tekkés there was no central power that could stop incursions save the general will of the nation, which leaned in quite the opposite direction. Each chief holds his authority by the good will of his tribe, and is quite dependent on the counsels of the *Ak-saghal*, or white beards, for any course of action, and they, in turn, to ensure the acceptance of a project, must have the approval of the community at large. The chief depends for his support on his own flocks and herds, and receives no taxes or contributions from his subjects in any form. His authority rests on his personal influence, which is often based on his proved capacity as a leader of forays; and he has no means at his disposal to prevent his followers, even if he so desired, from engaging in the occupation which

public opinion has long recognised as the best and most creditable employment for able-bodied men.

Whichever side should be held more to blame for the system of incessant marauding prevalent along the Persian border, there can be no doubt of its suppression being essential to the development of the really great resources of Central Asia. With clear highways, and secure communications, the former prosperity of the country could be easily restored, and increased tenfold. The fertility of much of the soil is very great, as may be judged from what I have said of the border provinces of Persia; and the mineral resources I believe to be scarcely less. The suppression of brigandage can only be achieved by bringing the Turcoman nomads under the rule of a strong Government. This task has been attempted in vain by Persia. Early in the reign of the present Shah the conquest of Merv was undertaken, but the expedition was utterly routed by the fierce men of the plains. For two months subsequently the Tekkés were engaged in gathering the arms thrown away by the vanquished invaders, who left thirty pieces of artillery as substantial trophies of their defeat. Russia alone at present seems to be able to tame the predatory instincts of the nomads, and I think her rulers are fully alive to the importance of the task. Already they have put a stop to the slave trade, which used to be carried on in Khĭva and Bokhara, and it is said that as many as forty thousand Persians have been liberated from slavery by their conquests. In fact, the opulent Turcomans all owed their wealth to this traffic in human beings, and its suppression has done much to reconcile the Persian population to the further advance of the Muscovites. How all this will end it is not easy to predict. The Russian conquest of the Akhal Tekkés will certainly be beneficial, in a commercial sense, to both Persia and Central Asia. In other respects, different views

will be taken of the situation, according to the temperaments and leanings of different individuals. The question of the Persian 'frontier' is sure to come up before the lapse of many years. I have already spoken of the hazy views entertained on the subject by the Persian Government itself, and personal examination on the spot convinced me that the Sipah Salar had good grounds for declining to lay down accurately the bounds of his master's dominions. Beyond Derguez lies a district inhabited by Turcomans who have given a sort of nominal submission to the Shah, in order to escape the depredations of the Turkish border cavalry. The inhabitants of some of the villages pay a tribute of corn; others are merely regarded as Persian subjects, in order that the chiefs may be held responsible for the good behaviour of their people. When one of these frontier tribes leaves its abode, or declines to pay tribute, the boundary shifts inwards. When a tribe, hitherto independent, finds it to its interest to acknowledge the sovereignty of the Shah, the boundary is advanced outwards. Should Russian power be once firmly established, in place of the Tekké authority, it would not be difficult to foretell who will profit by this vagueness of the boundary lines.

During my stay at Muhammedabad Turcoman captives were occasionally brought in, and placed in the gaol for safe keeping. Wishing to see how they were treated, I paid a visit to the gaol, a mud building, guarded by two or three sallow, hungry-looking gaolers, who gave me immediate admittance. In a room about ten feet square, with an earthen floor, nine individuals were squatted on the ground. Three were citizens of the town, undergoing punishment for some misdemeanour; the others were Turcoman captives, most of them having been brought in on the previous day, while engaged in driving off cattle. They were elderly men, three of them being bearded, and having long,

aquiline noses and black eyes, while two others were distinguished by flat noses, grey eyes, and faces of the genuine Tartar type, with scarcely any beard. The latter type is much more common among the nomads, the aquiline features and flowing beards generally indicating a mixture of Persian blood. All looked very downcast, and were dressed in wretched clothes, without their long great coats. They had doubtless been stripped by their captors of everything worth taking. Iron collars around their necks were connected by a massive iron chain, which was the only obstacle to their escape, as the gaol itself was ruinous. The sixth Turcoman was a young fellow, who had been over two years in prison, and seemed to bear his captivity with indifference. As a general rule, I understood that such captives were, some time or other, ransomed by their friends. Horses are generally given in exchange for the prisoners, but sometimes money payments are made. The wives of captives often send in their personal ornaments, especially the numerous silver coins which deck their hair and garments, to purchase their husbands' freedom. This money is appropriated by the Khan, no part being shared with his men, who however, on forays, generally get a bounty of ten francs for each prisoner, and five for each head.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A MUSSULMAN PASSION PLAY.

Religious acting—Khan's invitation—Ceremonious reception—Public stage—Spectators—Scenery—*Dramatis personæ*—Violations of dramatic canons—How they act in Central Asia—Expressions of grief—The Khan's emotion—A conjugal tribute—Marital etiquette—The villain of the piece—His allies—A stage combat—Histrionic artifice—Smoking him out—A tragic scene—Feminine grieving—An execution—Realistic acting—A horrid entertainment—A juvenile dance—Costumes—Ceremonies—Calisthenics—Central Asian can-can—Retribution—An excited Turcoman—A stage combat—A useful pigtail—The bridge of Al-Sirat—Public penance—Iron scourges—A reprieve—Refreshments—Closing scenes—The Frankish ambassadors—An impromptu lion—Tokens of grief—A public appeal—Recognition—A graduated blessing—'Ya Ali'—Police discipline—An appeal.

With the month of Moharrem came the Mussulman services usually celebrated during that period; and every day a body of professional artists gave a public representation of the religious drama founded on the massacre of Imam Hussein, or, rather, of one scene of the play, the entirety of which extends over several days, every incident being acted in the fullest possible detail. In large cities it is allowed to unbelievers to look on, diplomatic representatives and other strangers of importance being often specially invited; but out here, on the extreme edge even of semi-civilisation, the presence of a 'kaffir' at one of these Mussulman religious dramatic performances would, as a rule, be as unacceptable to the unadulterated Islamism of the place as in a mosque itself. However, by special favour, I received an invitation from the Khan to be present, as some extra acting was

about to take place. Near the scene of the performance I was formally received by half-a-dozen *ferashes*, or palace servants, each bearing in his hand a long peeled stick, by whom I was conducted to the Khan. This official recognition was necessary, as otherwise offence might have been taken at my presence.

Crossing the open space which served as a stage, I found the Khan, together with his male relatives and principal officers, seated on a slightly raised platform of earth and brick at one side of the old town gate. The market-place outside, flanked by the caravanserai, constituted the theatre. Some three thousand spectators were present. To our left were the women, four rows being seated on the ground, and the remainder standing behind, wrapped from head to foot in their mantles of indigo-dyed calico, and looking like so many conventional stage spectres when blue fire is lit at the wings. Opposite them, and similarly arranged, were the men, for the most part clad in the lemon-coloured sheep-skin great coat characteristic of the border populations. Here and there were the red orange tunics of those who seemed insensible to the rather chill air, and above all was a sea of sunburnt bearded faces and huge grenadier hats of black and brown sheep's wool. Still further back behind them, perched on the top of the ruinous mud front of the caravanserai, were about a hundred women of the better class—among them the Khan's family. Outside the open space were many mounted Turcomans, gun at back, the prong of the forked rest sticking a foot beyond the muzzle, and giving them the air of mounted hay-makers. In the midst of the arena stood two poplar poles, six feet apart, a stout camel-hair horse rope reaching from one to the other at a height of four feet above the ground. Close by was a heap of stout osier rods, such as are used in administering the bastinado. At some distance sat a white-

turbaned, long-bearded moullah, on a tall throne approached by three steps. There was a kind of wooden platform, such as Easterns sleep on in the open air during hot weather, on which stood a very prosaic-looking arm-chair. In the latter sat a pompous-looking person, robed in Cashmere shawls, and wearing an enormous turban of the old Kurdish pattern, which may be seen to-day on the heads of Sheik Obeidullah's followers about Bayazid. A number of similarly attired men, and two boys of about twelve years of age, sat upon a long wooden bench opposite. With them was a man wearing female attire, and closely veiled; but he had apparently forgotten to take off a pair of enormous brown leather jack-boots. This was the third day of the play, and as I had never seen the text of it I was necessarily completely at sea as to the particular episode in the tragedy which was about to be acted. I give the following description as an illustration of how such things are managed on this remote border, and as an example of the most realistic acting that has ever come under my notice. I do not recollect to have ever before seen a theatrical representation of capital punishment, and certainly never with the shockingly realistic details which Derguez stage managers deem necessary to meet the critical tastes of an audience not altogether unacquainted with the stern reality. There was the inevitable man in chain armour and spiked helmet, and bearing sword and shield, who seems an inseparable adjunct of these performances. On this occasion he was the victim on whose sanguinary end the interest of the scene turned.

The main idea represented was the struggle between what are now Shiia and Sunni—the justice or otherwise of the precedency of Omar to Ali in the Khalifat. As well as I could make out the sense of the dialogue, which was spoken in Jagatai Tartar, the man in the armchair on the platform was Hussein, and the individual with the helmet

was his standard-bearer and champion, and an upholder of Ali's reputation. He sang, or rather chanted, in a doleful tone, several lengthy expressions of his sentiments, finally ascending the platform and kneeling down to receive the benediction of the person in the chair, who knelt in his turn to receive that of the man in the helmet. Then the latter mounted a horse brought in to the rolling of a drum, and made pretence of departing on a journey, and Hussein withdrew from the stage. Meantime two new parties arrived on horseback, one of whom was evidently the typical Sunnite, and the other his chief executioner and right-hand man. The typical Sunnite issued several orders in a voice pitched like that of a field-officer commanding a battalion movement, and general dismay seemed to supervene, in the midst of which the helmeted champion returned from his journey and defied the executioner to single combat. Previously to engaging in the strife, he repeatedly embraces two small boys, who are apparently closely related to him. His remarks to them called forth universal expressions of regret from the audience. This constituted one of the most curious features of the scene. The women uttered short, snapping howls, which, coming from behind the closely-wrapped mantles of so many hundreds, produced precisely the effect of a burst of laughter on the part of the audience of a European theatre at some culminating burlesque absurdity. In fact, when I afterwards heard sounds of merriment from the same gathering, the vocal expression of opposite emotions seemed to be identical. The male spectators gave no audible sign of emotion, nor, apparently, did they feel any, though it was considered to be in good taste, not only as a tribute to the moral of the scene, but also as a compliment to the actors; to produce one's handkerchief and apply it to the eyes. The Khan had a large white damask napkin,

evidently specially prepared for the occasion; but I caught him once, at an excessively tragical moment, and while holding his apology for tears in front of his face, making some remarks in an undertone to his brother, at which they both chuckled in a scandalous manner. While waiting for the conclusion of the long dialogue between the knight of the spiked helmet and the executioner, we were entertained with the spectacle of a man beaten to death with rods, the most curious element in which was that the men who made believe to whip the life out of the culprit were the very same who every day discharged such functions in reality; and the rods used were of the very same size and kind as those employed for the bastinádo. This episode brought to the front a feature of Oriental manners which few Europeans have an opportunity of witnessing, viz. the manner in which a wife shows her respect and affection for her husband. The pseudo-female with the jack-boots turned out to be the wife of the man who was being beaten. Previous to his being tied to the whipping-post, she came forward and prostrated herself before him, her forehead touching the ground. Then she walked round him, kissing the back of his shoulders as she passed, again prostrating herself on coming to the front. There were some other examples of marital etiquette during the play, and in all of them it seemed to be the proper thing for the lady to make the entire circuit of her husband before coming to a halt before him. This, however, was mere by-play pending the advent of the great event, viz. the combat and subsequent execution.

The executioner, the villain of the piece, stood over six feet high, notwithstanding that his small head was, apparently in consequence of some spinal disease, set deeply between his colossal shoulders. He wore a pair of long buff leather boots, opening out in bell-fashion above the knee,

and which in Europe would be considered as essentially 'stagey.' Here they form part of every-day costume. A red cotton handkerchief was tied around his head, not turban-wise, but rather as if it were applied as a bandage for some cranial injury, and coming down low on his beetled brows. Even without the circular brass Kurd shield and curved scimitar, he was as truculent-looking a person as I have ever seen on or off the stage. Shiia dramatic justice could not for a moment allow that such a person could be a match for a follower of Ali, so accordingly he summoned to his aid three other equally objectionable-looking personages, each very like himself, and thereupon a 'free fight' commenced. One of the most interesting features of this scene was the illustration it afforded of the use of the small Kurdish buckler and curved scimitar in combat. Of Eastern races, I believe the Kurds are the most addicted to this rather primitive system of combat. Indeed, except among the Kurds and some Afghan refugees at Meshed and Kuchan, I never saw the shield borne as an adjunct of actual warfare. We were treated to all the various arts and devices used in such combats, and merely as a specimen of attack and defence it was well worth seeing. Then there were various attempts on the part of the unarmed assailants of this champion of Hussein to trip him up with a rope, or entangle him in its folds by running round him. He ultimately vanished, as if by magic, below the surface of the ground, into a previously prepared hole which we had not hitherto perceived. This hole, I believe, represented a well, in which the real hero took refuge. Attempts were now made to smoke him out by stuffing lighted brooms with long handles into the cavity, but, this device failing, he was ultimately dragged out by means of ropes, and brought before the judgment-seat of the wicked individual, who, in no whispered tones, gave orders for his instant execution. The captive hero was thereupon bound Mazeppa-wise upon

the back of a horse, and, having been led several times round the arena, ultimately arrived at the scene of punishment. Taken from the back of the horse, he was dragged by the heels a good fifty yards, to the gate of the caravanserai. On this occasion his coat of chain mail must have stood himself and his garments in good stead, the ground being in no wise like a skating rink, but, on the contrary, strewn with stones and broken earthenware. In a few moments he made his appearance on the top of the caravanserai among the ladies assembled there, surrounded by guards and accompanied by the executioner, and during a quarter of an hour pleaded for his life. This was excellently done, and drew forth a large amount of grief, as before, from the women, also bringing the men's pocket-handkerchiefs into requisition. He was ultimately thrown down, and we could see curved daggers brandished over him. The system of execution here is to cut the throat with a dagger, and then sever the head from the body with the same instrument. The actors so managed that, while the body and legs of the victim were left in view, the head was just out of sight. The convulsive struggling of the limbs was admirably imitated, and then, the real man being drawn back, a lay figure was thrust forward, exhibiting the severed bleeding neck. This was immediately afterwards lowered to the ground by ropes, and dragged back to the centre of the ground—still struggling and kicking. Within the headless lay figure was a little boy, who gave the requisite movement to the limbs. The figure, still twitching in a most horrid manner, was hung up on the centre of the cord extending between the two poles fixed in the ground; and the climax of the entertainment, the disembowelling of the body, commenced. In the breast and stomach of the figure had been stowed away the lungs, heart, and entrails of a freshly-killed sheep. The executioner, with his dagger, cut the figure open, and

the still bleeding viscera were dragged out one by one with expressions of savage glee, and flung into the midst of the space. With this sanguinary performance the day's acting came to an end, and the spectators, who up to that moment had preserved the greatest order, rushed round, and I lost sight of the mangled remains. The acting was continued on the morrow, and during several succeeding days, but the whole of the lengthy play could not be performed, there being no one in the town rich enough, or at any rate disposed, to pay the expenses for any longer period. Up to that time the Khan had defrayed them.

Immediately on the termination of the acting, a still more curious performance, in the shape of religious dancing, commenced. Twelve boys, varying in age from eight to fourteen years, clad in long tunics of clean printed chintz, and having dark-coloured handkerchiefs on their necks, which crossed upon the breast and were tied behind the waist, threw off their sheep-skin hats, retaining only the little tight-fitting skull-cap. Some of these boys were wonderfully handsome. The expression of their faces was altogether feminine. In fact, dressed as they were, in printed calico frocks, they might easily have passed for so many pretty little girls. In each hand was carried a circular piece of wood, about four inches in diameter and two inches thick. Eight of them formed into a circle around the other four, who chanted something relating to Ali, Hussein, and Hassan. They faced slowly round one after the other, striking their pieces of wood together like Spanish castanets, and extending their arms at full length, now in front of the forehead, now behind the head, in cadence with the rhythm of the chant. In two or three minutes the chant quickened, and the boys commenced a kind of waltzing step, turning completely round in four movements, and accompanying each with a clap of the castanets. After completing the

entire circle they again relapsed into a march, in due time resuming the waltzing, if I may give it that name. While the children were thus dancing close to where we sat with the Khan, further away the men had engaged in their own calisthenics. Some sixty men had formed in line, each grasping with his left hand the waist-sash of the man beside him; his right hand remaining free. The chain thus formed started off in quick time, the man on the right flank leading. Each dancer made an oblique step with his left foot, forward and to the left, supplementing it with a hop on the same leg. Then came an oblique step with the right foot, forward and to the right, with another hop. At each step and hop the dancer smote his breast with his right hand, shouting 'Hussein! Hassan!' Each threw his body forward and appeared to be dragging the next one after him. The whole performance gave one the idea of a kind of mad can-can, in such quick time that the dancers could scarcely find breath to vociferate with sufficient rapidity the names of the two blessed Imams in whose honour they were thus exerting themselves. As each dancer became exhausted he fell out, but new-comers constantly appended themselves to the tail of the line that circled round the arena which had previously served as a stage. To all appearance the same set of men were dancing all the while, for the main phalanx remained unbroken for hours. Long after the sun had set, and I had retired to my lodgings, even at ten o'clock in the evening, rhythmic, muffled shouts of 'Hussein! Hassan!' smote my ear. In none of the parts of the world in which I have sojourned did I ever see religion assume a calisthenic form save in Muhammedabad and in Spain. In the latter country the religious dances of the *Corpus Christi* festival are famous, and a traveller in the westernprovinces cannot have failed to remark the funereal dances of the peasantry. Doubtless

these physical expressions of sentiment in Spain are of Oriental origin, like so much else that exists in that country.

A singular thing in connection with these Shiia festivities on the border of the Akhal Tekké is that, accustomed as the inhabitants are to the annual representation of the tragic fate of Hussein and his followers, the audience sometimes become so excited at the atrocities perpetrated on the holy personages that, unable to restrain themselves, they rush in and belabour the individual who represents the villain. Instances have been known in which, on the last day of the theatrical representations, when Hussein comes to grief, the executioner has perished at the hands of the frenzy-stricken spectators. Here at Muhammedabad, during my visit, a mild outbreak of this kind occurred. When the massacre of the two children of Hussein was being acted, an Akhal Tekké Turcoman rushed from among the spectators, sabre in hand, to rescue the infants, and had to be withheld and disarmed by half-a-dozen *ferashes*. From this it may be judged what a powerful influence the Mussulman 'mystery plays' exercise on the impressionable minds of an impulsive and unlettered people.

On the second day of the performance there was the usual quantity of tedious speechifying and doleful declamation, the great feature being the single combat between Abass, the standard-bearer of Hussein, and one of the enemy. Abass is supposed to lose both his arms during the fight, and continues the conflict holding the sword between his teeth. After the acting came dancing such as that already described. I omitted, however, to mention that the younger of the boys who danced had, reaching from the centre of their shaved crowns to the napes of their necks, slender plaited tails of hair, in fact, regular 'pigtails.' These, I believe, are the appendages by which the angel Gabriel will seize them should they in the journey from

earth to heaven slip from the narrow path across the bridge of Al-Sirat, and be in danger of tumbling into hell. Among the elder boys this tail was not to be seen, being replaced by a bushy tuft of hair. The most peculiar portion of the after ceremonies consisted of the self-inflicted penance of some of the more devout members of the audience. Half-a-dozen persons, two of whom were powerfully built men, the remainder boys of sixteen or eighteen, drew close to where we were sitting, and, squatting in a circle, hastily stripped off their garments to the waist. Then, to the cry of 'Hussein! Hassan!' they commenced forcibly striking their breasts with their palms. In a short time a kind of frenzy seemed to gain upon them, and an instrument of torture was produced. It consisted of a short iron handle, terminating in a ring, from which hung half-a-dozen iron chains, each about eight or nine inches long. Each link of these chains was at least an inch and a half in length. The instrument was, in fact, an iron scourge. When the chant had become fast and furious, one of the men seized on the scourge, and, bobbing it a few times in front of his face, began to lash himself with it over the shoulders so quickly that the eye could scarce follow his movements. When each had borne as much of this self-infliction as he could he passed the instrument to his next neighbour, who repeated the operation. The shoulders of one of the youths were torn and bloody, from the violence with which he punished himself. All this is done by way of expressing sorrow for the death of the blessed Imam Hussein, who, together with Ali, seems, in the minds of the Shiia Mussulmans, to have thrown Mahomet completely into the background. This style of acting was carried to such an extremity that the Khan was obliged to give the signal for ending the play. Before the Khan's visitors and friends rose, sugarless black coffee was served in the usual diminutive

porcelain cups, laid into a receptacle resembling an egg-cup, which prevents the finger from being burned by the hot coffee. Two handsome jewelled water-pipes were then handed round, and each one went his way.

By special invitation of the Khan I went to see the closing scene of the Moharrem drama—that in which the Imam Hussein is killed. I believe that the presence of non-Mussulman spectators is generally objected to on this occasion; and I should never have dreamed of presenting myself had not the Governor sent two of his men to bring me to the play. This last day being that in which, for Mussulmans, all the interest centres, the market-place in which the previous scenes had been enacted was entirely inadequate to contain the concourse of spectators. Every shop in the town was closed, and men, women, and children flocked to a wide space entirely without the town walls, where the necessary preparations had been made. As before, the women occupied the left, the men the right hand of the small pavilion in which the Khan and his friends sat. These acts, to uninitiated eyes and ears, are all very much the same except in their main incident, which always seems to be illustrative of the killing of some person or persons. In this case Hussein and one of his children are the victims. The curious features of the scene are the introduction of the Frankish Ambassador, who pleads for the life of the Imam, and who is accompanied by a lion. The sensation produced is tremendous, and great bearded men weep in downright earnest over the woes of Hussein. In the course of the act the Khan had two fresh pocket-handkerchiefs brought to him wherewith to dry his tears. Turning to me at a moment when the Khalif of Bagdad was making a most truculent speech as to his intended slaughter of the Imam, he said, his eyes wet with tears, 'What a *haram zadé* he is'! Haram zadé in Persian literally means an illegitimate

son; but its generally accepted meaning is robber, murderer, or bad character. In very many instances among the men, it was easy to see that the expressions of extreme grief were entirely simulated; but there were many whose genuine emotion could not be doubted. Out in this far-off quarter the people have but little notion of what a Frankish Ambassador looks like. In this instance he wore ordinary Persian garb, qualified by a crimson sash across his left shoulder. With regard to the appearance of a lion, the stage manager seemed to be even still more astray. While the principal actors on horseback were caracolling to and fro, and declaiming the well-known phrases with regard to the reverence due to the grandson of the Prophet, I had been noticing an odd-looking object creeping about the centre of the arena on all-fours. It looked like an ape with a long white shirt on, who had fallen foul of a pot of red paint and smeared his garments with it. This object kept gathering up dust and throwing it on its head, in Oriental token of grief. I was on inquiry informed that it was a lion, which, together with the Frankish Ambassador, had come to be converted to Islamism by witnessing the sublime attitude of the Imam when about to die.

There is no question but that the tragedy is full of pathos and elevating sentiment, though in the hands of the wretched itinerant actors who travel out into these districts the drama is murdered as ruthlessly as is Hussein himself. Before this final act of the drama commenced, a scene was enacted which forcibly recalled to my mind what I had seen at home. The conductor of the theatrical representations, clothed in a long chintz gown, got up on a kind of table and addressed the assembled multitude, reminding them of the blessed Imams and of himself and his company likewise. The Khan had paid the actors the sum of twenty krans (francs) per diem during the ten days of the performances,

but the audience were expected to contribute something also. The Khan set the example, bidding five krans. This was announced by a man who acted as collector, and who shouted, 'The Khan gives five krans.' Then the man on the table invoked the blessing of Allah, Mahomet, Ali, and the Imams, on the Khan. Some one else bid ten krans, whereupon followed a volley of benedictions. Then some unlucky wight of a priest, who looked poor enough, bid one kran. 'May the Lord bless him!' exclaimed the speaker. It was only when the bids or votes rose to five krans that Mahomet and the Imams were requested to contribute their share of benediction. Sometimes two, or three, krans were bid; and the blessing was nicely apportioned, in quantity and unction, to the sum given. A portly man, with a long robe and a merry face, who was one of the Khan's chief servants, received the money, handed it to the treasurer, and proclaimed aloud the sum given and the name of the giver. After each benediction from the stage manager, his entire company, as well as the audience, cried 'Ya Ali,' by way of confirming the prayer.

After the usual coffee and pipes, the Khan's rising gave the signal that all was over, and this signal was still further emphasized by the *ferashes*, or police, laying about them with stout ozier wands, hitting at the backs of the men and the bare ankles of the ladies. As I left the scene with the Khan, a grim-looking, nondescript figure glided behind me, and, touching me on the shoulder, said, 'Sahib, I am the Frankish Ambassador.' He evidently considered that the Frank present ought to compensate him in some measure for the ordeal he had undergone in adopting, even for so short a time, a character so uncanny.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE ATTOK. FALL OF GEOK TEPÉ.

Fresh hindrances to departure—Russian intrigues—Communications with Makdum Kuli Khan—Topography of Derguez—Ethnology of the frontier provinces—Deserted cities—An excursion with the Khan of Derguez—Curious ceremony of Guébre origin—A cavalry review—Turcoman horses—Ornaments on horses and men—A varied assortment of guns—Curious divination rites—The plate of destiny—Lutfabad—Vineyards and wines—Arrack—Persian ideas on wine drinking—Intoxicating powder—Intemperance in Persia—Opium smoking—Major Stewart—Crops in the Attok—Primitive harrows and ploughs—Armed cultivators—Ploughing with one hand and fighting with the other—A people of robbers—Want of roads—Awlili and Makdum tribes—Bringing in prisoners—A ghastly sight—Butchering wounded prisoners—Permission to leave Derguez—Fighting at Geok Tepé—A Persian raid—Kalta chenar—Between two fires—In sight of Geok Tepé—Description of the stronghold—Incidents of the siege—The final assault—Fall of the Tekké capital—Flight of the defenders.

On leaving Meshed all obstacles to my penetrating into the Turcoman country seemed to have been removed. I was in communication with Makdum Kuli Khan, the Akhal Tekké commander, and felt little doubt about overcoming any scruples he might still entertain about receiving me into his fortress. The Prince Governor of Meshed had given me a formal passport to proceed, and I fully expected to find myself, in a very few weeks at furthest, in Geok Tepé. Persian diplomacy, however, is hard to fathom, and Russian agents, who thought I intended to take an active share in the defence of the beleaguered fortress, raised up obstacles which kept me over two months in the Derguez. The Governor of that province, Mehemet Ali Khan, while treat-

ing me with sufficient personal courtesy, declined absolutely to let me pass his frontier towards the Akhal Tekké, in spite of the passport obtained with so much difficulty. A guard was placed over my movements, to prevent me from slipping off, and it was only after fresh negotiations with Teheran that I finally succeeded in getting liberty to depart. Meanwhile, I was able to keep up pretty regular communication with the Tekké camp, by means of the visitors coming thence to Muhammedabad. I also had an opportunity of examining the state of affairs in the Derguez itself. It may seem strange that the Tekkés should come freely into the Persian territory, in view of the incessant cattle raids to which I have referred, but these were looked on as a sort of legitimate international pastime, not particularly interfering with the public peace. Thus the raid by which fifteen thousand Turcoman sheep and cattle were brought into Derguez at the time I left Meshed, though organised by the Khan of the province himself, was not regarded, either by his own people or the Turcomans, as an act of open war, but simply as a private enterprise of quite an ordinary kind. An Akhal Tekké chief, to whom I spoke on the subject shortly afterwards, treated it with the utmost indifference, and highly praised the dexterity with which it had been managed. He looked on it, apparently, much as a merchant in Europe would regard the successful enterprise of a rival in trade, but with no feelings of indignation, nor, apparently, did he think there was any moral wrong involved in the transaction. In accordance with this state of public sentiment, I had no trouble in maintaining close relations with the belligerent Turcomans, though I was not permitted to visit their territory.

The Derguez, which may yet assume considerable importance, in view of the establishment of the Russians on its borders, is an irregular oval plain, running north-

west and south-east, bounded on the side adjoining the other Persian provinces by a considerable mountain range, —the Allah Akbar, or Hazar Masjid, and separated from the Attok and level Turcoman country by a low chain of hills. A strip of the plain beyond these hills was, at the time of my visit, subject to the Governor of Derguez, the Turcomans having accepted the Persian authority, but the boundaries of this district known as the 'Attok,' or Skirt, were somewhat varying. The length of the plain within the mountain chains is about seventy miles, and the width varies from twenty to thirty. A range of hills divides the plain in the direction of its length. A gorge, known as 'Of the Forty Girls,' gives a passage through this range, and the town of Muhammedabad, the capital of the province, stands about three miles from the northern end of this gorge. Another gorge, with terribly steep sides, affords a narrow passage along its bottom from Derguez to the Kuchan valley. This road is impracticable for wheeled carriages of any kind, and it is with difficulty that even horses traverse it; still, it is the only means of communication between the provinces. Its entrance is guarded by a fort; but, though the valley itself is dotted with watch towers, the 'Pass of the Forty Girls' has no such protection at its entrance. Turcoman 'chappows,' or plundering expeditions, often slip through it, and even get round by the southern end of Derguez into the less guarded provinces beyond the mountains. The original Muhammedabad stood close to the entrance of the gorge, and must have been an effectual bar to such raids, but at present only the ruins of its fort and ramparts remain. In Persia, probably owing to some superstition, a town once abandoned is never re-peopled. Should war, famine, or plague, cause the population of a place to desert their homes—and such events are common in

the East—they prefer, when the pressure of the calamity has been removed, to build a new town somewhere in the neighbourhood rather than to re-erect abodes upon the depopulated site. South-east of Derguez lies the district of Kelat-i-Nadri, beyond which is Sarakhs—all three being border provinces, and subject, nominally at least, to the jurisdiction of the Prince Governor of Meshed, whose power extends over all Khorassan.

The population of these frontier provinces is entirely of Turkish, Turcoman, or Kurdish origin, there being little or no pure Persian blood among the inhabitants. The Turks are descendants of settlers from Bokhara and Khiva, and are a better-looking race than the Turcomans, whose features bear much of a Kalmuck type, with little or no beard. Even when they renounce the nomad life, and settle down somewhat permanently as cultivators, the Turcomans show a strong reluctance to living within walls. Their houses are an imitation in shape of the movable dwellings, or *aladjaks*, of the roving population, and are built of reeds and mud. Architects who can trace the features of the original timber hut in the lintels and triglyphs of the Parthenon would find an interest in studying this first development of permanent buildings from a movable original. The whole population of Derguez, Kelat, and the Attok, is not over eighty thousand—a very scanty number indeed, considering the extent and fertility of the country. One is painfully struck everywhere throughout these countries, and, indeed, through most of Central Asia, by the evidences of a once dense population. Ruined towns and cities abound, some of which were places of wealth a couple of generations ago, but are now only inhabited by foxes and jackals. Abiverd, the most advanced Persian outpost in the Attok, was a flourishing city in the time of Nadir Shah, but now a dozen of Guebre shepherds are the

only human dwellers among its ruins. Khivabad, between Abiverd and Kelat, built by the same energetic tyrant, has been utterly deserted.

Shortly after my arrival, the Khan, Mehemet Ali, invited me to accompany him on a tour of inspection to Lutfabad, the capital of the outlying Turcoman district of the Attok, and situated on the edge of the great plain which stretches away to Khiva. As a necessary protection he was accompanied by three hundred of his feudal cavalry. Crossing, by a pass, the low range of hills separating the Derguez from the level Turcoman country, we descended into the outlying plain near Kairabad, a Turcoman village of eight hundred inhabitants, but fortified in the Persian fashion, like the villages in general throughout Derguez. On the approach of the party, a deputation of the elders of the place came out, and received the Khan with a singular ceremony. An old man carried forward a tray of lighted embers, and threw them under the feet of the Governor's horse, pronouncing the words 'Khosh geldi' (You are welcome). The Governor acknowledged the salute by presenting the old man with a piece of silver. This form of salute is said to be of Guebre origin. Carpets were then spread, and a *pilaff* was laid before us, which we ate with our fingers. After dinner there was a review, the men being ordered out to ride races in pairs. A small prize was given to the winner of each match. The horses were really beautiful animals, mostly of the pure Turcoman breed. They are somewhat narrow in the chest, and long in the legs. In general they have little mane, owing perhaps to the friction of their heavy felt coverings. They are of tolerable speed, and of wonderful endurance. The horsemanship of the riders was superb. The whole force was afterwards inspected in order of battle, with the main body deployed in line, a squadron in front, and flying

detachments on the wings. All the men had scimitars and guns. The latter were a miscellaneous but serviceable assortment of weapons. The majority carried long heavy rifles, somewhat resembling the hunting rifles used by Kentucky sportsmen, but there was a considerable number of Chassepôts, and also some guns of large calibre, not unlike short duck guns. There was no uniform; the soldiers wore the common dress of the country.

Mounting again, we rode forward, passing the villages of Mir and Mianabad, at the latter of which the brother of the Khan joined us with two hundred additional troopers. The Guebre salutation was given at both places. In the evening we reached Lutfabad,[1] and established ourselves in the citadel for the night. After supper the Khan amused himself with a peculiar kind of divination. Before setting out on his official duties he had sent a party off on an *aleman*, or private foray, and he was anxious to know what luck had befallen his little venture. A plate of 'destiny' (*fall*) was brought in, being only a slab of unbaked earth on which a circle had been traced, and divided by radial lines into twenty-nine sections. Three pieces of straw were placed at random on the divisions, and the Khan, taking a division at haphazard, and counting to the left, repeated the letters of the alphabet, and announced the letters corresponding to the three straws. An old Turcoman interpreted the result, and announced that the party would return the next day with success. Oddly enough, in the main this turned out to be true.

Lutfabad presents a good appearance from a distance, being surrounded with trees and well fortified. The country around, though forming part of the Attok, an insecure and debatable land, is well cultivated, and vast tracts of stubble

[1] The original name of this place was Bouga Jik. It was named Lutfabad after Lutf Ali Khan, the father of the present Governor of the Derguez, Mehemed Ali.

showed the extent of the last year's crop. There were also vineyards, and groves of trees for firewood, all fortified. At night these groves are carefully guarded, for the Tekkés, when on a *chappow*, were not above carrying off a few ass-loads of firewood, if nothing better could be found. In spite of the Mahometanism of the population, wine and arrack are largely made from the produce of the vineyards. The wine is of two kinds, a red wine, with a peculiar rusty flavour, and a deep-yellow sugary wine, something of the flavour of white Malaga, but altogether too sweet for table use. The arrack is distilled from the lees of the wine-presses, and is simply horrible. Few persons would care to taste it a second time. On myself it acted as an emetic. In Persia people generally drink liquors purely for their stimulant effect, altogether regardless of their flavour. The arrack is kept in goatskins, lined with pitch, as in Spain, which give the liquor the peculiar odour of a strongly-smelling he-goat, while its taste is highly suggestive of coal-tar. Opium smoking is also universally prevalent throughout Khorassan, though all but unknown to the Turcomans on the Caspian shore, and many of the inhabitants have the deathly pallor and heavy leaden stare characteristic of confirmed slaves of the drug. On the whole, temperance cannot be said to be a distinguishing national virtue of the races of the Persian debatable land.

A peculiarity about the intemperance here is that, though liquors are freely drunk, it is considered improper to allude to them openly in ordinary conversation. The natives compromise with their consciences for the non-observance of the Mahometan law of total abstinence by not speaking of the forbidden beverage in public. There is less delicacy about the use of opium, which does not come under the express ban of the Prophet, however Eastern moralists may condemn its use. I have seen men smoking with

perfect indifference in the rooms which I chanced to occupy during my journeys. Six or eight would lie at full length on the floor, with their heads together on a pillow, and their bodies, stretched out like the spokes of a wheel, radiating from it. A small table, about a foot in diameter and six inches high, is placed near the pillow, to support the lamp, which is generally made of alabaster. The latter is fed with butter, and is covered by a large bell-glass, with a brass-bound hole in the top, over the point of the flame. The lower edge of the bell-glass is slightly raised on three props, passage for air being left to keep up the flame. Over the flame the smoker or his attendant holds a piece of opium, about the size of a pea, on the point of a metal skewer, and tempers it carefully to the consistency proper for smoking purposes. The pipe itself is an earthen or metallic bulb, about the size and shape of a small pear, having a small hole in one side, and a hollow wooden stem, about a foot long, inserted in the broader end. A piece of roasted opium is stuck in the side aperture and pierced with a pin-hole, and then held over the lamp while the smoker inhales the smoke and fumes through the stem. Half-a-dozen of inhalations bring on a semi-lethargic condition, and the smoker then relinquishes the pipe and falls back motionless on the pillow. The fumes are very sickening to a looker-on, and I have often suffered considerably from being obliged to remain in a room where opium smoking was in progress.

Though the Khan was not aware of the fact, I was not the only European in his party on this excursion. A few days after my arrival in Muhammedabad my Persian servant informed me that an Armenian trader from India was stopping at the caravanserai. I called on him a little later, and, though his features were of a European type, his dress and manners were in perfect keeping with his

supposed nationality. He told me that he belonged to an Armenian family settled in Calcutta for three generations, and that he had learned English there. His two servants were unmistakable Armenians, and he and they conversed a good deal in Hindustani. The name he gave was Khwaja Ibrahim, and his business in the Derguez was to purchase Turcoman horses. On this excursion he accompanied the Khan. About three weeks after the commencement of our acquaintance he informed me that his real name was Stewart, and that he was Major of the Fifth Punjab Infantry, and travelling on leave of absence. He was, like myself, desirous of penetrating to Merv, but finally gave up the project, getting wearied of the obstacles raised by the Persian officials in the way of any stranger entering the Turcoman country. He left me at Muhammedabad ten or twelve days after our return from this Lutfabad expedition, and returned to Meshed, whence he proceeded home by way of Teheran and the Caspian, his leave of absence being nearly expired, and no time being left him to thread any further the intricacies of Oriental intrigue. Subsequently, when I returned from Merv to Teheran, I met him in the latter town, he having come back from England to return again to the charge.

Wheat, barley, and melons are the chief crops grown in the Attok. As we passed, the peasants were everywhere at work with their rude wooden ploughs, each having only an iron shoe on the ploughshare. The harrow was T-shaped, being merely a tree trunk having a pole driven into its midst, and to which the oxen were attached. Oxen are universally employed in agriculture, horses being reserved for riding. Nearly every one, no matter how poor, possesses at least one horse. The peasants were all armed while at work, each man having his musket slung on his back as he followed the plough or harrow. Farming, in fact, is quite a warlike business.

The able-bodied men go to the field, if at any distance from home, in parties of ten or twelve. On the first alarm of an inroad, the oxen are hurriedly driven under the walls of one of the fortified towers which dot the country at every two or three hundred yards, and the cultivators place themselves within the fort to protect their property by the fire of their muskets. The towers have loopholes around their tops, masked by projecting bartizans of wicker work plastered with clay, and somewhat like a candle extinguisher in shape. From these a destructive fire can be poured on any assailants who may be bold enough to approach the cattle. The robbers have no time to stay, and the system of defence is therefore pretty efficacious in general, though of course the martial farmers are sometimes caught napping, and have to pay the penalty in more or less extensive losses of cattle. As might be expected, the villagers thus trained to the din of arms have themselves scanty regard for the property of others. Indeed, a solitary traveller is sure to be robbed, if not murdered, by the settled cultivators, even if he should never meet the nomads. The wonder is how any cultivation at all is attempted in such a country. Moreover, there is in the Derguez no market for produce beyond that which is required for the wants of the district itself. There are no roads to the more peopled provinces beyond the mountains; and throughout the Attok I have seen piles of chopped straw, which would fetch a high price in Meshed, left to rot on the ground. No wonder that the Russian agents were received joyfully when they came to purchase supplies. When once the East Caspian railroad reaches this country, its productive capacity will be enormously increased. Facilities for the transport of provisions to market, and security against plunderers, will give an immense stimulus to the industry of all classes—Turks,

Kurds, Persians, and even Turcomans. On the other hand, these populations will become large consumers of the Russian goods, which already have such importance in their markets. It is not extravagant to anticipate that at a not very remote day millions of inhabitants will be found in the regions now so thinly settled, and that the prosperity of old times will be rivalled by the modern development of this fertile land.

The Khan stopped only one night in Lutfabad, and the next morning continued his excursion to Makdum, a village inhabited by a distinct tribe of Turcomans. The Tekkés form the population in the part of the Attok immediately adjoining the desert. Behind them are the Awlilis, and, close to the foot of the Allah Akbar, the Makdums have their settlements. The village was once fortified, but the Makdums have allowed the walls to go to ruin. Beyond this place are the remains of numerous irrigation ditches, and some large canals, all giving proof of a large former population. We made a brief stay in Makdum, returning to Lutfabad the same evening, and thence the next day to Muhammedabad.

On the day after my arrival I received an invitation to visit the prison, for the purpose of seeing a Turcoman prisoner who had just been brought in. He had been shot through the thigh-bone by a Chassepôt bullet, and his captors were quite uncertain whether it was worth while to retain him as prisoner. Should he die, as a matter of course no ransom could be obtained for him, and, meantime, the cost of his food would be so much dead loss. I was asked whether he could recover, and after examination of the wound I pronounced it quite possible that he could. On the ground, beside the unfortunate prisoner, lay the ghastly head of one of his countrymen, brought in at the same time, and which had been kept unflayed for my

examination. The gaolers, as soon as I had looked at the horrid object, proceeded to skin it with as much indifference as a cook would pluck a dead fowl. A few days afterwards I learned that the wounded man's throat had been summarily cut for the purpose of sending his head, along with others, to Meshed. This fact will give an idea of the respect in which human life is held in this country. The strangest thing about these barbarities is the indifference with which they are regarded by both sides. Mehemet Ali Khan himself not only corresponded in a friendly way with the Turcoman chiefs while trading in the heads of their tribesmen, but some years before, when forced to fly from his province by the Shah's troops in consequence of a revolt, he had taken refuge with the Tekkés without hesitation. It did not appear that he felt any particular fear of retaliation from the friends of the numerous victims of his raids, public and private, nor, apparently, was any malice borne towards him in consequence of deeds such as I have just described.

A couple of days afterwards I was at last allowed to start on my long-delayed journey. The secret of the matter was that the Russians had by this time completed the investment of the Tekké stronghold, and their agents were now perfectly indifferent to my arrival. I started from Muhammedabad about January 16, and proceeded to Durangar. News had come in of two sorties of the garrison of Geok Tepé on the 9th and 10th. The plans of the Tekkés had been betrayed to the enemy, and, in consequence, the first sortie was repulsed with loss. On the 10th, almost the whole Tekké force made a desperate attack on the advanced Russian works, and succeeded in storming three of the four entrenchments which had been thrown up in front of the gates of the town at about a thousand yards' distance. Two breech-loading field pieces,

and several prisoners, fell into the hands of the besieged, who cut the throats of the unfortunate captives shortly afterwards. This partial success, however, had no further results. Reinforcements were reported to be on the way to the front from Bami, where the bulk of the Russian forces were stationed, and it was evident that the final struggle was close at hand. Before the lines of investment were completed, a large body of cavalry had left the town, and were hovering about between Geok Tepé and Askabad. This force was not unoccupied in the meantime, owing to a characteristic event. The Khan of Kuchan, thinking the moment a favourable one for doing a stroke of business on his own account, while the Tekkés were occupied with the defence of their stronghold, sent out a *chappow* of a hundred horsemen to seize whatever corn, cattle, or horses they could find in the outlying Turcoman villages. The Tekké warriors outside, however, got notice of the intended visit, and ambushed their Kuchan invaders so successfully that not a man of them escaped, sixty being killed and forty made prisoners. This affair, which took place two days after the sortie from Geok Tepé, of course did not diminish the danger of the journey before me, but it would never have done to turn back after having come so far, so I pushed on to Kaltachenar, the last village acknowledging the Persian authority in that direction, and not far from Askabad. Not deeming it safe to trust myself in the plain, where I was equally liable to fall in with Russian scouting parties or Tekké warriors, I kept along the slopes of the mountain chain, though travelling there was very fatiguing to the horses. Besides my two servants,[1] an escort of six or seven Derguez troopers accompanied me, but at such a

[1] A Kurdish ex-brigand and an Akhal Tekké Turcoman, whom I had hired to replace my Teheran servants, who refused to accompany me to the Turcoman territory.

time the utmost caution was needed. Early on the 24th we ascended the top of the Markov mountain, which towers some six thousand feet over the Tekké plain, and is not over twelve miles from Geok Tepé. With my double field-glass I could easily make out the lines of the Turcoman fortress, and the general position of its besiegers, but I was too far off to be able to make notes of details. I could plainly see, by the smoke of the guns and the movements of the combatants, that the attack had begun in earnest, and I watched its result with intense anxiety. The Russian assault was directed against the southerly wall of the fortifications, and, after what was apparently a desperate conflict there, it was evident that they had forced their way. A crowd of horsemen began to ride in confusion from the other side of the town, and spread in flight over the plain. Immediately afterwards, a mass of fugitives of every class showed that the town was being abandoned by its inhabitants. The Turcoman fortress had fallen, and all was over with the Akhal Tekkés.

Though the discipline and superior weapons of the Russians had thus at length secured victory over the wild courage of the nomads, the struggle had been really a desperate one. From the fugitives whom I encountered that evening and on the following days I gathered many particulars of the siege and its conclusion.

Geok Tepé, I should remark, is a misnomer, the true name of the place being Yengi Sheher, or the New Town, it having been called into existence only in 1878, at the commencement of the military operations of the Russians against the Akhal Tekké territory. Geok Tepé is a long-deserted village lying about three or four miles to the north of the new town, and well out into the desert, which at this point approaches very close to the mountains. Almost the entire population of the Akhal Tekké was con-

centrated at Yengi Sheher, between fifty and sixty thousand *kibitkas* covering the ground within the walls. These latter, of the usual unbaked brick, enclosed a rectangular space, some eight thousand paces in circuit, and furnished with nine gates. Of these, three were in the western side, three in the northern, two in the eastern, and one in the southern.

In the north-western portion of the town stands an ancient earth-mound called the Dengil Tepé, a name sometimes also given to the town itself. Along the western and eastern sides of the place, which are also the longer, run two streams of water, having their sources in the mountains to the south, and running northward into the desert, where they disappear. Along these streams, which constituted the water supply of the population, were several mills. Lest these water-courses should be diverted, many wells and reservoirs had been constructed within the walls. Opposite each gate was a large traverse, to protect it from artillery fire. Within their entrenchments, solid enough to resist any fire save that of a regular siege train, and sufficiently high to make an assault a very hazardous affair, the Tekkés confidently awaited the Russian advance. That, however, they had certain misgivings, would seem to be indicated by the fact that, instead of storing the produce of the harvest within the walls, it was concealed in pits considerably to the east and north of the town, provisions for but a week at a time being brought in.[1]

The Russians assumed the aggressive by pushing forward a strong force to a place called Kareez Yagana Bahadur, within seven miles of Yengi Sheher, and close to the foot of the mountains. Thence they went forward to Urpagli, only two thousand paces from the walls, and,

[1] The details of the siege here given were supplied to me by various refugees from Yengi Sheher, Makdum Kuli Khan himself among the number.

establishing some guns, shelled the town. Owing, however, to the Turcomans having constructed blindages in connection with their huts, this shelling appears to have done little or no harm. Desperate sorties were made from time to time on or about January 11, troops were pushed on between the south of the town and the mountains, and entrenched themselves at Jollé Cakshall, about fifteen hundred yards eastward of the walls. From this last-mentioned point, as well as from Urpagli, shells were thrown into the town during twelve days, but without producing any effect upon the spirit of the defenders, though they were now practically cut off from external aid. It may be that this obstinacy on the part of the Turcomans, and a fear of some serious attempt to succour the place from Merv, decided the Russians to attempt an assault. On the 24th a heavy cannonade was opened from Urpagli against the north-western, and from Jollé Cakshall against the south-eastern portion of the town. The assaulting column started from the latter place and was directed against the southerly gate on the eastern side of the town. This gate had to be blown up by mining. The assault was desperately resisted, but was completely successful. As soon as the Russians effected a lodgement within the walls the Tekké cavalry sought safety in flight. The works opposite the northern gates having been destroyed by the last sortie, retreat was open on that side, and the garrison took advantage of that circumstance to effect their escape when once resistance was hopeless. Crowds of the townspeople followed their example. The Russians made little effort to pursue the fugitives, but the panic spread rapidly through the plain. From my post on the summit of the mountain I could see the commotion among the population. The villagers between Yengi Sheher and Askabad, men, women, and children, with their cattle and

effects, were leaving their homes and streaming towards the Persian frontier. It was impossible to tell how soon the Cossacks would be down on us, so, seeing that the Akhal Tekké war was over, we hastily turned our horses back to Kaltachenar. Crowds of fugitives from the captured town were already streaming in as I arrived, full of details of the struggle. Kaltachenar was evidently no safe place for me to stop in, nor was anything to be gained by remaining there, so with all speed we made our way on to Askabad on the following morning.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

ACROSS THE ATTOK TO KELAT-I-NADRI.

Askabad—Pursuing the fugitives—Yamud Turcomans—Occupation of Askabad—Feelings of the border population—The horrors of war—An escort of robbers—Kosroe Tepé—Dergana—Mistaken for a tax assessor—Kaka—Changing the courses of rivers—The Tejend swamp—Homage to the victors—Persian neutrality—Lutfabad to Kelat-i-Nadri—Shillingan—Makdum Kosgun—Nomads settled down—A Turcoman chief's abode—Primitive camps—A wild road—Foxes and jackals—Different species of partridge—Edible tulip-roots—Sun-baked tree-trunks—Khivabad—Ice houses—Archingan—Kelat-i-Nadri—A Persian valley of Rasselas—Regular troops—The last struggles against the conquerors—Rectifying the boundaries of Persia—Russian pretensions—Bringing back the fugitive Tekkés—Conciliatory measures *à la Russe*—The spoils of war—A Russian agent on my track—Invitation to Merv—Turcoman presents—Honours that must be paid for—Merv and British interference—Embassy to Candahar—Leaving Kelat-i-Nadri—The agent again—Intimidating my escort—Approach of the Cossacks—On the road to Merv.

ASKABAD had been frequently spoken of in Europe as a second Geok Tepé, on which the Tekkés could fall back when driven from that fortress. Nothing could be further from the fact, as the town possessed no means whatever of making a defence against an enemy, much less against one flushed with victory. It had been indeed a place of importance in former days, and thus a certain prestige was attached to its name, but since its capture by the Turcomans seventy years before it had been allowed to fall into complete ruin. The walls and towers had crumbled down, the roofs had been stripped from the houses, and a few families of wandering Tekkés, camped rather than settled among the ruins, were the only inhabitants. Even these had

fled to Persian territory on the news of the fall of the Turcoman fortress, and when I reached the town it was entirely deserted. It is admirably situated as a station for the Russians. The water supply is copious, and plantations around offer abundance of wood, so there is little doubt that in the hands of its new masters it will before long assume even more than ts former importance. Askabad was evidently no safe halting-place for me, even had it offered any shelter. The Cossacks were scouring the plain in pursuit of the fugitives, and reconnoitring the country. I therefore hurried on at once, and indeed none too soon, for a Russian scouting party had entered the place the same day. My fate would have been very uncertain had I fallen into their hands, and at any rate I should have been entirely debarred from pursuing further explorations in Central Asia. I had now made up my mind to proceed to Merv at once, and my only hope of doing so was to get well ahead of the Russian advance. We camped out in the hills that night, and the next day arrived in safety at Lutfabad, after a journey of about fifty miles in all.

At Lutfabad I learned that the scouting party which had entered Askabad so soon after my departure was composed of Yamud Turcomans, some two thousand of whom were in the Russian service as irregular cavalry. Though akin in race to the defenders of Yenghi Sheher, these Turcomans showed the utmost readiness to serve the invader against them. In fact they seemed delighted with the chance which General Skobeleff's campaign afforded them of paying off old scores with their hitherto independent neighbours. Private feuds are at all times more powerful among the nomads than even national interests, and thus the conduct of these newly conquered Russian subjects is not to be wondered at. Still, their masters did not repose implicit confidence in their fidelity, or at least

in their honesty. Any Turcoman will, when an opportunity arises, plunder friend or foe indiscriminately, and after some mysterious raids had been made on the Russian lines from such a direction as made it impossible to attribute them to the Tekké enemy, the Yamuds were obliged to give several of their chiefs as hostages to Skobeleff. This measure, I believe, was successful in preventing further raids on the Russian supplies, while the alacrity of the Yamuds in harrying their kinsmen was not thereby in the least diminished.

Askabad[1] was not left long without a more formidable Russian garrison than the Yamud scouts. A regular force of five thousand men, with sixteen guns, followed quickly, and not only occupied the town, but immediately commenced rebuilding it for permanent possession. This completed the conquest of the Akhal Tekké country, the fertile portion of which was now almost entirely under Russian domination. Makdum Kuli Khan, with the bulk of the fugitive cavalry from Geok Tepé, retreated towards the Tejend swamp. In order to pursue him it was necessary for Skobeleff's forces either to cross the Persian territory or to march through the waterless desert. There was considerable uncertainty as to what course he would follow, or how far the Russian conquests would be extended. Whatever feelings the Khan and his officials might have on the subject, the most profound indifference about any change of masters prevailed among the populations of the Attok, both Turks and Turcomans. They expressed perfect willingness to sell grain to the Russians, or to any one

[1] General Soboleff stated to Mr. Marvin that Captain Butler's letter about the existence of a second Akhal Tekké fortress eastward of Yengi Sheher was the cause of Skobeleff's advance to Askabad and Lutfabad. Skobeleff must have been perfectly aware through his agents in the Derguez and at Meshed that there was no other fortified position. In any case, if the occupation of Askabad did not enter into his plans, why did he not retire from it, when he found the place not fortified, but deserted and ruinous?

else who would pay for it, and were as ready to be subjects of the Czar as of any other ruler. All they asked was that their religion should not be interfered with. I remember an old man asking if the Russians were likely to build churches and ring bells in their villages, or if they would injure the tomb of a certain local religious celebrity near Askabad. These were the only points that seemed to interest him, and I believe that he fairly represented popular feeling in the whole district.

Meanwhile the direst confusion prevailed throughout the country. The Tekkés who had escaped from Geok Tepé were everywhere robbing and murdering. The Russian pursuing parties were also active, and for me at least were scarcely less dangerous. Moreover, the moss-troopers of Derguez, and the Kurds from Kuchan, were abroad like flocks of sea-gulls in troubled waters, seeking what they could pick up, and mercilessly harrying the unarmed fugitives from Geok Tepé especially. There was no time to be lost, however, if I were ever to get to Merv, and I quitted Lutfabad on the day after my arrival there. I left my baggage behind, as I only intended to reconnoitre the road. My escort, as a matter of course, was furnished by the Khan, and I was to give them a message for him whenever they and I parted; they would not venture to plunder me, at least openly, though, as may be gathered from what has been already said, they were all trained robbers. Indeed, they were evidently looked upon as such by the villagers in the places through which I passed, and in cases where the fighting men were absent it was only after long parley that I could gain admission for myself and my disreputable escort.

We rode rapidly past Meyilli and the deserted town of Kosroe Tepé, which was evidently once a place of importance, judging by the size of its earth mounds, on which

the walls and towers are rapidly crumbling away. Some years ago the present Khan of Derguez established a large colony of Turcomans here, and for a time they remained at peace in their new habitations. Ultimately, however, they all abandoned the place, which was tenanted when I passed only by vultures and jackals. Pits had been dug here and there in the ruins for the extraction of nitre, which is specially abundant in the clay of these deserted villages. The soil of the whole plain is more or less impregnated with it. We halted at Dergana, another village, for breakfast. Here the elders of the place, a body of old men with long white beards, received me with the utmost respect. Each in turn came forward, made a low bow, and took my right hand with his two. A large felt carpet was spread for our use, and on it we were regaled with a breakfast of bread, melons, and strong green tea, the latter to me a nauseating dose. In all likelihood the village elders took me for a tax-gatherer, sent to assess their produce.

Leaving Dergana, we passed through the deserted Abiverd, and arrived at Kaka, a considerable village some three miles further, and not far from the head of the Tejend swamp. Kaka is well supplied with water. In fact it has risen on the ruins of Abiverd, in consequence of the Persian Government some years ago having turned the course of a large stream, the Laïn-Su, which formerly ran through Abiverd, but now flows through Kaka. I made two excursions to the Tejend swamp from this last-named place, and found it partially covered with jungle, in which the wild boar and leopard abounded, and tigers were not uncommon. The marsh is a treacherous expanse, and men and horses are often swallowed in its depths while attempting its passage at night. Having convinced myself of the impracticability of a journey in that direction, I hurried back to Lutfabad, after two days' absence.

During this time the Russian prestige had been increasing daily. In Persia, as elsewhere, nothing succeeds like success, and Skobeleff, the conqueror of the great Tekké stronghold, was a person to be treated with infinitely more honour than plain General Skobeleff. The Persian authorities went further, and almost threw themselves into the arms of Russia. The prohibition against the exportation of corn was wholly disregarded, and provisions were poured into the Russian quarters. Two thousand camel loads were dispatched from Meshed itself, the residence of the Prince Governor of Khorassan, shortly after the occupation of Askabad, and six mule loads of gold were sent to that city to pay for these and other supplies. Russian imperials were lavishly scattered in the border provinces, and their effect in conciliating the civility, or rather the obsequiousness of both the people and their rulers, was magical. Orders were issued from Teheran to refuse shelter to the fugitives from Geok Tepé, and even to seize and send prisoners to the Russian camp any of the Tekké fighting men who might be found on Persian soil. This last measure was certainly pushing neutrality to a most peculiar end, but Persia was absolutely bound to the car of her powerful neighbour, and the authorities doubtless thought it wise to make the best of a bad situation. The Russian commander on his side was not backward in his use of the proffered services. He accepted the situation graciously, but without the least show of hesitation. He informed the Governor of Derguez that he intended advancing to the Tejend by way of Kaka; in other words, across territory hitherto recognised as Persian, without any form of asking leave. He had just written to announce that he would reach Lutfabad himself in a day or two. The brother of the Khan of Derguez, Seyd Ali, showed me Skobeleff's letter to this effect, and I saw there was not an hour to be

lost. I got my escort quietly together, and, having stopped one night only, left Lutfabad at daybreak with all my baggage. I heard subsequently that Skobeleff and his escort arrived in the town the same day, so that my escape was again a close one.

We took the same road from Lutfabad as I had on my previous excursion, but turned our course from it at Shillingan, a village of about fifty families, situated four miles from Lutfabad. Taking the track towards Kelat-i-Nadri, we passed through a well-watered and cultivated country to Hassar, a hamlet seven miles from Shillingan, and thence rode on to the Turcoman settlement of Makdum. Here we halted for breakfast, and to take some bearings for our road. Makdum occupies the top and sides of an ancient earth mound. The present inhabitants, who are nomad Turcomans that have been established there by the Persian authorities, have let the walls fall into decay, as the nomads have an objection to dwelling within enclosures, except by absolute necessity. A few *aladjaks*, or circular huts, such as I have already described when writing of Gumush Tepé, were to be found here, but most of the dwellings were built of reeds and earth combined. Leaving Makdum after an hour's stay, we rode along by the skirt of the hills over rough and often swampy ground, until we reached Kosgun, a large village at the foot of high and steep hills. The Laïn-Su, which has been already referred to at Kaka, flows close to the westerly side of Kosgun, but it is only with much trouble that its true direction can be made out, so much is its course deflected artificially, and cut up for the purpose of irrigating the arable ground near.

We halted for the night at Kosgun, as there was no other village to be met with for nearly thirty miles in the direction in which we were going, and there was no likelihood of

our being troubled by the Cossacks in such a place. Like Makdum, it is a Turcoman colony seated amid the ruins of an old and much dilapidated town. The population of about two hundred had erected their dwellings in their national fashion, and allowed the older buildings and walls to go to ruin. The chief, however, had a somewhat more pretentious abode, in which he gave me hospitality for the night. It was about fifteen feet long, and eight wide on the inside, with mud walls, and a doorway, closed by a heavy reed mat, in one corner. Two upright posts, one at each end, supported the trunk of a tree as a rough ridge-pole, and over this a large reed mat was thrown, much as sailors throw a sail over a spar to improvise a rough tent. The gables were left open, admitting light and air and giving egress to the smoke. A fire made of *thessek*, or dried dung, burned on the hearth, and the mistress of the house, with her face unveiled in the Turcoman fashion, sat by it cooking *pilaff*. At night, a lamp of earthenware filled with the oil of the castor bean was lighted, the wick being placed in the oil with the top projecting over the side. After supper the men smoked opium till my head was dizzy and my stomach nauseated with the heavy sour fumes.

Early in the morning we resumed our journey towards Kelat. The track lay along the foot of steep, almost overhanging earth bluffs, under whose shade a wide stretch of gravel and large boulders showed the extent and violence of the winter torrents that come down from the mountains. The raised spots in the bed of the dry river, as well as its banks, were overgrown with thorns, huge reeds, and a high grass like the pampa grass of South America. At times the jungle was so thick that it was with much ado we were able to force our way through. Jackals and foxes started up before our feet in such spots, and once a leopard or something very like one showed himself, for a moment. Snakes,

mostly of a venomous kind, glided across our track every moment, and coveys of partridges were constantly springing up almost under our horses' feet. The red-legged partridge was the most common, but there was also abundance of the royal partridge, a bird equal in size to a small turkey, and occasionally we saw braces of a small ash-grey species, with yellow legs. No other birds were to be seen except very large black eagles, which soared high above our heads.

The plain stretching to the northward was thickly covered with giant tulips, called by the natives *lalla gul.* They were of a deep crimson colour, and so large that the seed capsules were sometimes four inches long. I searched closely for some of the seeds, but could find none, they having been all carried off by the field rats and mice which swarmed all over the plain. The jackals also seemed to have a taste for the bulbous root, as the numerous holes they had scratched in digging them up testified. The Turcomans are very fond of the bulb as an article of food, and I found it in taste not unlike a very sweet chestnut, but much better and more tender. Many of the tree-trunks along the dry river bed were strangely transformed by the combined sun's heat and occasional moisture. The old trunks were literally charred, or rather baked to the blackness and hardness of coal, while still standing erect. At first I thought they had been blasted by lightning, but on closer examination they showed no signs of splintering. They were lignite, formed in this place by the heat of the sun, and the fact may be worth noting by geologists, in connection with the theory of coal formations.

Some twelve miles further southward, the narrow valley widens into an amphitheatre a couple of miles across, and in its midst stands the large deserted town of Khivabad. I do not recollect to have seen anywhere a description of this very singular place. It was built by Nadir Shah on

his return from Bokhara, and peopled by inhabitants of that place and of Khiva, whose removal from their original homes the Shah deemed advisable for one reason or another. The town is square, and about two miles in circumference. The walls and towers of mingled baked and unbaked brick are in a state of almost perfect preservation, the scarp and counterscarp of the deep fosse preserving their steep slope. There are four gates, guarded by massive circular towers of baked brick, with embrasures for artillery. Connecting the gates are two broad thoroughfares, crossing each other at right angles in the centre of the town. The other streets are parallel or at right angles to these, after the fashion of a newly laid-out American town. The wooden beams of the roofs have all been carried away for fuel, but the walls of the houses remain intact. It was easy to see that the fortifications had not been stormed or dismantled. On the death of Nadir Shah, about one hundred and thirty years ago, the inhabitants of Khivabad, having no longer the fear of that bloodthirsty monster before their eyes, went off *en masse* to their former homes. The place has been ever since, I am told, entirely uninhabited. Standing on one of the towers, and gazing over the ample space within the walls, so utterly silent and deserted, the enchanted cities of Eastern story come to the mind, and one might well imagine the great flocks of blue pigeons perched along the battlements to be the bewitched inhabitants. Along the streets and among the houses grows a species of giant hemlock, with great bulbous joints on the stem. At those points where the broad bases of the petioles join them is to be found a quantity of snuff-coloured, clammy matter, which my guides informed me is eaten by the people of the locality, and produces an effect like alcoholic intoxication. It is probably the pollen of the flowers which has lodged at the joints of the stem and leaf. Near the walls are two

very large conical structures of baked brick, plastered outside with loam. They are sixty to seventy feet high, and their floors are excavated to a depth of ten or twelve feet. These are ice-houses, in which the snow and ice from the hills were packed in immense quantities, and preserved for use during the summer heats.

The ground around Khivabad is very fertile, and largely cultivated by Awlili Turcomans from the plain northward. These people come a distance of from fifteen to twenty miles to work on the land, but, strange to say, they will on no account inhabit the deserted town, though its well-preserved ramparts afford every necessary protection, and it is admirably situated in the midst of the well-watered amphitheatre of rich alluvial soil. This, however, is but in keeping with the general customs of the people here, who seem to have an ineradicable objection to inhabiting any abandoned place of the kind. They prefer to go to a vast amount of trouble in constructing an entirely new town, often quite close to the adjoining old one. A little to the south of Khivabad is the point at which the river, whose dry bed I followed along the valley, is deflected to Aliabad between Kaka and Karakhan. It is quite as considerable a stream as the Atterek, and loses itself in the great Tejend swamp after a considerable portion of its water has been consumed in irrigation. It is named the Idalik, and in early summer, when swelled by the melting snows from the mountains, becomes a dangerous torrent. A few miles higher up, and at the foot of the Kelat mountains, is the village of Archingan, where I halted for the night. It is within sixteen miles of Kelat.

Archingan is a village of about three hundred inhabitants, strongly fortified in the usual frontier manner. The circuit of the walls is about three hundred yards. Its interior was indescribably filthy, and dung-heaps and mud

holes abounded. Our stay there was only for the night, and the next day we started for Kelat-i-Nadri, the seat of government of the district lying between Derguez and Sarakhs. The road was a mere track, winding along the sides of steep mountains, and at times following the bed of the mountain torrents. Kelat itself is the centre of the defensive system, if such a name can be given to it, of the north-eastern Persian frontier. It is not a town, properly speaking; but an oval valley, enclosed on all sides by almost vertical cliffs over a thousand feet high. Narrow gorges, at the eastern and western ends respectively, and both well fortified against attack, are the only modes of access to this valley. It recalls, in its general appearance and inaccessibility, the Happy Valley of Rasselas, as imagined by Johnson. The mountains, when we visited it, were covered with snow, and the air was piercingly cold. An old fort, and a collection of crazy huts at the western end, constitute the only thing like a town in the valley. The Governor's residence stands in the middle of the valley, with a large circular stone tower attached. This was built by Nadir Shah, who selected the place as a military centre, and left his name attached to it. It is now garrisoned by a regiment of regular infantry and some artillerymen. The officers of the latter had a picturesque appearance in their deep crimson tunics and trousers, surmounted by black Astrakan shakoes. The military commandant was a Kizilbash Persian who had been present at the siege of Herat when Pottinger commanded in that town. He resided in the fort near the western end, and depended directly on the Prince Governor of Meshed, the authority of the local Khan being limited to civil matters. The cliffs around the valley were thickly dotted with towers, and in the hands of an efficient garrison the place would be impregnable.

Kelat offered me facilities for watching the movements

of the Russians without myself attracting as much notice as I should have done in the Derguez, so I resolved to remain there for some time; I was at least in communication with Makdum Kuli Khan, the defender of Geok Tepé, who had retreated with the bulk of his forces to the other side of the Tejend. His followers had formed an encampment among the swamps of that river, and were daily recruiting their numbers with the stragglers who had scattered over the country after the last engagement. From this place they still carried on a desultory warfare with the Russians, and an *aleman* of five hundred men was even sent out to attack the troops engaged in rebuilding Askabad. To put a speedy and effectual end to hostilities, Skobeleff had already announced his intention of marching on the Tejend and establishing an entrenched camp there. As this involved a passage through the Persian villages of Kaka and Abiverd, he solved any difficulties about obtaining the Shah's permission to encroach on his territory by proclaiming the whole country inhabited by Turcoman populations to be Russian territory by right of conquest. As the Attok or frontier district east of the Allah Akbar range is almost entirely inhabited by the race in question, this involved the annexation of a province hitherto recognised as belonging to Persia; but Skobeleff was not likely to meet any serious opposition in carrying out any plans he might adopt, at least not for the time. Even if his action should be subsequently disowned by his Government, he would first have attained his object of reaching the Tejend. Meanwhile he was using considerable efforts to induce the Akhal Tekkés to return to their homes and accept the Czar as their sovereign. The Russian cavalry had compelled many families to return to their country, and others had come in of their own accord; while the action of the Persian Government in surrendering all Tekké fugitives was likely to add still more to the number. It was quite

plain that the Russian general would meet no serious resistance on his way to the Tejend, and also that if I wished to get to Merv at all I must anticipate his march.

The news from Geok Tepé which I gathered from Tekké refugees was somewhat uncertain in its character. I learned, however, that permanent buildings were being thrown up there, with a view apparently of forming a Russian town as well as a military post. Some of the measures adopted to bring back the fugitives were, if the Tekkés were to be believed, of an atrocious character. There were about fifteen thousand women left in Yengi Sheher on he retreat of the army, and these the general threatened to abandon to the soldiery unless their male relatives should return at once and submit to the Czar. He also, I was informed, ordered the women to deliver up their gold and silver ornaments as a war contribution. The Turcoman women, however humble, all possess an immense quantity of such trinkets, and a Tekké told me he had himself seen a pile of them heaped up on two carpets to a height considerably greater than that of an ordinary man. Whatever truth was in these statements—and they were confirmed by several witnesses—everything indicated that Skobeleff was determined to make thorough work of the conquest of the Akhal Tekkés. How much further he might be inclined to push on it was indeed hard to tell. Tejend, I knew by common accounts, was a most unhealthy site for a camp. The neighbourhood of a great swamp, under a Central Asian sun, could not but be malarious, and even at Kaka, a long distance from the marshes, intermittent fevers and consequent biliary derangements were terribly prevalent. A camp protected on one side by the swamp and on the east by the river Tejend, which is unfordable during nearly the first half of the year, would be perfectly safe against an enemy's attack, but could hardly fail to be a hotbed of fever. This

might easily tempt a man like Skobeleff to complete his work by pushing on to Merv itself.

My movements, I soon found out, were not left entirely to my own discretion in Kelat, any more than they had been in Meshed or Muhammedabad. The Khan politely invited me to lodge at his palace, where I was completely under surveillance, and I perceived quickly that he was by no means decided as to the propriety of letting me go. It was absolutely impossible to leave the valley without a pass from the Khan, as the two gorges which led from it were entirely closed by the forts at their entrances, and no ingress or egress was permitted without his order. About February 20, I was disagreeably surprised to see Dufour, the renegade Russian Nihilist to whom I have already alluded, ride past the gate. He now appeared in the character of a Russian agent in Kelat, where he had formerly resided for some time. In this capacity, as I afterwards learned, one of his first steps was to ask the Khan to arrest me and keep me from going to Merv. The Khan declined, but promised, I believe, to keep a watch on my movements. Dufour left in the course of two days, and I determined to anticipate any measures he might take for having me arrested by following him at once. The Khan gave me permission to depart with an escort, which was in reality a guard, and on February 25 I started back to Kaka.

Before leaving Kelat-i-Nadri, Makdum Kuli Khan had sent me word of his intention to leave the banks of the Tejend with the forces he still commanded, and to fall back towards Merv. There, in conjunction with the Mervli, he proposed constructing a new stronghold similar to that of Yengi Sheher; and he invited me to the feast and ceremonies with which its foundation was to be celebrated. I was very desirous of accepting his invitation, but there were

some important points to be first taken into account. It is the established custom among the Turcomans, on the arrival of a distinguished stranger, such as I should undoubtedly be considered if I accepted the chief's invitation, to overwhelm him with gifts of horses, rich carpets, and valuable weapons, entirely regardless of his own wishes. To refuse a present would be a deadly insult—enough to convert the would-be donor into an inveterate and implacable enemy. This would seem a trifling difficulty, but it must be remembered that in return for such generosity the givers expect, and, indeed, require presents of at least equal money value to the highest market price of their own. In fact, the honoured guest is bound, *nolens volens*, to become the purchaser of an indefinite quantity of property of a kind for which he has no possible use. The position becomes somewhat embarrassing, and even dangerous, when the recipient of these gifts has not the money available to pay for them. But there was a still more formidable rock ahead in the policy lately adopted, as I learned, by the people of Merv.

On the fall of Geok Tepé, a council was held at Merv, which, by the way, is not a city at all, but rather a collection of Turcoman settlements, to deliberate on the steps to be taken to avert invasion. The Mervli unanimously resolved to put themselves under British protection, and to hoist the British flag. They were under the impression that Russia and England were natural enemies, and they hoped that the latter would at once come to their aid, or at least supply them with money and arms to resist the common foe. It never entered their heads that a distant Power would feel any hesitation about accepting them as nominal subjects, or object to being responsible for their little national eccentricities in the way of plundering raids. A deputation of thirty leading men

were despatched to Kandahar to inform the commander of the British forces, then at that town, of the step they had taken, and to solicit assistance in their impending struggle. I knew from constant conversations with the Turcomans, both from Merv and the Akhal Tekké country, how full their heads were of British subsidies, and I also knew a good deal better than they did how their advances would be received by the British general. Should the deputation get back with a refusal while I was in Merv, I was very likely to be held responsible for the disappointment, or at least made a scapegoat for the anger of the Mervli. Though I had done my best to explain to Makdum Kuli that I had no connection with politics, they evidently took me for an informal British agent, and I need hardly say that the sacredness of an ambassador's character would be but a slight protection among such a race when smarting under keen disappointment. To be afraid of receiving too many presents and of being invested involuntarily with high diplomatic functions may seem an odd predicament, but it was exactly mine as I left Kelat-i-Nadri. Still, my mind was made up to reach Merv at any cost, and with an escort of ten horsemen furnished by the Khan I rode out of that strange valley.

At Kaka I found the Russian agent who had given me such annoyance already established, and engaged in buying grain for the detachments of Cossacks who were expected hourly. He was also occupied concerning the possibility of turning the Laïn-Su and Idalik streams in the direction of Tejend, with a view to facilitating the advance of the troops there. This, he said, was by orders of General Skobeleff, who thus lost no time in exercising the rights of sovereignty in the country which he had so recently and coolly annexed to the Russian Empire. Luckily for me, this agent had no Cossacks with him, though

he ordered the Turcomans about with all the authority of a governor. His escort consisted of men from Lutfabad who were certainly not yet to be counted Russians, nor available for the purpose of detaining me. He called on me soon after my arrival in the town, and endeavoured to dissuade me from proceeding ; but finding I paid little attention to his remonstrances, he grew very insolent, and I had to order him out of the house. In the morning, however, he was again at my door, and by threats of the coming Cossacks he succeeded in terrifying my escort into accompanying me no further. He was ordering them to take my baggage off the horses on which it had been packed, when I heard the noise, and walked out with sabre in hand to demand what he meant by such interference with my affairs. He ran hastily into his house, and I ordered my servants to mount and start immediately. I was glad to be rid of my guard, with whom I should have found it difficult to get into the desert, and I at once improved the opportunity thus offered me of quitting Persian soil and its troublesome officials. Pursuit by the Cossacks was the chief immediate danger I had to apprehend, and to prevent this I avoided taking the direct road to Tejend, and pretended to turn back to Kelat to complain to the Khan of the treatment I had received. My two servants were now my only companions, and I felt at length really free.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RIDE TO MERV.

Leaving Kaka—My guardians at fault—A stratagem—A jungle scene—A melancholy solitude—Dushakh—First meeting with Turcomans—A stronghold—Men and women—Adjem Serdar—A first-class residence—Curiosity—Commandant of Sarakhs—Black and yellow Russians—A piece of information—Precautions against thieves—An uneasy night—Starting to the sound of music—Ancient ruins—Fresh difficulties—Wild ass and antelope—Turcoman lies—False and real alarms—'Peace be with you'—Ménéh—Troglodytic dwellings—Ana Murad Kafur—Retaliation—A prisoner—Waiting—A march in the dark—Crossing the Tejend river—Trees and driftwood—Wild boars—*Odjar* bushes—Kizil Dengli—Rainpools—Looking for water—A chance drink—Entozoa—The 'sandy desert'—A dangerous spot—Shaitli—Salty wells—Rate of marching—A wet couch.

I RODE out of Kaka, following the road to Kelat for ten or twelve miles. I knew that I was being narrowly watched from the ramparts of Kaka, and that, acting as I did, the observers would have little doubt that I was making straight for my supposed destination. The Russian agent had unwittingly done me a great service in ridding me of the very people who were charged not to allow me to go towards Merv. Both he and they thought I would never dare venture alone across the des rt. Once, however, engaged among the first ravines and hill spurs thrown out by the great mountain chain, I turned my horse's head and rode swiftly in the direction of Merv, directing my steps by compass, and becoming involved in ground where it would not be easy to track me owing to the rocky and gravelly soil, and the number of mountain streams which intersected the way. There was no road or beaten track of any kind.

Sometimes I plunged into deep ravines, densely grown with giant reeds and cane brakes. Pheasants rose by dozens at every twenty yards. Wild boars continually plunged with a smashing noise through the reeds, and now and again I caught sight of a leopard or lynx stealing away deeper into the jungle. The entire scene was one of primitive nature. Very probably I was the first European who had ever trodden that way. Indeed, except under such circumstances as those by which I found myself surrounded, there was small reason for anyone, European or native, to wander among those savage recesses. At length, the ground becoming dangerously swampy, I ascended the lower hill slopes in order to gain firmer ground, and at the same time to obtain a view over the plain, and take bearings for my future line of march.

From the summit of a grassy hill I had a fine view of the plain, reaching away northward and eastward. Although it was early in the year, the rays of the noontide sun were intensely hot, and the further reaches of the plain appeared of an aërial blue tint, such as in northern climes we are accustomed to associate with the sky rather than with the earth. Far and wide were scattered countless towns and villages—all deserted, their lonely walls and towers standing out, grimly desolate, in the white, mid-day blaze. Scores of ancient mounds dotted the plain. The vast expanse, marked with all these traces of vanished life, quivering and dancing in the mirage, had about it something weird and unearthly, that filled the mind with a sense of desolation and loneliness. I knew well that numerous parties of ruthless bandits were lying hidden among the ruins; and it may be imagined how carefully I scanned the ground with my field-glass as I decided upon which direction I should follow. It was not easy to make a *reconnaissance*, as, owing to the trembling, heated atmo-

sphere, one could hardly tell whether an object at a distance of five or six miles were a look-out tower or a Turcoman horseman.

After a lengthened survey I decided on my course, and, descending the hill, rode straight towards the only inhabited place within reach. This was Dushakh, marked on maps as Chardéh and Chararděh, though the people inhabiting it recognise it by that name with difficulty. It was about twenty-five miles distant. The tract which I crossed on my way to it was a rich, loamy surface, where streams from the mountains run riot amid luxuriant growths of wild flowers and herbs, grass being of but rare occurrence. Dandelion, sage, fox-glove, thistle, mints of all kinds, and a thousand other plants flourish, but a square yard of grassy sward is a rare phenomenon. Some tufts of wonderfully green grass are to be met with along the verges of the running streams, but where other vegetation abounds grass seems to shun its company. One by one we left behind us the embattled mud ramparts of Beg Murad, Nourek Khodja, Achmet, and Zakadja, all grimly silent as the tomb—not even a stray robber within their walls.

As I drew near Dushakh, dark, leaden-coloured clouds had come over the sky, and the sun was setting fiery red. To the left was a very large ancient mound, crowned by crumbling walls and towers. A long, low rampart enclosed an irregular rectangular space of about a hundred yards square. I now, for the first time, met the Merv Tekkés. Dushakh, which is now well within Persian territory, formerly belonged to old Merv, and the soil around it, being fertile and well watered, is still haunted by the descendants of its former owners. These people, some two hundred in number, have their real houses in Merv, and come to Dushakh (Chardéh) only during sowing and harvest time.

The ground which they cultivate is watered by streams which rise within the oval crater of Kelat-i-Nadri, and as these can at any moment be turned at their source to a new direction, the tillers of Dushakh are at the mercy of the Khan of Kelat. Hence, in return for the water supply, they pay him one-tenth of the total corn produce.

Uncouth forms were to be seen upon the ramparts, and curious eyes gazed at me as I galloped up at the head of my slender following. I was evidently taken for the tax-gatherer, coming to assess the newly-planted ground. When the rickety gate of unhewn tree-trunks was unbarred, and I stood within the quadrangle, my eyes fell upon a wild sight. Within was an irregular, muddy encampment, where pit-like hollows were half filled with reddish-brown liquid of pestilent odour—the drainings of the camping-ground of camel, buffalo, and human being. Amid this stood what at first sight seemed to be gigantic stacks of corn, but which proved to be the huts of the inhabitants. They were composed of great sheaves of giant reeds, placed in lean-to fashion. A number of camels, looking as raggedly wretched as they usually do on these plains, groaned and grunted. A couple of hundred horses, none of them very remarkable for beauty, stood tethered around. Women with dishevelled hair and wild eyes, clad in long, flowing red shirts, which, with the long purple trousers, formed their only attire, gazed round corners at me with a guilty look. Fifty or sixty men, in colossal sheep-skin hats and deep red robes, carbine at back and sword at girdle, came forward to meet me. The chief, Adjem Serdar, stepped out to give me welcome, notwithstanding the fact that he had not a very clear conception of who I was, or of the nature of my business at Dushakh. I was shown into the only habitation which was not a reed hut—a single chamber with earthen walls, partly excavated at the foot of the

ramparts. I could barely stand upright beneath the rough roof of unhewn pine trunks. A fire of camel's dung smouldered at the upper extremity. The room speedily became crammed to suffocation by Turcomans, whose curiosity was little short of ferocious. They literally thrust their noses into my face, and seemed desirous of looking down my throat. The majority were of opinion that I was a Russian spy, but an active minority were in my favour.

An hour after my arrival, the Persian colonel commanding the garrison of Sarakhs, who was on his way to Derguez with a present of horses sent by the Prince Governor of Meshed to Mehemet Ali Khan, paid me a visit. Having seen a little more of men and things than had the nomads, he promptly declared that I was what I announced myself to be. I was, he said, a *Kara Russ*, or Black Russian, this being the description given by the Turcoman to the English, in contradistinction to the *Sari Russ*, or Yellow Russian, as they named Skobeleff and his co-nationalists.

Adjem Serdar came up to where I was sitting, and, in a whisper, imparted to me what he doubtless thought was a new and unforeseen piece of intelligence, viz., that the greater number of the people of his village were thieves, and that it was advisable to look very sharply after my horses. He had, he said, taken the precaution of chaining them together by the fetlocks, and he presented me with a collection of iron instruments, resembling small reaping-hooks and undersized crowbars, which I was informed were the keys of the padlocks which secured the chains. To make matters doubly sure, two trusted henchmen, made specially responsible for the safety of the horses, slept beside them.

After supper—the usual mess of greasy rice served in a great wooden bowl, and clawed up, ghoul fashion, by each one with his bare fingers—we lay down to sleep as well as we

might in a place in which it is no exaggeration to say that all night long I could hear the huge black fleas springing and dancing around me. We were up an hour before dawn, for I had told the chief that it was possible a party of Cossacks might come that way two or three hours after sunrise, and I wished to be well away on my forward journey betimes. In the angry red dawn I rode out of Dushakh, with an escort of four men, in addition to my two servants, and a mounted musician, who was charged to lighten a mile or two of my way with the strains of a two-stringed guitar, on which he performed briskly.

Three miles east of Dushakh is an immense ancient mound, surrounded by domed brick tombs and the remains of what seems to have been an extensive monastic establishment. This hill and its surroundings are known to the people of the locality as Yazthi Tepé. From its summit a commanding view could be obtained, and with the aid of a field-glass it was easy to have timely notice of the approach of Cossack patrols. We made tea, and talked of the route to Merv. My conductors exhibited scruples about the advisability of allowing me to go on, lest they should be held responsible for facilitating the advent of a suspected stranger to a place always jealously closed to travellers, and, at such a critical moment, when the immediate possibilities were so menacing, all but unapproachable. They did their best to dissuade me from continuing my journey, and, finding their eloquence thrown away, flatly refused to accompany me any further. I told them that it was a matter of indifference to me whether they accompanied me or not, as in any case I was resolved to go forward. We then parted, and, steering by compass, I made the best of my way towards Méneh.

For many miles there was no trace of cultivation; nor did any streams occur, though there were abundant evi-

dences, in the form of old irrigation canals, that the plain had at one time been extensively tilled. A short, crisp grass, watered by rain-falls, grew abundantly on the white loamy surface, and stunted bushes abounded. On every side were indications of the near proximity of the wild ass (*colon*) and antelope (*geran*), and here and there were unmistakable rootings up of the soil by wild boars. A well-marked track showed the way across the plain, and at intervals of two or three miles were brick towers and small ruined fortalices, originally constructed for the protection of the caravan route.

I had been informed that my immediate destination, Méneh, was about sixteen miles from Dushakh. After traversing double that distance I could see no sign of a halting-place. The true distance turned out to be over forty miles—a fact necessarily well known to the inhabitants, but which their instinctive habit of lying on all occasions prevented them from telling me. As I advanced eastward, the Persian mountains trended away to the south-eastward, until they appeared only as faint blue undulations on the horizon. My Kurd, who had hitherto indulged in a good deal of the vapouring and boasting common to most Orientals, began to show marked signs of uneasiness as the wild Turcoman desert widened away before us. My second attendant, a refugee from Geok Tepé, naturally felt at his ease, as every one we might encounter would be tolerably sure to be his countryman. Besides, the horse he rode, and the various articles which he carried, were not his own. Save his dilapidated cotton overall, he had nothing to lose.

More than once we experienced false alarms. On one occasion we seemed to see a party of horsemen, three or four miles off, galloping towards us. A long examination through a telescope failed to afford reliable information,

owing to the trembling of the heated layer of air in contact with the plain, which gave to distant objects apparent life and motion. When within half a mile of the supposed horsemen, they turned out to be the fragments of a brick fort. On the occasion of each new alarm it was with the greatest difficulty that I could keep my Kurd from turning back, or flying towards the mountains. He said that I was mad to come into such a place with so slender a following, and that the Khan of Kelat, or anyone in his senses, would not venture out into those plains without an escort of at least five hundred men.

An hour or so before sunset came a real alarm. Coming to the brow of a gentle undulation, I suddenly perceived a couple of horses some three miles off; and on drawing nearer two men rose from the ground, where they had been lying, mounted, and rode towards us. When within a quarter of a mile they unslung their muskets and laid them across their saddle-bows, in readiness for action—a movement which we imitated. At fifty yards we halted, and the new comers challenged with the usual salutation of the desert, 'Peace be with you.' This indicated that fight was not desired, at least for the moment. We approached to within half-a-dozen paces, each party eyeing the other intently for fully a minute before breaking silence. The horsemen proved to be two Merv Tekkés from the colony at Méněh, roaming about on the look-out for prey. On learning who I was, and whither bound, they turned back with me, and we rode on far into the night before any signs of inhabitants were apparent. A little after sunset we came abreast of some ruinous old buildings crowned with crumbling cupolas, and styled the Imam Zadé of Méněh. They lay about six hundred yards to our left, and my guides, galloping away in front, dismounted before the walls, and remained some little time in prayer. This is an invariable

custom among the Turcomans when passing any place reputed for sanctity.

During the last two or three hours we stumbled along slowly in the dark, splashing through flooded ground and falling into deep irrigation trenches. We must have crossed some thousands of acres of cultivated ground before reaching a ruinous old mud-walled fort to which we were guided by some glimmering lights. The women and children, together with the cattle, were within the walls; the men, for the most part, inhabiting strange-looking wigwams without. By the blaze of the camp-fires I could make out some scores of Turcomans standing and lying about, their weapons tied in sheaves around wooden posts planted in rows. The huts were of the most primitive construction, consisting of oblong pits about six feet in depth, rudely roofed over with tree-branches and bushes, on which was piled the rough hay destined for the horses. A steep incline led to the interior, where a fire of brambles and cattle dung gave out an uncertain light and stifling smoke. Saddles and other horse furniture were piled around. Here, in company with fifteen Turcomans closely packed together, I spent a thoroughly miserable night. At dawn the Turcomans went about their various occupations, and I had a little leisure to write. The task was no easy one, for the place swarmed with every kind of vermin, and, early as was the season, flies were present in myriads. They settled in clouds upon the paper, drinking up the ink before it could dry, and blotting the writing with their feet.

I took the bearing of Merv and Sarakhs from Méněh, having carefully ascertained their direction. Merv bears 65° N.E., and Sarakhs 70° S.E.

The Merv Turcomans at Méněh, like those at Dushakh, come there only in the sowing and reaping seasons. They, too, pay a tribute of one-tenth of the produce to the Khan

of Kelat, who commands their water supply, the source of which is within his valley. Formerly, when Merv was a regularly organised state, Méněh was included in its territory. Ana Murad Kafur, the chief of the party, told me that the families of himself and his companions had been settled in this particular district ever since the arrival of the Tekké Turcomans from the northern plains, and that they had annually, without intermission, cultivated the ground. His real home, he explained, was at Merv, where he hoped to renew his acquaintance with me, 'if,' said he, 'you ever get there.'

He told me that the Turcomans had generally managed their dealings with the Persians at Kelat-i-Nadri in a satisfactory manner, but that reprisals on his part occasionally became necessary, on account of wanton acts of aggression by the Khan's men-at-arms. He had been obliged, he remarked, to retaliate for the death of his grand-uncle, which had taken place many years previously. That person had been treacherously murdered while on a visit to Kelat-i-Nadri. A descendant of one of the perpetrators happened to fall into the hands of Ana Murad Kafur, who, in a spirit of generosity, abstained from taking his life, only cutting off his ears and nose, and chopping off his fingers in the middle. He seemed to take great credit to himself for his leniency. I must own that this additional disclosure of the amenities of border society by no means reassured me. On the contrary, it doubled my anxiety to make a final plunge, and put myself out of pain once for all.

I had everything in readiness to start at midday, and only awaited the appearance of the escort and guides who had been promised me. While waiting, the chief brought in an Akhal Tekké Turcoman, heavily manacled at the ankles. He was a wretched-looking man—a fugitive from

Geok Tepé, on his way to Merv. *En passant* he tried to do a stroke of business at the expense of his congeners at Méněh, and was caught in the act of driving before him some of their sheep and cattle. Filled with virtuous indignation at this unseemly act, the Méněh folk had set upon and ironed him, and Ana Murad Kafur informed me that in compliment to my arrival he would be set free, and would accompany me to Merv. His fetters were removed in my presence, and his arms restored to him. I cannot say that I was perfectly easy on discovering that my escort was to be composed of individuals like this. There were others—a fat, ruddy-faced Turcoman from Merv, just returning from the Derguez, whither he had gone to sell horses to the Khan of that place, and two brothers, who, having completed their agricultural operations at Méněh, were going home.

The afternoon wore on, the sun rapidly neared the horizon, and yet I could see no sign of preparation for setting out. I felt very anxious, for, knowing the objections which the people at Dushakh entertained to my going forward, I feared that I was about to experience similar ones at Méněh. I did not care to express my suspicions openly, for I knew that if they set their faces against my expedition it would be impossible for me to make my way thither across a vast, waterless space, with which I was utterly unacquainted, and in the midst of which I should probably perish with thirst, even if I were not cut down by the first party I should meet with on the way. Evening fell, and, unable to restrain my impatience any longer, I asked why the day had been allowed to pass by without any move in the desired direction having been made. I said that I wished to set out at once, but was desired to wait a little longer. It was not safe to start during daylight. All kinds of marauding bands were sure to be abroad, who would espy our course from a distance, and waylay us. The fall of

Geok Tepé, and the complete upsetting of the little order that ever existed in these regions, had made the road doubly dangerous. Through utter helplessness I had perforce to wait the pleasure of my hosts. It was some time after sunset when I was told that everything was in readiness for our departure. I emerged from my semi-subterranean wigwam, found the horses saddled, and my escort of four mounted. The night was dark, for the slender moon showed but fitfully behind drifting clouds, and was but three hours from the western horizon. After that time the blackness would be dense, as it usually is, under such circumstances, out on these plains. There was certainly but little fear of anyone, friend or foe, detecting our whereabouts.

When all were mounted, we had the half-hour's pause, usual on such occasions, to smoke the water-pipe. This instrument constitutes an important element in the life of a Turcoman. During the day, not half an hour passes but it must be prepared, and he will rise half a dozen times in the night to have a pull at his eternal *kalioun*. During a journey this constant smoking becomes a serious nuisance, so often is a halt called, and so considerable the delay occasioned by the lighting-up of this confounded tobacco apparatus.

At last we started, seven in all—myself, my two servants, and the escort of four Turcomans. I was not favourably impressed by the appearance of these latter, for each of them was as truculent-looking a fellow as I ever met with in any part of the world. Ana Murad Kafur, with half-a-dozen of his horsemen, accompanied us for a mile on our way, to see us off, and also to make sure that no evil befell his guests within his own particular jurisdiction.

We picked our way with difficulty among the shallow

pits which served as granaries for the storage of the corn of the Turcomans. The grain is first covered with straw, and then with earth. This system seems to result very satisfactorily, and I have seen corn taken from these receptacles in excellent condition after many months. In the faint moonlight we could see remnants of old buildings, and, to judge from the number of deep irrigation trenches through which we splashed, the water supply must have been very copious indeed. Then the plain widened out, and we were soon in the open Turcoman desert. Accustomed to the darkness, I could make out that for some hours we trod over traces of former cultivation. Then came the naked, marly plain, with stunted bushes of tamarisk and camel thorn, sparsely strewn here and there. Midnight passed, and I thought the dawn long due before a halt was called. We were in the midst of slightly raised sand-hills, crowned by low bushes. That which I here speak of as 'sand' is simply drifted marl dust, which, when moistened, turns, unlike siliceous sand, into a thick, clammy mud. My escort told me that we were close to the Tejend river, but that to attempt the passage in the dark was exceedingly dangerous. I lay down to rest among some tamarisk bushes, which at this spot were of unusual dimensions, doubtless owing to the proximity of the river. The rest of the party lighted a fire, and fed the horses. As I lay down, a faint light on the horizon indicated the approach of daybreak.

I thought that I had scarcely had time to close my eyes when I was summoned to mount and be off. It was still but red dawn as we rode up to the brink of the river. To the right and left was a long stretch of marly bank, sloping to the water. In front was a sluggish stream about fifty yards wide. Along the bank, especially at the turnings of the stream, at which its direction was forced by the current towards the opposite shore, trees grew plenti-

fully. Many of them were from twenty to thirty feet in height, and four to eight inches in diameter. Everywhere were stranded tree-trunks and masses of brushwood, piled up tier upon tier as they were left by the periodic floods. Between natural growths *in situ* and this drift-wood there is an immense accumulation of fuel along the lower waters of the Tejend, before they lose themselves in the swamp to the northward.

The stream was barely fordable, and it was only by zig-zagging in the most cautious manner, the horses feeling for the shallowest portion of the crossing, that we avoided getting floated altogether. To save our tea and sugar, the servants knelt on their saddles, carrying the saddle-bags over their shoulders. Birds of many kinds filled the bushes on either bank, and from their whistling and chattering they seemed to be of a species with which I had not previously met. Huge water-rats scampered about, and I saw an animal, which I took to be an otter, plunge into the stream. We crept up the sandy slopes of the river ravine—for the surface of the water is from twenty to twenty-five feet below the level of the surrounding ground—and rode out into the plain beyond. This plain is not sandy. It is an argillaceous expanse, the dust of which is like the sand of western shores. Wherever the wind gives rest all kinds of grasses and leguminous plants grow luxuriantly in this shifting soil, especially in the neighbourhood of the river, or after a series of rainfalls. In fact, it is precisely similar to the ground which at Dushakh and Méneh gives such abundant crops when irrigated by the streams from the Kelat valley. The sand-hills of this so-called desert are but as the dust-heaps of a much-frequented high road in Europe. With an adequate water supply it would be as productive as any of the heavier soils known in other climes.

After an hour's ride from the river we halted to make

tea. Here the hills of drifted marl dust were of considerable elevation, and, so far as I could see, formed a continuous line, separating the district immediately in contact with the river from the outlying plain. On their slopes was an abundant spring vegetation. I noticed one remarkably beautiful species of lily, of small size, having fleshy, flame-coloured petals. This grew very plentifully. Away to the east we could see whole broods of wild boars, feeding, and while tea was being got ready some of my companions indulged in chasing them. Our morning meal consisted of tea, rough griddled bread, and some morsels of indurated white cheese, hardened to the consistency of horn. Under such circumstances half an hour is a long halt. We were soon in the saddle and away again.

The plain was a monotonous level, overgrown, in spite of the absence of regular water supply, with tamarisk, whose gnarled stems were often four inches in diameter, and whose withered remains strewed the plain for many a mile with fuel sufficient for a whole army corps. The accumulated growths of half a century were there, mingled with the still living bushes. I noticed in some places small houses built after the fashion of American log huts, and intended as sun shelters for passing caravans. Great heaps of tamarisk stems were piled up as landmarks and as signals to following companions. Whatever the dearth of water in the place might be, there certainly was no lack of the means of producing fire. This tamarisk is termed *odjar* by the Tekkés, as well as by the Yamuds.

Towards mid-day the heat became very intense; and though the small water-skin which we had filled at the Tejend sufficed for ourselves, our horses suffered greatly from thirst. Two miles northward is a place called Kizil-Dengli, or the 'red sign,' so called from a kind of stout obelisk, built of unbaked brick plastered with loam, and

erected above a subterranean cistern situated in the centre of a space where the plain formed a basin of about a mile in diameter. Here the rain water accumulates, not only in the cistern, but on portions of the surface, where it remains, during the early part of the year, often for weeks together. We turned in this direction, hoping to find a little water for our horses. At short intervals were immense mole-hills, some being from two to three feet high. They looked like so many heaps of lime, their surfaces being encrusted with an efflorescence of nitre and other saline matter. Wherever there was the least scarping of the ground, the same appearance was noticeable.

At Kizil-Dengli we found the cistern quite dry. All around was perfectly bare of vegetation, and covered with cracked segments of thin caked sediment, showing the site of the surface of the water-pools, then quite dried up. Here and there, on slightly elevated ground, were islands of scorched-looking thistles and other weeds. Where the water had lodged, vegetation was even more absent than on the more arid portions of the plain. Though we crossed the waste in very open order, seven of us covering nearly a mile of front, each one scrutinising sharply on every side of him, not a drop of water could we find. Nothing was left but to regain the original route, from which we had made a considerable deviation. It was only after another league to the eastward, while following a remarkably definite track, scarce a foot in diameter, formed by the continued passage of long camel trains, in single file, and which was sunk three or four inches below the surface, that we succeeded in discovering a little water. It was at a point between two long undulations. The hollow track had served as a kind of drain by which the rain-fall had been led to the hollow, and there, fifty or sixty yards in length, was a narrow pool, occupying the track. It was not more than two inches

deep, and the fine marl sediment hung so lightly at the bottom, half suspended in the water, that the horses could take but one draught at a given place, the disturbed silt rushing into their mouths. However, drinking as they walked along, they obtained sufficient to assuage their violent thirst. The men refused to partake of this water, as the stagnant rain-pools almost invariably contain the eggs of entozoon animals, which, as I shall subsequently have occasion to mention, produce serious inconvenience.

League after league of plain was traversed without any new feature becoming apparent, but at length we reached a district where the marl had drifted into long ridges, which lay across our path, and were separated by intervals of two to three hundred yards. Here the *odjar* bushes increased in size, and on the slope of the undulations was the freshest looking vegetation I had seen since leaving the Tejend. Why the marl dust should have accumulated in heaps at this particular spot it is hard to say. The Turcomans style this part of the ground the 'sandy desert,' though it is the most fruitful of the entire expanse up to the point at which the influence of the Murgab begins to make itself felt. As evening wore on we entered quite a forest growth of *odjar*, which attained the height of from ten to fifteen feet, the trunks often being of considerable proportions. At times the track followed a hollow way, which at some former period may have been a branch of the Murgab; and the tamarisk growing along the summit of the bank on either side quite shut out the faint evening light, leaving us in utter darkness. This, my guides told me, was a spot where caravans were often surprised by marauding bands, who found it a convenient place of ambuscade. At some points the bushes had been cut away, so as to leave the track comparatively open, and thus render surprise less easy.

As we crept along in the gloom, stumbling over fallen

trunks, we started all kinds of wild animals from our path. Some I knew, by their grunting, to be boars, which abound here in incredible numbers. Others, by their pattering trot, I recognised to be jackals; and a few that bounded away lightly were either lynxes or leopards. This point is called Shaitli. Here there is a well, or rather a deep subterranean cistern, of very brackish water, so exceedingly charged with saline matter that recourse is only had to it under the most desperate circumstances, for even camels and Turcoman horses will drink it with hesitation. This water is only accessible by means of nose-bags, lowered by a rope through a small aperture.

We halted several times, and took our bearings from the few visible stars. Often we were completely at fault, but these Turcomans, like North American savages, possess an unerring instinct which invariably sets them right in the end. We had been riding pretty briskly, generally at a trot, when the nature of the ground allowed, and frequently at a canter. I calculate that, on the whole, we made over six and a half miles an hour during our entire journey. After midnight dense blackness came on, and the atmosphere became stifling. We had now been riding almost continuously for one entire day and the better part of two nights, and I must admit that I was very tired, especially as our only refreshment had been a crust of bread and a little all-but-uneatable cheese, washed down with weak sugarless tea. Once or twice I suggested a halt, but in whispered tones was informed that there was no knowing when *ogri* (robbers) might appear. This I thought rather good, considering that I was in the company of as select a party of thieves as could be found hidden in any desert bush or crumbling ruin. In the end, even the horses seemed incapable of going any further. The men seemed to be made of iron. We reined in for a consultation. It was decided to turn aside a

hundred yards, so as to be away from the accustomed track, and thus lessen the risk of being attacked by any passing brigands. Amid the dense growth of tamarisk and other bushes we found a comparatively open space, where we determined to make a brief halt. As we dismounted, a bright flash of sheet lightning lit up the ground, and some heavy rain-drops fell splashingly. It was clear that a heavy shower was coming on. Still, I was so fatigued that I did not pause to think of this. I only asked somewhere to stretch my wearied limbs. A horse-cloth, a leopard skin, and an old ulster which had seen a great deal of service, constituted bed and bedding. 'With a saddle for a pillow did I prop my weary head,' and in half a minute I slept as only the wayworn traveller can sleep.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RIDE TO MERV (*continued*).

An early start—General discomfort—Dash Robat—Derivation of name—Entering Merv territory—Gloomy forebodings—Effect of an umbrella—Doubts—A field council—Caravan—My costume—Reasons for—My reception—A frightened servant—False friends—Beg Murad Khan—Forbidden to write—Under guard—Taking notes under difficulties—Tokmé Serdar—Impromptu map-drawing—The military situation—The Serdar's views and subsequent action—Across country to Merv—A bridge—Kadjar Khan—The 'Queen of the World'—Earthworks—A relic of the Persian campaign—My anomalous position.

It was still dark when voices around me told that a fresh move was about to be made. I found myself half afloat. A torrent of rain was falling, and I was thoroughly saturated, leopardskin and all. My limbs were stiff with rheumatism; and many specimens of the divers species of insects which haunt these bush-grown solitudes had fled to me for refuge against the downpour. I was for the moment a peripatetic museum of entomology. There were juvenile tarantulas, too young as yet to be capable of much harm, stag-beetles, lizard-like mantis, and every imaginable variety of *coleoptera*. As may readily be imagined, I did not spend much time in examining them, but, brushing them out of my hair and ears, and shaking them from the sleeves of my coat and legs of my trousers, I endeavoured to put myself in marching order. The Turcomans were busying themselves with their horses, and looking ineffably cross, for notwithstanding their powers of endurance they also were very much knocked up. It was quite impossible to kindle the water-pipe, with which accustomed luxury they were for the moment compelled to dispense. Our horses were standing

round, with drooping ears and tails, piteously gazing upon the wet mud. As I mounted, my animal fell to his knees with sheer weakness and wretchedness. Then we were off again, not at a very rapid rate, for the horses were scarcely able to put one leg before another.

The dull leaden dawn of a rainy morning showed that at every step the plain was becoming less and less encumbered with jungle—*jengal*, as my companions termed it. Within an hour and a half we halted amid a mass of brick and broken tiles, which for the moment I took to be part of the renowned city of which I was in search. Sore and wretched as I felt, I was immediately on the *qui vive*. I took note of the peculiarities of the place. Close by was a domed structure, the ruin of what I at once perceived to be an old caravanserai, dating back perhaps to the time of Timour Lenk, or still further—a remnant of the better days of Merv. This place is called Dash Robat. On inquiry I found that at least sixteen miles stretched between us and the nearest limit of what my companions called Merv. We halted among the ruins to wring our dripping garments and gnaw our remaining crusts. One of the company collected the twigs which had fallen from the numerous birds' nests in the crevices around, and proceeded to kindle a fire and to compensate himself and his comrades for their enforced abstinence from the *kalioun*. I walked round the building to examine its nature and extent. The ground plan and general architecture bespoke an amount of science and intelligence lamentably absent at present in these wretched wastes. There is a quadrangular space, eighty yards square, round which runs a broad corridor, opening off which on either side are apartments—an outer one for summer, and an inner one for the cold weather. The latter was furnished with a fireplace, as is generally the case in Eastern caravanserais at the present day. The main

entrance, which has a south-easterly aspect, was capped by a ruinous dome of flat, yellowish brick, similar to that which composes the entire structure. A shattered fountain stood below its centre. Ample stabling existed on the northern side of the edifice, and there were numerous chambers of larger size, probably intended for the accommodation of persons of importance. All is at present in a state of utter dilapidation, though many of the chambers are perfectly weather-proof. When once their floors were cleared of the accumulated ruins of years, they would afford no bad accommodation for wayfarers travelling over such ground as this. It is difficult to guess how the ruin has been wrought, for there are no evidences of earthquake shocks. Probably the mere vertical pressure, seeing that the cement used was of a very inferior kind, and little more than a sort of adhesive loam, was sufficient to produce the wreck which I saw. The storms of ages, whistling through the corridors and arcades, would complete the destruction. The dismal, silent arches were a welcome shelter to us after our miserable night, and I could not help asking my conductors, somewhat angrily, what they meant by halting out in the open when so good a shelter was so close to us? They appeared to think my question rather childish. Said one of the party, laughing, 'Why, we kept out in the jungle expressly to avoid robbers. The surest way to find them would be to come here. This is invariably their halting-place when they are abroad, and at night honest people like ourselves always avoid it.'

The name Dash Robat probably means the 'stone or brick halting-place,' or it may be the 'halting-place in the plain,' or 'a distant halting-place,' for the word 'Dash,' accordingly as we take it in Jagatai or Persian, may mean one or the other. It was doubtless one of a numerous series of similar edifices constructed by the rulers of Merv

for the accommodation of caravans plying between their capital and the Persian border. I could willingly have lingered among the ruins some time longer, in hope of the weather clearing up and a gleam of sunshine setting in; but my guides urged the absolute necessity of finding forage for the horses, and the still greater one of avoiding the risk of meeting the evilly-disposed persons whose trysting-place Dash Robat was said to be.

It was a dismal morning as we left the grim ruins and made straight for Merv, distant, as I had been told, about sixteen miles. The spirits of my Kurd servant were by this time at the lowest ebb, and, to tell the truth, I did not feel very gay myself. He gave it as his unalterable conviction that, on arriving at our destination, we should be murdered forthwith; but I was in such a state of bodily suffering that I did not much care whether he were a true prophet or not. When one is wet, tired, and hungry, and in the midst of a drizzling fall of chilly rain, mounted on a jaded steed whose faltering steps betoken that he has nearly broken down, any distance will seem long; and as that which lay before us was in reality much greater, as is usually the case, than the guides had announced, my patience was fairly worn out before we came upon any trace of inhabited ground. At length we were within sight of some marshes. Then came a boggy expanse, traversed by narrow, deep-cut trenches, proceeding from an offshoot of the Murgab. The sun was rising, and steamy columns ascended from the dun-brown waste. A few spectral camels and lean cows stood about, with a kind of hopeless air, and some sheepskin-clad youths got up from their smoky fires to stare at us as we passed.

Seyd Ali Khan, the Governor of the Attok, had presented me with an umbrella when I was leaving Lutfabad, and my Akhal Tekké servant had hoisted it to keep off the miserably cold drizzle that was falling. This phenomenon

entrance, which has a south-easterly aspect, was capped by a ruinous dome of flat, yellowish brick, similar to that which composes the entire structure. A shattered fountain stood below its centre. Ample stabling existed on the northern side of the edifice, and there were numerous chambers of larger size, probably intended for the accommodation of persons of importance. All is at present in a state of utter dilapidation, though many of the chambers are perfectly weather-proof. When once their floors were cleared of the accumulated ruins of years, they would afford no bad accommodation for wayfarers travelling over such ground as this. It is difficult to guess how the ruin has been wrought, for there are no evidences of earthquake shocks. Probably the mere vertical pressure, seeing that the cement used was of a very inferior kind, and little more than a sort of adhesive loam, was sufficient to produce the wreck which I saw. The storms of ages, whistling through the corridors and arcades, would complete the destruction. The dismal, silent arches were a welcome shelter to us after our miserable night, and I could not help asking my conductors, somewhat angrily, what they meant by halting out in the open when so good a shelter was so close to us? They appeared to think my question rather childish. Said one of the party, laughing, 'Why, we kept out in the jungle expressly to avoid robbers. The surest way to find them would be to come here. This is invariably their halting-place when they are abroad, and at night honest people like ourselves always avoid it.'

The name Dash Robat probably means the 'stone or brick halting-place,' or it may be the 'halting-place in the plain,' or 'a distant halting-place,' for the word 'Dash,' accordingly as we take it in Jagatai or Persian, may mean one or the other. It was doubtless one of a numerous series of similar edifices constructed by the rulers of Merv

for the accommodation of caravans plying between their capital and the Persian border. I could willingly have lingered among the ruins some time longer, in hope of the weather clearing up and a gleam of sunshine setting in; but my guides urged the absolute necessity of finding forage for the horses, and the still greater one of avoiding the risk of meeting the evilly-disposed persons whose trysting-place Dash Robat was said to be.

It was a dismal morning as we left the grim ruins and made straight for Merv, distant, as I had been told, about sixteen miles. The spirits of my Kurd servant were by this time at the lowest ebb, and, to tell the truth, I did not feel very gay myself. He gave it as his unalterable conviction that, on arriving at our destination, we should be murdered forthwith; but I was in such a state of bodily suffering that I did not much care whether he were a true prophet or not. When one is wet, tired, and hungry, and in the midst of a drizzling fall of chilly rain, mounted on a jaded steed whose faltering steps betoken that he has nearly broken down, any distance will seem long; and as that which lay before us was in reality much greater, as is usually the case, than the guides had announced, my patience was fairly worn out before we came upon any trace of inhabited ground. At length we were within sight of some marshes. Then came a boggy expanse, traversed by narrow, deep-cut trenches, proceeding from an offshoot of the Murgab. The sun was rising, and steamy columns ascended from the dun-brown waste. A few spectral camels and lean cows stood about, with a kind of hopeless air, and some sheepskin-clad youths got up from their smoky fires to stare at us as we passed.

Seyd Ali Khan, the Governor of the Attok, had presented me with an umbrella when I was leaving Lutfabad, and my Akhal Tekké servant had hoisted it to keep off the miserably cold drizzle that was falling. This phenomenon

of an umbrella, an article hitherto unseen in this part of the world, called around us many spectators. From the audible observations on all sides I could learn that the opinion was that a successful raid had been made, and that I was being brought in as one of its results. As we proceeded, the irrigation trenches became larger and more numerous, the sluggish waters scarce flowing between the high-piled banks. Considerable reaches of ground were under water. Through the rain-mist beehive outlines were visible. They were the first *aladjaks* of Merv, and I strained my eyes eagerly to catch a sight through the fog of the domes and minarets which I expected to see looming athwart it above the embattled walls of the 'Queen of the World.'

Here came a pause. Some of my conductors suddenly entertained doubts as to my nationality, and my motives for visiting them in their inner *penetralia*. 'How could anyone know that I was not a Russian?' 'What will our friends say when we bring him among them?' 'Who knows but he has a brigade of Cossacks at his heels?' 'What is his business here?' Such were the words I heard pass between them. The more considerate said, 'Who knows but that they will kill him at the first village?' For two long, weary hours we sat on horseback in the driving rain, our backs to the wind, awaiting the result of this field council. Some of the party looked daggers at me, and seemed inclined to solve the matter by there and then finishing me off; but the better-minded majority seemed to get their own way. One of the latter rode up to me and told me not to be afraid—that all would yet be right, he hoped. He added, significantly, that if all were *not* right, I should have only myself to blame for coming there. A decision was come to at last, and we rode straight to the first huts, which we could see faintly, through the mist, a mile or two off.

From a distance, a Turcoman village looks like an immense apiary. The dun-coloured, cupola-shaped *evs* resemble so many large beehives. The group of houses towards which we directed our steps numbered some hundred and fifty. A few jujube, apple, and willow trees grew here and there around them, and some patches of vine and melon cultivation were to be seen. A number of bales of silk, with some tobacco, tea, and other merchandise from Bokhara, lay around, for a caravan which had come from the latter place was on the point of re-starting for Meshed.

A crowd of wild-looking people of both sexes, who were busying themselves with packing the bales upon camels, left their work to stare at myself and my cavalcade as I rode up—the women, with their draggled locks and rain-sodden, witch-like garments, perhaps the most weird of all. We were at the Bakshih village of Beg Murad Khan—one through which the caravans invariably passed to and fro. There was new wonderment on all sides as to what kind of person I might be, and all seemed to take it for granted that I was a prisoner. So far as my personal appearance went, I might have passed for anything. I wore an enormous tiara of greyish-black sheepskin, eighteen inches in height. Over my shoulders was a drenched leopard skin, beneath which could be seen my travel-stained, much-worn ulster overcoat. My legs were caparisoned in long black boots, armed with great steel spurs, appendages utterly unknown in Turkestan. A sabre and revolving carbine completed my outfit. Some people may wonder that I openly presented myself in the midst of the Tekké population, among whom the nature of my reception was at best doubtful, in such a garb as this, and why I did not assume a style of dress more in keeping with the custom of the country. I had considered this matter carefully before deciding upon the irrevocable step towards Merv. I could speak Jagatai

fairly well, and my sun-tanned countenance and passably lengthy beard offered no extraordinary contrast to that of an inhabitant, but my accent, and a thousand other little circumstances, not to speak of the indiscretion of my servants, whom I knew perfectly well it was utterly useless to pledge to secrecy, would have been enough to infallibly betray me. To appear in Turcoman costume, or in any other which tended to conceal my real nationality and character, would, under the circumstances, have been to court almost certain destruction. I have to congratulate myself upon having adopted the course I did, for subsequently, when taxed with having a covert and hostile mission to Merv, I was able to plead that in coming there I had made no attempt at a disguise, and that my servants, one of whom was of their own race, could speak as to the character in which I resided in Derguez.

I dismounted at the door of a hut to which my horse was peremptorily led, and, in view of the attitude of the people, I for the first time fully realised the risks which at the commencement of my venture I had so gaily faced—at best, captivity for an indefinite period. Nevertheless, I was so delighted to have reached my long-sought destination, and to be at Merv at last, in spite of all the difficulties which the nature of the ground, the efforts of adversaries, and the jealousy of the population had cast in my way, that my pleasurable emotions overcame all others. Here I was, at last, in the heart of the Turcoman territory. Let the future take care of itself.

The circular bee-hive house into which I was shown was instantaneously crowded almost to suffocation. Before the entry of myself and my following, it was occupied by the caravan *bashi*, or chief of the commercial cavalcade about to start for Meshed, and a dozen or so of his consignors. He was very civil to me, his more or less international

instincts probably teaching him that it was best to be so. Some one pulled off my wet riding-boots, after a prolonged struggle; another substituted a lamb-skin mantle for my drenched leopard-skin and overcoat. A bowl of scalding hot green tea, without sugar, and tasting like a dose of Epsom salts, completed my material comforts. I sat close to the fire, and warmed my shivering members. All the time, the assembled people were gazing at me with an eagerness of expression that no words could convey. They apparently thought that after all I might be somebody mysteriously connected with the events transpiring so near to them, and who had come among them on a friendly mission. This idea was evidently still further propagated by the volubility of my Kurd, who, in the last agony of apprehension about his own personal well-being, was pouring torrents of lies into the ears of his auditory, telling them what a tremendous personage I was, and what wonderful comfort I was about to administer as soon as I could get the ear of the Khan. As for my late escort, some of them simply stated that I had come from the direction of the Russian camp, and were sufficiently cowardly to shirk all responsibility, and declare that they knew nothing further about me, though on the road they had at times been quite enthusiastic about the advent of a friendly Ferenghi to Merv. They even went so far as to say that they believed me to be a Russian, and that I came to Merv as a spy. Their expression of opinion seemed to take effect, and I could see, by the thinning of the audience, that I was losing ground. Angry voices, reaching me from a hut, close by, told me in half-heard words that the general opinion was not in my favour. 'Who knows but he is a Russian, and come to survey the road, and we will have an *aleman* (hostile foray) on our backs in forty-eight hours?' Then a great fat man, with a mingled expression of ruffian-

ism and humour, came in, and asked me plainly who and what I was. This was Beg Murad Khan, a gentleman whose more intimate acquaintance I subsequently made in more than one disagreeable instance. I told him as well as I could, considering that the language used was Jagatai Tartar, and that the Turcomans have not a clearly defined notion of the functions of a peripatetic literary man. I said that I could set myself right in a few days by despatching a letter to the British native agent at Meshed (Abass Khan) by the caravan which was about to start. This proposition was met by a general shout of warning not to attempt to write a single word, or my throat would be immediately cut.

In fact, these people were so startled and frightened by the rapid Russian successes at Yengi Sheher (Geok Tepé), and entertained such dire apprehensions that Skobeleff might be on the point of repeating his performance at Merv itself, that my appearance as a stranger and possible Russian put them in such a temper that it was not by any means safe to trifle with them.

Struck by the peculiarity of my surroundings, and wishing to chronicle them while they were still vividly impressed upon me, I once ventured to produce my note-book and jot down a few hurried items. At once an excited Turcoman darted from the hut with the news that the Ferenghi was writing, and such is the dread of these unlettered people of the mighty effect of *litera scripta* that a regular storm arose, and I could hear the recommendation to finish me off at once repeated by many a lip. In came the humorous-looking ruffian again—evidently a person of high standing—to assure me in a vehement manner that if paper and pencil were again seen in my hand I could only blame myself for the result.

Everyone save myself and my two servants was then

ordered to quit the *kibitka*. A strong guard was mounted at the door; and I was left to ruminate over the possible outcome of a situation into which, my conscience whispered, I had thrust myself with a scarcely justifiable amount of recklessness. However, under the combined influence of dry clothes, a fire, and a meal of boiled rice, which was considerately sent to us, I speedily began to recover good spirits. 'After all,' said I to myself, 'unless they are even worse than they are painted, these Merv Tekkés won't murder me out of hand simply on suspicion of being a Russian, especially as my hypothetic countrymen are not far off.' I longed very much to commit these and other details to writing, but fears of awakening another storm by my obduracy made me content with comparative inactivity. Under cover of my mantle I from time to time jotted down the leading points of my adventures since quitting Méněh, acting with the greatest possible caution, for I knew that, while I was apparently left alone with my attendants, fully a dozen eyes were watching me intently through crannies in the door and walls. Moreover, twenty hours in the saddle, with only a couple of attempts at rest, such as I have described, and with so slender a commissariat, justified some repose. I lay down, and in half an hour was sleeping soundly.

It wanted but an hour of sunset when I was awakened by the opening of the door, and the entry of a man whom I had not previously seen. My Kurd servant at once recognised him. He had often met him at Geok Tepé previous to its fall. The stranger was no other than the celebrated Tokmé Serdar, the chief military leader of the Akhal Tekkés, and the man by whose energy and ability the defence of the Turcoman territory and fortress had been so prolonged. He was slightly under the middle height, broadly built, very quiet, almost subdued in manner, his small grey eyes sometimes lighting up with a humorous

twinkle. His features, though not at all regular, had that irregularity which is often seen in a distinguished *savant* of the West, and bore the impress of thought. Had I met him elsewhere, and clothed in European garb, I should not have been surprised to learn that he was an eminent member of the Bar, or some other learned profession. For some time he said but little, being evidently engaged in examining me closely. At length he seemed satisfied that I was not a Russian, having probably had sufficient experience of Russians to enable him to form a sound opinion. He went on to say, what I had so often heard from Tekké lips, how disappointed they were that the English troops had stopped short, and not come on *viâ* Herat to the Turcoman country. Then he proceeded to review the general situation, and its bearing on the Turcoman question. He displayed a knowledge of geography that surprised me. On the sandy floor he traced with his finger a rough map of the ground from Candahar to the Caspian. 'Here,' said he, 'are the English; here is Merv; and here are the Russians. In one case the distance to be traversed is large, in the other, small. In case of the sudden outbreak of hostilities, we know which party would arrive first at Merv. The Akhal Tekkés have seen that when the Russians assailed them the English troops did not come to the rescue. The Merv people remember this, and will probably side with the first comers.'

This was Tokmé Serdar's way of looking at the situation—a sufficiently broad one, and probably the correct one too. He believed that if the Russians wished to move on Herat from their present position in the Akhal Tekké country, it would be neither necessary nor expedient for them to come to Merv as a preliminary step. Could they but secure the neutrality or friendship of the people of this latter place, their evident route would be along the line of

partially cultivated and watered country to some point on the Tejend river, and then along the banks of that stream to Herat. Active hostility on the part of the Merv peopl would, of course, necessitate their subjugation before further advance could be made, as it would be very inconvenient to have a large force of cavalry, accustomed to raiding, constantly assailing the flank of the line of communication.

This had always been my way of looking at the question, and I was glad to find it confirmed by a man of such great practical experience and knowledge of the country of which he spoke as Tokmé Serdar. 'The only difficulty,' said the Serdar, 'would be for the Russian infantry and baggage waggons to clear the ground intervening between the last water to westward and the Tejend river.' A pretty stiff march of thirty miles, however, would be sufficient to accomplish this—a few wells dug at a medial point rendering the journey quite an easy affair. Of course there would be another route from Askabad, *viâ* Kuchan or Muhammedabad, to the Meshed valley; but in both these cases there would be mountain chains to cross, which, in the present state of the roads, would be altogether impracticable to artillery and waggons, and, moreover, a serious violation of Persian territory would be involved.

I spent the entire evening talking over these matters with Tokmé Serdar. He said he had received an invitation to the Russian camp, coupled with an assurance of perfect immunity and forgiveness for the past. He said that all his property was in and about Geok Tepé, and that he would much desire, if it were possible, again to enter into possession of it. He expressed himself as being satisfied that the Russians would not kill him, albeit he had killed a good many of them; but he thought that perhaps the fact that sixty prisoners had been taken during one of the combats,

and killed within the walls of Yengi Sheher a few days before its capture, might militate against him. 'I fear,' he observed, 'being sent away to reside in some distant part of Russia, as so many of the Yamud chiefs have been during the past few years.' He remained all that night with me, sleeping in the same hut, and going away early the next morning. I have not since seen him, but I am aware that he surrendered himself at Askabad a few days afterwards, as so many of his companions were then doing daily, and have since done. How he subsequently proceeded, as chief of a deputation, to St. Petersburg, had audience of the Emperor, laid the homage of the Akhal Tekkés at his feet, and, with his companions, received dresses of honour (*khilats*) as a token of the Imperial favour and appreciation, is now known to the public. His son, a lad of twelve years, remained as a student at the military college when the Serdar returned to his country.

At ten o'clock on the following morning I was ordered to mount my horse and proceed to head-quarters—to Merv itself, the seat of the Tekké Government, that mysterious goal to which I had been so long looking forward. It was still raining, and the flat country presented a wretchedly dismal appearance. I was escorted by my fat acquaintance of the previous day, together with twenty other horsemen, and preceded and followed by over a hundred persons on foot. We rode in a north-westerly direction, crossing large and deep irrigation canals, roughly bridged over by tree-trunks covered with brambles and earth, and floundering a good deal through flooded spaces. Then the weather began to brighten somewhat, and I was able to look round.

On every side was an immense plain, here and there broken by extensive plantations of trees, and hundreds of groups of bee-hive shaped huts or *aladjaks*, each group consisting of from fifty to two hundred dwellings. The

villages were usually from one to two miles apart. The ground was everywhere well tilled, corn-fields and great melon-beds alternating. In a few minutes the ground became higher, and vegetation more sparse. We were crossing a portion of the battle-field on which, some twenty-two years previously, the Persian expedition was defeated, thirty-two field guns being captured by the Turcomans. Another hour brought us to the banks of the Murgab, which I now saw for the first time. We crossed it upon a rickety bridge, supported on unhewn tree-trunks planted vertically in the river bed, the roadway being four feet wide, and devoid of anything in the shape of a parapet. This structure was nearly fifteen feet above the surface of the river. The stream follows an extremely winding channel, in a shallow ravine varying from twelve to eighteen feet in depth. The surface was from thirty to forty yards wide. The water, three to five feet deep, was quite yellow with suspended earth, the current at that season (March, 1881) being almost imperceptible. Turning sharply to the left, we rode parallel to a line of great earthen ramparts, recently begun to be thrown up, and five minutes more brought us to the residence of Kadjar Khan, the *Ichthyar*, or supreme chief.

I found myself in the midst of about two hundred huts, ranged in rows of two or three hundred yards in length. In front of one of the foremost waved a small red banner, from a lance-shaft lashed to the top of a pole. This marked the residence of the Ichthyar, or executive chief, elected by the leading persons of the entire Merv district. Five hundred yards distant to the northward loomed a long line of earthwork, forming a front of a mile and a half in length, and shutting out the prospect in that direction. This line formed the cord of an arc described by the river, and constituted the new Turcoman stronghold, Kouchid Khan Kala,

so named in memory of the late supreme chief, who had died three years before. The original fort bearing that appellation formed one extremity of the new work in course of construction. To the west and east were extensive tree plantations, and away over the plain, in every direction, seemingly countless numbers of groups of huts could be discerned.

A few yards behind Kadjar Khan's house was a tolerably large pavilion tent of a pale blue colour, intended, I was informed, for myself. It was part of the spoil captured from the Persians, and had evidently belonged to some ill-fated officer of rank. Within it I found a thick felt mat, covered by a Turcoman carpet. In a shallow pit near one end burned a charcoal fire. A decent-looking, white-bearded old man received me. He was the brother of the Khan, and a moullah. Kadjar Khan himself was absent at some distant village. While very civil, my new acquaintance was exceedingly reserved in manner towards me, as the current of public opinion was still in favour of my being a daring Russian agent, sent forward to reconnoitre for a coming force. Under the circumstances, doubtless, he did not care to be too cordial with a person whose throat might have to be cut within the next twenty-four hours.

My position was altogether anomalous. Every precaution was taken to prevent my evasion, for fear of my proving to be a hostile individual; while at the same time I was treated with a good deal of personal consideration, in view of the possibility of my being a person of importance who had come on a friendly mission. My saddles and scanty luggage were piled up at one end of the tent, and I took my seat upon the carpet, to commence the semi-martyrdom which lasted for the next twenty days, and which tried my patience more severely than it had ever been tested before.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OPENING SCENES AT MERV.

Interviewed by Turcomans—Public opinion—*Yassaouls*—Persecution—Merv notables—Baba Khan—Aman Niaz Khan—Yussuf Khan—Ophthalmic maladies—Turcoman dress—A Merv Jew—Drinkables at Merv—Religious toleration—Persian intolerance—Kadjar Khan—His appearance—Daily existence—Dust storms—A medjlis—Opium—My Kurd servant—An awkward position—Before the Council of Elders—The old man of the sword—Cross-examination—The Padishah and the 'Coompani'—Favourable wind-up.

THE afternoon was well advanced before I was fairly installed in my new residence, and as yet the tidings of my arrival had not spread. Only a few Turcomans of the immediate locality ventured near the tent, and even their curiosity was overborne by the awe they felt for the Ferenghi, one of whom, for the first time within the memory of any of them, had actually penetrated into their inmost recesses. The old moullah remained with me nearly all the evening. Soon after my arrival three or four of the elders of the community tried to draw me out, but I preserved great reticence. I wished to feel my way, and to gain an insight into the characters of my visitors before venturing upon any decided statement or expression of opinion, or giving any explanations, which, however true they might be, might either entangle me with these crooked-minded people or disappoint their expectations. During the first evening I was left comparatively tranquil, but early the next morning a change came over the scene. It was one of the two days

of the week on which the people of the oasis assemble at the bazaar for trading purposes. On each of these occasions several thousand people come together.

Long before the sun was well above the horizon a surging crowd had gathered around my tent, the interior of which was also crammed with members of Merv society, all eager to interview the mysterious stranger who had fallen among them, as it were, from the clouds. They were the same sort of dressing-gown robed, sheepskin-clad, gigantic-hatted beings as those whom I have described when writing about my residence among the Yamud Turcomans of the Caspian shore. They sat upon their heels in a kneeling position, their folded arms resting upon the fronts of their thighs, and gazed at me with the ludicrous eagerness which may be observed in baboons and apes when some unfamiliar object meets their eyes. I had been fast asleep, my head resting upon a heap of baggage, and my body covered over with a large sheepskin mantle, but these people waited patiently until it might suit me to let myself be seen, for it is an inviolable piece of etiquette among them never to disturb a sleeper.

I was somewhat bewildered by the events of the past few days. I sat up, rubbed my eyes, and looked around me, quite unable to understand the sudden and numerous audience who had favoured me with their presence. Words cannot describe their astonishment on beholding my unwonted costume. My short, black, closely buttoned tunic and cord riding-breeches seemed to fill them with amazement. They gazed and gazed as though they could never stop looking at the external appearance of the Ferenghi. It was the gaze of the operator while endeavouring to mesmerise his subject. Simultaneously, from without, scores of eyes peeped through every nook and cranny of the tent walls; and I could hear remarks upon my personal appearance and costume, winding up with a statement of the con-

viction of the observers that I was most unmistakeably an 'Oroos.' Let it not be imagined that, after the first eagerness of curiosity was satisfied, this sort of thing came to an end. Quite the reverse. As the tidings of my arrival spread, relays upon relays of fresh sightseers thronged to the capital and besieged my abode. Instead of attending to their business in the bazaar, they abandoned everything for the chance of getting a glimpse of me. Sometimes the throng was so terrific that the tent reeled and swayed around me, and I thought it was coming down upon my head—a thing which ultimately happened when the spectators, utterly impatient at not being able to get within reach of the peep-hole, or in line with the doorway, tried to lift up the edges of the tent and introduce their heads. This being done simultaneously, and all the tent pegs becoming removed, the thing actually subsided upon me, nearly smothering myself and the more select party inside. Then came a rush of *yassaouls*, or local police (!), striking right and left with sticks, and shouting reproaches against the sightseers for their violent breach of decorum in thus inconveniencing a stranger guest.

All night long, even when I slept, the same state of things continued, both inside and outside the tent. The people seemed never to go to sleep, or to have any desire to do so. The strange cut of my tunic and riding breeches appeared to create an unquenchable thirst on the part of those who had once seen them to see them again. During the first month of my residence at Merv I might be said to have lived in the interior of a much-patronised peep-show, in which I was the central—and, indeed, the only—object of attraction. At first the effect was maddening, but I afterwards fell into a kind of comatic stupor, and began to feel under mesmeric influences. One could not make a move but it was commented upon. The manner of washing my face and hands called forth loud

exclamations; and the operation of combing my hair seemed greatly to tickle their fancies. More than once I asked the old moullah whether there were no means of getting rid of the persecution under which I suffered. He shook his head gravely, and said surely I was not harmed by being looked at. When the horribly irritating effect at first produced passed away, I began to look upon my ever-present, passive human tormentors as so many caryatidic appendages of the architecture of my residence.

I had not as yet seen Kadjar Khan, and was very impatient to do so. He had not yet returned from his tour of inspection, but was expected hourly. However, I had visits from persons who ultimately proved to be of much higher social standing than even the Ichthyar himself. There was suddenly a great commotion among the outside crowd, and a general making way of those within the tent, as three individuals entered, and, gravely saluting me with much ceremony, took their seats beside me. These were Kouchid Khan, commonly known as Baba Khan, the son of the old ruler of Merv. Baba Khan, as I will henceforward call him, was chief of the Toktamish division of Turcomans, those residing in that portion of the oasis which is situated to the east of the river Murgab. The second, Aman Niaz Khan, was chief of the Otamish, or western division, and the third was Yussuf Khan, a lad of fifteen or sixteen years, brother of Makdum Kuli, the Akhal Tekké chief, and hereditary leader of the Vekil, or extreme eastern division of the Merv Tekké. Baba Khan was a low-sized man, of cunning aspect. One eye was completely destroyed by *keratitis*, the ophthalmic malady commonly known by the name of 'pearl'; the other was of a deep black colour, actually flaming with vivacity and penetration. At least ten per cent. of the Turcomans seem to be affected by this disease, probably in consequence of the combined effect of

the fierce sun-light reflected from the marly plain, and the irritation produced by the dust-storms, so frequent in this district, and the smoky atmosphere of the huts. Baba Khan, while apparently speaking to me, was in reality talking at the crowd within the tent, and endeavouring to show his keenness of perception by sneering at my stout denial of being a Russian, and broadly hinting that he could tell my nationality from the very style of my long boots—which, by the way, were made in Constantinople. He, too, had much to say on the standing topic of conversation, the relative positions of the British and Russian troops with regard to Merv, the extreme propinquity of the latter, and the distance at which the former were cantoned at Kandahar.

Aman Niaz Khan was much more agreeable in his manners than his brother chief, and was evidently more of a natural gentleman. His eyes were feeble and watery, and he had the sallow, downcast air which accompanies the excessive use of opium. His features were regular, but wasted. He affected an extreme humility, which I am quite sure he was far from feeling. He told me that his health was very delicate, owing to his excessive consumption of opium, by which, he said, he was gradually ruining his constitution. He could not give it up, he remarked; he had been used to it from childhood. Over his long, sash-girt robe of striped crimson silk was another, of similar material, variously and brilliantly tinted. The ground of the robe was white, and it was so woven as to present a number of irregular patches, or rather splashes, of bright red, blue, yellow, and purple. At a distance he looked as if wrapped up in a large Union Jack. Some of his attendants were similarly attired, the colours varying to green, vermilion, and purple, according to the taste of the wearer. In this respect Aman Niaz and his followers were in distinct contrast to Baba and his men, who were clad in very

sombre garments. All wore the huge grenadier hats of black curled sheepskin characteristic of the Turcomans, and each had the usual long carving-knife-like dagger stuck in his white sash.

Young Yussuf Khan had the most Tartar-like physiognomy of the company—flat nose and high cheek-bones, but his eyes were full and grey, and quite unlike the peeping, slit-like organs of the genuine Kalmuck. Out of reverence to his seniors, he said but little. He was seated on his heels, his hands clasped before him, and concealed beneath his robe of amber-coloured camel-hair cloth. He gazed steadfastly before him, as if lost in contemplation, expressing little or no curiosity about me or my belongings. This is considered *bon ton* in Turcoman society.

I spent a weary day, repeating the same answers a hundred times to the same never-varying, tiresome questions, and do not think that I ever talked so long before, in any language; and as that which I used to express myself was Jagatai Tartar, it may be imagined how trying the conversation was to me. One after another the chiefs withdrew, saluting me with ceremonious politeness, and again leaving me at the mercy of the inconsiderate crowd, who seemed to have no regard whatever for my privacy or convenience.

Towards evening one of the few Jews living at Merv, a merchant named Matthi, paid me a visit. He wore a long robe of cotton stuff, with narrow red and white stripes, and a dome-shaped tiara of yellowish brown leather, bordered round the lower part with fine black Astrakan. His beard, tinged with grey, was of inordinate length and fulness, and he carried a staff of some five feet in length, but no arms. In the East Jews rarely carry weapons of any kind. I believe that in the Derguez they are forbidden to do so. Thinking that, like most of his co-religionists in the Levant, he might speak Spanish, I addressed him in that language,

but no word did he understand. He spoke Tartar, Persian, Hebrew, and some Hindustani. He brought with him a bottle of arrack, and one of reddish-brown wine from Bokhara. The arrack, coloured yellow with turmeric, was not altogether unpalatable, though it would have admitted of very considerable improvement; the wine was simply abominable—a treacly syrup of some vinous liquid. The arrack was distilled from large white raisins, and manufactured on the spot. If kept for a year or so I dare say it would be passably good, but, drunk as it is, immediately after distillation, it is very unwholesome, being mingled largely with fusel oil.

The Jew merchant told me that there were but seven families of his religious persuasion at Merv. They had resided there from time immemorial, and had not among them even a tradition as to the place from whence they had come previous to settling in the oasis. Very possibly they were a remnant of the old traders who had formerly followed their avocations in the city of Merv in the days of its prosperity. He told me that he was in no way annoyed or incommoded on account of his religion. In the shape of imposts he only paid a very small amount in excess of his brother traders of the Mussulman faith for the privilege of selling in the bazaar, the excess amounting to something like half a franc on each occasion. I was at first surprised to find that such religious tolerance existed in Merv, for I knew that in Muhammedabad and other portions of the border Persian territory, especially at Meshed, Jews were not allowed the free practice of their religion, but were compelled to attend the mosque on Fridays, being frequently driven thither by blows of a stick. They were not allowed to call themselves *Moussai*, their real religious name in these Eastern countries, but were compelled to style themselves *Jedid*, which signifies a

convert to the Mussulman faith. In my opinion, the superior religious toleration among the Turcomans is due far more to complete indifference in regard to such subjects than to any greater liberality of mind on their part. In Merv, as a rule, but little heed is paid to anyone's religious belief, provided he be possessed of money. The Mussulman there would draw tears to the eyes of the Wahabees whom Palgrave describes. Opium smoking and arrack drinking are the common and wide-spread vices. In fact, the Mervli are Mussulmans in very little more than name.

It was only after sunset on the second day that Kadjar Khan, the *Ichthyar*, made his appearance. Owing to the excessive crowd in the tent, he had been sitting not far from me for an hour before I was aware of the fact; the intense democracy of the population, as well as other circumstances which became known to me afterwards, preventing the display of any of those external signs of respect usually shown to the chief magistrate of a State, however small it may be. He was in every respect a remarkable-looking man. Tall and gaunt, he was clad in simple robes of the soberest tint. His aquiline features were the exact counterpart of those of the bust of Julius Cæsar at the British Museum. The total absence of beard, save a few scarcely perceptible hairs upon the chin and upper lip, gave him the appearance of being closely shaved. His face was decidedly a fine one, though somewhat ascetic, and spoiled by an uneasy, vulturine expression of the eye, the pupil being quite surrounded by the white. His lips were firmly set, and the muscles of his jaws twitched and worked convulsively, as if he were under the influence of some strong emotion. He was over sixty years of age. For some time he spoke apparently to himself, his eyes fixed on vacancy. At first I did not feel at all comfortable beside him. I had seen his face before, but it was only when

reminded of the time and place that it came back to my memory. In the early portion of the preceding year he had been at Teheran, together with twelve other Turcomans of note, endeavouring to come to an understanding with the Shah about the relations of Merv with Persia. He had remained for five months the guest of the Persian monarch, and had left for Merv at a period subsequent to my own departure from the Persian capital. I had met him, casually, in the market-place, and on one occasion when I visited the Persian Prime Minister, Hussein Khan, the Merv chieftain was waiting in the ante-room. His physiognomy struck me at the time, but it was only when I heard his name at Merv that I recalled his personality. He was very soberly clad in a mantle of dark brown stuff, and bore no external symbols of rank whatever. He said but little, his observations being mainly confined to 'Inch Allah' (Please God) at the end of each of my sentences. At last he got up and went out abruptly, and I saw no more of him for two days. About sunset his brother, the old moullah, sent me a large wooden dish filled with broken bread, and mingled with some shreds of meat, over which mutton broth had been poured. Of this my Kurd servant and myself made our suppers. The Akhal Tekké servant had discovered his family among the refugees from Geok Tepé, and had taken leave of me. So ended my first day's contact with the notables of Merv.

The experience of each succeeding day was similar to that of the one which preceded it, the annoyance caused by importunity and intrusion still continuing, and becoming aggravated by the fact that the charm of novelty wore off. People came from far and near to look at me, and during the first fortnight I had not a single moment of privacy or undisturbed repose. I was closely confined to my tent, for whenever I tried to go outside the door I was

followed by a number of persons, evidently told off to look after me, and to warn me that I should not go straying about, 'lest,' they said, 'the dogs might bite you.' It is true that these dogs were really dangerous, and a stranger, even though a Turcoman, approaching the place, ran imminent risk of being pulled in pieces unless the animals were called off by their proprietors.

During the day the heat, within the tent, was stifling; and at times dust storms arose, drifting the powdered marl, and forcing it through every chink of the tent, until it filled one's ears and nostrils, and insinuated its way into the saddle-bags and among one's eatables. It was wearisome work, sitting there all day to be stared at, with absolutely nothing to do. If I attempted to read a page of one of the few books that I had with me, I was tormented by demands for explanations as to its nature, what it contained, &c. I could not even think, on account of the incessant questionings; and I really believe that, unless relief had come in one form or another, I should have become demented.

On the seventh day after my arrival, advantage being taken of the assembly of people at the bazaar, a general *medjlis*, or council of the Merv chiefs and elders, was summoned to investigate my case, and to decide what my standing at Merv should be—a friendly one or the reverse, and to examine the evidence *pro* and *con.* with regard to my being a Russian. My Kurd servant was lying in a corner, stupefied with the fumes of opium, which he had been smoking to deaden his fears of the possible result of the reunion of the redoubtable Merv elders. He was in the last extremity of fear, and had the conviction, which he more than once expressed to me, that we had not the slightest chance of escaping with our lives.

This Kurd had done me a world of harm, and his action bade fair to place me in serious jeopardy of, at best, a

lengthened detention. He had formerly been a professional raider in the service of the Emir Hussein Khan, the Governor of Kuchan. His business then was to conduct parties of horsemen into the neighbouring Turcoman territory, and to secure as many sheep and cattle, as well as heads of the inhabitants, as possible, in the same fashion as that adopted by the henchmen of the Khan of Derguez. He quarrelled with his chief, and was gaining his living in a heterogeneous manner when I met with him. The British Consular Agent at Meshed constantly employed him to travel between that town and Geok Tepé, and to keep him informed as to the doings at the theatre of war. I had met him at Muhammedabad several times, while on his way to or from Geok Tepé. He had brought me letters from Makdum Kuli Khan and from Meshed, and had often conveyed my letters and telegrams to the same place. He was recommended to me as a man used to daring enterprises, and one who, however doubtful his morality, was at least possessed of unmistakable physical courage—a man who would face any danger, and who courted adventure; in fact, in all ways excepting his absence of morality, just the kind of person I required for my prospective visit to Merv.[1] His name was Gholam Riza. I dare say he would have faced the Tekkés bravely enough in open combat, but so terrified did he become at first contact with them in their own territory that he was scarcely answerable for his actions. To put himself under cover of some greater responsibility, he on all occasions gave out that I was a person of immense importance, going to Merv with the British flag in my pocket, which was immediately to be hoisted; and that I was about to summon from

[1] I had been obliged to dismiss my Persian servant who had come with me from Teheran, and who had been previously in the service of Mr. Arnold. His utter dishonesty and extreme cowardice rendered it impossible for me to undertake the journey to Merv in his company; even if he had been willing to come with me, which he was not. I hired Gholam Riza in his place.

Kandahar endless legions of British troops. I repeatedly warned him not to make such statements, and told him that I would flatly contradict them; but, maddened by fear, he paid no attention to what I said.

Here I was, then, in a very awkward position. From hearing my servant reiterate the statements which had sprung from his own imagination, stimulated by his fears, the authorities had begun to attach some kind of importance to what he said, and to believe that after all I might be some kind of envoy, despatched to Merv by reason of the very critical position with reference to the advancing Russian forces. I had to dispel these illusions, and at the same time to make known the nature of my business among them—by no means an easy task.

The council of elders had been sitting for over an hour when I was summoned to attend it. I confess that it was not without a considerable degree of trepidation that I obeyed the summons. Issuing from my tent, I was led through a surging crowd to a wide waste space in the rear, where, on the marly earth, some two hundred persons were seated in a circle of twenty yards in diameter. An immense gathering of the public pressed around them; for at Merv the entire population, of both sexes and all ages and conditions, are privy to the important deliberations of the Council of State. Within the circle, and close to one side of it, was laid a large felt rug, on which I was requested to be seated. Then followed a dead silence. Everyone was scrutinising myself and my garb. I had expressly donned all that was left me of European clothing, lest, as I have said, I should be accused of having tried to disguise myself in Eastern attire; and I feel sure that I presented a singular appearance, considering the unavoidable mixture of garments I was compelled to put on.

I cast a rapid glance around me when I was seated

cross-legged on my rug. There were young and old, well-dressed and shabbily-attired men in the assembly. The general expression of countenance was far from reassuring; but there were some faces that gave me confidence. The gathering before me was doubtless fairly representative, so far as types were concerned, of the population of Merv, and I was greatly struck by the general absence of the Kalmuck type. The physiognomies before me would readily have passed for European, and the only peculiarity noticeable was the absence, in the main, of beard upon the sides of the jaws. Fully a third of the number, however, had beards of respectable dimensions—a sign, probably, of admixture of Persian blood.

There was a general whispering for some time, and then, from the opposite part of the circle, I was addressed in thundering bass tones. The speaker was a man of colossal proportions and of advanced age, as the long white beard which swept his breast denoted. He was rather well dressed, in the fashion of the country, one which probably dates back to a very remote period. His formidable name, as I afterwards learned, was Killidge Ak-Saghal, or the Old Man of the Sword. He said, in tones of one accustomed to send his voice afar in the tumult of combat, 'Who and what are you, and what brings you here?' This was a comprehensive question, and I answered in the same fashion.

I said that I was a native of that part of Frangistan called England, and that my present occupation was observing and reporting on the progress of the Russian arms; and that, fleeing before General Skobeleff's advance, I had arrived at Merv. Then ensued a pause, during which my statement was discussed throughout the assembly. 'What proof can you give of the truth of your statement?' said the Old Man of the Sword. Hereupon I deftly produced

my pocket-book, and unfolded the various documents which I possessed, some in English, others in Persian, testifying to my identity and occupation. The old man, who seemed tacitly recognised as the speaker of the assembly, and who furthermore possessed the rare accomplishments of reading and writing, not only his own language, but also that of Persia, gravely examined my papers, which he subsequently read aloud and translated into Turcoman idiom for the benefit of the assembly. A murmur of approval followed. 'But,' said the militant elder, 'how can anyone tell but that you are not a Russian who has murdered some Englishman and taken his papers?' I began to perceive that my interlocutor was a wag, and wished to show his humour to the company. I said, gravely, that there were means of showing that this supposition was untenable, by a reference to the British agent at Meshed, and to the Minister at Teheran, and that in any case he should seek some further support for his hypothesis before he adopted it. I also remarked that if I had been allowed to communicate with my friends in Persia I could have long before shown to their satisfaction who and what I was; that all I could do for the moment was to exhibit my papers to them; and that, with their approval, I would write and obtain unquestionable evidence of the genuineness of what I had stated. Then followed divers queries from other members of the assembly. How long had I left England? What was my rank, &c.? During this questioning there was much jumbling together, in the minds of the speakers, of Hindustan and England, the Padishah and the 'Coompani.' I was asked to indicate the respective directions of England and India, and when I pointed to opposite portions of the horizon, the wonderment and astonishment grew greater. Who and what the 'company' was was discussed at length, and I was asked whether it could possibly be true,

as was currently reported in the East, that the Padishah of England was a lady.

In a little while I began to gain ground, and could easily perceive the truth of the adage that 'we easily believe that which we wish.' This council of dignitaries concluded by convincing themselves that I was an Englishman, and had come to Merv for the purpose of doing what my Kurd had so industriously circulated to be my object. After an hour's discussion I was told that I might withdraw. I was led back to my tent, from whence I could hear the loud and eager debate which ensued.

While awaiting the final decision of the council, the moments were anxious ones for me. For all I could tell, sentence of immediate death might be pronounced upon me, and I endeavoured to steel my mind for the very worst. In half an hour I was again summoned. From the smiling faces around I knew that a favourable decision had been arrived at. The thunder-voiced old Nestor told me that I was not to be killed, for which I felt duly thankful, considering the state of concern in this regard in which I had been living for some days, and up to that moment. 'But,' said he, 'you are to remain a prisoner until a reply can be received from Abass Khan, the English agent at Meshed.' Couriers were to be at once despatched to that city, on whose return another *medjlis* would be held. I then again withdrew, and the council broke up.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

ROUND ABOUT MERV.

A change of residence—*Kibitka, ev, aladjak*, description of—Household furniture—Ancient superstitions—Tekké costume—Letter from Meshed—A visit to the fortifications—Construction—Faults—Water supply of fortress—Foulness of Murgab—Distant view of old cities—Captured artillery—Miscellaneous calibres—Dilapidation—Unbusinesslike ideas—Promenade with the Khans—Working at defences—Old Kouchid Khan Kala—Jewish village—A Turcoman college—Khodja Nefess—Graves—*Usta adam—Susana thob*—An absurd idea—The factory *in prospecto*—Provisional appointment—Gaining ground—Precautionary measures—Gholam Riza sent home—Reasons—A letter to Teheran—Alone among the Turcomans.

A FEW days had elapsed since the meeting of the *medjlis*, when I perceived an unusual movement towards the rear of my tent. On drawing aside one of the folds, I saw a number of Turcoman women engaged in the erection of an *aladjak* quite close to my tent. The new dwelling was destined for me, for I had several times complained about the dust and the extreme heat to which I was exposed in my canvas house. No one who has not resided in tents in a hot climate can imagine the great inconvenience of living under canvas. During midday hours the heat is unbearable unless the tent be doubled with felt or very thick coloured stuff.

I will now describe in detail an *aladjak* and the method of its construction. It is also styled *kibitka*, and *ev*. *Aladjak* is Khirgese, *kibitka* Russian. *Ev* is the real Turcoman name, and means a house. This typical nomadic dwelling is ordinarily about fifteen feet in diameter, and eleven or twelve feet to the culminating point of its domed roof. To a

height of six feet its walls are vertical. These walls are composed of an open lattice-work of rods nearly an inch and a half in diameter, sloping at an angle of forty-five degrees with the horizon. They cross at intervals of eight inches. The entire height of the lattice-work is nearly six feet. At the point of junction the rods are pierced, and bound together with the dried intestines of sheep. When a village is being moved, the four pieces of lattice-work which complete the entire circle of the *kibitka* close up into a limited space, and can easily be packed upon the back of a single camel. When a house is being erected, the four component pieces of the lattice-work are expanded to their greatest extent, and placed in the form of a circular enclosure. They are bound firmly together by cords of plaited camel-hair thread. The dome-shaped roof is formed of a number of curved wooden rods, of about the same dimensions as those which compose the lateral lattice-work of the wall. One extremity of each is firmly lashed to the top of the lattice-work, the other being inserted into a cart-wheel-like construction some s x feet in diameter, which constitutes the summit of the cupola.

When the lattice walls have been erected, the women—for the mounting and dismounting of these residences are invariably effected by women—place the central cart-wheel-like piece upon the top of a pole, and hoist it to the necessary height in the middle of the enclosure. Three or four others simultaneously insert the extremity of the curved rods into the holes pierced in its circumference, lashing the lower ends as I have already described. The result is a structure very similar to a gigantic parrot-cage. Outside the vertical lattice walls are suspended sheets of felt, of a breadth equal to their height. Outside this felt the walls are enclosed by a roll of reed matting. This latter consists of giant cane-like reeds, of about six feet in length, placed vertically side

by side, and bound together by half-a-dozen parallel threads of interlacing camel-hair. This, in turn, is further secured by an exterior belt, passing round the entire structure, and connecting with the door-posts on either side. The roof is covered with felt alone. The central aperture has a hood of the same material, which can be drawn over it and pulled back at pleasure by strings which hang near the door. In fine weather this aperture is always open, for, save the door, there is no other means whereby light and air can penetrate to the interior, or the smoke of the fire find an exit. An *ev* has no windows. In these inland districts precautions against storms, the *tenkis* especially, are quite unnecessary.

The furniture of the *ev* is very simple. The fire occupies the middle of the apartment, immediately under the central opening in the dome. The half of the floor remote from the entrance is covered with a *ketché*, or felt carpet, nearly an inch in thickness. On this are laid, here and there, Turcoman carpets, six or seven feet long by four to five in breadth, on which the inhabitants sit by day and sleep by night. A special bed is unknown to a Turcoman. The semi-circle next the door is of bare earth, and on it chopping of wood, cooking, and other rough domestic operations are conducted. Round the walls hang large flat camel-bags, six feet by four, one side being entirely composed of the rich carpet-work in which the Turcoman women excel. Ordinarily, all the household goods are packed in these bags, for transit from place to place on the backs of camels. When empty they form a picturesque tapestry.

I have sometimes seen a kind of rude bed, supported upon four legs, the space within the frame—a rude network of coarse camel-hair cords—being covered with a felt mat by way of mattrass. There is another article of furniture, a kind of rude support upon which boxes, quilts, and bolsters are stored, so as to be removed from the damp

earth. Besides the primitive horizontal hand-mill, or quern of our Celtic forefathers, and the *samovar*, which is in almost hourly requisition, for the courtesies of Central Asia require that every stranger be presented with a cup of tea immediately upon his arrival, nothing more exists in the way of household furniture. Hung on one side are the saddle and other horse trappings of the master of the establishment, along with his sabre and musket. The horses are tethered by the fetlock close by the door of the *ev*.

Within the roof, and near its top, hang a couple of lamb or goat-skins, turned inside out, and smoke-dried. The neck-aperture is kept widely open by four crossed sticks. These skins swing to and fro in the air current produced by the fire, and are termed *toonik*. I have repeatedly questioned the Turcomans as to the meaning of this. They evidently attached some mysterious importance to it, but were loth to explain. The skins are probably remnants of some old pre-Mussulman worship, such as that which was customary among the Scythian forefathers of this people. Near the doorway, against the felt wall-lining, is sewn a piece of linen or calico, four or five inches square, forming a pocket for the reception of the bounties of wandering spirits. This they call the *tarum*. A horseshoe, too, is occasionally to be found nailed upon the threshold. These are the principal superstitious usages of the Turcomans. I was surprised to find how few they were.

It was an unspeakable relief to me to abandon my old quarters in the tent for the comparative coolness of the *ev*; and I longed to be equally quit of my tormenting visitors, who continued to observe and catechise me with the same unflagging zeal as at the commencement. At last, perceiving that it must be my European garb which attracted their curiosity, I resolved to adopt the attire of the country. A native dealer from the bazaar waited upon me, and pro-

duced a store of choice garments. I selected the ordinary Turcoman costume—a long crimson tunic of coarse Bokhara silk, with slender black and yellow combined stripe—a *kirmesi daun*, as it is called. Over this comes a light brown flowing garment, of fine camel-hair tissue, the *duyungi chakman*. I next purchased a *beurg*, or embroidered skull-cap, a *telpek* (sheepskin hat), a *keyuk* (shirt), *gushakli* (sash), *balak* (wide white cotton trousers), and a pair of *chokoi* (broad-toed slippers, of red stamped Russian leather). Stockings are rarely worn—never with slippers. When long riding-boots are used, the feet and ankles are swathed in a band-like wrapping called *dolok*. In severe weather the enormous great-coat styled a *kusgun* is worn. Sometimes this is replaced by a heavy mantle called a *yapundja*, of woven sheep's wool.[1] Thus equipped, though I was far from getting rid of the troublesome curiosity of my neighbours, I obtained much relief in this regard, and was enabled, in company with some acquaintances, to stroll about the village, generally with a following of not more than two hundred persons.

Shortly after procuring the Turcoman costume, a letter arrived from Meshed, from Abass Khan, the British Consular Agent at that place. He is a native of Kandahar, and a Mussulman, the Persians being unwilling to allow a Frankish representative within their holy city, or the hoisting of the Giaour standard close to their most sacred shrine. In this letter he testified to my nationality, and declared that I had no connection whatever with the Russian expedition. From the moment of the receipt of this communication I was placed at comparative liberty, though always subject to a certain amount of surveillance on the part of the Turcomans, who took up a strangely mixed

[1] The words *kusgun*, *yapundja*, and also *kapnek*, are often used indifferently to indicate any kind of heavy outer garment.

attitude towards me—partly that of hosts, and partly that of gaolers. Naturally of an extremely suspicious turn of mind, they were watching the course of events, to see how they would be affected by my arrival among them.

One day, old Kadjar Khan called upon me, and asked me to accompany him on a visit to the fortifications then in process of construction, and to the guns captured by the Tekkés from the Persians and others. Kouchid Khan Kala, or the Fort of Kouchid Khan, is named after the last actual ruler of Merv, who had died three years previously. It lies to the east of the main channel of the Murgab, its length forming the cord of a large bend which the river here makes to the southward. In some maps I have seen this fort indicated upon the western bank, a mistake very easily made, owing to some of the irrigation trenches having beds almost as deep and wide as that of the main river. The original Kouchid Khan Kala, which was constructed when the Persian army invaded the country, twenty-two years previously, is little more than a redoubt. Its remains constitute the extreme easterly angle of the present works. When I arrived at Merv, the new fort, or rather fortress, was but half completed. As many as from seven to eight thousand young men worked at it daily. The rapid and unforeseen arrival of the Russians in the neighbouring oasis of the Akhal Tekké had given a great impetus to the work. Each subdivision was forced to supply a certain number of workers, every able-bodied young man being required to give four days per month or to pay a sum of two francs for each day omitted.

The fortifications were of that kind which the populations of these Central Asian plains seem to have constructed from time immemorial, and the remnants of which one still sees scattered far and near. They consist of one huge continuous embankment, thirty-five or forty feet in vertical

height, and sixty feet at the base, steeply revetted on both exterior and interior slopes, and crowned by a parapet wall the exterior surface of which was continuous with that of the main rampart. Whatever may be said about Turcomans, and, to tell the truth, there is not much good to be said about them, they have shown themselves well able to hold their own behind a breast-work. I mounted a steep incline close to the main entrance, and stood upon the summit of the ramparts. Looking along the line, one perceives it to be slightly devious in trace. This might possibly be with a view of obtaining cross and flanking fire, but the indentation of the ramparts was too slight to be of any practical use in this respect. Most likely the divergence from a rigidly straight line was owing to carelessness in construction rather than to any plans of the engineers. The summit of the embankment was sixteen feet wide, and the parapet on its top seven feet in height. The footbank to enable the defenders to fire over the crest was about two feet wide. The parapet itself, like the whole superstructure, was of well-kneaded and rammed tenacious yellow loam. Two feet thick, it was impervious to the most potent rifle bullet at reasonable range, but through it and the breast-work the projectile of the smallest mountain gun would pierce as through cardboard. The construction has two, if not three, very grave faults. Firstly, there is no flanking fire. An enemy within forty feet of the foot of the rampart would not be under fire, direct or otherwise. The scarp, or exterior surface of the wall, is too steeply built. The earth was first built up roughly, in a series of mounds, intervals being left for the workers to mount by, without going too far round or climbing too steep a slope. Then, outside of this, a revetement of moist earth clods was built, having an incline of nearly seventy degrees. No artificial means were taken to bind this facing to the inner mass. The conse-

quence is that on the occurrence of every slight shower forty or fifty yards of it come down with a run, bringing with it the breastwork above. Even without rain, its own ill-arranged weight drags it down. Untaught by daily experience of its instability, the Turcomans went at the repairs again and again with the most praiseworthy diligence. Besiegers would only have to plant their batteries at fifteen hundred yards or so, and an hour's firing with large calibre howitzers and heavy bursting charges, at the base of a given hundred yards of the wall, would annihilate the breastwork and leave a gently sloping path to an assaulting column over the entire distance. So much for Turcoman engineering. The third fault is the great height of the work, the whole forty feet being sheer above the level of the ground. They dared not dig a ditch, lest water from the ubiquitous irrigation trenches should accumulate in it, and do the work of the enemy's artillery beforehand, by sapping the foundations. The overflow of the river, too, would do this wholesale if the least lodging-place were given for the water ; that is, in view of the actual height and bad construction of the earth mass. Such an idea as leaving the exterior earth at its natural slope and procuring permanent cover from projectiles never occurred to them. The Turcoman is accustomed to the dead level of the plain in usual interneeine combat. On the top of something lofty he considers himself invincible. It is an old idea of these plains, and can be traced in every colossal mound that dots its expanse. He has no notion that his laboriously constructed cliff can be brought down about his ears. If the ramparts could only be got to keep up, they would be really almost insurmountable barriers to an attack. The long lines of the work, too, would give admirable scope to an enemy's enfilading artillery; and, tall though the covering masses, vertical fire could play havoc with the crowded huts

within, for it was the intention of the Mervli to concentrate themselves and their families within the fortress in case of an invasion. The interior slope of the rampart is built steeply, with a view of ranging the *kibitkas* as closely as possible under its shelter. This is well enough in its way; but half a million of people cannot find cover immediately behind less than two miles of rampart of any practicable height.

The water supply is independent of the main river, which flows along the western front. The fields within are irrigated from an easterly branch of the Murgab flowing from the dam over higher level. It enters by the eastern end of the fortress, and would not be easily got at by an invader. The water, too, is much better in quality than that of the main stream below the dam, which is very foul, owing to the number of villages on its banks and the amount of filth discharged into it. Bubbles of sulphuretted hydrogen ripple its sluggish grey current; and after bathing in it I have retired with nausea and headache. Moreover, the people told me that, in case of siege, wells within the place would supply all their needs.

Standing on the ramparts, the eye ranges over a fair expanse of well-cultivated country. Corn of various kinds, and melons, seemed the only produce, if I except the apples, jujubes, grapes, and apricots of the frequent enclosed plantations. Around the fortification, at distances varying from half a mile to three miles, is a broad belt of tree growth, which would admirably supply all the needs of a beleaguering force with regard to firewood and gun platforms. Away on the eastern horizon are frequent mounds, the remains of former fortalices; and just visible are the towers and cupolas of the ruined capital of these plains—long, long ago, amid which perhaps, as the poem tells us, Mokanna held his revels and his soliloquies.

Later in the afternoon I went to see the cannon captured from the Persians, about which I had heard a great deal before my advent to Merv. Half a dozen of them were close by the hut which I occupied; the remainder were within the new ramparts. No sooner did I emerge from my dwelling in company with the Khan, than, as usual, I was surrounded by a crowd of some hundreds of persons pressing so close upon us that I was nearly suffocated. They seemed to treat me as some inanimate object of interest. Thus escorted, I visited the nearer half-dozen of guns. Three were still on their field carriages of rather ponderous construction; the other three lay on the ground, the broken wood-work of their supports rotting hard by, and the iron-work scattered around or still clinging to the fragments of the carriages. One was an 18-pounder, the others were six-pounders—all smooth bore, and of bronze. The guns themselves were in fair condition, save that the vent-holes were inordinately enlarged, and of such irregular form as to lead me to think that when abandoned the guns had been spiked, and the nails subsequently roughly wrenched out. One of these guns was of Bokharan make, as the inscription on it told. The bores were, as a rule, so scraped, apparently by the passage of heterogeneous projectiles, such as gravel and horse nails, that at first sight the guns might pass as having been formerly rifled.

Passing onwards, a great gap in the ramparts was reached, and I stood within the interior of the *enceinte*. There were a group of *aladjaks*, and some young trees and bushes. This was the immediate dwelling-place of Baba Ḳhan, son of old Kouchid. On a small open space—some on the carriages, some on the ground—were twenty-eight pieces of bronze ordnance. There were three or four 18-pounders, a dozen four-pounders, one chambered seven-inch howitzer, and two six-inch mortars. The Persian

artillery seems to have been composed of very heterogeneous calibres. The Turcomans were very proud of their spoils, and took every pains to tell me all about the different guns. I said that in view of the possible arrival of the Russians I wondered that some pains had not been taken to mount the disabled pieces. 'Oh,' said the Khan, 'there are plenty of people who could do that in a couple of weeks. There is abundance of wood growing in the gardens. Most of the iron-work is on the spot; and I know where the tire of one wheel is—it fell off as we were bringing the gun across the river.' This was all highly satisfactory to the general audience; but I knew that in the whole of the Merv tree plantations not a trunk of more than eight inches in diameter was to be found. I asked whether any considerable quantity of projectiles was on hand. Thereupon the chief told me of several traders in the bazaar who had many, which they used as weights when selling corn. 'Besides,' he said, 'the Persians fired a great deal; and the old men who were looking on could easily point out where the shot fell, and we could dig them up when required.' Up to this time I had a kind of vague notion that the Turcomans had made some kind of military preparations, considering the nearness of the Russians. What I have just narrated will speak for itself. As regards the gunpowder, there were Ali Baba, and Hussein and Hodja Kouli, and several others who knew what it was composed of; and, besides, there was every reason to believe that the Emir of Bokhara would not be backward in affording facilities for a supply if he got a good 'present.' All this was extremely melancholy from the point of view of military precision; and I inwardly congratulated myself on the fact that I was not one of the officers charged with 'haunting the oasis and stirring up the Turcomans.' The Khan further naïvely remarked that he hoped I should be of

no small assistance in remounting the guns and founding the necessary projectiles. Having deciphered the inscription and date on each gun, I left the precincts of the Turcoman park, having impressed the spectators with the idea that I was consequently no small artillerist in my way. I was all the more struck by this extraordinary *insouciance* and want of preparation in a very essential military department, because these people are by no means unacquainted with warfare, and, at Geok Tepé at least, showed considerable knowledge of military organisation. But the fact was that among these more easterly Turcomans, who had never known the contact of stern mechanical drill, each man thought that, armed with his curved brittle sabre, his antiquated, cumbrous muzzle-loader with its forked rest, the half-pound of bad gunpowder he bought the last time he was in Meshed or Herat, and the bullets he founded from the material dug up on the battle-fields of his ancestors, he was amply provided with all the necessaries of war.

While examining the guns, I was joined by Baba Khan and Aman Niaz Khan, each of whom arrived on horseback, attended by a large following, also mounted. They told me that they were about to make a tour of inspection of the works, and invited me to accompany them. The fortifications were under the immediate superintendence of these two Khans, in virtue of their separate jurisdiction over the two great divisions of the population—the Toktamish and the Otamish. Kadjar Khan, for the moment, was the general director of affairs. As he was on foot, and attended only by a rabble of the general populace, he declined to go on with us, and I could not help seeing that he had a strong objection to my accompanying the others. Whatever his objection might have been, however, he signified it only by his general demeanour, and said nothing.

We rode up the breakneck slopes of the unfinished

ramparts, and at very considerable risk, as we trod upon half-finished parapets and terraces, following the line in a north-westerly direction. Parties of toilers were everywhere at work, the great majority creeping, ant-like, up the ramps specially provided, and bearing on their backs great bags of earth taken from the irrigation trenches in course of construction within the works, and from the surface of the ground outside. Anything like the formation of a great exterior fosse was carefully avoided, for the reason that an excavation near the foot of the wall would inevitably induce an accumulation of water, and undermine the solidity of the exterior escarpment. The contents of the bags of earth emptied on the summit of the embankment were levelled out, and beaten with rammers. One elderly man, doubtless having a repute for engineering skill, supervised the work of some fifty of his younger companions. The great quadrangular enclosure which constituted the fortress had but two entrances—one in the middle of the south-western face, the other directly opposite to it, on the north-eastern. At the north-western angle, however, was a wide space, to admit of the waters proceeding from the great irrigation canal, which supplied the interior space, finding exit, and being used for irrigation purposes beyond. It was intended at this point to construct some kind of a water-gate. The entire *enceinte* was rapidly nearing completion. Each of the Khans took occasion to point out to me the relative superiority of style in the works progressing under his own immediate care. The ground within the walls, plentifully supplied with water, was highly cultivated, though corn and melon were the only vegetables to be seen.

As I followed the contour of the enclosure I saw that I had been rightly informed as to the numbers daily employed upon the fortifications. As we passed by they ceased working, to salute the Khans and take note of my-

self, for I was still, and continued to be for a long time afterwards, the great centre of attraction for sight-seers. With the exception of Baba Khan's group of *evs* there were no villages within the works, save at the south-eastern extremity, where about a hundred and fifty houses were grouped around the old Kouchid Khan Kala, which gave its name to the new entrenchments. I was conducted to the summit of this old work, and from it were pointed out to me the various positions occupied by the Persians during their invasion, and the advanced batteries where the half-dozen guns then in the possession of the Tekkés had been brought to bear upon the invaders. It was a singular fact that the south-eastern extremity of the enclosure was almost entirely open; what would be termed in field fortification a musketry trench alone closed it. I enquired the reason of this, and was told that from that direction little danger was apprehended, and that the points most likely to be immediately attacked were being put in a state of defence. My informants seemed to imagine that an enemy would dash himself against the first point of their defences with which he came in contact, and would not seek any easier access to the interior of their fortress. They appeared to regard the river Murgab as a sufficient obstacle to the turning of the flanks of the fortress. It probably would be a formidable one if precautions were taken to dam the stream below Kouchid Khan Kala, so as to render it unfordable, for at almost all periods of the year it can be forded by horsemen.

During our promenade, which lasted some hours, I was struck by the great respect shown to the two hereditary Khans, and the careful attention with which their instructions were followed after they had pointed out anything which seemed to them at fault. We sallied out by the north-eastern gateway, and, turning to the left, wended our

way towards a collection of huts and buildings of earth, surrounded by luxuriant groves of trees, and situated half a mile distant from the northern angle. This settlement was a curious one in its way, being chiefly composed of several Jewish families, who had been settled there, as they themselves told me, from time immemorial. They seemed by far the busiest and most flourishing of the Merv communities which I had hitherto visited. Bales of merchandise lay in the vicinity of every house, awaiting transport to Bokhara or Meshed, and I could not help thinking how different the state of affairs in the oasis might be if each group of dwellings in the Merv district were equally a scene of commercial activity. In one respect the houses were very different to the majority of those scattered over the plain; for, instead of dwelling exclusively in *aladjaks*, as the Tekkés for the most part do, tower-like buildings of unbaked brick, plastered over with fine yellow loam, had been constructed, giving the place a fortified appearance. The settlement was not entirely made up of Jews. There were in it some Kurd families, who, years before, had been carried away from the Persian frontier, and had settled among the Tekkés.

At this point, too, was the *medressé* or college, presided over by a Turcoman much renowned for his erudition, and named Khodja Nefess. His academy, a large and not unpicturesque edifice of loam, was surrounded by a grove of pomegranate, jujube, peach, and willow trees. I never had an opportunity of meeting this worthy. He studiously kept aloof from me, doubtless lest his sanctity might be impaired by contact with a giaour, for he had a great reputation for holiness—whether deserved or not I am unable to say. I had heard of him at Gumush Tepé; and the Yamuds there seemed to deem him the opposite of a holy person. I believe that in his time he had been a great

raider, and had amassed considerable wealth by the sale of captives seized upon the frontier of the neighbouring kingdom.

It was evening as we turned our horses' heads towards the 'capital,' and rode along the Murgab to the seat of government. Our way lay across a cemetery, which, as is usual in most Turcoman countries, lies in very disagreeable propinquity to the habitations of the living. As on the Persian frontier, the graves are very shallow, and the hoofs of the horses broke through the slender mass of earth which covered the bodies. A couple of dismounted guns lay among the graves, and I was told that a few others were scattered among the villages of the oasis, the inhabitants of which, having taken a leading part in their capture, wished the trophies of their prowess to remain near them.

Baba Khan left us to proceed to his own village, but Aman Niaz accompanied me to my house, which, on our arrival, was filled by a very numerous and disagreeable crowd. Among them was an individual of considerable note—the *ustá adam*, one of those universal artists or Jacks-of-all-trades of whom I have already spoken. He could work in silver and gold, repair gun locks, shoe horses, and perform all manner of skilled labour. He was introduced to me with great ceremony, and evidently looked upon me with no small amount of awe, as he appeared to think that, in my capacity of Ferenghi, I must be his superior in all manner of arts. His object in coming to see me was ludicrous enough. The Turcomans had had a sore experience of Russian breech-loading cannon during the siege of Geok Tepé, and the desire of every heart was that the Merv artillery should be converted into *Susana thob*. He wished me to draw him a plan and section of one of these modern implements of destruction, and also sought my

co-operation in the work of altering the pieces on hand to the newest form. I asked him what tools and apparatus he could command for the purpose. From beneath his robe he produced an old rasp, such as is used in these parts for finishing off the hoofs of newly-shod horses. It was considerably the worse for wear. Along with it he had brought a hand-saw, probably manufactured by himself, for each tooth pointed in a direction different to that of its neighbour. With these two implements, and my aid, he purposed to effect the wished-for transformation of the cannon. To endeavour to explain to this man the absurdity of trying to change old-fashioned muzzle-loading bronze field-pieces into breech-loaders, with such extensive modifications as were entirely beyond the power of the most skilled artizans, and, above all, with such implements as he produced, was entirely useless; so I contented myself with nodding my head, looking very grave, and adopting such other tricks as are usual when one desires to pass for being exceeding wise.

Aman Niaz became quite enthusiastic, and was already verbally laying out plans for the construction of a large factory close at hand, of which I and the *ustá adam* were to take the direction. He graciously added that I should have command of the pieces in action, at which condescending intimation I rose and bowed profoundly. I felt that if I had to follow Kadjar Khan's hint about remounting the guns on carriages sawn out of trunks of apple and peach trees, and, moreover, to convert the guns themselves into breech-loaders with a hand-saw and a horse rasp, I might safely accept the position of artillerist-in-chief without in the least compromising my national neutrality.

All this will serve to convey an idea of the extremely primitive notions of the people among whom I found myself, in regard to artillery at any rate. In some other matters they were shrewd enough. However, notwithstand-

ing the disagreeable circumstances immediately attending my arrival, and the manner in which I had been kept in custody, I managed to make some progress towards securing the good opinion of the Turcomans. This was principally owing to the receipt of the letter from the British Consular Agent at Meshed, testifying to the fact that I was not a Russian. Besides, I had spoken to them so candidly about their own shortcomings, in the matter of military engineering, and otherwise, that they could hardly doubt my sincerity. In fact, as I had never at any time attempted to dissuade them from resistance in the event of a Russian advance, and had in no wise tried to bias them in favour of the Czar, they must have been unmitigatedly suspicious indeed if they could have continued to look upon me with the same dire distrust as at the commencement. The extreme readiness with which I had agreed to take my share in the conversion of the guns clearly won upon the esteem of these good people, and by the time the assembly broke up I was almost firmly established in their good graces.

At this time, my object was to make as perfect a survey as possible of the Merv district, to become fairly acquainted with the manners, customs, and government of the people, and their general tone of mind, and then get out of the place as quickly as possible. I knew that, whatever measures I might take, my departure would be considerably delayed, and that I should in all probability have ample opportunities for doing everything that I desired. The same evening, I took the first step towards effecting my release —one of many which ultimately proved successful. I wrote a letter to Abass Khan, explaining my position, in which I confined myself to asking him to emphasize the fact of my being a British subject by immediately sending me a communication stating that my presence was instantly required at Meshed, and expressing the hope that he would

see me there shortly. The more to impress those around me with the genuineness of this communication, and especially as I was not sufficiently master of Persian orthography to convey in that language all I wished to say, I wrote to Her Majesty's Minister at Teheran asking him to make the desired communication with the Meshed agent. This letter to the British Minister was naturally calculated to show the genuineness of my statement as to my nationality.

I found a ready messenger in my Kurd servant, Gholam Riza. That personage had long since utterly despaired of ever getting out of the hands of the Tekkés, but having no resources from which to pay a ransom, however small, and being tolerably certain that the Persian Government would give him no aid in the matter, he had wandered about the village in a state bordering on distraction, engendered partly by fear, but to no small extent by excessive indulgence in arrack and opium. Notwithstanding all my injunctions, he had gone on reiterating that I was an emissary of the British Government, and that immense importance attached to my mission. He hoped that, by a kind of reflected lustre, he might become endued with a dignity of his own. As he could speak the Jagatai fluently, and was ready to pour forth the most apocryphal information about myself in particular and the governments of the earth in general, he was pretty well received in the houses which he visited. Sometimes I did not see him for days together. My horses were neglected, and I had to shift for myself. Kadjar Khan called upon me, and inquired whether I had any objection to Gholam Riza being sent away from Merv. This was exactly what I wanted. The fellow was of no use to me; he was daily endangering my existence by his wonderful stories, and, furthermore, he was receiving from me a salary far higher than that ordinarily

given to such an Eastern servant. 'I do not think,' said the Khan, 'that he is a proper attendant for you. I have to send men to look after your horses, while he receives the pay. Besides, he goes round to all the *evs* at meal times, and eats up all the food, a thing which would be highly improper in itself, for the people of Merv have not too much to eat, and cannot afford to support a stranger.'

I immediately assured the Khan that I was quite of his way of thinking, and that nothing would please me better than to see Gholam Riza sent back to Meshed. I was thus enabled to accomplish two objects at the same time. I was glad to get the unfortunate man away from the place and back to his family; I felt that my thus acquiescing in his departure, and my expressed desire that he should go, would to a great extent indicate my own willingness to remain, and my trust in those among whom I was thrown; and at the same time I secured a safe messenger, who would not only take my letter to Meshed, but also convey my verbal instructions. A caravan was leaving on the following day, and it was agreed that Riza should go with it. When he came in that night, he was overjoyed to hear of his release. He supposed that his safe departure from the Tekké capital was due to my initiative and efforts. He duly started with the caravan, and thus I found myself entirely alone among the Turcomans.

I was somewhat surprised at the readiness with which Gholam Riza was allowed to take leave of Merv, but the real truth was that he was recognised as a man utterly incapable of paying any ransom whatever; and in addition to this, Makdum Kuli Khan, the defender of Geok Tepé, had borne witness to the fact that the Kurd had frequently called upon him before the fall of that stronghold, with messages from the British Agent at Meshed. This circumstance also favoured the supposition that I was not a

Russian emissary. It is also possible that my servant's knowledge of the country had entered into the calculations of the Merv authorities, and that they wished to prevent the devising of any scheme for my escape which could result from our remaining together, for though the Turcomans had begun to exhibit a certain amount of confidence in me, they were as yet by no means willing to let me go away.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

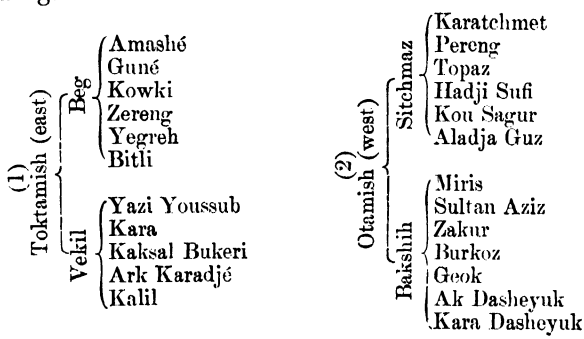
GOVERNMENT AND HISTORY OF MERV.

Clan system—Tribes and subdivisions—The Toktamish and Otamish tribes—Yaps or clans—Names of Merv clans—Distinctive clan dress arrangements—The Khans of the tribes—Kethkodas of the clans—Administration of law—Punishments—Supreme council of the nation—Honorary titles—Serdars and Bahadurs—War chiefs—Serdar Tokmé—The national militia—Yassaouls or police—Public revenues—Roads and bridges—The new gendarmerie—Military discipline—Plunder and police—Tekké ideas of enforcing the law—Dislike of walls—The villages of the oasis—Porsa Kala—The Turcoman migration—Turks and Turcomans—Fortunes of the present Mervli—Settlement on the Tejend—Removal to Sarakhs—Destruction of Bairam Ali (Old Merv)—Saruk colonization—The Persian war against the Tekkés—Tekké conquest of Merv—Persian invasion—Its repulse—Distinguished prisoners—A long captivity—Saruks and Salors—Ersari Turcomans—Turcoman informants—The Russians and Merv.

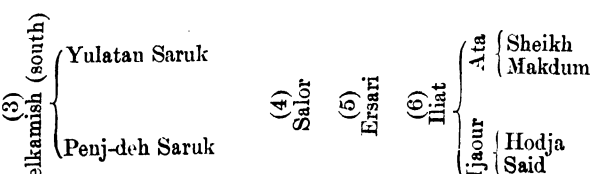
THE constitution of the Turcoman tribes inhabiting Merv is essentially the clan system, much resembling that of the Scotch Highlanders before Culloden. There are two tribes in the nation—the Toktamish, on the eastern bank of the river, and the Otamish, on the western. The Toktamish is the most numerous and also the senior tribe, but its precedence over the western division is purely honorary. Kouchid Khan, who commanded the whole nation during its migration to Merv, and in the subsequent war with Persia, was hereditary chief of the Toktamish. On his death, however, his son Baba Khan succeeded to the headship of the Toktamish tribe only, a position which he held during my visit to Merv. His personal character was not sufficiently distinguished for the Turcomans to continue his

father's authority in him, and the Otamish Khan successfully asserted his claim to equality in the government. Kouchid Khan's name is still potent among the people of Merv, and their new fortress bears his name. The Toktamish and Otamish tribes are subdivided into four sections, with sub-chiefs over each, and still further into twenty-four *yaps* or clans.

The following table will indicate at a glance the divisions and subdivisions of the Tekkés east and west of the Murgab :—



Other Turcomans bordering upon the Merv territory assed as follows by the Merv Tekkés :—



These names may have some philological value, so I have taken pains to ascertain them as accurately as possible. In Merv itself the distinction between the clans is kept up with the utmost formality. Personally I never could discover the difference between them, but the Turcomans had no difficulty in telling to what clan a man belonged at first

sight. On asking once how the distinction was marked—for to my eye there was nothing in the dress, like the Highland tartan colours, to distinguish the wearers—a native pointed out that a peculiar way of knotting the sash and wearing the hat always indicated a member of the Sultan Aziz clan, a peculiar tie of the sword belt one of the Burkoz, and other minute points of dress the members of the other clans. My eye could never be sufficiently trained to tell a man's clan at first sight by the cock of his hat, or the tie of his sash; but my Turcoman friends never erred in the matter, which is a somewhat important one in their society. Each clan is presided over by a hereditary chief, or Kethkoda, who claims relationship in a distant way with the Khan of the tribe. There are also Kethkodas of higher rank over the subdivisions of the tribes. The Kethkodas administer the government of their clans, such as it is, and occasionally act as judges, though such functions more properly belong to the Cadis, or judges learned in the law. The Cadis are simply men who have studied the Koran and are familiar with its legal precepts. The Khans or Kethkodas appoint them judges, and the more intricate questions, especially those relating to the caravans and trade, are generally submitted to them, while the chiefs try such cases as can be decided without any profound legal knowledge. On bazaar days the Khan in person usually administers justice in public, and often inflicts summary punishment with his stick. For neglect of public duties, for instance, such as not working due time on the fortifications, fines are imposed, and if the offender cannot pay, his hat is taken off, his hands bound to his sides, and he is exposed in this condition to the sun for an hour or two. Thieves are tied to a stake and their heads similarly exposed. Occasionally the punishments are much heavier, and are inflicted without respect of persons. Thus, shortly after my arrival, a son of Kadjar Khan was

sentenced by his father to be tied to a stake for forty-eight hours for aiding the escape of a prisoner, a Circassian officer in the Russian service. The penalty of the bastinado, so common in Persia, is unknown in Merv. Quarrels between individuals are rare, and are seldom brought before either Khan or Cadi, being settled by a blow or a stab on the spot. Even in cases of murder no steps are taken to punish the assassin, except on the demand of the wife or nearest male relative of the murdered man.

The Kethkodas are usually wealthy in flocks, and indeed require to be so, as they receive no contributions from their clansmen. Strangers are usually entertained by the Kethkoda, who expects, however, in return, a present of at least double the worth of his food, usually curdled camel's milk, mutton fat, and griddled bread, if the visitor be at all well off. I must admit, however, that mendicants who are unable to pay are equally well received, but for others the Turcoman hospitality is decidedly venal. The twenty-four Kethkodas presided over by the two Khans, and assisted by a number of the *Ak-Saghal*, or grey-beards of the clans, men of position and experience, who are called by a sort of public opinion, constitute the *medjlis*, or great council of the nation. This body is convoked to decide on grave questions of national policy, such as that of taking measures to resist the Russians at the time of my arrival. The question what to do with myself was also submitted to the great council. The Khans and the four Kethkodas of the great sub-divisions of the tribes constitute the executive of the government, and hold privy councils for their own guidance, to which the public are not admitted. At the great council everything is conducted in genuine Homeric style, without any attempt at privacy.

The title of Khan is given, as a matter of courtesy, to many of the descendants of former Khans who possess no

power in the state. The Kethkodas are not addressed by that title, however. The personal title of 'Serdar' is also given to certain men, Kethkodas, and simple clansmen who have shown considerable military skill in the field. The title is purely honorary, and the incessant raids, in which the people of Merv, like their brethren, the Akhal Tekkés, were constantly engaged, gave plenty of opportunities to adventurous spirits for winning their spurs as Serdars. A man who had won renown as a brave warrior only, without pretensions to skill as a commander, was styled a *bahadur*, or as it is pronounced in Jagatai, *bâtur*. The Serdars formed a class somewhat like officers *en disponibilité* in Europe, from which the council could select commanders in case of war. If the Khan was competent he would naturally command the national forces in virtue of his office, but should he be from age or other causes incapable of acting as general, a temporary military chief would be chosen by the council from the Serdars. If the Khan's incapacity should be very marked, he would even be deposed on such an occasion from the Khanate, and his nearest competent relative elected. A similar custom prevails among the other branches of the Turcomans, as well as in Merv. Thus, during the war between Russia and the Akhal Tekkés, the hereditary Khan, Makdum Kuli, had nominal command of the forces, but the active operations outside the walls of Geok Tepé were conducted by Tokmé Serdar, who possessed no hereditary rank, but was chosen general in virtue of his known military skill. His position with reference to Makdum Kuli Khan was much the same as General Moltke's in relation to the Emperor William in the Franco-Prussian war. Subsequently to the fall of Geok Tepé, Tokmé Serdar made his submission to the Russians, and went to St. Petersburg to lay his sword at the feet of the Czar. Permanent fidelity to any cause, even a national one, is a very rare quality indeed

among the Turcomans, and I was little surprised at the news of the Serdar's defection from the ranks of his countrymen. Makdum Kuli Khan, however, seemed to feel his conduct keenly, and, while praising highly the abilities of his former lieutenant, he expressed deep regret that he should have disgraced his fame by swearing allegiance to the *Ak-Padishah*, White Czar.

In time of war every able-bodied man is called out for service, either in the field or on the fortifications, by the council. As the whole population is trained to arms there is no difficulty in raising a large force, but there are no officers except the fighting general or the Kethkodas, and no gradations of military rank. This want of organisation is fatal to the efficiency of the Merv forces in anything like a prolonged campaign, especially against European troops. The lack of officers is partly compensated by the individual training of the men in military exercises and the use of arms. Behind their fortifications they can fight desperately, and as skirmishers on the flanks of a line of march their activity and personal daring make them formidable enemies, but they are wholly incapable of carrying out the complicated operations of a regular campaign. They can harass and impede an enemy's plan of action, but they cannot devise, or at least carry out, one of their own. The only thing like a standing army in Merv when I arrived there was a sort of police force of a thousand horsemen, under the command of two officers, styled the *Yassaoul-bashis*. To them was entrusted the execution of the orders of the council, and also the duty of providing escorts for the caravans coming to Merv from Bokhara and Meshed.

Taxes and a public treasury were institutions unknown in Merv at the period of my visit. The traders in the bazaar used to assess themselves to pay for the needful repairs of the market-place and the roads and bridges ad-

joining the oasis. These bridges are merely tree trunks thrown across the streams and covered with earth and reeds. A small tax was levied on the Jews who used the stalls, and applied to the same purposes. The police expenses were paid by a tax of twenty-five krans on each camel load, and ten on each horse or mule load of merchandise passing through the territory of Merv. Otherwise there were no public burthens at the time of my visit, beyond the compulsory service in time of war, and the *corvées* for their fortifications. The chiefs lived on their private property without any contributions from their clansmen. Indeed, fixed contributions of any kind seem altogether foreign to Turcoman notions. Even when other tribes were held in absolute subjection, as the Salors were by Merv, no tribute was exacted from them. They were held to obey the orders of the council with regard to their movements, but no impost was levied on them.

With regard to the police force, an important change in its numbers and duties was made subsequently to my arrival, and mainly in consequence of my representations to the council, and, in private interviews, to the Khans. Its numbers were increased to two thousand, who were ordered to hold themselves in constant readiness at the orders of the Yassaoul-bashis, Yaghmour Khan and Ana Murad Kafur. Yaghmour Khan was one of the few honest men in the place; and, though descended from a family of ancient distinction, was quite poor. He was continued in command of one of the new bodies of *yassaouls*, or police. The etymology of this word is characteristic. 'Yass' is the verb 'beat,' and 'aoul' means a village. So that policeman, in Jagatai, means literally 'Beat the village.' The duties of the new force, however, were not intended to be of the aggressive character implied by their Turcoman name. I had represented so forcibly to the council the necessity of

suppressing private raids, that orders were issued against the time-honoured practice, and the *yassaouls* were to hold themselves in readiness to enforce those orders in case of any violation being attempted. The manner in which the force was raised was somewhat strange to Western ideas. Two thousand men were named by the Khans, and ordered to move their houses and families to a place between the loop of the river and the new fortress. House moving in Merv, though it must be understood in a literal sense, is not such a formidable undertaking as a flitting in Europe. The *aladjaks* are dismounted, and packed with all their contents on camels' backs in the course of an hour, being set up again on their new sites in the same time. A couple of camels are sufficient to convey the lares and penates of a Turcoman, with the house itself included. There was no delay in obeying the Khan's orders, and the 'new police' town sprang up as if by magic under the walls of the fortress. Every member of it was ordered to keep his house and himself in readiness to start on duty at a moment's notice, when summoned by the Yassaoul-bashi. These calls were pretty frequent from the first, and were obeyed with the utmost promptitude, whether by day or night. The voice of the public crier had no sooner announced the orders of the chief than the men were up and in the saddle, armed from head to foot, and ready to start in any direction in pursuit of the violators of the public peace. To insure their efficiency, public inspections were held by the Yassaoul-bashi every month, and any man who had no horse was fined fifteen krans. Three were so fined at the first inspection, but subsequently the necessity of keeping themselves provided with horses or quitting the force seemed to be understood well enough. The police received pay, the tax on the caravans being appropriated to that purpose, and a small sum was also exacted from the owners of stolen

property, when recovered by the exertions of the police. Plundering expeditions, being of every-day occurrence, proved a fruitful source of income to the *yassaouls*, and brought home to their minds at least the advantages of acting in the name of law and order. Public opinion, however, was by no means so unanimous on the subject, as raiding and raiders were time-honoured institutions in Merv, and the sympathies of the populace with the bold plunderers were not diminished in the least by the admitted expediency of putting a stop to their pursuits. Even Baba Khan, the senior chief of Merv, was by no means inclined to look with a severe eye on raids. I suggested that raiders should be made to pay the fines, but the idea was not apparently relished by anybody. The *yassaouls* preferred rather to have their pay secured by the booty itself than to take the chance of getting it out of plunderers who might be hard to catch.

In justice to the people of Merv it must not be forgotten that raids, even among members of the same tribe, are not, or were not until lately, looked upon in the light of robbery. It is not supposed they are altogether legitimate, but still, if they are executed with ability, admiration for the 'smartness' displayed quite overpowers any moral reprobation that may be felt for the act. In other matters the Tekkés are not altogether devoid of notions of honesty. Petty stealing is very rare among the grown men, and even wild marauders will readily bow to the decision of a Cadi on a legal question of their rights. The instinctive feeling of the necessity of some sort of law is very marked among these nomads, though in certain points of conduct they do not see the need of its application, as in this matter of raiding on their neighbours' flocks. When we remember the authorisation of thefts by the old Spartan laws, and even the practices on the English and Scottish borders less than

three centuries ago, we should not judge too harshly of the raiding propensities of the Tekkés.

A marked feature of the Tekké character is the unwillingness to reside in towns. The present settlements in Merv are only villages of *aladjaks*, and even the strong defensive position of the former town of the Saruks, Porsa Kala, was not sufficient inducement to make the newcomers take up their abode there. They made an encampment or village within a short distance of its walls, and close to the dam of the Murgab, but this place, Benti, contains only about seven hundred houses. Other villages are scattered about in the spaces between the irrigating canals, but none has any pretensions to be the successor of ancient Merv, the Queen of the World, as the city was styled in its palmy days. Porsa Kala itself was more of a city than any of the Tekké settlements, and probably contained ten or twelve thousand inhabitants. Some writers seem to speak of it vaguely, as if it were still the capital, so little are the changes of position among the Turcoman tribes known in Europe. A short sketch of recent history may serve to remove this ambiguity.

The present inhabitants of Merv are comparatively recent immigrants, and indeed the whole Turcoman population of these countries has been only a short time in its present seats. I endeavoured during my stay in Merv to collect all the information I could on the history of these nomads, which is naturally very obscure, owing to the unsettled nature of their lives. One tribe succeeds another easily among the nomads, and the population of a district is often completely changed in the course of a few years; and as there is no written history of these movements, it is only by the utmost diligence in cross-examining the most intelligent natives, and then comparing their statements carefully, that anything like an accurate notion of them

can be formed. Like most uncivilised nations, the Turcomans can lay but little claim to accuracy in their stories of past events, and chronological exactness they pay scarcely any attention to. However, I had frequent opportunities of consulting the most intelligent elders of Merv, many of whom had taken an active part in the events of the last half-century, and remembered them vividly, while they also recollected clearly the traditions of older movements that had been handed down by their fathers. From all that I could learn thus, it appears that the country now occupied by the Merv and Akhal Tekkés was peopled a hundred and fifty years ago by a settled Turkish population of the same race as the present inhabitants of Bokhara. The name Turcoman is confined to the nomads, as distinct from the settled branches of the same race, who are styled Turks distinctively, in Central Asia. When used here the latter name is not to be confounded with the Osmanli Turks of Stamboul, who parted from the parent stock several hundred years ago, and have been since separated from their kinsmen in Central Asia by the interposition of Persia. During the reign of Nadir Shah, who was himself of pure Turcoman blood, the whole of Turkestan as far as Bokhara and Khiva acknowledged his sovereignty. The then Turkish population of Merv merely acknowledged his suzerainty by a tribute analogous to some of the old feudal tenures in Europe, I believe by the present of a nut or some fruit on stated occasions. On the death of Nadir, the Persian monarchy rapidly decayed. Afghanistan fell away, and the nomad Turcomans of Khiva poured into Persian Turkestan on the north-east, while Bokhara attacked it from another quarter. About a hundred and thirty years ago, the Tekkés, the Saruk and the Salor Turcomans, commenced their invasion. The Akhal Tekkés then got possession of the territory which they still occupy, though not with its exact

present boundaries. In fact the war with Persia has been practically continuous since, as has been pointed out in former chapters, and it is only within the last seventy years that Askabad was taken by the Akhal Tekkés. Still, whatever variations the Persian boundaries may have undergone, the Akhal Tekkés have remained pretty steadily in the territory they seized on after Nadir Shah's death, and which has now passed under Russian sway with its inhabitants. Their brethren, the present inhabitants of Merv, had a more chequered history. While the Akhal Tekkés were establishing themselves along the north-eastern slopes of the Kopet Dagh mountains, the former settled around the great swamps in which the Tejend is lost. The abundance of water no doubt made this appear at first a most desirable territory, but the unhealthy nature of the soil proved a serious drawback. Then the waters did not rise as usual, and for three years in succession there were severe droughts. The Tekkés consequently determined to abandon their abodes by the Tejend swamps, and about the year 1834 they moved into the Persian territory at Sarakhs. They held possession of Sarakhs and the adjoining territory, nearly as far south as Seistan, for about twenty-one years, or until shortly after the accession of the present Shah of Persia.

While the Tekkés were occupying the western part of Turkestan, other nomad tribes were pouring into the east of their settlements. These were the Ersari, who settled and remained along the banks of the Oxus at and about Charjui, pronounced Charjow, and the Salors and Saruks, who pushed on to the Murgab. After their arrival there, Merv itself was destroyed, and its Turkish inhabitants almost exterminated by the power of Bokhara. The Bokharan conqueror, Begge Jan, captured the then city of Merv, being the third historic city that had existed under

the name, after a prolonged resistance, and utterly destroyed it. Seven hundred thousand persons are said to have perished during the siege and subsequent slaughter, and though the numbers are doubtless exaggerated somewhat, it is evident from the ruins that remain that a dense population must then have occupied the oasis, and have been utterly swept away. The Bokharans did not occupy the conquered country, and the Salor and Saruk Turcomans found no resistance there when they moved their *aladjaks* close to the ruins of Merv. The fall of Merv took place nearly a century ago, and from that time until the advent of the present Shah to the throne of Persia the Salors and Saruks remained in undisturbed possession of its territory. About twenty-six years ago, however, a general movement took place among the Turcoman tribes. The Persians attacked the Turcoman possessors of Sarakhs, and, after a vigorous campaign, compelled them to abandon their settlements. Seventy thousand houses are said to have been destroyed in this campaign. The dispossessed tribe in turn attacked their kindred tribe, the Saruks, and after several combats drove them out of Merv to positions further south on the Murgab, which they still occupy, at Yulatan and Penj-deh, higher up the river.

The Tekkés were not left long in undisputed possession of the Merv oasis. The Persians, flushed with the success of their campaign against the Turcomans of Sarakhs, believed that they could easily follow them to their new abodes, and bring Merv itself again under their sway. The Saruks, who had been expelled from their settlements by the Tekkés, made common cause with the Persians, and three years after the Tekké occupation of Merv the present Shah attempted the conquest of the oasis. But the fortune of war had changed. The Tekkés defended their new settlement with a vigour which appalled the Persians,

who expected an easy victory from their artillery over an enemy whom they had already driven from their own frontiers. Kouchid Khan managed the campaign against the Shah and his Turcoman allies with consummate energy. After a three months' harassing warfare in the desert, the allied army advanced close to Merv, but only to be totally routed in a pitched battle there. The entire Persian train of thirty-six pieces of artillery fell into the hands of the nomads, and the routed army fled in utter confusion to Meshed. For weeks the victorious nomads were engaged in gathering the arms and other spoils thrown away by the flying troops of the Shah, and the captured Persian guns still ornament the ramparts of Merv. A number of officers of high rank were made prisoners, and had to be ransomed afterwards at enormous prices. Some of the ransoms were as high as six or seven thousand pounds. Others were left to die in captivity for want of means to meet the extortionate demands of their captors. I met one of the prisoners, a colonel of artillery, during my stay in Merv. His captivity had lasted twenty-two years, and his beard was white as snow, though when captured he told me he was quite a young man. As I spoke with him I could not help feeling a nervous apprehension of what might be my own fate among the avaricious nomads, in whose power I was so absolutely. The poor captive complained bitterly of the neglect with which he had been treated by his wife and family, who, he said, were living on his property in luxury, and letting him drag out his life in captivity. Up to the time of my departure he had not been released.

Since the disastrous issue of Nasr Eddin Shah's campaign, the Persians have made no open attempt on the independence of Merv. Both officers and soldiers have too vivid a recollection of the horrors of the defeat to have any

stomach for another trial of strength with the fierce nomads. The Saruks of Penj-deh still continue inveterate in their hostility to the present inhabitants of Merv, but they are unable to gratify their feelings in any more effectual way than by plundering raids, which the Merv Tekkés are not slow in reciprocating.[1] Those of the Saruks who inhabit the districts nearest to Merv, which are irrigated by the canals from the Bent-i-Yolatun, have partially given up their enmity towards their neighbours; but the clans higher up the river, towards the Afghan frontier, are still irreconcilable with their foes. The Salors, whose settlements lie between the Saruks and Merv, have submitted absolutely to the latter, and are treated by the Khans as subjects. During my stay, a Persian envoy endeavoured to persuade them, by promises of pay and protection, to migrate to Sarakhs in a body, but this attempted movement was summarily put a stop to by the orders of the Merv Khans. The Yassaoul-bashis were sent out in hot haste to arrest the chiefs, and, although no order had been previously issued against their moving anywhere, there was a strong inclination at first to put them all to death. When finally they were released, it was only with strict orders not to attempt to quit the territory of Merv. These Salors, however, are but a small part of the Salor tribe, which is scattered all over Turkestan. Some of them are found among the Saruks close to Herat, and a still larger number among the Ersari. The Salors in Merv only number seven hundred families, and are associated with the Otamish tribe of Tekkés.

As for the Ersari Turcomans, their long separation from

[1] During the latter portion of my stay at Merv an attempt was made by the Saruks to enter into some kind of union with the Tekkés for the purpose of better resisting the Russian advance, but I am unaware whether any practical result followed.

the other Tekkés has well-nigh obliterated any feeling about their common origin. They depend rather on Bokhara, and frequently cross the desert to raid on the Merv Tekkés. In numbers they are by no means equal to the latter. A well-informed Turcoman, who had been much among them, estimated their numbers at seventy thousand.

I have endeavoured to give the history of the Tekkés, as I learned it from the older men among the tribes, but I do not pretend to vouch for its accuracy. In the absence of better evidence, it may be of some use in throwing light upon the vicissitudes of the tribes now inhabiting the almost *terra incognita* of Central Asia.

CHAPTER XL.

THE DAM AT BENTI.

Water system of Merv—Tomb of Kouchid Khan—Kala and Killissi—Mid-day halt—Salutations—Holding the stirrup—Mid-day meal and siesta—Grace—Murad Bey's village—Porsa Kala—Benti—Hydraulic works—Computation of time—A shaky bridge—Diligent workmen.

THE water system of Merv is the key to the entire territory. It has its origin at the great dam of Benti, some twenty-five miles to the south-eastward of Kouchid Khan Kala. Without this dam the present cultivated area would be reduced to a condition as bleak and arid as that of the plains which surround it. Owing to the extreme flatness of the plain, the manner in which the water channels are concealed by the growing crops, and the accidents of the ground, slight as they are, it is impossible, even from the commanding heights of the ramparts, to form any idea of the direction in which these water-courses flow. I was extremely anxious to pay a visit to the starting-point of the irrigation canals, and to visit the old Saruk fortress, which, prior to the coming of the Tekkés, constituted the central stronghold of Merv, and protected the water-works. My wish was soon gratified. I had noticed a tendency on the part of the Khans—both the hereditary governors of the Toktamish and Otamish, and Kadjar Khan the Ichthyar—to make friendly advances to me, for every day that I remained among the Merv Turcomans the conviction seemed to grow upon them that I was their friend, and could be

trusted to travel about in their territory. I had repeatedly expressed my desire to visit the old Saruk stronghold, and as the Turcomans are themselves rather curious in the matter of ancient buildings, they seemed thoroughly to appreciate my wish, and I was told one evening that on the following morning Baba Khan would show me the works.

A little after daybreak on May 2 I found an escort of fifty or sixty horsemen drawn up before my door. Baba Khan, in riding costume, came in to say that he was ready to go with me. We consumed several bowls of green tea together, and, as usual, chatted a good deal about Frangistan, its peoples, manners, and customs. Towards eight o'clock we mounted, and started on our journey. We crossed the space within the ramparts, and issued from the north-eastern gate, making a wide *détour* to the northward, along a slightly elevated fold of ground, to avoid the cultivated expanse to the east, which at this season was so very flooded by excessive irrigation, determined to that particular district by the formation of the surface, as to render crossing it a disagreeable matter.

Four or five miles to the north of the Kala, after traversing a considerable number of villages surrounded by luxuriant groves of various fruit trees, we passed, on our left, an extensive sepulchral monument standing alone in the plain. It was the tomb of Kouchid Khan, the last great ruler and autocrat of Merv—a kind of rude mausoleum, ten or twelve feet in height, surrounded by an embattled wall. Some pomegranate trees grew within the enclosure. My companions halted, and, turning their horses' heads towards the tomb, inclined over their saddle-bows and prayed for a few moments. This was a tribute to the greatness of the departed. Then we turned to the east, and reached an extensive village called Baba Kalassi. In regard

to this name, I would call attention to an error into which some persons have fallen, owing to the resemblance between the Turkish form of the genitive case of the word *Kala* and that which is applied to the numerous Christian ecclesiastical remains which dot Armenia. Baba Kalassi means 'the fort of the father;' Killissi, an obvious corruption of the word *ecclesia*, signifies a church. Neither the Turks nor the Turcomans invariably use the genitive form when making use of this word *kala* in conjunction with another, as, for example, in the name Kouchid Khan Kala. Properly speaking it should be Kouchid Khan Kalassi. There seems to be no definite rule by which the use of one form or the other is regulated. When travelling through Armenia I came upon two villages in close proximity, one of which was termed Kara Kala, or 'the black fort,' and the other Kara Killissi, which means 'the black church.' At the latter place were extensive remains in stone of ecclesiastical buildings which conclusively indicated that 'church,' or 'monastery,' was conveyed by the appellation. During my wanderings over the Merv oasis I never came upon any structure which could possibly have been a Christian church.

At Baba Kalassi we dismounted, for the sun was becoming exceedingly hot. The elders of the village advanced to meet us, holding our stirrups as we dismounted, and uttering the stereotyped phrases of welcome—*Khosh Geldi* (You are welcome), *Safa Geldi* (You are the bringer of good fortune). This holding of the stirrup is not the mere token of respect which one would be likely to suppose. For me, at least, it was an absolute necessity. Easterns do not generally tighten the girths of the saddle, lest, as they believe, it might interfere with the lung action of the horse. Consequently, when the weight of the body is thrown upon the left foot in dismounting, the saddle is apt to turn under

the animal's belly, and the rider to receive an ugly toss. In this ceremony of reception the right stirrup is tightly grasped by the host, so as to prevent such an accident. This service is usually performed by one's attendant; when it is performed by one's host, it is a polite method of expressing that he is at your service.

I have often wondered at this looseness of the saddle-girth among a people whose lives are largely passed on horseback, and who are frequently obliged to mount and dismount rapidly. The Turcomans have a knack of getting into and out of the saddle, notwithstanding its slackness, by throwing their whole weight upon the neck of the horse by means of the left hand; but I could never manage it.

Before we were allowed to stir from the sides of our horses the indispensable water-pipe was presented to us, after the usual indulgence in which we were led into the interior of the village, several men armed with long sticks laying about them furiously at the dogs, who, according to their wont, rushed savagely at us. In each village of any extent there is generally a house, belonging to the chief, but not habitually used, set apart for the reception of visitors of distinction. That to which we were conducted was an *ev* of more than ordinary dimensions. It was comfortably carpeted, and the walls were hung round with embroidered camel-bags, and adorned with sabres and muskets. Special carpets, of small size, were immediately laid for Baba Khan and myself close to the lattice walls, from which the felt covering had been temporarily stripped in order to admit a current of air. The carpets were laid as remote from the door as possible, that being the position of honour in an Eastern dwelling. In a kneeling posture, and sitting upon our heels, we uttered the muttered compliments, lasting for more than a minute, which are the invariable prelude to

talking about the matter in hand. I was the chief object of attraction. The Khan, having taken upon himself the responsibility of showing me round, seemed also to feel the necessity of maintaining the genuineness of my character as much as possible. He told our hosts that I was *a sahib* from Frangistan, who had travelled much, and who had been driven by the Russians to take refuge among the Merv Turcomans. Of course there was a considerable spice of diplomacy in this statement. As far as it went it was in one sense true enough, and on the whole I did not think it necessary or advisable to contradict it.

A quarter of an hour after our arrival large circular wooden dishes of *gattuk*, or coagulated and slightly sour milk, were laid before us. In each dish was a coarsely carved wooden ladle, with a handle eighteen inches long. A rather dirty-looking piece of coarse cotton stuff was unrolled, disclosing three or four cakes of smoking bread, twenty inches in diameter and an inch and a half thick. On these viands we regaled ourselves with as good an appetite as we could muster, for Turcoman good behaviour requires that when food is laid before a guest he should simulate, even if he do not possess, a voracious appetite. Turcomans, as a rule, need no dissimulation in this regard, for I have seldom met with one who at any given moment was not capable of swallowing food of any kind to an extent which would surprise dwellers in Western towns.

Our repast finished, we all said grace. Turcomans never by any chance, whether at home or in the desert, neglect this ceremony. Holding our joined hands before us, in the fashion of an open book, we prayed in muttered tones. What the terms of the prayer were I was never able to catch, but I muttered away as well as the best of them. Then, separating our palms, the elbows resting on the hips, we each exclaimed with unction, and in subdued

tones, 'El hamd Lillah' (Praise be to God). Then we stroked our beards, with the right and left hands alternately, and looked cautiously over our shoulders, right and left, lest Shaitan (the devil) might be lurking nigh us. A deep, heavily-drawn sigh, by way of expressing the stomachic oppression which we experienced from the completeness of our meal, and eructations, natural or forced, were polite and indispensable recognitions of our host's hospitality. To refuse to eat a considerable quantity of the food set before you would be an unpardonable offence. To do the reverse is to exhibit a good feeling, which raises you in the estimation of your entertainer.

I remember that when upon one occasion I had ridden a long distance since the early morning, and was worn with fatigue and hunger, halting with my companions at a village, dishes of newly-made *gatuk* were laid before us—a preparation which, when fresh, is really delicious. It needed no adventitious politeness to make me devour it, and I emptied my huge dish of coagulated milk in a manner which charmed my host. Another was set before me, which I devoured with equal zest. I had even surpassed my companions in voracity, and from time to time I observed my grey-bearded entertainer turn to the assemblage, and, with a look of genuine pleasure lighting his countenance, say, alluding to me, 'He is a good man; he is an excellent man.' Occasionally, a few hours after gorging in this manner, I have been compelled by circumstances to set to again, and, in following the dictates of Central Asian politeness, have rendered myself incapable of mounting my horse for the next twelve hours.

After this eating match, bolsters, six feet long and two in diameter, were brought forth. The general audience retired, and myself, the Khan, and a few chosen associates lay down to take our siesta. This is an established in-

stitution in Merv, even on the war path, unless immediately pressing circumstances supervene. It was delicious thus to shelter from the sultry blaze outside, gently fanned by a comparatively cool breeze which swept across the flooded fields, and to sink into forgetfulness. We remounted at three in the afternoon, and bent our steps in a south-easterly direction, more or less parallel to the water-course which irrigates the interior of Kouchid Khan Kala. Towards five o'clock we struck the main eastern branch of the Murgab, passing to the right of two ancient mounds of considerable size, entirely bare of vegetation, and staring yellowly in the sun-blaze. We meandered a good deal among irrigation canals, and ultimately turned our horses' heads due south, along the main eastern canal, arriving at a rude bridge of poles covered with brushwood and packed earth. At this point the canal was nearly twenty feet wide, and the current flowed rapidly. Five hundred yards eastward was a village of the Beg sub-division of the Toktamish, under the jurisdiction of Murad Bey, the maternal uncle of Makdum Kuli Khan. Here we halted for the evening, though we might well have gained our destination before the darkness set in; but Baba Khan seemed to delight in halting, and thoroughly to enjoy the eager hospitality pressed upon us. Murad Bey was one of the most respectable Turcomans with whom I came in contact. He was free from that grasping covetousness which is an unfortunate characteristic of the large majority of his compatriots. While he entertained us with the most lavish generosity, he firmly, though courteously, refused the half-dozen pieces of silver which I offered him. He was, as I afterwards discovered, one of the richest men of the community. At daybreak we were off again, Murad Bey, his son, and a troop of horsemen accompanying us to the bridge.

The title 'Bey' indicated the rank of this chief, which was a high one, and next to that of 'Khan.' In many cases the same word, differently spelled and pronounced, is applied to the most ordinary individuals. Dourdi Beg, my old host of Gumush Tepé, for instance, had no pretensions to rank of any kind, and in his case the 'Beg' had as little significance as 'esquire,' when attached out of courtesy to the name of some inconsiderable person at home.

We recrossed the bridge, and pursued our way southward along the western bank of the canal. As we progressed, the banks became steeper, until at length the water lay far below us. The ground which we were traversing was so elevated above the water-flow that irrigation was impossible. It was arid and barren. Thistle and dandelion, with other and similar herbs, grew sparsely over its surface, which was staring white. To our right was a long embattled line, with many a bastion square and round. This was Porsa Kala, where erst the Saruks held their own, having placed their great military centre close to the dam—the heart of the country.

Baba Khan was in too great a hurry for his breakfast to permit me to examine the old position just then, and we rode on a little farther to the south, to the dam itself. As we neared it, the ground became still more arid than before, rising steeply. The traveller approaching Benti would imagine that he drew near some extensively fortified position. There were bare earth surfaces, heaped wildly here and there, groups of men crowning their crests. Away to the right, half seen among the undulations of the accidented ground, were some hundreds of *evs*. I was in rather an ill humour as we drew near this spot, for the superior officers of our numerous escort were continually urging me to the front. I was not then sufficiently accustomed to Tekké manners to know whether they meant me to keep

abreast of the Khan, that being the position of honour. I was rather under the impression that they did not wish me to stay behind, lest I might disappear, and make my way to the Persian frontier.

When within four hundred yards of the dam, the Khan halted, to allow me to come up with him. He said, 'This is the point upon which all Merv depends.' The words sprang to my lips—I could not repress them, for I felt exceedingly annoyed, out of temper, hot, and thirsty. 'If this be your vital point, why have you pitched your fortifications twenty-five miles away from it?' I admit that this was impolitic, inasmuch as it exposed the senior Khan before his followers. He said nothing, but his solitary eye glowed brighter.

We rode on abreast. A subdued roar of waters, growing louder as we advanced, struck my ears. In ten minutes we were upon a bare ridge of newly turned earth. Around us were a number of sun-shelters, a couple of stakes in the earth supporting a cross pole, from which depended a rude mat of plaited rush. The sun was fiery hot. In the scant shade crouched dozens of men, bronzed to the tint of Moors. As the cavalcade drew nigh they rose to their feet with a respectful air—at least a hundred of them. To the south-east was a stretch of ground, grown with waving reeds, across which flowed the broad, level expanse of the upper Murgab. It was the first time I had an opportunity of seeing the main stream which gives fertility to the oasis. As far as eye could reach in the same direction stretched a wild jungle—*jengal*, as the inhabitants called it. As we dismounted, our stirrups were held in the fashion of the country. Notwithstanding my colossal sheepskin hat, which warded off the sun's rays, I was glad to throw myself upon the proffered carpet, in the scanty rim of shade which the sun-shelters afforded. Green tea was served. The

bronzed workers stood by with folded arms, waiting for the Khan to tell them to be seated. Then they sat down with the stoical repression of curiosity characteristic of North American savages. They refrained from asking about me, though news of me had already reached their ears. They waited till the Khan should condescend to inform them. Presently he said, 'This is the Ferenghi who has come to Merv, and I have brought him here to show him how we cultivate our grounds.' They looked pleased that some one from a far-off land should take an interest in their labours.

We reposed for an hour, and then Baba Khan proposed a visit to the dam. A broad stretch of calm waters, eighty yards wide, lay in a south-easterly direction. Along its banks were thickets and reeds, and right and left were sedgy plains. Just at the point at which the dam was placed the river expanse was suddenly constricted. For twenty yards on either side the river bank above the dam was revetted with stout fascines of giant reeds, solidly lashed to stakes planted in the bank to prevent the friction of the current, as it neared the dam, from washing away the earth surface. Huge masses of earthwork closed the narrow gorge by which the stream found exit to the lower level by a passage scarce ten feet wide. The waters rushed thunderingly through this narrow gap to a level eight feet below their upper surface. The passage was some fifty yards in length, and, like its approaches, was lined with reed fascines.

The object of this dam was to enable lateral canals to be thrown off, which would water the high lands above the level of the main stream northward of this point. The rush of water was tremendous, and nothing but the most assiduous care could prevent the narrow outlet from being widened to an extent which would have brought the water level with the lower reaches. The administration of this point calls for the best executive ability on the part of the

Turcomans. The call was well responded to, and I could not help thinking that other and equally urgent calls would meet with similarly willing and capable responses. It is one of the chief duties of the Ichthyar Khan to see that this dam at Benti is kept in working order, for on it depends the sustenance of the entire Mervli nation. Absolute powers, in this respect, rest in the hands of the executive magistrate—at the moment Kadjar Khan. One hundred men are incessantly employed in care of the dam and its sluice, and their best energies are continually exerted in replacing the fascines washed away by the heavy rush of the torrent. As I stood on the summit of the earthwork two dozen men, waist deep, were lashing new fascines into their places, while others were ramming earth behind them. It was a scene of activity refreshing to a European mind after the pastoral calm of the districts which I had left. Europeans are apt to think that the normal state of existence of an Oriental is one of sleepy calm—a milder opium dream, in which he hopes of things which he cannot achieve. But anyone standing as I did that day beside the roaring sluice of the Murgab, observing the efforts of the sun-browned men doing their duty willingly and well, would appreciate what these Easterns would be capable of under happier auspices. As I have said, it required incessant care to prevent the sluice from becoming unduly widened; and night and day relays were at their posts. Baba Khan stood by my side as I looked on, and his one dark eye was often turned upon me with exultation as he saw how I appreciated the labours of his compatriots. Then we rode higher up, and he pointed out to me the place where his father, Kouchid Khan, had established the new dam when the Saruks were driven away. There was a vast chasm in the white marly earth to our left, where water still trickled through, and where the huge bulrushes grew luxuriantly; where water-fowl settled

in screaming flocks, and the otter plunged ceaselessly. A wider extension of the cultivated tract required the movement of the dam to a higher level, and to effect this alteration had been the work of Baba Khan, who took as much pride in showing me the existing structure as a father might in exhibiting his first-born to a friend.

I had taken several magnetic bearings during my journey from Kouchid Khan Kala, by glancing furtively at a small prismatic compass, the gift of Colonel C. E. Stewart when parting with me at Muhammedabad—an instrument for which I cannot too much thank that gallant gentleman, for it has rendered me invaluable services. He had used it himself in the neighbourhood of Muhammedabad. The people of that locality only supposed that he was anxious about the time of day, just as the Turcomans on the banks of the Murgab did when I held it in the palm of my hand in order to gauge the angles at which the various tepés and other landmarks bore away from us. Without the aid of this little compass I should have been lost; for the more ponderous instrument with guillotine sight and folding prism could not be produced with impunity amidst a suspicious population like that among which I lived. As it was, they imagined that I was concerned about the hour, and on being questioned on the subject, I volunteered the information that a Ferenghi was required to pray much oftener than a Mussulman, and that he could not possibly allow the proper hour to pass without committing a grievous offence against his religion. When they asked me what the hour was, I got out of the difficulty easily; I had only to remind them that my countrymen computed time in a manner different from that of the followers of the Prophet. I pointed to the zenith, and told them that when the sun was there we counted an hour from that and called it 'one,' reckoning on twelve hours and then commencing again.

These good people, who begin counting at sunset, and again at sunrise, dividing the entire cycle into twenty-four hours, were surprised at the absurd and unphilosophical basis upon which we Westerns found our calculations; and I am sure that I fell measurably in their esteem after giving this illustration of occidental obtuseness. 'But, apparently, you never pray at all,' said the Khan. I smiled, and answered, 'I pray always; that is the difference between the Ferenghis and you of the Eastern plains. You snatch a few minutes from your occupations to pray to your Creator, whereas our life is one continued prayer.'

This was a bold statement, but it carried weight with it. I could see that Baba Khan was sorely puzzled as he sat behind me on the rude marl-heap thrown up from the water channels around. He felt that I was doing something which he could not understand; he was chafed and annoyed; but still he had not a palpable ground upon which to attack me. At last he said, 'I think dinner awaits us.' Our horses were led up, and we trod the yielding, shifting slopes of the newly-thrown earth. We neared the dam itself, below which thundered the current from the upper surface. Baba Khan's horse went first, but he curvetted and pranced as his rider forced him towards the shaking pathway that spanned the current. He reared, and nearly threw his rider. He had never crossed the bridge before. I rode a powerful grey animal from the Caucasus, used to the torrents of his native mountains, and he stepped upon the bridge without a moment's hesitation. It was little if at all over three feet in breadth, and my steed trod mincingly as the brambles and earth gave way beneath his feet. The sounding torrent roared beneath us, and the spray, caught by the passing wind, wetted my face and clothes, short as was the time of passage. When I had crossed, the other horses followed uneasily.

Looking from the centre of the fragile structure which spanned the torrent as it swept from the upper Murgab to the lower waters, one could realise the amount of energy and toil requisite to keep the slopes of the sluice revetted with fascines, and I cannot refrain from again recording my sense of the industry and willingness which marked the exertions of the men employed, and that, too, in a public cause. The narrow, sloping channel, through which the waters thundered, was some ten feet in breadth, and the volume of the higher waters, spread out to eighty yards, and raised to an undue level by the dam, forced their way through this outlet with a power which should be seen to be comprehended. Up to that time I had had a poor idea of Turcoman energy, but I must say that I came away from the dam reproved for my doubts. 'After all,' I said to myself, 'it is absurd to think that the men who followed Zenghis Khan to victory have so utterly changed their nature that no energy remains.' Under due direction they would be capable of much—for good or for evil.

CHAPTER XLI.

WATER SYSTEM OF MERV.

A greasy dinner—Alasha and Novur canals—Turcoman swimming—Karyab and Malyab—Yaghmour Khan—Canal branches—Turbine mills—Porsa Kala—Turcoman dislike to houses—Benti Kazakli and Benti Sultan—Penj-deh—Military considerations—Agur Bashe—A runaway horse—Turcoman customs—Mjaour villages—Distant view of old Merv—Home to Kouchid Khan Kala.

THE village of Benti is situated at the angle formed by the main bed of the Murgab and the westerly canal. It is about five hundred yards from the dam, and consists, as I was informed, of about seven hundred huts, though judging from personal observation I should think there were not so many. The houses are grouped close along the bed of the great earth bank formed at the time of the excavation of the canal. Benti differs in no wise from other Turcoman villages. In its immediate vicinity there is no cultivation, and its *raison d'être* seems to be that it is a site for the dwellings of those told off to regulate and repair the dam and sluice. Baba Khan and myself dismounted at the door of the Kethkoda's house, where the afternoon meal awaited us. The usual number of bowls of *gattuk* were produced. Immediately after these came the *pièce de résistance*. It was contained in an enormous wooden dish, and consisted of mutton fat, melted down on the previous day. The great heat of the weather prevented it from becoming actually solid, and it was in a pulpy, semi-crystalline state, and of a greyish-green colour. These

Turcomans invariably keep their meat, before consuming it, as long as the climate will allow them to. In fact, they prefer it when its odour has become what might be styled 'gamy.' This dish was placed in our midst as we sat, cross-legged, in a circle. Each person dipped in it a morsel of bread, and proceeded to eat. The first mouthful was enough for me. The nauseous taste of the unsalted fat, combined with its abominable odour, made it quite impossible for me to repeat the dose. I had largely partaken of the *gattuk*, and made pretence of going through all the little pantomimic arts which obtain in the country with a view of showing that I had eaten enough, and more than enough; and though I felt that I was scandalising my host and companions by not dipping further into the dainty dish, I was obliged to run the risk of their displeasure. I withdrew from the circle, and threw myself upon a felt mat, feigning sleep. In an hour I was aroused by Baba Khan, to accompany him on a further inspection of the dam and waterworks. We proceeded to the point where the westerly canal branches from the main bed, just below the dam, and climbed the tall earth bank, from which a tolerably good view of the water-courses was obtainable.

With us was the Kethkoda responsible for the keeping in proper order of the waterworks. He seemed to take great pleasure in pointing out to me the result of his operations, and in explaining the irrigation system of Merv. One hundred yards south of the great dam branched off the two canals which irrigate the territories of the Toktamish and Otamish. We stood upon the earth excavated from the Alasha canal, which at this point flowed almost due westward. From the summit of the bank on which we stood to the level of the water below was nearly fifteen feet, the breadth of the canal at the water level being about the same distance. The sides of the canal stood at an angle of about sixty degrees,

the extreme stiffness of soil permitting of this abruptness of slope. At this point the water flowed at a rate of between three and four miles per hour, and was, my informant explained, fully eight feet deep, and consequently entirely unfordable by man or horse. He also told me that this canal existed at the time of the advent of the Turcomans to Merv, and that it was of great antiquity.

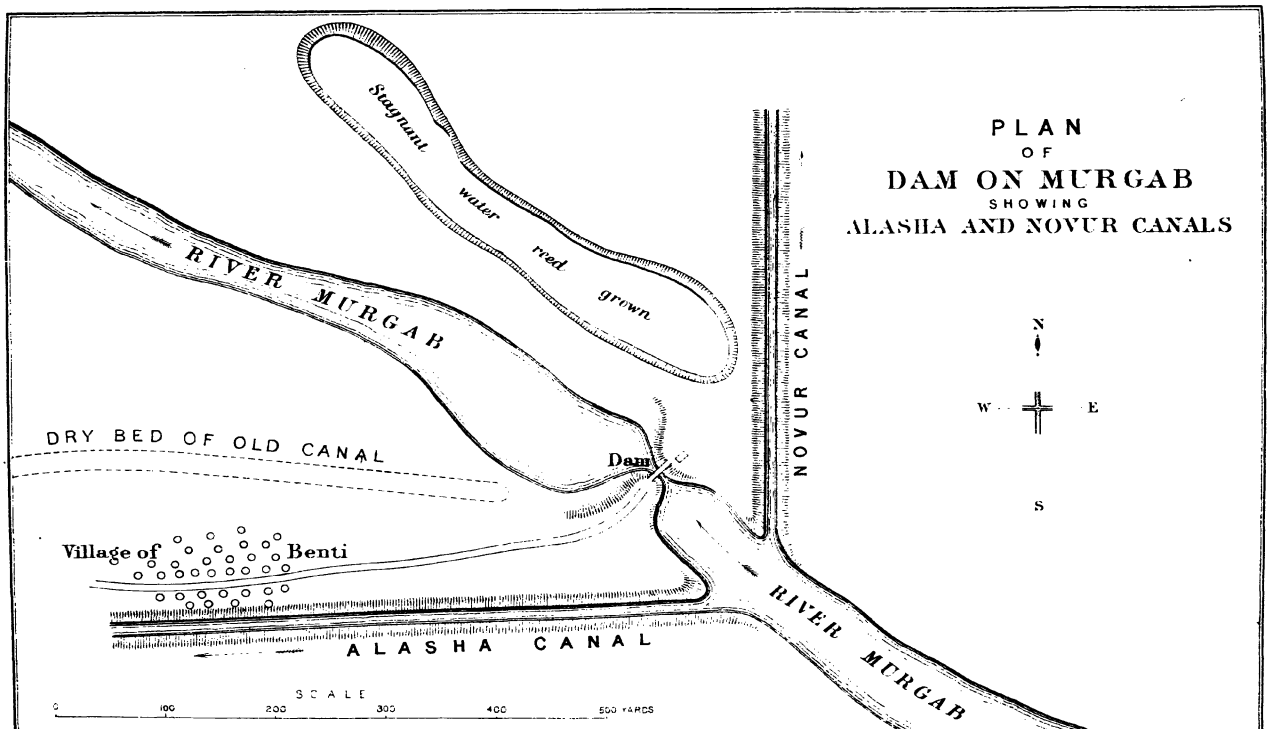
On the eastern side of the river, and directly opposite, flowed, due north, the Novur canal, which irrigates the Merv territory lying to the eastward of the main bed of the Murgab. It was of about the same dimensions as the Alasha canal, but, owing to the lesser height of the earth-banks along its sides, I judged that its depth was not so great, and therefore that the Toktamish territory stood at a higher level than that of their brethren on the western side of the river. South of the dam stretched away, in a straight line to the south-east, the upper waters of the Murgab, which was here about eighty yards across. Owing to the accumulation of waters resulting from the construction of the dam, the surface of the river was but eight or ten feet below the surrounding country. A number of Turcomans were bathing, and, as they constantly tried to find bottom, I could perceive that, except close to the eastern side, the depth must have been at least six feet. Even close under the eastern bank a tall man was barely able to keep his chin above water while standing on the bottom. I remarked that in swimming the Turcomans never adopted the system commonly in vogue among Europeans. Instead of swimming fully abreast, and striking simultaneously with both arms, they kept one shoulder forward, and struck hand over hand.

Bulrushes and sedge grew plentifully along the shore, but, though the eye ranged far along the river bank, no trace of a tree could be seen, or, indeed, of anything larger

than the ordinary *odjar*, or tamarisk bushes, and even these were by no means as large as those I had seen in the midst of the arid plain which I had crossed in coming from the Tejend river to Merv. It may be that they are not allowed time to reach their proper dimensions, but are used up for firewood.

The Novur and Alasha canals, the first flowing almost due north, and the latter west, form as nearly as possible a right angle, which is bisected by the main stream of the Murgab after its escape from the sluice, which takes a north-westerly direction for about ten miles beyond Kouchid Khan Kala, then turning to the northward. Fifteen or sixteen miles below the fortress is another dam, at a point called Egri Guzer, where are a series of villages governed by Yaghmour Khan, an important Kethkoda of the Amashé division of the Beg tribe, and who usually resides at Kouchid Khan Kala, where during my stay he acted as Yassaoul-bashi, or chief of the police, of the Toktamish. At the Egri Guzer dam two other canals branch off—the Malyab to the west, the Karyab to the east. At this junction, owing to the exhaustion of the waters for irrigating purposes, the Murgab has diminished to a very inconsiderable thread of stream, and struggles forward eight or nine miles further before it totally disappears. Owing to the limited supply of water, the cultivation is very sparse at this point, and the edge of the Kizil Kum, or red desert, is speedily reached. The Novur canal goes in branches to the east and west, principally in the latter direction.

I have already mentioned the wooden bridge across this canal, which conducted to the village of Murad Bey. Immediately to the south of this bridge branches off the canal which supplies the interior of Kouchid Khan Kala with water. A couple of miles further northward it divides into two, one branch flowing in a north-westerly direction,


PLAN
OF
DAM ON MURGAB
SHOWING
ALASHA AND NOVUR CANALS
Stagnant water reed grown
RIVER MURGAB
NOVUR CANAL
DRY BED OF OLD CANAL
Dam
Village of Benti
ALASHA CANAL
RIVER MURGAB
N
W
E
S
SCALE
0
100
200
300
400
500 YARDS

and passing close by the slopes of a large mound known as Geok Tepé. This hill must not be confounded with that from which the Akhal Tekké stronghold captured by the Russians takes its name. In the Tartar language 'Geok' means 'the colour of the sky,' an epithet applied to these hills, owing to the cerulean tint which they assume when seen at a distance across the plains. When close at hand, their colour is anything but that of the sky, being a yellowish orange, entirely denuded of all vegetation save a few straggling shrubs. Still further on, this branch of the Novur canal again subdivides, throwing off irrigation trenches in every direction, and ultimately dying out something like ten miles from Geok Tepé, expending its waters in the cultivated ground belonging to a few scattered villages situated on the borders of the desert. The other division of the Novur canal takes a north-easterly direction, watering the territory of the Vekil, a very slender supply indeed struggling as far as the ruins of the old cities of the plain—the ancient Merv. I have already given the names of the various subdivisions of the Turcoman clans. Each one has its particular watercourse, branching from one or other of the canals.

The western canal, the Alasha, divides into two at a distance of three or four miles from its origin, one branch going in a north-westerly, the other in a south-westerly direction. The latter is known as the Sukdi Yap, and along its banks dwell about a hundred and fifty Salor families, remnants of those Turcomans who, together with the Saruks, occupied the oasis before the coming of the Tekkés. Towards the extremity of the Sukdi Yap are the villages of the Sitchmaz, whose chief, Ana Murad Kafur, was the Yassaoul-bashi of the Otamish. Two miles south of his village all cultivation ceases in that direction. The north-western branch of the Alasha canal is the one from

which the territories of the Otamish are principally irrigated.

All these irrigation canals and branches naturally diminish in volume as they get remote from their source at the Benti dam; and when, in the early portion of the year, the waters are low, some of the channels are entirely dry. The minor ones, too, are constantly being shifted in direction, so that no definite plans of them could be procured. The main canals, however, with their principal branches, always contain water. The distance between Kouchid Khan Kala and the great dam, measured along the river bank, is somewhat over twenty miles.

The area of the cultivated district varies considerably, according to the quantity of water procurable from the Murgab, and depends, to a great extent, upon the dryness of the year. The greatest length of irrigated territory is from fifty to fifty-five miles, measuring from the southward of the dam in a north-westerly direction. Its greatest breadth from east to west is from thirty-five to forty miles. For a short distance below the dam the main stream of the Murgab is available for irrigation, but seven miles or thereabouts to its northward the channel of the river is too deeply cut to allow of the waters being conducted over the surface. Within this point, however, it is largely available, and, apart from irrigation, the streams are used to turn a very considerable number of rude turbine mills for grinding corn.

Two miles to the north-westward of the great dam of Benti, and close to the northern bank of the Murgab, stands the old city of the Saruk Turcomans, Porsa Kala, once the military and political capital of the oasis, but now deserted and replaced by Kouchid Khan Kala. After having observed the watercourses, and gained as much information as I could from my guides, I rode away early next morning

with Baba Khan and his following towards this place. The ground stretching between it and the dam is very bleak and barren, as, owing to its formation, it is impossible to lead the water over its surface. A fall, however, takes place in this surface in the immediate neighbourhood of the old city, which brings the latter within the reach of irrigation. Seen from a distance of a mile, Porsa Kala exhibits a long line of parched yellow walls and towers, rising from the summit of a slightly raised bank-like rampart similar in construction to that of Kouchid Khan Kala, but of not more than one-half its vertical height. The tall walls and flanking towers closely resemble those of mediæval European fortresses, and display a considerable amount of skill in military engineering. Walls and ramparts are now crumbling under atmospheric influences, though in many places they are in a state of fair preservation; the hard loam plaster which covered the unbaked brick walls still clings to the surface, and bartizans and crenelations cut the deep blue sky with their serrated outlines.

To me nothing is more dreary than the impression produced on entering precincts that only a few years ago were replete with life, but are now still as the grave. But thirty years ago Porsa Kala was thronged with its Saruk inhabitants. You can still see the roof-trees black with the hearth smoke, and water pitchers stand idly in the corners. So strong is the remaining impression of former life that one momentarily expects to meet a stray former inhabitant, and almost fancies he hears the soft muffled tread of the camel, when it is only the stifled throb of some choked stream which once gave birth to a turbine mill. The Saruks were apparently of much more gregarious instincts than their successors, the Tekkés. While dwelling here among the latter I saw no approach to anything like a permanent place of residence. Their houses are *aladjaks*,

which can be shifted at half an hour's notice. The idea of a definite centre seems foreign to the Tekké mind. I was talking one day to an old chief, a Kethkoda, by name Dowlet Nazar Beg. His age could not be far from seventy. He had seen the Tekké nation shift from the Tejend to Sarakhs, from Sarakhs to Merv. His limbs were speckled with marks which a superficial observer might have attributed to some cutaneous disease. They were the bullet marks which recorded nigh half a century of constant combats. I was talking to him *apropos* of a chance of liberation which seemed to offer itself. I asked him if he would be one of my escort of a hundred men as far as Meshed. He said, 'I have often seen the walls of Meshed as I galloped by on a raid. I never was within the walls. Are there *aladjaks* there? You know we, the Turcomans, do not inhabit walled houses.' He said this in a lofty manner, as if I suspected that he might be guilty of such a misdemeanour as inhabiting a walled house. I said there were no *aladjaks* at Meshed; but plenty of space where one might camp in the open. This appeared to satisfy him, and he said that he would willingly accompany me, provided that I made no pretence of asking him to dwell for never so short a space in a walled house. It seems odd that people so near akin as Saruks, Mervli, and Akhal Tekkés should have such different ideas. The Saruks, among the ruins of whose town I halted, were apparently of a less irreconcilably nomadic nature than the genuine Tekké. A near contact with Bokhara, from whose immediate neighbourhood they came, may have influenced the Saruks in their more domestic tendencies. At all events, they showed a keener strategic spirit in camping close to their dam than the present inhabitants of Merv have displayed in building their bulwarks so far off from what is to them the heart of their territory.

The sun was nearly vertical, and the sky wore that purple hue which belongs to mid-day hours in this part of the world, as I left my companions asleep in the scanty shade of the roofless walls, and sauntered out to take a look at the ruins. All around was an expanse of yellowish brown. No trace of vegetation could be seen on the burned-up expanse. Here and there lay a leaden-tinted snake with unfolded length, a veritable image of lethargy had not its diamond-like eyes denoted its sleepless vigilance. I have not a Turcoman's religious mania for killing snakes, but I have a terror of finding one curling around my ankle; and I fear that incessant vigilance in this regard made me lose much of the melancholy, solemn impressiveness of the once inhabited waste around me. Porsa Kala cannot have contained less than ten thousand inhabitants in its palmy days; and to judge from the care they took in fortifying themselves, they seem to have had something worth taking care of. This Porsa Kala, the Saruk capital of the Merv district up to thirty years ago, is doubtless the 'Merv' marked as a town in the maps which I have seen, which were based on the travels of Burnes, Shakespeare, and Taylour Thomson, and date previous to the advent of the present inhabitants of Merv, the Tekkés who came here from Sarakhs after driving out the Saruks. The present Tekkés never inhabited Porsa Kala. They pitched their circular huts at the dam of the Murgab, about two miles from the walled town. Two and three days' journey higher up the river are Benti Kazakli, where the more northerly section of the Saruks inhabit, and Benti Sultan, where are the remains of the old dam constructed by the former inhabitants of Merv, to supply Bairam Ali, Sultan Sanjar, and ancient Merv (Giaour Kala) with water. *Bent* means a dam, and the *i* added is the sign of the genitive case. Hence the names above mentioned signify respectively the

dam of Kazakli and the dam of the Sultan. The Kazakli dam is also known as that of Yulatan, because the canal proceeding from it waters the small town of that name situated on the left bank of the Murgab south of the great Merv dam, and which is inhabited by the most northerly division of the Saruks. These latter are on 'speaking terms' with the Tekkés. The other, and larger Saruk division residing at Penj-deh, still retain all the old feelings of hostility against the Tekkés, dating since the time, somewhat over a quarter of a century ago, when they were driven from their old settlements in the Merv oasis.

Porsa Kala admirably fulfilled the object with which it was doubtless constructed—that of covering the dam and the commencement of the main lateral watercourses. Why the Tekké Turcomans should have pitched upon a point so far distant from the most vital and vulnerable portion of their territory as Kouchid Khan Kala for the erection of their great defensive work is to me inexplicable. It may be that they wished to remove their military centre as far as possible from their enemies the Persians, and to force the latter to leave their base of operations at Sarakhs as far behind them as possible before they were able to strike a decisive blow against Merv. Still, however, it would be useless for the Turcomans to try to hold out at Kouchid Khan Kala, were an enemy in possession of the Murgab dam, for the destruction of this, by lowering the level of the waters to the southward, would leave both the Novur and Alasha canals completely dry, and so reduce the entire oasis to an arid desert, like the ground immediately around it. A military occupation of Benti, with a sufficient force for four or five months, would compel the Tekkés either to surrender or to abandon their territory. I have often called the attention of the Turcoman chiefs and Serdars to this fact, but they were either unable or unwilling to see

the force of my arguments. They said that within the walls of Kouchid Khan Kala wells were constructed which would afford an ample supply of water for a garrison; but I am perfectly sure that any such supply, however copious, would be inadequate to the wants of the Mervli, their flocks, herds, and camels. Besides, as the Turcomans never lay up accumulations of grain further than are required until the gathering of the next harvest, the rendering of the irrigation of their ground impossible would be to them a death-blow. They should, perforce, either surrender or starve, unless they effected an exodus to some less vulnerable territory. Moreover, they reminded me that Turcoman warriors were good for something, and that though an enemy might establish himself at the dam, he could not by any means be sure of holding his own there any more than the Persians, when they last came to Merv, were. It is quite true that with adversaries like the Persians the line of communications between Sarakhs and Benti might be very seriously interrupted by flank attacks of Turcoman cavalry, but when I gave my opinion I was thinking of another kind of enemy altogether. I was thinking of the Russians. The latter hold successfully—not without much suffering, certainly—the long line from Tchikislar to Yengi Sheher; and should they once be established at Sarakhs, or even at any point on the Tejend river, they would find little difficulty in securing their communications with a point only seventy or eighty miles distant. Once entrenched at Benti, a battalion of Russian infantry, its supplies from its base secure, might bid defiance to the assaults of the entire Tekké nation. The Russians themselves have been forced to recoil from rude breast-works manned by Turcomans, with their clumsy muzzle-loaders. What chance would Turcomans, accustomed to fight on foot only on the defensive, have when attacking European soldiery armed

with the deadliest breech-loaders of modern construction? It may be taken for granted that even a very moderate European force, properly established at Benti, would have the entire Merv district at its mercy. It is true that if only the sustenance of the garrison of Kouchid Khan Kala were taken into consideration, sufficient water might be procured by digging wells within the place, and possibly enough provisions might be accumulated to enable a prolonged resistance to be made; but the surrender of the place would only be a matter of time unless other armies in the field co-operated with its defenders. Turcomans, however, are exceedingly sanguine of temperament, and appear to entertain the idea that when all their own resources are at an end, Allah will come to their aid; or perhaps they have the shrewder notion that after having done their best to hold their own by force of arms, they can surrender when the worst comes to the worst.

When my companions had aroused themselves from their siesta, we mounted, and made towards home. Our way, as before, lay along the left bank of the Novur canal, up to the point at which the branch which feeds Kouchid Khan Kala diverges to the westward. Here, crossing the rude wooden bridge, we halted for a brief space at the headquarters of Murad Bey. Thence we proceeded northward, towards a group of villages in the plain, inhabited by a minor sub-division of Turcomans, known by the odd appellation of Agur-Bashe, or 'sore-heads.' There were half-a-dozen groups of huts, ten or twelve in each, scattered over a wide extent of plain, their occupants all living in the same primitive, pastoral manner as their compatriots.

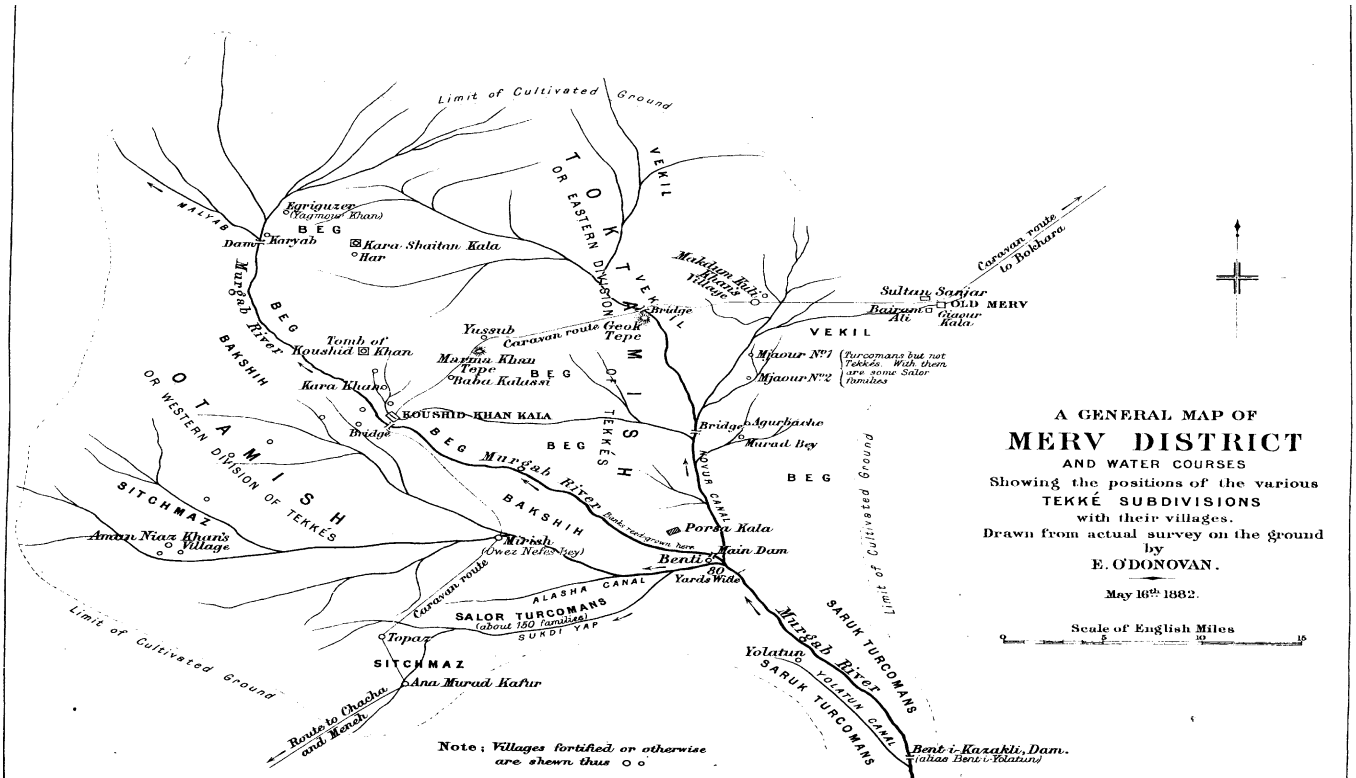
Here an amusing incident occurred. A Turcoman dismounted from his horse, a white one. Animals of this colour are rarely seen in the district, an evil repute attaching to them. The horseman wanted a drink of water, and

incautiously let go the bridle. The steed forthwith started incontinently to gallop across the plain. A runaway horse is a serious nuisance in a country like this, and everyone feels it to be his duty to aid the master of the fugitive beast in recovering his property. The whole of us, sixty in number, strove to head off the truant. For a couple of miles we rode in a straight line, but the runaway, unencumbered by weight, and having a good lead, gave us a long chase. Then the irrigation canals shifted both our courses, and we doubled and turned, sometimes heading away towards the desert, sometimes back upon the cluster of villages. At moments a Turcoman rider galloped close on either side of the riderless steed, and tried in vain to grasp his bridle, and I saw one attempt the daring expedient of springing from his own saddle into that of the horse which we pursued. He met, however, with a sad overthrow. Backwards and forwards over the vast plain we went, for a space of not less than an hour and a half, and, though we were joined by extra parties from the villages, who tried to turn the contumacious horse, we could not succeed in catching him. I was completely tired of the matter, and, besides, knowing that we had a long journey before us, I did not care to blow my horse any further, so I drew up on a slightly rising ground and watched the hunt. From what I saw of the remainder of it, I am of opinion that Turcoman horsemen would scarcely do well 'across country,' for though they will hang alongside their horses, stand in one stirrup, and sling themselves under the belly at full gallop, they do not care for leaping. I saw many a one come to grief at the broad irrigation trenches. The country is so flat that the horses are never taught to jump. At length it was decided to abandon the chase, and the proprietor of the wayward animal borrowed a horse to ride home upon. He issued orders that the fugitive should

by no means be allowed to escape, and that if he could not be captured he should be shot. This was quite in keeping with the spirit of Turcoman ideas. They would much sooner liberate a captive without ransom than tolerate his running away from them, and in the same way the instructions to shoot the horse, and not allow him to run wild at his own discretion, were given.

We continued our march in a northerly direction, passing numerous villages of the Mjaour Turcomans, who, together with some Salors, constitute a colony at this place. My companions informed me that these people were not Tekkés, but Mihmans, guests and *doghan* (friends) of the Tekkés. They were the remnants of the old Turcoman tribes who had first occupied the Merv district after the death of Nadir Shah and the decline of the Persian military power. They had still clung to their old homes after the Tekké conquest.

At the northernmost of the Mjaour villages we halted to give our horses to drink, and to refresh ourselves with a draught of *yaghourt*. While waiting, I mounted a small sepulchral earth mound which stood hard by. From its summit I caught my first glimpse of the old cities of the plain—the ancient capitals of Margiana. A long line of walls and turrets, dominated by some towering domes, broke the line of the horizon some eight miles away to the north-east. I could scarcely express my anxiety to proceed there and then to this mysterious spot, concerning which so much has been written and so little known. Half-way between me and the ruins lay a large, shallow sheet of water, where unused irrigation trenches expended their supplies upon an uncultivated plain. Black ibises, wild swans, storks, cranes, and a hundred other varieties of aquatic birds waded in or swam upon the silent marsh. I begged again and again that my conductors would turn


Limit of Cultivated Ground
VEKIL
TOKTAMISH OR EASTERN DIVISION OF TEKKÉS
Karigurez (Rajmouz Khan)
Dame Karyab
Kara Shaitan Kala
Har
Murgab River
BEG
BAKSHIS
Tomb of Koushid Khan
Yussub
Caravan route
Geok Tepe
Murrna Khan Tepe
Babu Kaldasi
Kara Khana
KOUSHID KHAN KALA
Bridge
OTAMISH OR WESTERN DIVISION OF TEKKÉS
Mekhtum Kuli's Village
Bridge
Sultan Sanjar
Bairam Ali
OLD MERV
Gaour Kala
Caravan route to Bokhara
VEKIL
Mjaour No 1
Mjaour No 2
(Turcomans but not Tekkés. With them are some Salor families)
Agurkashe
Murad Beg
Bridge
Porsa Kala
Main Dam
Bent
80 Yards Wide
KOUSH CANAL
Murgab River
Bank rendered green here
Mirrish (Sweet Nettle-Tree)
Aman Niaz Khan's Village
SITCHMAZ
ALASHA CANAL
Caravan route
SALOR TURCOMANS (about 150 families)
SURDI YAP
Topan
SITCHMAZ
Ana Murad Kafir
Limit of Cultivated Ground
Route to Chacha and Merah
Limit of Cultivated Ground
SARUK TURCOMANS
Yolatun
YOLATUN CANAL
SARUK TURCOMANS
Bent i-Kazakli, Dam. (alias Bent i-Yolatun)
Note; Villages fortified, or otherwise are shewn thus ○○
A GENERAL MAP OF
MERV DISTRICT
AND WATER COURSES
Showing the positions of the various
TEKKÉ SUBDIVISIONS
with their villages.
Drawn from actual survey on the ground
by
E. O'DONOVAN.
May 16th 1882.
Scale of English Miles
0 5 10 15
Stanford's Geogl Estab.t

their steps in that direction, but was told that the day was too far advanced; that the neighbourhood of the ruins bore a very bad repute; that there were ghouls and divs, and various other kinds of evil spirits to be met with; not to speak of the Ersari robbers from the banks of the Oxus, who from time to time lay in wait to plunder passing caravans. They promised, however, that if matters went well I should very shortly pay a special visit to the old cities, and with this I was obliged for the moment to be content, and nothing was left but to turn my horse's head homewards. Riding as swiftly as we might across the flooded plains, we arrived at Kouchid Khan Kala on the evening of May 5, having been absent just three days.

CHAPTER XLII.

MAKDUM KULI—SIGNS OF REVOLUTION.

A visit from Makdum Kuli Khan—Suspicions about him—His appearance—Conversation—Yussuf Khan—Tekké loss at Geok Tepé—Temporary adherents—Makdum Kuli's resolves—Presents—Inquisitive visitors—The Yassaoul-bashi—Captive Circassian officer—His escape—Russian military insignia—Dispute with the Mervli—Yaghmour Khan and Kadjar Khan—Dowlet Nazar Beg—Important revelations—Kadjar Khan's mission to Teheran—A man of straw—Object of revolution—Rumoured pro-Russian conspiracy—Kadjar Khan in a rage—The coming council—Demand for a *zat*—Incivility of Kadjar—Aman Niaz's diplomacy—Signs of change—Kidaieff's letter—An atrocious offer—Marks of distinction—Baghur Khan, the Persian envoy.

Two days after my return from the dam of Benti and Porsa Kala, I received a visit from a person whom I had long been desirous of seeing, viz. Makdum Kuli Khan, the redoubtable chief of the Akhal Tekkés, and the son of Noor Berdi Khan, and who, in co-operation with Tokmé Serdar, his principal general, had long and successfully held the Russians at bay before the walls of Yengi Sheher. He had arrived at Kouchid Khan Kala on the previous evening, but had not been allowed to see me at once, for since he took refuge at Merv he had been regarded with an eye of jealousy by the other chiefs, and he and his refugee followers were, to a great extent, treated as deserters. I was known to have been in communication with him previously, and, notwithstanding the headway I had made in the good graces of the Merv Tekkés, the latter still guarded me vigilantly, lest I might take some opportunity of retiring to Sarakhs or Kelat-i-

Nadri. As I afterwards learned, they feared that Makdum Kuli Khan might assist me in effecting my escape, and it was with the greatest difficulty that the Akhal Tekké chief at length obtained permission to call upon me.

I was quite alone when he entered. I was surprised at his youthful appearance. He did not appear to be more than twenty-seven years of age, though the total absence of beard and the extreme slightness of his moustache might have made him appear younger than he really was. Makdum Kuli Khan is over the middle height, slightly made, with very regular features, large hazel eyes, and a somewhat ruddy complexion. The general expression of his face was one of extreme mildness, but there was another which at first made me laugh in spite of myself; he seemed ever on the point of sneezing. His costume was that of a well-to-do Turcoman—a long, striped crimson tunic, girt with voluminous white sash knotted in front; a long-sleeved camel-hair robe of light brown, thrown across his shoulders, and bound at the edge with the broad, peculiarly marked ribbon, striped diagonally yellow and red, indicating the Tekké division to which he belonged. Thrust in his sash was the long poniard which the Turcoman always carries, the handle of embossed gold, set with turquoises, and enamelled in the pommel. This was the only occasion on which I had seen a Turcoman, chief or otherwise, bearing gold-mounted arms. As a rule it is rare to see even silver used for this purpose.

Makdum Kuli saluted me gravely, and seated himself after the fashion of the country—kneeling, and reclining upon his heels. We exchanged the usual formalities required by Turcoman politeness, and he then told me of the difficulty he had experienced in obtaining permission to visit me. Kadjar Khan, he said, was very jealous of my being visited by any person except himself. He (Makdum Kuli)

had proposed that I should visit him at his brother's *aoull*, but leave had not been accorded. His brother, Yussuf Khan, was in quite a different position from himself. They were sons of the same father, by different mothers. The mother of Yussuf, the younger brother, was a Merv Tekké by birth, and the daughter of some near relation of Kouchid Khan; while Makdum Kuli's mother was an Akhal Tekké. Yussuf was recognised as a Merv chief, but Makdum Kuli was not. The latter told me that he had been much disappointed with regard to the aid he had expected to receive from the Mervli. Only three thousand in all had come to his assistance; and even these had remained but a short time with him. On this matter he spoke with some bitterness. He said that when retreating from his stronghold at Yengi Sheher, the Russian artillery had played sad havoc among the crowds of fugitives, who, mounted upon camels, and carrying all their worldly goods with them, could move but slowly. He estimated the entire Tekké loss, men, women, and children, at about ten thousand. At first, a considerable number of Akhal Tekkés had accompanied him, and camped near the Tejend swamp. A large number of these, however, on learning the terms offered by the conquerors, had returned to their old camping grounds in the Akhal Tekké. Some four thousand had accompanied him, and settled for the time in the territory of his brother Yussuf Khan, but these were daily leaving him in large numbers, to return to their old homes. However, he counted that at least three thousand horsemen would stand by him and follow his fortunes to the last. He said he had been offered the most favourable terms on condition of returning to Yengi Sheher, but had steadily refused to accept them. It was the intention of himself and his staunch followers to fight to the last should Merv be invaded, and, if beaten, to retire into Afghanistan. If not well received there, they

purposed asking an asylum within the frontier of British India.

Our conversation was but brief, for Makdum Kuli Khan evidently feared lest Kadjar Khan might suspect him of concocting plans with me. He promised to see me again shortly, and reminded me that in one of my letters to him, written from Derguez, I had promised to make him a present of a field-glass, a revolver, and a signet ring. He inquired if I had these articles about me at the moment. As the two former were in full view it was not easy for me to deny having them. It is true that I had promised him the gifts mentioned, but I had done so with a view of inducing him to enable me to penetrate to Yengi Sheher; and, seeing that very little was to be gained at the moment by giving away what were to me almost indispensable articles, I should have been glad of any excuse to put off the Khan. On second consideration, however, knowing that his brother's district adjoined the ruins of the old cities of Merv, which I intensely desired to see, I thought it well to gratify his desires. He was delighted with the double telescope, and expressed his admiration of the Smith and Wesson revolver. Before leaving Meshed I had got made a very heavy gold ring, of Oriental pattern, and bearing an oval blue stone of the kind known in that part of the world as Solomon's seal, and engraved in full with his name and title. This I also presented to him, and he took leave of me, very well satisfied.

After Makdum Kuli's departure, my *ev* was crowded with visitors, anxious to know what the Akhal Tekké chief had been saying to me. Something was evidently on the *tapis*; and, apart from the hints which I received, the anxious and earnest conversation among the Kethkodas who visited me indicated that it was something of no ordinary importance. Rather broad hints were let drop that Kadjar Khan, the

chieftain whom I had hitherto regarded as the Ichthyar, or supreme ruler of Merv, was not altogether what I had supposed him to be, and that some change was impending. Some of his followers were present, and a warm dispute occurred—among others, with Yaghmour Khan, the *yassaoul bashi*, or chief of police and of the administrative forces of the political centre of Merv. The immediate cause of dispute was in connection with a Russian Circassian officer, captured a short time previously on the road between Askabad and Muhammedabad, the capital of the Derguez. Shortly after the arrival of the Russian troops at Askabad, as I have already mentioned, Skobeleff wrote a letter to the Khan of Derguez, Mehemet Ali, which was shown to me by Seyd Ali, his brother, governor of the town and district of Lutfabad, in the Attock. He said that he required certain stores in the shape of rice, corn, and sheep. These were sent to Askabad, and, in consonance with their character as good paymasters, the Russian authorities almost immediately despatched the amount due in payment. A *ferash-bashi* of Mehemet Ali went to fetch the money, and a small escort of Cossacks accompanied him on the road to Lutfabad. The escort was under the command of an elderly Circassian who held the rank of sub-lieutenant, and who, owing to his knowledge of Eastern tongues, acted as interpreter to the Russian forces in their relations with the Turcomans. Not far from Lutfabad the convoy was attacked by a force of Merv Tekkés. Some were killed, others succeeding in escaping; among the latter being the *ferash-bashi*, who carried the saddle-bags filled with money. The interpreter was made prisoner.

Some time after my liberation from strict captivity in Merv, as I was sitting at the door of my *ev*, I saw an unusual concourse of horsemen crossing the bridge over the Murgab. The red banner borne in front—that which is

always carried before the ruling Khan when he goes abroad in a public capacity, announced that something of interest was transpiring. In a few minutes the *cortège* drew up before the door of Kadjar Khan's house, among them being the grey-coated Circassian officer, unmistakable by his Astrakan cloth-topped *chapka*, or head-dress, and the shoulder-straps which denoted his rank. Long familiarity with the ensigns of military precedence, gained while with the Russian forces on the Caspian shore, enabled me at once to determine what rank he held. The gold shoulder-strap, with its single black stripe and solitary silver star, showed him to be a sub-lieutenant. Several Mervli of distinction were seated around me, and told me that the captive was a Russian general. I laughed, and said that they were mistaken; that he was no general, but only a *yirmi-bashi*, that is, a commander of twenty men. They grew indignant at the idea of my making light of the rank of their captive, and asked me how I was aware of what I stated. I immediately drew for them with pencil and paper the various insignia of rank in the Russian army, and told them, if they doubted the truth of my assertion, to examine the shoulder-straps of the officer more closely, and they would then perceive that they corresponded with the indications I had given them.

On this occasion a certain Moullah Baba, to whom I was indebted for many unkind actions during my stay in Merv, took the opportunity to revive the old story that, after all, I was a Russian; that I was crying down the rank of the captive in order that he might be let off with a lighter ransom than became his position. 'The Sahib,' he observed, 'says this is only a chief of twenty men, and that an officer of superior rank would have much more conspicuous *galons*. But where are his own (my) *galons*?' I turned the tables on the moullah by saying, 'You know that these

galons are to be bought in any bazaar in Frangistan, and if I had wished to impose upon you I had only to lay out a few krans in the purchase of insignia of very high rank. I preferred to come among you with a dress such as I wore, and to ask you to take my word for the rest.'

Yaghmour Khan, without exception the most straightforward and honest person I had met among the Merv Tekkés, was glad to hear my statement about the rank of the Russian officer, for he sincerely wished that no Russian should be kept a prisoner at Merv, and he feared that, considering the prevailing idea about the rank of the captive, great difficulty would be experienced in setting him at liberty. He took sides with me in the matter, while the other greedy brigands almost lost their heads at the idea of their possibly being defrauded of the rich store of money which they supposed would be forthcoming as the old Circassian's ransom. I ascertained that the *yassaoul-bashi* and Kadjar Khan were at loggerheads on the subject; and it was directly from this dispute that disclosures, of immense importance to me, took place.

During the day many persons called upon me, notably among them a certain Nazar Dowlet Beg, who had formerly acted in the capacity of Grand Vizir to the celebrated Kouchid Khan, the autocrat of Merv. This man had been most persevering in stating his conviction that, notwithstanding the various letters from Abass Khan, the British agent at Meshed, guaranteeing my nationality as non-Russian, I was simply one of Skobeleff's forward agents. On this occasion, however, seeing that the political tide was turning against the chief with whom he was closely associated, old Kadjar Khan, and evidently guessing, from his knowledge of his compatriots, that I was gaining ground, in true Eastern fashion he came up to pay court to me. He told me the circumstances under which the existing Ichthyar

came to be in such a position at Merv. I have already alluded to these circumstances. When the Russian invasion of the Turcoman territory was impending, the Shah sent a messenger to Merv, inviting the Khans to visit him at Teheran, and to try to come to some agreement with him by which Persian supremacy at Merv would be acknowledged. Whether this was intended to guarantee Merv Tekkés against Russian invasion, or to place it in his power to sell them to their enemies, I am unable to say. Probably he wished to be able to say to the Czar that he could dispose of the nomads. The two hereditary Khans, Baba Khan and Aman Niaz Khan, declined the honour of the invitation. They feared lest they might be held as hostages. Temporarily retiring from their positions, they summoned the minor Khans and Kethkodas to a council, and got them to elect Kadjar as Ichthyar. The latter had no pretensions to hereditary dignity. He was what was called a *Bahadur adam*, or, as they would style it in Merv, a *Bâtur adam*, that is to say, a man of intelligence who had distinguished himself in battle. Thus was a man of straw set up, and, fully instructed, sent to Teheran, with a following becoming his ephemeral rank, to hear what the Shah had to say. After some months' residence at the Persian capital he came home, having been unable to arrive at any agreement. It was thus that, on my arrival at Merv, shortly after his return, I found Kadjar installed in the position of Ichthyar. Circumstances were threatening; the Akhal Tekké was invested; no one could foresee the issue. The hereditary Khans deemed that the moment had not yet arrived to assert their natural supremacy, and continued to allow their man of straw to act as scapegoat.

By this time, assurances received from Mr. Thomson, the British Minister at Teheran, coupled with their own innate perceptions of me, and strengthened by every word

which I had said to them from time to time regarding the best policy to be pursued at Merv, had convinced the Tekkés of the genuineness of my non-Muscovite character. Once satisfied as to this, they ran into the opposite extreme; and notwithstanding all my asseverations as to the real nature of my mission to Merv, they insisted upon attributing to me an importance which I as frequently declined to accept. At this moment, their idea was that, as for the first time in their history they had got into communication with the Western Powers, and above all, with the celebrated 'Koompani,' it was probable that financial matters might enter largely into the future affairs of Merv, and that, in view of the presence of British troops at Kandahar, their advent to Herat, and later to Merv, was a matter of little doubt. Hence they had commenced an agitation, gentle at first, but which culminated in a revolution by which they unceremoniously overthrew their man of straw, and reasserted their hereditary dignity and control.

I spent the whole day in listening to the conversations of the advocates *pro* and *con*. A new light was beginning to dawn upon me. After sunset Kadjar Khan called; his tone was much more conciliatory than it had previously been. He ordered the *ev* to be cleared, and when he, myself, and Nazar Dowlet Beg alone remained, he proceeded to unfold a discovery which he said he had made—that Baba, Aman Niaz, and Yaghmour were intriguing for the coming of the Russians to Merv. This, to begin with, was a deliberate falsehood. He asked me on no account to have any relations with the persons whom he had mentioned, averring that he alone was commander at Merv, that the confidence of the people was his, and that to lend the authority of my approval to the others would be to seal the fate of the oasis and its population.

It occurred to me that, having to do with such crooked-

minded people, honesty and straightforwardness would constitute the better policy. I frankly informed the Khan that many chiefs of importance had called upon me, and explained to me the circumstances under which he had come into power, and that I had understood that he was not in reality the legitimate Ichthyar. At this the old man flew into a violent rage. He rose to his feet; he walked round the hut, stamping furiously; his eyes flashed, and he uttered oaths and exclamations in Jagatai. Then, calming himself, he took his seat beside me. He told me that my life would not be worth a moment's purchase if the other Khans came into power. He, for one, recognized that I was not a Russian, and he begged and prayed of me to stand by him at the next great council, which, he informed me, was called for the following day. He then left me abruptly.

An hour later, a general uproar occurred; horsemen were mounting hastily. Kadjar Khan, almost beside himself with passion, burst again into my *ev*. I inquired what was the matter; he said that the Circassian had escaped. Yaghmour Khan had conspired to set him at liberty; and I was asked to take note of this as a proof of the pro-Russian tendencies of the said gentleman. He omitted, however, to tell me that his own son had been the prime mover in the matter, and that the latter was undergoing punishment, his hands being bound behind his back, and tied to the flagstaff from which floated the crimson banner of Merv. After announcing to me the flight of the Circassian, Kadjar rushed furiously from my hut; a crisis had evidently arrived in the history of Merv. At the end of another hour the curtain before my door was raised, and the brother of Kadjar Khan, the white-bearded old moullah who had received me so politely on my first arrival at Kouchid Khan Kala, entered. He was, as had always been his wont,

exceedingly courteous. He spoke of the plot against his brother, and tried to enlist my services in the cause of the latter. He said: 'The moment is a critical one for you; it is probable that you have no friend here except my brother; I would beg to remind you that you have omitted an indispensable ceremony as a stranger visiting Merv. You have not presented any *zat* to the chief.' *Zat* means a present, without which one cannot with advantage approach any person of importance in the East, especially if his business be in the slightest degree political. I had foreseen the *zat* when leaving Meshed on my journey Mervwards. Though I was sufficiently acquainted with the mercenary nature of Persians to know that money, pure and simple, would be an acceptable present to them, I had formed another idea of the Turcoman character, and feared that any mere present of specie would be looked upon as an attempt to buy the favours of the authorities. I had, consequently, laid in a stock of jewellery and other articles, with a view to handing them over to the chief persons as soon as I should be assured of their position. I have already spoken of the presents which I gave to Makdum Kuli. I told the moullah that I was by no means forgetful of my obligation in regard to the *zat*, and that I was only awaiting a favourable moment to hand over the presents. 'You can give them to me,' said the moullah; 'or, if you like, you can send them by your servant to the Khan's house.' Upon my saying that I preferred to send the presents by my servant—for, to tell the truth, I was not quite sure that the moullah would not confiscate them for his own use—Kadjar Khan's brother took his leave.

Among other articles intended for presentation I had a silver casket, richly engraved and embossed, and set with turquoises and rubies, for which I had paid about twenty-five pounds sterling. I placed within it some ruby and

turquoise rings, folded it in paper, and, after sealing it, despatched it by my servant to the Khan's residence. In the meantime Aman Niaz came in, accompanied by his uncle and several followers, evidently with a view of preparing me for coming events. He had scarcely taken his seat when Kadjar Khan again appeared. He was, clearly, highly displeased at the presence of Aman Niaz Khan, but it was also easily to be seen that he did not care to say too much in presence of the latter. He simply drew from his pocket the casket which I had sent to him, saying, 'What is this?' I replied, 'Khan, as you see, it is a jewelled silver casket.' 'What is it for?' he continued. 'To keep as a tribute of my respect,' I replied. 'What is it worth?' said the Khan. I mentioned its value in Persian money. 'Ouallah Billah!' he cried. 'Six hundred krans! why, I would not give you two for it!' Then, throwing it contemptuously on the carpet close to me, he said, 'Take back your box, and give me the money!' I must admit that I was considerably taken aback by the manner in which my present was treated. However, I had, at a bound, gained an enormous insight into the mental temperament of Turcoman chiefs. I replied, 'Certainly, Khan, if you wish; but I thought you might be offended if I merely offered you the money.' Then, with an affectation of great magnificence, I drew from my pocket the twenty-five pounds in gold, and handed it to him. 'By God!' exclaimed he, 'that is right; I am satisfied.'

Hereupon a new comedy arose. During this scene Aman Niaz Khan had been glaring at me from between his bleared eyelids, and when Kadjar, happy in the possession of his wealth, left the *ev*, the Otamish chief elevated both his hands behind his ears, in expression of amazement at the manner in which the present had been dealt with, and said: 'Sahib, you can see that Kadjar is no Khan. Had

such a present been offered to me by a Dowlet Adam (a man of the state), I would not part with it for four times its value, not even if ten horses were offered to me in return.' Of course this was too broad a hint to be passed lightly over. I replied, 'Aman Niaz Khan, there are Khans, and Khans; I recognise you as a true Khan. Will you accept this casket as a slight token of my regard?' Whereupon he again raised both hands behind his ears, bowed low, as he sat in a kneeling posture, and, stretching out both his palms, received the coveted gift. All his followers were loud in their exclamations of admiration at my generosity; and the Khan's uncle volunteered the statement that all that his nephew possessed, and all his clansmen, were at my service. 'Not,' he took care to remark, 'because of the present, but because I can at once perceive that you are really a Dowlet Adam.' These were some of the opening incidents of the bloodless revolution which was to take place in the near future.

Almost every moment from this time forward I could perceive signs of the approach of something unusual, and also that events were rapidly turning in my favour. After the visits of Kadjar and Aman Niaz Khans, one of Baba Khan's chief cavalry officers called upon me with a soda-water bottle full of arrack as a present from the Toktamish chief, and Beg Murad, the fat, humorous-looking ruffian to whom I have alluded when describing my arrival at Merv, and with whom I had ever since been on very indifferent terms, sent me a gift of a shaggy, big-tailed sheep. At the same time, the leading persons of Kadjar Khan's party were unremitting in their efforts to get from me an assurance that I would acknowledge as Ichthyar no one save their friend. Failing to obtain this assurance, they endeavoured to effect small loans of money from me, in order to make sure of something before their faction went out of power.

On this same evening I received a note, written in Russian, from Kidaieff, the young Russian gunner who had been imprisoned in Merv during the preceding seven years, a facsimile of which will be found in the Appendix (F), coupled with a verbal message from him, asking for some pecuniary assistance, and bespeaking my good offices towards obtaining his liberation. The bearer, by name, I believe, Ana Geldi, was the individual in whose immediate power Kidaieff was. Having failed during so long a period to extract any ransom from the Russian authorities, he was trying to raise all the money he could, in one way or another, before Kidaieff should slip through his fingers, as, at the moment, seemed far from impossible. However, as a proof of his belief in my non-Muscovite character, and as an intimation of good will, he remarked that I had only to say the word, and the throat of the captive would immediately be cut in my honour. I was very much afraid that some such atrocity was about to be committed, and that it was intended, if things came to the worst, to foist its responsibility upon me; so at the risk of being suspected of pleading for the life of a countryman, I used all my efforts to point out that I should consider it the reverse of an honour to have anybody whatever, even though a Russian, killed in the way suggested. On this occasion I sent the money asked for by Kidaieff, but I very much doubt whether he ever received any of it. I also sent him word that as soon as possible I would come to see him, and hear his story from his own lips.

Kadjar Khan came in again somewhat after midnight, accompanied by Dowlet Nazar Beg. They sat up the livelong night with me, talking about the state of politics in the oasis, and the necessity of preventing what they called the pro-Russian party from coming into power. Shortly after their entry, I was puzzled by the sound of digging, in the immediate neighbourhood of my house. It was continued

with the utmost persistency. I began to be alarmed, lest some trick was about to be played upon me, or that they were even digging my grave, but I received from Kadjar Khan the assurance that preparations were being made to do me honour, and that a ditch and breast-work were being drawn around my *ev*, in order to keep intruders and noisy people at a distance. When morning dawned, I could perceive that my dwelling was nearly encircled by a small trench, at a distance of a few feet from its walls. Previous to leaving me, a little before sunrise, Kadjar Khan informed me of the arrival of a Persian envoy, by name Baghur Khan, who had come from Meshedon a mission to the Merv authorities, and that the emissary would probably be heard at the great council which had been called for the morrow. To this council I, too, looked forward with great interest, for upon its decision with regard to myself would to a large extent depend my obtaining liberty to visit the old cities of Merv, and the other places about which I wished to gather information.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE COMING REVOLUTION.

A revolutionary *medjlis*—A privy council—Public uncertainty—A cross-examination—Merv politics—Yaghmour Khan and the Yassaouls—My new residence—Promotion—Bahadur—Communications with India—The political situation—Turcoman letters—Yalangtush Khan—Baghur Khan Presents—Baba Khan and Persia—Newspapers and paper money—Telegraphic news—A change in the direction of affairs.

THE day following the events described in the last chapter was one of those on which the bi-weekly bazaar is held at Merv. It is usually largely attended by the leading chiefs of the various tribes; and on this occasion, a summons having been issued to them by Baba and Aman Niaz Khans, the attendance of representatives was unusually full.

The business of the bazaar is transacted at a very early hour, the extreme heat compelling the traders and customers to retire before midday for the siesta.

Between one and two o'clock in the afternoon, as I lay drowsily upon my carpet, awaiting the turn of events, I was summoned to attend a meeting of the notables of Merv. I was conducted by the messenger to an *ev* of more than ordinary dimensions, situated about two hundred yards to the north of my own. I found there assembled some twenty-five persons, including the Khans of the Toktamish and Otamish divisions. The *ev* was one specially set apart for the deliberations of what I suppose I may term the privy council of Merv, as distinguished from the general *medjlis*, or union of representatives, great and small, and Ak-saghals

of the entire oasis. The interior was decorated with rich carpets, hung round the walls, and the floor was covered with equally costly material. I was given to understand that a general council had been held earlier in the day, but that no definite result had been arrived at, save that the council of Khans and Kethkodas had received power to organize a new and vigorous executive, calculated to deal with the pressing circumstances of the moment. The leaders had come to the conclusion that the time had arrived for the resumption of power by the hereditary Khans, and the removal from office of old Kadjar, who had acted during the previous twelve months as their figure-head and mouth-piece.

Up to this date (May 10) the representatives of Merv were quite in the dark as to whether the Russian advance was to be resumed, or whether it had come to a definite pause. They were also uncertain as to the progress of events in Afghanistan, and my own presence, and that of Colonel Stewart not far off, had utterly perplexed them as to the course they should follow. As they were by this time tolerably convinced as to my nationality, and had seemingly placed some faith in the exaggerated statements of my Kurd servant, they considered me a proper person to be consulted at this momentous crisis. I was very tired and sleepy, after my night-long interview with Kadjar Khan and his companion, and felt in anything but the humour to undergo the cross-examination which evidently formed part of their programme. But as I surmised that my liberty of action for a considerable time to come might depend upon the manner in which I bore myself before this council, I tried to answer their queries as best I might. I was asked point blank, 'Are the Russians coming to Merv, or are they not?' Thanks to the news now forwarded to me weekly from Teheran, I was aware that the Russians had promised not

to advance further eastward than Askabad; and I knew that I could safely answer that, for the moment, they were not coming to Merv. 'How long will it be before they do come?' asked one of my interrogators. 'That,' I replied, 'it is impossible to say. For the present, in the face of the protests of the English Padishah, and the general condition of affairs, they have come to a halt; and unless some unforeseen occurrence, such as war between England and Russia, should take place, I think that a space of four or five years may be counted on without any advance on their part in this direction.' Another equally pointed question was then put to me. 'Where are the English troops now?' 'At Kandahar,' I replied, 'and slightly in advance of that position, on this side.' 'Are they coming here?' asked Dowlet Nazar Beg, the ex-Vizir. 'That,' I answered, 'it is entirely impossible for me to say. My opinion is that, unless Russia makes a further advance, the English troops will remain where they are.' I continued, 'I believe there is an agreement between Russia and England that Kandahar and Askabad shall be the boundaries of the advance on either side. I understand, too, that a guarantee has been given that the independence of Merv will be respected unless the Tekkés render peace impossible by aggressive actions.' Baba Khan then took up the examination. 'What course,' he asked, 'would you recommend to the people of Merv under the circumstances?' 'In the first place,' I said, 'that they absolutely refrain from all raidings or other hostilities against their neighbours, be they who they may; and in the second place, that any Russian prisoner or prisoners here detained be set at liberty.' Again he inquired, 'Would the English Padishah be willing to receive the people of Merv as *naukers*?' *i.e.*, servants, or subjects. 'That,' I said, 'is a matter about which I have no information; but you can easily be informed about it by forwarding a docu-

ment, bearing all your seals, and testifying your desires, to the English representative at Meshed, to be forwarded by him to England, or you can send it there direct; but I am afraid that in that country it will be found difficult to read your communication, as the people there hardly understand your language.' 'If,' continued Baba Khan, 'we are received as *naukers* by England, shall we be required to pay taxes?' 'That,' I replied, 'I do not know, but I think that in case you were accepted you would not be required to make any contribution.' 'Would the English Padishah supply us with breech-loading rifles and ammunition, and with cannon?' 'In case you were acknowledged as subjects,' I remarked, 'I have no doubt that, were you threatened by an enemy, you would not only be supplied with arms, but also with soldiers. But,' I continued, 'I am only giving you my opinion, for I have no authority whatsoever to speak on these subjects.' 'We should very much wish,' said Yaghmour Khan, 'to follow the advice which you have given us with regard to the prevention of raiding on our neighbours. It is not, however, by the will of the bulk of the people that raids ever take place; there are in every country a number of thieves, *ogri*, and so there are at Merv. In order to prevent them from following their evil courses, and bringing a bad name upon us, we must have our *yassaouls* well organised, and to this end we require to pay them for devoting their services to the public cause. For this we need money. We have not enough. Will the English Padishah give us sufficient to pay for the maintenance of two thousand horsemen?' 'That,' I said, 'you must ask in your letter.' A series of minor questions followed, to all of which I gave such replies as I was able. On the whole, the assembly of notables seemed satisfied with the course pointed out by me, and proceeded to debate among themselves what heir immediate mode of action should be.

By this time I was fairly wearied out. I could scarcely keep my eyes open, and as I felt that it was better for my personal safety to take no part whatever in factional disputes among the Mervli themselves, I requested permission to withdraw to my own house, stating that I was exceedingly tired and sleepy, after a night spent in conversation with other persons. I remarked that Kadjar Khan and his immediate following were absent from the meeting—a fact which led me to suppose that the latter was one hostile to the old Bahadur's claims of supremacy. I judged that he was on the eve of being deposed.

When I left the place of assembly, half a dozen Turcomans accompanied me; but instead of leading me in the direction of my former residence, they conducted me to an open space lying between the northern and southern lines of *evs*, and which had hitherto been entirely unoccupied. To my great surprise, I found that in its midst was being constructed a kind of redoubt, seventy or eighty yards square, on which nearly a hundred men were busily engaged. In the centre of this space was an *ev* in course of erection. The wooden, cage-like framework was already reared, and half a dozen women were occupied in adjusting the felt walls and roof. To this I was led by my escort. I had become too accustomed to the vicissitudes of fortune, and the unforeseen whims of the Turcomans, to be surprised at anything, so without question I paced along the narrow causeway which served as one of the entries to the redoubt, and entered the half-completed dwelling. My saddles, arms, bedding, and other effects were piled within it, and the two Turcoman servants whom I had hired since the departure of Gholam Riza were busily engaged in adjusting the carpet.

I was at a loss to account for this latest proceeding. My leading impression was that this enclosure was a kind of state prison, in which I was to be lodged for greater

security; but as ever since my arrival, notwithstanding the revulsion in my favour which had taken place since my nationality had been demonstrated, I had been jealously guarded, an interval of a couple of hundred yards in the sites of my place of detention could make but little difference. However, turning to my conductors, I said, 'Why have you changed my *ev* from the place in which it stood to this? And what is the meaning of this breastwork which you have thrown up around it?' 'This,' they answered, 'is your residence as a Khan; for the *medjlis* has decided that you are to be accepted here as the representative of the English Padishah.' This was almost too much for my gravity, but, retaining my self-possession, I simply bowed, as if all this were only a matter of course, and, sitting upon the carpet prepared for me, made note of the circumstances.

I slept for an hour or two, and, on awakening, found that several members of the council at which I had been present were seated around, waiting an opportunity of addressing me. Among them were old Dowlet Nazar Beg, the Vizir, and many others who up to a short time previously had invariably declared it to be their unalterable conviction that I was a Russian and a spy, and that I should be dealt with accordingly. These persons, finding that matters had taken an unexpected turn, were very anxious to propitiate my good will. One of them said it was a shame that I had ever been treated as a prisoner. Another remarked that it was a great proof of my bravery that I had come among the Tekkés almost unaccompanied, when so many others who had arrived at the very edge of their oasis had turned back without visiting them. I had not, they said, come like a raider; I had brought my saddle-bags (*heibe*) with me, as a friend who came to visit friends, and I was therefore a *bahadur adam*. All of them, in speaking, addressed me as 'Khan'; so that I presume they must have

received instructions to that effect from the council, inasmuch as no one among them, save a person bearing that title by right, hereditary or otherwise, is ever so addressed. I had hitherto been styled *Sahib*, or *Agha*, but from this time forward I was invariably addressed as *Bahadur khan*, or, as they pronounced it, *Bâtur khan*.

After an hour I asked to be left alone, as I had much to think of; and I proceeded to cogitate on the events of the day and my sudden and unforeseen advancement, and to try and fathom how much of sincerity or *ruse* there might be in all these exterior marks of respect. I was not surprised at the leaning of the *medjlis* towards British allegiance, for before I left Kelat-i-Nadri I was aware that that body of deliberators, in view of the critical situation at the time of the fall of Geok Tepé, had declared its intention of claiming British protection, and had intended to despatch thirty horsemen as a deputation to Kandahar. These men had actually been sent, but owing to the state of the country, the occupation of Herat, and the country intervening between it and Kandahar, they had never been able to reach the latter place. It was all very well for the chiefs and elders of Merv to come to the conclusion of putting themselves under British protection; but, narrow as their experience for the most part was of the borders of their own oasis, they were not in a position to decide upon any practical manner of proffering their friendship to Great Britain save by the despatch of the horsemen to whom I have referred. These having failed in their mission, every avenue was practically closed, for the Mervli had no idea whatever of any British Empire outside of Hindostan, and the wisest and most erudite among them would never have dreamed of looking to a centre of authority, away from British India, to which to tender allegiance.

The moment was a critical one for the Tekkés. They

believed that they would shortly be called upon to decide whether their lot should be thrown in with England or with Russia, whose forces, they felt sure, would in a brief space meet each other somewhere in the vicinity of Merv. Their dislike to Russia was of long standing, and had been inflamed to the highest pitch by the operations at Geok Tepé. Even though Tokmé Serdar had pointed out to them that the Russians were much closer to Merv than the English, the Tekkés preferred to side with the British forces, and it was on account of this decision that prominence had been given to the fact of my presence among them. The Saruk Turcomans, too—those inhabiting the country adjoining the upper waters of the Murgab and along the Merv-Afghan frontier—were in a state of ferment. Under the circumstances in which they found themselves, they scarcely knew where to proffer their friendship or allegiance. As neighbours of the Afghans, it was of the greatest importance to them to know at an early date whether they should espouse the cause of Abduhrrahman or that of Ayoub, and as the success of one or other of these depended upon the friendship and co-operation of the British Government, the Saruks attached great importance to my presence at Merv. All these people, despite my asseverations to the contrary, had got it into their heads that I was an agent of the British Government, and on the day of which I have just spoken I received two curious letters, one from the Saruk chieftains, eight in number, and another from a Jemshidi chief, Yalangtush Khan, whose father had been slain by Ayoub's orders, and who had taken refuge with the Saruks at Penj-deh. I subsequently received other letters from this same chieftain, announcing to me the movement of the Herat troops, and what I supposed to be Roberts's crowning victory, for the communication is without date (*see* Appendix A, B, C).

The political idea of the Saruk chieftains, as expressed in this document, cannot be without interest, as it shows what was the feeling in this part of the world at that very critical moment, and the opinion held about Ayoub's relations with the Russian Government.

The first letter which I received from Yalangtush Khan was forwarded by me to the British Minister at Teheran, and consequently cannot be reproduced here. It was to the effect that, his father having been killed by command of Ayoub, who was fighting against Abdulrrahman, the *protégé* of the British Government, Yalangtush wished me to tell him to whom he ought to look for compensation for the loss of his father; and he himself suggested that the English sovereign was a proper person to make good his claims. I have had very many letters from the same quarter. In the Appendix I have only given a few as examples of the caligraphy and epistolary style of the country.

The Persian envoy, Baghur Khan, who had arrived from Meshed, was refused permission to penetrate into the oasis, and was forced to take up his dwelling in the outlying Sitchmaz villages, along the Alasha canal, where some scores of Salor families reside. Baba Khan came to me to ask what action he ought to take in regard to this messenger, who had come, he said, from the Prince Governor of Meshed, a personage whose relations with the Merv Tekkés had never been of a friendly nature. He had no credentials from Teheran. Baba Khan did not approve of any dealings with subsidiary parties. The envoy, he told me, had written to him stating that his mission was one touching the propriety of the Mervli putting themselves under Persian protection, and so giving the Government of that country a right to interfere, and to prevent the annexation of their territory by Russia. He had also promised that a considerable sum of money would be annually paid to maintain

a police force in the district. He was also the bearer of considerable presents.

I was in much perplexity as to what reply I should give to Baba Khan. I tried to put him off by saying that doubtless he and the other Tekké chiefs knew far better than I did how to deal with such an emissary. As, however, the Toktamish chieftain seemed to attach much importance to my opinion, and as my answer would very possibly influence the Merv elders very greatly, either for good or evil, as far as I was myself concerned, I at length told him that my own impression was that it would at this crisis be by far better for Merv to retain perfect freedom of action and entire independence, especially in view of the fact that the people of Merv were apparently desirous of securing an English connection. This seemed to satisfy him, and he was good enough to say that he, too, thought that that was the best course to follow. The general feeling in Merv was that no relations should be entered into with Persia, for, even if she undertook to defend Merv against Russia, she could not be relied upon to do so, inasmuch as a powerful expedition once sent by the Shah had been disastrously overthrown by the Turcomans themselves. Besides, it was generally believed that Russia and Persia were working together, and that if the Shah's troops and functionaries once effected a lodgment in the oasis, the next move would be to hand it over to Russia for a money or some other consideration. From what I have seen of the relations of the Turcomans with the Persians, I am convinced that they are very little more cordial than those with the Russians. If the Tekkés were compelled to submit to one or the other, I believe that, unacceptable as the choice might be, they would prefer the Russians, for the latter would have something to give them, whereas the Persians, in their usual fashion, would only seek to exact as much as possible from

them. At all events, it was decided that Baghur Khan should for the present be compelled to remain on the Merv border, until his mission had been still further expounded and examined, and, above all, until he had forwarded the presents without which no envoy or person of distinction can approach a government or a chief. In the East, and especially in Persia, the present on one side generally takes the form of a *khilat*, or dress of honour. The Turcomans, however, stipulated that the presents to be sent forward by Baghur Khan should be in ready money, with which, as one of the chiefs archly informed me, they could purchase dresses or any other articles which suited their tastes.

The courier who brought Baghur Khan's message to Kouchid Khan Kala also brought with him several newspapers, which had been forwarded to me from Teheran, *viâ* Meshed. They were, I believe, the first of their kind that had ever been seen in the place. That same evening a literal 'gathering of the clans' took place within my redoubt, and inside the *ee* itself, to witness the unfolding of these wonderful documents. There was a ludicrous misapprehension as to the nature of these papers. As I have already stated, Turcomans have but little idea of the value of gold, their currency being almost entirely of silver. Of paper money they have but a very shadowy notion indeed. They first became aware of its existence through having seized some Russian paper roubles, when raiding upon the lines of communication between Bami and Geok Tepé. Matthi, the principal Jew-dealer of Merv, being, like all of his race, thoroughly *au fait* on financial matters, readily purchased these rouble notes, but at a ridiculously low price, giving about two krans for a ten rouble (1*l.* sterling) note. That a flimsy piece of paper should be worth even two krans was a source of wonder to the Turcomans, but, as they received value for it, they con-

cluded that it must have some mysterious virtue of its own. They took my newspapers to be of the same nature, and as they were much larger than the rouble notes, they thought that they must be of vast value indeed. The general impression appeared to be that the first remittance of public funds from the English Padishah had arrived. It would have been amusing, had it not been dangerous, to witness the extreme disappointment displayed upon their countenances when I told them that the documents in question were simply *rooz naméh*, or newspapers. The cunning old ex-Vizir, however, felt quite satisfied that they were paper money, and that my statement to the other effect was made simply in order to throw dust in their eyes, and thus guarantee my own secure possession of the money. Later on, when he saw the heterogeneous purposes to which this paper was applied, and the total disregard which I showed for it when I had ascertained its contents, they began to be assured of the truth of my statement about the *rooz naméh*. The telegrams relating to Kandahar and the doings in Afghanistan interested them immensely. It very often happened that events in and around Kandahar, telegraphed to London and published there, arrived by the ordinary post at Meshed, and thence by courier to Merv, sooner than it dribbled across the Afghan border in the very incorrect and unintelligible form in which news of them reached us afterwards. As regards the news from Cabul, had it not reached me through the newspapers, I should not have heard it until six months after date, through the native sources of intelligence. Of course the delay with which news reached us from the direction of the Indian frontier was greatly increased by Ayoub's occupation of Herat; and, moreover, everything that filtered through his lines came tinctured with the ideas and views of his partisans.

In addition to the newspapers, I had another source of comparatively rapid intelligence, which mightily astonished the Turcomans. There is published daily at Teheran, by the telegraphic authorities, a small bulletin of all the more interesting telegrams received at or passing through the city. These were forwarded to me by a friend by the weekly courier to Meshed, whence they came on to me. In this way it very often happened that when Yalangtush Khan or some other of my correspondents on the Afghan border sent me a special courier with the intelligence of what was passing near Herat, I had already communicated the news he brought, in a much fuller form, to the Merv chiefs. One thing that I could never get them to understand was the nature of the advertisement columns, money articles, and commercial items. Many a weary day have I spent, after reading out the telegraphic news, endeavouring to persuade my visitors that the great bulk of the newspaper contained nothing whatever of special interest to them.

The revolution was now practically effected, though not consummated in a public form. Kadjar Khan had ceased to administer public affairs, and for the moment the eastern and western divisions of the Turcomans arranged their state concerns apart, under the guidance of their own immediate chiefs, Baba and Aman Niaz Khans. As both these gentlemen had been very civil to me since the meeting of the privy council, I thought there was a good opportunity of disregarding old Kadjar's recommendation to keep myself aloof from them, and accordingly, the same evening, I asked Aman Niaz Khan whether it would not be possible for me to visit the ruins of the old cities of the plain. He was very fond of expeditions of the kind, and willingly assented to my desire, telling me that on the following day he would accompany me, with the necessary

escort. This he undertook to do without any permission from Baba Khan, for now that no Ichthyar or chief commander was in power, Aman Niaz considered himself quite on a footing of equality with his brother Khan of the eastern division, though the latter was by courtesy styled the senior of the two.

CHAPTER XLIV.

A VISIT TO THE RUINS OF MERV.

Aman Niaz Khan—Setting out—Wild carrots and edible tulip bulbs—Serrated teeth—Melon seeds—Irrigation—Merv Geok Tepé—Mills—Arrack—Ruined suburbs—Bairam Ali—Double enclosure—Mosque—Palace—Arg—Hoopoos—Solomon's servants—Berberis—Ancient tombs—*Sahaba bouridal*—Enamelled bricks—Giaour-Kala—Interior lake bed—Old mound and *arg*—Caravanserai of Yussuf Hamadani—Public pots—Silvered bricks—Turcoman devotions—Siesta—Iskender Kala—Alexander the Great a prophet—Sultan Sanjar—Treasure-seekers—Tombs of the enemies of Sultan Sanjar—Hostile demonstrations—Sheiks—Substantial souvenir of Mecca—A lonely panorama.

A LITTLE after dawn, according to appointment, Aman Niaz Khan, who had stayed specially in my neighbourhood during the preceding night, his own residence being a considerable distance away, came in to drink green tea with me before starting. He brought with him his maternal uncle, Nazarli Beg, a kind of scribe called Moullah Baba, and half-a-dozen of his own immediate clansmen, the Sitchmaz, that subdivision of the Otamish to which his family belonged. He wore the silk cloak, irregularly splashed with brilliant tints, which he habitually affected, and which he carried when I first saw him in my pavilion tent. As usual, he looked extremely sallow and worn, and the edges of his eyelids were bloodshot. He looked quite a wreck of a man, though, as I had subsequent reason to know, he could hold out as well as the best of his men in traversing long distances. He told me that he felt far from well; that he had smoked too much opium on the preceding

evening, and that he had also drunk more arrack than was good for his health. I have already mentioned that the Merv Turcomans, or at least a considerable number of them, drink spirituous liquors very freely. In this the chief of the Otamish surpassed any of his followers. I asked him whether we should provide ourselves with any of the forbidden liquor for the road, but he said it would not be necessary, as we should not complete the entire journey that day; we should stop at Makdum Kuli Khan's village, where we should be sure to find some, as that chieftain had been expecting the visit for some time past.

The sun was getting pretty well above the horizon as we mounted, each one fully armed, as if he were going on the war path instead of on a peaceful promenade. The Khan, besides two formidable horse-pistols in his holster, carried at his belt a Colt's revolver of an antiquated pattern. At his back was hung a remarkably handsome double-barrelled fowling-piece of English make, and at his side appeared the inevitable sabre. With the exception of the revolver and pistols, all his men were similarly armed.

We directed our steps towards the great entrance of the now nearly completed fortress, with the intention of crossing it, and making our exit by the opposite gateway. In doing so we had to pass through a group of *aladjaks*, in which, surrounded by the greater number of the captured Persian guns, was Baba Khan's residence. Early as the hour was, the latter chief was seated on a carpet before his door, attended by his immediate henchmen. As we drew near I could hear from some of the villagers muttered expressions of discontent, and queries as to whether I had obtained Baba Khan's permission to proceed to Makdum Kuli's village. I heard Aman Niaz say, *sotto voce*, that we had not got Baba's permission, and did not want it, that his own was quite sufficient. Still, I thought it would be only

courteous, under the circumstances, to make known my intentions to the senior Khan, so, dismounting, I drew near the group. Baba and his entire company rose to their feet as I approached, and received me very politely. I stated the object of our expedition, and the senior Khan at once gave consent, saying that he was sorry that circumstances prevented him from accompanying me. He despatched a few horsemen with us as far as the next village, this being an evidence of politeness usual on such occasions.

A Turcoman, when not on the war path, but merely travelling, as we then were, takes every possible opportunity of stopping, now to light his pipe, and now to enter some *ev* in which to partake of the food that is invariably offered. At Baba Kalassi we drew up, especially as the people of the place, seeing the Khan and his horsemen, and his distinguished Ferenghi guest, coming up, insisted upon our dismounting and partaking of breakfast with them. This my companions were in no wise loth to do, so leaving our horses to the care of the attendants we entered the elder's house. The elder invariably entertains strangers, and in compensation receives a small subscription from each villager, either in money or kind.

A very substantial *pilaff* of boiled corn, well greased with sheep's-tail fat, and mingled with slices of *kashir*, or sweet yellow wild carrot, which abounds in Merv, and, indeed, all over the plain extending westward to the Caspian, was served. Boiled in the manner I have described, in combination with fat and corn, the *kashir* is exceedingly agreeable to the taste, and much sweeter even than the red carrot. In size it is rarely over a foot in length, and three-quarters of an inch in diameter at its thickest portion. I have no doubt that under cultivation it would attain much more respectable proportions, but vegetables, such as the carrot, turnip, &c., are never cultivated among the Turcomans.

Another singular vegetable was laid before us, viz., the bulbous root of the wild tulip, or Lala Gul. This flower often attains a height of from two and a half to three feet, the flower assuming the dimensions of a large tumbler. It is of a brilliant crimson colour. The bulb varies in size from that of a small onion to three inches in diameter. It is eaten raw, and tastes like a very tender sweet chestnut, but with rather more of the flavour of the hazel nut. It appears to be wholesome, for though I have eaten large quantities I have never suffered any inconvenience therefrom.

I had often been puzzled, when riding across the plains, to see holes of a foot in depth, evidently newly scraped up, and I now learned the cause of these. The jackals and foxes are very fond of the tulip root, and dig it up with their paws. The wild boars also consume it largely.

After the corn *pilaff*, a wooden dish, filled with bread and mutton broth, and on the surface of which were some half-picked bones, was served. These bones, ribs of a young lamb, the Turcomans scarcely deign to pick. They crunch them up bodily, together with whatever meat may be attached to them, for as a rule their teeth are wonderfully fine, and seem to continue undeteriorated by age. From the very first my attention had been attracted by the beauty of the teeth of the Tekkés, and I had also noticed a peculiarity which I at first set down as a natural abnormality. Almost without exception the two upper middle incisors of a full-grown Tekké exhibit, each in its midst, a deep angular notch, reaching to a depth of fully a quarter the length of the exposed portion of the tooth, and rendering it bi-cuspid. I had taken note of this fact, and, with a view to ascertain whether it was a general peculiarity of the race, I lost no opportunity of observing, and subsequently discovered its origin. The melon (*kaoun*) and water melon (*kharpous*)

form a large portion of the diet of the Mervli. Their numerous seeds are laid by and dried in the sun, partly for sowing purposes, and partly to be eaten in leisure moments. In most of the towns on the border one sees, in the grocers' booths, large sacks of these dried melon seeds. One side of the flat seed case is more or less rounded, but the other side presents a sharp, hard edge. In eating the seed the rounded edge is placed upon one of the lower incisors, and the sharp edge pressed with one or other of the upper ones. It requires considerable pressure to cause the two carpels of the seed cover to separate so that the interior may be extracted. As the Turcomans, even when on horseback, are continually eating these melon seeds, in the end their sharp edges produce the serration of the teeth of which I have spoken, and that, too, only in the upper incisors, owing to the rounded margin of the seed being placed lowermost. That it has nothing whatever to do with the natural formation of the teeth is evident from the fact that in young children there is no sign of this peculiar marking. Besides, the Tekkés were at some trouble to explain to me its cause.

Breakfast over, we resumed our march, passing close to the base of an ancient mound, Marma Khan Tepé, where, to judge from the great amount of brick and tile scattered around, buildings of considerable size must have formerly stood. The Turcomans told me that a town of large dimensions once existed there. It was, in all probability, one of the halting places on the road to the city of Merv. Not far from it is the village of Yussub, where a second bazaar is held, for the convenience of the Vekil and other outlying divisions of the Toktamish who live too far to the east to be able to frequent the principal bazaar at Kouchid Khan Kala. Thence we pushed on, almost in a due easterly direction, save when the unpleasant inundations with which we met at every few hundred yards forced us to make a *détour*.

Though it was early in May, the heat was exceedingly intense, and irrigation was absolutely necessary to prevent the young corn from being utterly dried up. Secondly, the irrigation canals were in full operation, and at places where the conformation of the ground did not allow of the water being led into a large number of small channels the stream was simply dammed up, and a small inundation was produced, spreading over the required extent. This was especially the case in regard to rice.

Fifteen miles N.E. of Kouchid Khan Kala, another very large ancient mound, called, like that within the celebrated Akhal Tekké stronghold, Geok Tepé, or 'the sky-coloured hill,' is seen. It is partly surrounded by the main western branch of the Novur canal. To its north and west is a marsh, nearly a mile in length, and entirely grown over with giant cane-like reeds, in the midst of which runs, meanderingly, the canal. At this point the canal gives movement to a very large number of turbine and overshot mills, by means of which the principal grinding of corn for the district is done. The main channel has here cut its way very deeply into the soil—the steep banks of fifteen to twenty feet in height evidently showing that this canal has followed its present course for a very long time indeed. Passing over three different rude bridges, composed of tree trunks and osiers, we continued our march towards the head-quarters of the Vekil, young Yussuf Khan's village, where, for the moment, Makdum Kuli Khan, the great Akhal Tekké chief, dwelt, surrounded by the three or four thousand adherents who remained faithful to him after the overthrow of Yengi Sheher. Owing to the delays we had made upon the road, and the slow pace at which we proceeded, it was near sunset when we approached Yussuf Khan's premises. We were very kindly received by the two Khans. As Aman Niaz had foreseen, the arrack had not been forgotten.

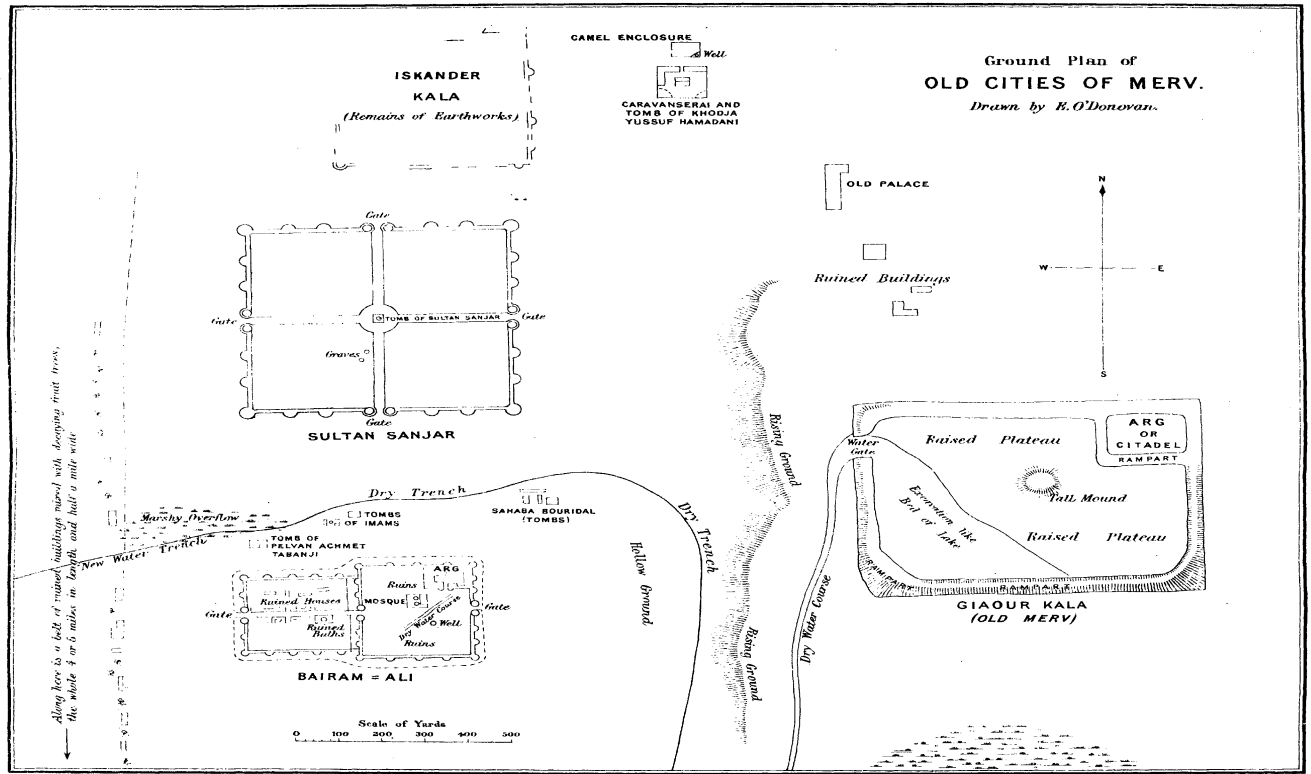
This was all the more courteous on the part of Makdum Kuli as he is a strict abstainer himself, and would not even touch a vessel from which arrack had been drunk until it had been washed with water.

The next morning, after a copious breakfast of bread, mutton broth, and boiled mutton, preceded by green tea, we set out for the ruins of the ancient cities, the centre of which lay almost due east—perhaps a couple of degrees to the northward. Half-an-hour's ride, through very flooded grounds, brought us to the eastern limit of cultivation. Then the ground rose slightly, putting its surface above the reach of the present irrigation system. Here we came in view of an immense wilderness of ruined buildings, forming a semicircle in front of us to the north and south. Between us and the domes stretched in an apparently unbroken line for four or five miles a belt of ruined wall and shattered houses, apparently the remains of former suburban villas and gardens. This belt, running due north and south, was over half a mile in width. Even still nourished by the scanty rains and still scantier moisture of the earth itself, the withered gardens displayed remnants of former greenness, choked with masses of ruin. Snakes swarmed on every side, and, save these, black eagles, sparrow-hawks, and vultures, were the only living creatures to be seen. Clearing this belt of dilapidated wall and building, at a distance of a quarter of a mile before us stood the western front of Bairam Ali, the youngest of the three cities, each of which in its turn has borne the name of Merv. This front was a line of embattled wall, two hundred yards in length, flanked by circular towers, and having a large guarded gateway in its centre. The wall, fifteen feet in height, is further strengthened by an exterior ditch, spanned at the gateway by a brick archway, now piled and cumbered with broken material. These walls were partly

of baked and partly of unbaked brick, and in a very fair state of preservation. Passing beneath the low, vaulted gateway, we stood within a square place, a complete wilderness of ruins. What had once been a street, crossing the square, was flanked by the remains of brick houses. On its southern side, and near its eastern extremity, were the vaulted remains of extensive baths. This first, or western square, was apparently a later addition, and intended for the accommodation of the caravans which frequented the place. The real town of Bairam Ali itself adjoins it. It is a quadrangular enclosure, two hundred yards from east to west, and about two hundred and fifty from north to south. Its western wall is common to both squares (*see* Plan). Its walls are, however, higher than those of the other, owing to their being built upon a low embankment of six or eight feet in height. Entering this by a gateway similar to the first, but of larger and more massive proportions, we again stand in the midst of complete ruin. Near the centre are the tolerably well-preserved remains of a mosque, its cupola forming a salient feature of the group of ruins. Its courtyard has well-built cloisters of brick, and adjoining the mosque itself is a large building, probably the residence of the moullahs. In the north-eastern angle is the brick 'arg,' or citadel, some eighty yards square. Its sides are parallel to that of the town itself, and two of them, the northern and eastern, are identical with those of the city. Entering by the gateway in the southern wall, we came into a kind of courtyard, lined all round by what were once elaborately ornamented buildings, three storeys high, the palace of the former sovereigns. One could still trace the arabesques and other decorations, stamped upon the stucco-plastered walls, and the chimney-places are still black with the smoke of the last fires. Near the entrance

Ground Plan of OLD CITIES OF MERV.

Drawn by E. O'Donovan.



Stanford's Geogr. Estab.t London.

London:- Smith, Elder & Co. Waterloo Place.

of the palace I noticed the broken remains of a subterranean aqueduct. It was brick arched, eighteen inches in height by twelve in breadth, and carefully plastered on the inside with some kind of hard brown cement. Here and there were numerous wells, now completely choked up, and the resort of immense numbers of snakes and of small birds, especially hoopoos, who take refuge in them against the broiling heat. This latter bird is never molested by the Turcomans, who hold it in great esteem. A moullah who accompanied us informed me that it was one of the principal servants (*naukers*) of Solomon, whose life it had on one occasion saved by conveying to him intelligence of some deadly peril which awaited him. Round the mouths of these wells were broken parapets, piled with masses of rubbish overgrown with a creeping species of *berberis*, a very disagreeable thorn when any piece of ground covered with it has to be traversed. It bears a large fruit, in size and shape closely resembling a green fig, the five carpels of which dehisce, separating and bending backwards, so that with their crimson interiors they might easily pass for the blossom of the plant itself.

This Bairam Ali was the last of the towns of Merv, if I except Porsa Kala, the Saruk settlement which I have already described. It is named after Bairam Ali Khan, its last defender, who was killed here in 1784, when the town was attacked by Begge Jan, *alias* Emir Masum, sovereign of Bokhara.

In the midst of all this waste of crumbling palaces and baths and ramparts, excepting the snakes, a few birds, and an occasional jackal, no living creature is to be met with, save, indeed, an occasional Ersari robber or treasure-seeker; for here, as in almost every other part of the East, the popular imagination enriches these ruined vaults and

foundations with secret treasures stowed away beneath them.

We left Bairam Ali by its eastern gate, for the double enclosure has two entrances. Immediately in front, and a thousand yards away to the eastward, rose a long line of earth bank, indicating the site of Giaour Kala, as the oldest of the Merv cities is now called. We did not proceed there immediately, but directed our course in a north-easterly direction, to a group of buildings some two hundred and fifty yards off, occupying the brow of an undulation of the ground. There was what resembled a large triumphal arch, forty feet high and about the same in breadth, built of hard flat-baked bricks of a yellowish-brown colour, and ornamented with oblong tiles enamelled of a bright blue, the alternate ones being a shade darker than those next them. Nowhere else among the ruins of Merv is the slightest trace of similar enamelled bricks to be found. In contact with, and to the south of the arch are two covered buildings, the sides of which are quite open. A low, open-worked brick balustrade runs breast-high around them. These buildings and balustrades are sparsely ornamented with blue tiles, like the triumphal arch. Both buildings are exactly alike, and inside each stands an oblong tomb of bluish-grey marble, beautifully and elaborately sculptured with inscriptions and arabesques, and divided into panels. Each tomb is about seven feet in length, two in breadth at the top, and four in height. The sides and ends have a slight incline. Apart from the arabesques and inscriptions, which are cut in very slight relief, the outline of the tombs is perfectly plain. Adjoining the more easterly of the buildings were the remains of what had probably been large baths, if one might judge from the extensive underground vaults with brick groining, closely resembling those within the *enceinte* of Bairam Ali. The Turcomans who accompanied

me could tell me little concerning the history of these tombs, or of the persons interred beneath them. They only spoke of them as very holy 'sheiks,' for here this word, which in Arabia and Syria simply means a military or political chief, indicates an individual celebrated for sanctity. The tombs were known as those of the *Sahaba bouridal*, literally 'the beheaded gentlemen,' and my informants told me that they had been murdered in the cause of religion; when, or why, they could not give me the slightest idea, though they prayed as devoutly before their resting-place as if they knew everything about their history. The entire area between these old tombs and the triumphal arch was completely covered with *débris* of bricks and tiles.

From this point we turned in an easterly direction, descending a pretty steep incline, towards a very deep irrigation canal which was in course of construction some hundreds of yards further on, in continuation of one which brought the water almost level with the north-western angle of Bairam Ali. When I saw it, the water had not yet been made to flow to this point. A shallow valley intervenes between the eastern face of this latter town and the western one of Giaour Kala. Crossing the valley, we proceeded towards the south-eastern angle of Giaour Kala. The great earth ramparts by which it is surrounded closely resemble, in size and construction, those of Kouchid Khan Kala, which would almost seem to have been copied from them. At a distance the ramparts of the old town exactly resemble a great railway embankment. The ground upon which it is situated rises considerably towards its northern side, while the level of the top of the walls on each side is exactly the same. Consequently, the southern line is much higher than that along the north. At the south-eastern angle the ramparts are at least sixty feet high. Urging our horses at full speed, we galloped

with difficulty obliquely along the great slope, and succeeded in gaining the summit. At this point the *turbé* of some holy person of the wilderness had been erected, and a pole, bearing a piece of tattered linen floating bannerwise at its extremity, had been planted beside it. The walls, which at a guess I should say were eight hundred and fifty yards from east to west, and six hundred and fifty yards from north to south, enclosed a regular quadrangular space. Immediately below us, and occupying the whole of the south-western portion of the enclosure, was what apparently had been a small lake in which water was stored for the use of the inhabitants. Through a gap near the north-western angle of the ramparts formerly entered an irrigation stream, the bed of which is still distinctly traceable, and which, I am informed, flowed from the ancient dam at Bent-i-Sultan, on the Murgab, a day's journey beyond the present Saruk dam of Kazakli.

Almost in the centre of Giaour Kala stands a large mound, on the summit of which are the traces of walls and towers. This was probably an old palace, or a defensive work of some kind. The *arg*, or citadel proper, was here, as in every other ancient town in this part of the world which I have examined, in its north-eastern angle, and consisted of a square enclosure, of which the northern and eastern sides were identical with the main rampart itself. The *terre pleine*, or inner area, of this redoubt-like work, is considerably above that on which the central mound stands. I made the entire circuit of the ramparts, proceeding first along its southern, then its eastern, and lastly its northern side. Towards the middle of the northern side still exist some traces of rampart, of upper parapet, and of embattled wall; but I should say that these were of a far later date than the great embankment on which they were built. The whole of the area within the ramparts is littered with the

débris of broken tiles and earthenware vessels, many of the fragments exhibiting the most beautiful tints, and, in some cases, prismatic colours. I did not come upon an entire utensil of any kind.

Standing on the ramparts of this old city, the view ranges far away to the eastward, over slightly undulating ground largely covered with tamarisk growths, while here and there are traces of ruined walls and buildings, scattered sparsely in the present wilderness. This Giaour Kala is the oldest of the three remains, and was doubtless the first walled city erected upon the spot. It was destroyed by the Arabs towards the end of the seventh century, when the lieutenants of Omar, having overrun Persia, pushed away northward towards the Oxus.

Descending from the northern ramparts, we wended our way in a north-westerly direction towards some large ruins, distant a few hundreds of yards. Some of them had been ancient palaces, to judge by the elaborateness of ornamentation of their interiors. Others had evidently been religious structures, and some may have been storehouses. Continuing still further in the same direction, and leaving the old town of Sultan Sanjar to our left, we reached the only building which in all the vast extent of crumbling remains is now used for any human purpose. It is the last caravanserai at which caravans from Meshed, proceeding through Merv to Bokhara, halt before entering upon the waterless expanse beyond. It is known as the caravanserai of Khodja (or moullah) Yussuf Hamadani. It consists of two enclosures, one about a hundred yards square, and another, some thirty yards to the northward, of half that size. The latter is simply a wall-girt space, within which camels and other beasts of burden are assembled at night, and in the corner of which is a deep well furnished with a bucket and lift. The entrance to the caravanserai is in the northern side of the

main enclosure. Right and left of the doorway are extensive vaulted apartments of brick, occupying the entire length of that side of the enclosure. More than half of the western side is taken up by a small mosque, the entire eastern front of which is open to the air. It is termed the mosque of Mehemet Hussein Herati, a nobleman of that locality who came hither on a pilgrimage and caused this mosque to be built in honour of Yussuf Hamadani, whose tomb occupies the centre of the main enclosure. In the vaulted chamber to the left, or east, of the doorway, are two enormous brazen pots, nearly five feet in diameter, set in a bed of brick arranged so as to allow of fires being lighted underneath them. In these huge utensils is prepared, simultaneously, the food of the members of the caravans. There are two attendants in the place—*sofis*, as my companions styled them—two exceedingly dirty-looking, cadaverous individuals, wearing large white turbans, and who are supposed to keep on hand various small stores to be disposed of to travellers. These men informed me that the pots were presented by Emin Khan of Urgenz (Khiva) when he came to this place upon a pilgrimage very many years ago—how many they did not know; it might be a century, or three centuries. The groined roof overhead was sadly blackened by the smoke of the fire, but here and there I could make out that the surface of the bricks had been silvered, or, I might rather say, leaded over, by being rubbed with a piece of metal. The attendants told me that this silvering had been done by order of Abdullah Khan, of Bokhara, who came upon a pilgrimage to the tomb of the saint. This may or may not be true, but while I could distinctly see the metallic covering on the surface of some of the bricks, it appeared quite confined to separate ones, those alongside being entirely without any trace of metallic tint. Had I not been told of the origin of the metallized appear-

ance, I should have decidedly said that it was some lacquered surface, developed in the process of baking the brick itself, and that, too, unintentionally. However, I give the story told me by the guardians of the caravanserai.

These vaulted chambers formed a very welcome refuge from the glare of the sun, resembling so many ice-houses when we entered them after a quick gallop over the blazing marly plain separating us from the ramparts of Giaour Kala. A tomb, which stood in the very centre of the enclosure, was evidently the original building round which the others had been erected at a later period. It consisted of a rudely-built, flat-roofed house, two stories high, some thirty feet wide by fifteen in depth. It was entered by a strongly barred door. Behind it, and adjoining it to the southward, was a balustraded, roofed enclosure similar to those at the tombs of the 'beheaded gentlemen,' and within which stood a somewhat similar tomb.

Before proceeding to eat or rest, my companions performed their orisons around the tomb of the blessed Yussuf Hamadani. They drew up in a line on its western side, with their faces towards the tomb, holding their joined palms before them in the fashion of an open book. They prayed for a few minutes in muttered tones, and then all advanced to the balustrade. Each person, laying both his palms upon it, applied them to his face, drawing them downwards towards his chin. Then they began to circle slowly around the tomb, proceeding towards their right hands. At each two steps they placed their hands upon the balustrade, repeating the operation of stroking down their faces and beards. The balustrade was covered with dust and sand, and as, owing to the heat of the day, my companions were perspiring pretty freely, it may be imagined what appearance they presented, after twenty or thirty applications of the dust-covered hands had been made to

their countenances. Arrived at the eastern side of the tomb, they again formed line, this time kneeling, still facing the tomb, and praying in the same manner as before. They then repeated the march round, with the same peculiar ceremony.

All this time I scarcely knew what to do. Were I to join in their devotions, I feared that they might suppose I did so in mockery; and if I did not join with them I was apprehensive lest they should take it as a slight on my part. However, as I was thoroughly unacquainted with the prayers which they were repeating, I thought it best to stand quietly by while they prayed. Then we went to visit the mosque, which was little more than a large deep recess, furnished with a *mirhab*, or devotional station. Above the principal recess, or chamber, was a vaulted room, surmounted by a small cupola. My conductors prayed for awhile within this building, and I was surprised that they made no objection to my presence within the sacred precincts, even during the religious ceremonies. I remarked, too, another peculiarity. They did not uncover their feet, as is invariably the custom in Constantinople, or in any Persian mosque that I have seen. On subsequent inquiry I learned that when, as was the case with all the party, long brown leather riding boots reaching to the knees were worn, it was not usual to remove them, either when entering a mosque or paying a visit to the house of a friend. These long boots are never worn except by a horseman, and the fact of his having been mounted presupposes that he has not soiled his feet in walking across the muddy ground.

Having got through a due allowance of prayers, we next proceeded to prepare green tea at the fire which the two *sofis* lighted for us. After the usual meal of griddled bread and weak tea, we indulged in the siesta for which the extreme heat and our long ride had fully prepared us. For

my part, I could get but little repose, for the *singak*, as the Turcomans call the common house-fly, attracted to the spot by the offal remaining after the passage of caravans, made existence almost intolerable. While we were endeavouring to rest, one of our companions took his station as sentinel upon the tomb of the little mosque, and kept a sharp look-out for the possible approach of Ersari robbers, who make the ruins of Merv a trysting-place when they organize an *aleman*, or raid, upon any of the Yekil villages.

After a brief rest, and having recompensed the *sofis* for their trouble with a few pieces of silver, we wended our way towards the remains of some earthworks lying about three hundred yards to the westward. Here was a rectangular space, its sides, like all the other enclosed areas of the place, looking towards the cardinal points, and each side being about five hundred yards in length. It had evidently been an encampment of some sort, but the traces of the fortifications were now very indistinct. The Turcomans call it Iskender Kala, and say that Alexander the Great's army was camped there when on its way to India. This is the local tradition, but in these countries Alexander, or, as he is styled, Iskender, comes into every story connected with ruins of remote antiquity. A moullah, a brother of Makdum Kuli Khan, who was explaining to me the local traditiona history of the place, informed me that Alexander had foretold the destruction of Merv, and that he was a great *pihamber* (prophet). I ventured to express a doubt as to whether the Macedonian soldier had ever been endued with the gifts attributed to him by my informant, whereupon he flew into a violent rage, saying that it was easy to see that I was a giaour, and unacquainted with the truth of things in general, as it was well known that Iskender was a *great pihamber*, and scarcely second to Suleiman-ibn-Daoud himself. Of course I pleaded the ignorance of a Ferenghi on

such matters in extenuation of my doubts, and said no more upon the subject.

After having examined the old entrenchments, we turned southwards, and approached the northern side of the ancient city of Sultan Sanjar. This is a great quadrangular enclosure, measuring about six hundred yards on each side, and surrounded by a well-preserved wall with numerous flanking towers, a *fausse braye*, or lower secondary exterior rampart, as at Meshed, being added. This town is said to have been destroyed by the son of Zenghis Khan, Tului, about the year 1221. It must, however, have been occupied at a later period—at least, the fortified walls—for in the flanking towers at the corners and gates are artillery embrasures. It is provided with four gates, each well defended by massive towers of baked brick, a material which also enters largely into the circuit of the walls, especially their lower portions. With the exception of the mausoleum of the Sultan himself, standing exactly in the centre, at the point where the two great causeways running respectively north and south and east and west cross each other, of all the buildings that once stood within the walls there is not now one brick remaining upon another. One is puzzled to imagine how such thorough and complete ruin could have been worked, and still more mystified by the occurrence, in close vicinity to each other, of pits of from four to five feet deep, dug all over the surface. I was told that these pits were made by treasure-seekers, a caravan scarcely ever passing by the place without many of its members trying their fortune by digging these holes, in hopes that they might perchance stumble upon a pot of gold or jewels. That quantities of ancient money and vessels of precious metal had been found here from time to time, Yussuf Khan assured me. The entire destruction of the foundation, and the upsetting and scattering of the material, is probably due to

this continued digging. Moreover, the materials of the houses have evidently been transported from the spot, and made use of in the construction of the later city close by—Bairam Ali. The Easterns appear to have a superstitious dislike to rebuilding upon the site of a former town. In the older city, Giaour Kala, there are only fragments of brick and pottery scattered over the surface, the great mass of the building material having, I believe, been made use of to construct the city which succeeded it, Sultan Sanjar. In like manner, when the last-named city was destroyed, the material was utilized for the erection of the most modern city. In Bairam Ali the buildings still extant can be seen, as well as the materials of the others, scattered about in great quantities, for, no other town having been built in the locality at a later period, the *débris* of the former one was not removed.

The tomb of Sultan Sanjar is a place of pilgrimage, and no Turcoman ever passes this spot without paying homage to the sanctity of the departed potentate. The tomb itself is of commanding size. It cannot be less than sixty feet to the summit of its cupola. Its form is very similar to that of Ferdusi's tomb at Toos, but it bears traces of having been still more elaborately ornamented. Its greatest diameter is at least forty feet. Its ground plan was that of a square, with the corners flattened; within, the walls still preserve a large portion of the stucco and white plaster with which they were formerly coated, and on which still remain, in many places, blue and red arabesques upon a white ground. The doorway is on the western side, and the floor seems to have been excavated, probably for the purpose of removing the pavement, so that one enters by an inclined plane, leading downwards, and can plainly see that the present floor is at least six feet below the level of the original one. In the centre stands the tomb, about

the size and dimensions of those of the *Sahaba bouridal*, not far off. It was doubtless originally of stone. Now it is of plastered loam, or the original, at least, is covered with that substance. My companions drew up in line in front of this, and went through the same ceremony as at the tomb of the holy man at the caravanserai. As before, I looked on, taking no part in the ceremonial. Then we mounted again, and rode away along the causeway leading to the southern gate. Here, on the right-hand side, and a hundred and fifty yards from the cupolaed mausoleum, are two very large piles of broken brick and tile. These, I was informed, were the graves of the 'enemies' of Sultan Sanjar; who or what these enemies were, no one could give me the least idea. The group of horsemen halted about fifty yards short of the heaps, and then each dashed by at full speed, discharging his musket at one or other of them. Those who happened not to have their pieces loaded rode up, dismounted, seized a fragment of brick, and hurled it furiously against the pile, uttering curses and maledictions upon the Sultan's enemies. This was extremely ludicrous, as none of the enthusiasts had the smallest notion as to who the dead people were, or what they had done to Sultan Sanjar. It helped to show me how blindly these illiterate Orientals are led by anything in the shape of a religious tradition. Even on this occasion I refrained from indulging in an outburst of religious sentiment, much to the disgust of the remainder of the party.

Issuing from the southern gate, we entered into a very shallow valley, which separates the ruins we were leaving from those of Bairam Ali, which lie due south, and about five hundred yards distant. This shallow valley, after clearing Sultan Sanjar, turns sharply to the south, intervening between the latter town and Giaour Kala. Taking

advantage of this depression, some of the Vekil Turcomans had led a slender thread of water in this direction from the easterly branch of the Novur canal. The water had been brought opposite the north-western angle of Bairam Ali, and half-a-dozen men were trying to lead it still further by cutting a very deep trench. At this point some scanty melon beds were being attended to, as the fruit can be sold at a great profit at this, the last station on the Merv line to Bokhara. On the southern bank of this irrigation trench are three Imam Zadés. The more easterly two are small covered structures of unbaked brick with rough, loam-plastered tombs within them. Here my indefatigably pious comrades again dismounted, and before each of the tombs again offered their vows. These two sepulchral edifices bear the name of the Imamlar. One hundred yards westward was a small enclosure, having in one corner a roofed chamber. This was the tomb of a person of sanctity named Pehlvan Ahmet Tabanji. Both he and the other two individuals are described by the general name of 'the Sheiks,' this being, as I have said, understood to imply a religious and holy personage. The latter celebrity seems to have been very distinguished indeed for piety, for his tomb is literally covered with souvenirs of all kinds, brought from afar by pilgrims. There were morsels of marble and earth from Mecca, and, among others, was a very droll offering. It was a marble cannon-shot, over twelve inches in diameter, and by some accident had been broken in two. The energetic piety of a pilgrim had caused it to be conveyed all the way from Mecca to the heart of the Merv desert.

Around and between the ruined cities, and reaching far and wide to the north and east, were blank aridness and desolation; save the usual desert shrubs, the chiratan and tamarisk, nothing in the nature of verdure was to be seen.

By this time the sun was getting low, and as I was heartily tired of dismounting whenever my comrades took it into their heads to go praying and walking round these tombs, I was glad when we turned our horses' heads westward, and made our way towards Makdum Kuli's house. As on our homeward journey we reached the belt of dilapidated gardens and tumble-down houses which intervenes at a short distance between the cities of the plain and the Yekil settlements, I could perceive the vast extent of the ground formerly built upon, for the suburbs of the walled towns cover a much greater space than the towns themselves. I climbed to the summit of a ruined building, half dwelling-house, half fortalice, whence a commanding view was obtained over the crumbling expanse of cities. A feeling of oppressive loneliness comes over the spirit as the eye ranges across that voiceless wilderness, so deserted, so desolate, yet teeming with eloquent testimonies of what it had been of old. The heart of Zenghis Khan himself would feel exultant at the absolute, hopeless lifelessness of those sites, where great cities had stood and myriad populations swarmed. Even vegetable life is absent; and the sun, elsewhere the source of life and plenty, here looks down but to scorch and wither; its light, which discloses the thousand beauties of less stricken lands, here shines only to emphasize the hideous barrenness of the wasted solitude. It was strange to think that a few yards of dam upon the Murgab, some trenches dug by illiterate toilers, had once made these present deserts vernal, and had entitled this Golgotha of cities to the proud name of Queen of the World. Who knows but that, again, when the hand of the raider has been stayed, and the merchant is once more permitted to follow his avocations in peace and security along these formerly frequented tracks, history will repeat itself, and Merv once more take its place among the nations of the earth?

CHAPTER XLV.

A DAY WITH MAKDUM KULI KHAN.

Amusements along the way—Rude sport—Mock forays—Vicious amusement—Prayer by the roadside—Makdum Kuli's clansmen Tokmé Serdar in a *Sanduk*—Yussuf Khan's dwelling—Turcoman reception—Conversation—Noor Berdi Khan's widow—Female costume and ornaments—An evening meal—Dislike to whistling—Hungry attendants—Turcoman appetite—Antique bronze lamp—Turcoman *chiraghs*—Sand flies—Early dawn—A private conversation—Presents and *haram zadés*—Deceit—Redress in case of murder—*Moomia*—Stones from *doornah*—*Gougenasse* and *preusské*—Snakes at Marma Khan Tepé—Supper with the Karaoul-bashi—Back to Kouchid Khan Kala.

RETURNING from my visit to the ruined cities of the plain, I had a good opportunity of seeing how Turcomans amuse themselves when abroad. The ground over which we were riding, owing to deep trenches, slippery mud, and occasional deep flooding, required all the horseman's vigilance to keep himself and his beast from coming to grief; but it was only over such spaces, disagreeable as they were, that I had any peace or quietness. The moment anything like firm ground was reached, some one of the party suddenly uttered a wild whoop, and put his horse to the top of its speed. All the others were, it seems, bound in honour to follow suit, myself among the number, and then a scene of wild, headlong racing commenced, varied by different performances. Each person was expected to unsling his rifle, and, going at full speed, to take deliberate aim at some object and fire. Then re-slinging his piece, he would draw his sword, and, racing up to the person next him, exchange passes and flourishes. This was all very well on unbroken ground, but the sudden

occurrence of a deep trench or mud hole became a serious matter while one was engaged in displaying his martial accomplishments, his horse going at the rate of twenty miles an hour; and, as it was sore against my will that I engaged in such antics, it was with unfeigned satisfaction that I witnessed occasional catastrophes in the shape of some gallant Khan—horse, armament and all—coming down with a crash in attempting to clear an unusually wide mud patch, and getting up the reverse of pleased with himself. But these people take a pride in showing their stoicism, like North American Indians; and the man who had come to grief was the first to initiate a fresh stampede. A great source of amusement was to charge full speed at a party of villagers returning on foot from some market, with their asses laden with goods, and send men, women, and asses flying right and left, often dashing some of them to the earth. As the parties thus assaulted were invariably armed, I had fears of the consequences; but we went at such a speed that, before the victims could pick themselves up and unsling their guns, we were far beyond the chance of being hit. We entered each *aoull* in the same style, sending goats and sheep flying, women and children madly rushing to the first place of refuge, under the belief that we were a party of Ersari raiders executing a foray, for this is exactly the way in which an *aleman* is carried out. The raiders approach quietly; but when within 'a measurable distance' of the village they are bent on plundering, they put their horses to the top of their speed, and, sword in hand, dash like lightning into the place, cutting down everyone before he can run to his house for arms. Then, seizing on everything moveable, including children, they are away again before resistance can be organised. Entering one village in this fashion, a group of old men were seen talking together in the middle thoroughfare. The brother of Makdum Kuli

Khan charged them at racing speed. The old men, fully believing that we were Ersari horsemen, rushed right and left. There was one who couldn't get out of the way quickly enough. The rider, a moullah or priest to boot, directed his steed straight at him and dashed him senseless to the ground. I was obliged to keep with the rest of the party, for if I held back I ran imminent danger of being massacred by the enraged villagers when I came up. As long as no actual harm was done beyond scaring the villagers, and as I saw it was one of the customs of the country, I didn't mind these simulated forays, but, after the incidents referred to, my face wore such a grave expression of disapproval that Makdum Kuli himself felt called upon to say something. Riding to my side, he asked me whether in Frangistan we did such things. I replied rather curtly that we did not, and relapsed into silence. After this the Khan forbade such exhibitions during the remainder of the ride. One can scarce understand treating even one's enemies in this fruitlessly reckless fashion; and yet the aggrieved people were not only Turcomans, but even fellow-tribesmen of the aggressors. I have never been actually in the midst of a real Turcoman foray; but from what I have seen of the fashion in which friends are treated, I can imagine the scenes which take place when real mischief is intended.

It was sunset as we drew near Makdum Kuli Khan's present residence; for it was not his permanent abode. Within three or four hundred yards of the place my companions all dismounted, and, leaving their horses to the care of one of their number, went through the rather lengthy prayers which all Mussulmans repeat at the close of day. Having washed their hands and faces in a neighbouring irrigation trench, they retired into a small grove of fruit trees hard by, and then went on with their orisons without removing either their sabres or their riding-boots.

Were they at home, the invariable custom is to wash feet, as well as hands, before prayer, as well as to undo the sword-belt; but the exigencies of the desert require that, when abroad, no man disarm himself for a moment, or in any way make himself unfit for instant combat.

Makdum Kuli lived with his younger brother Yussuf Khan, pending deciding what to do and where to settle for himself. He had still a large following of Akhal Tekké families, who had clung to his fortunes with a praiseworthy fidelity, and refused all offers on the part of the Russians to return to their former abodes. Still, as I have already stated, very considerable numbers—the great majority, in fact—had closed with the Russian terms, and become Russian subjects; so much so that the Mervli already classed them among their enemies, and reckoned that in case of war with Russia they would have to deal with their former allies, the Akhal Tekkés, as enemies in the field. The semblance of friendship was still kept up between them, and the people of Yengi Sheher were still allowed to visit Merv; but, for that matter, so were the Awlili Turcomans, and even the Derguezli. Great indignation was felt here at the part which Tokmé Serdar, the celebrated defender of Geok Tepe, had played. Nothing could exceed the indignation of his former associates who had fled hither to preserve their independence, when they heard that he had voluntarily gone to St. Petersburg and offered his sword to the Emperor, with vows of eternal fidelity. On these same vows, by the way, I did not set much value. By this time I knew the Turcomans too well to make such a mistake. I was very much amused by the description given me by some Akhal Tekkés of the Serdar's departure for Russia. It seems that my informants accompanied him up to the point where the trans-Caspian Railway was in working order. 'They shut Tokmé Serdar and two others in a large box (*sanduk*) and

locked him in, and then dragged him away across the Sahara. And,' added the speakers, 'Allah only knows what will happen to them inside that box.' The box, I need hardly say, was a railway carriage. To return to Makdum Kuli Khan. He was looked upon as quite an outsider at Merv, and took no part in the *medjlis* or Executive Council of Merv. His younger brother, Yussuf Khan, however, was considered a Merv Khan, his lands and clansmen never having existed beyond the Merv boundary.

Yussuf Khan's house—or rather his establishment, for he had several houses—is to a considerable extent a departure from that of the ordinary Turcoman Khan. There was a pretty extensive grove of trees—mostly fruit trees of one kind or another, the *jujube*, with whity-green foliage like that of the olive, figuring largely amidst the darker tints of the apricot and pomegranate. In the midst of this grove was a large open space, where were the immediate dwellings of the chief's family. There was a massive-looking square tower about twenty-five feet wide by thirty-five in height. It was built of unbaked brick, plastered over with fine ochre-tinted loam. A low doorway, closed by a rudely-carved wooden door, gave access to the ground floor, a large room lighted by four narrow loopholes, and paved with flat bricks from the neighbouring ruins of Bairam Ali. In somewhat less fiercely sunny weather than then obtained this quadrangular grotto would doubtless be cool enough. After a day's absorption of heat by the entire building, on coming into it from riding in the evening breeze one feels as if he had stepped into an oven. The place was for the moment uninhabitable. A rude flight of stairs on the outside of the building led to the upper storey, which was ventilated by four large windows besides the door. Here the breeze had free access, and the temperature was delightful. The terrace above, surrounded by a low embattled

parapet, was only used for sleeping on at night. In the square space around the tower were ranged half-a-dozen of the usual beehive-shaped huts, and a couple of long raw-brick buildings—the latter serving as stables. The two Khans dwelt in huts, a Turcoman as a rule having a strong objection to live in any other kind of residence. The tower is only added as an adjunct of state, and as quarters for visitors who know no better than to dwell in such an un-nomadic dwelling. The Khans had ridden on before, and, as I dismounted at the entrance to the dwelling, came forward to receive me. They were dressed in the usual Turcoman robes of the upper class—a long tunic of coarse crimson silk reaching nearly to the ankle and with a narrow combined stripe of black and yellow. This was girt at the waist, rather high up, with a voluminous white sash of cotton, in the front knot of which was stuck a highly decorated sheathed knife, a foot long; wide pantaloons of white cotton, red leather slippers, and an enormous grenadier hat of black sheepskin, completed the attire. I wore the same costume myself, for my Western garb had become unpresentable through long travel; and, besides, I wished to avoid the crowds which pressed around to see my Ferenghi costume each time I showed myself abroad. The Khans came forward in the politest manner, surrounded by a crowd of retainers. On such occasions the proper thing is to walk with a slow, pensive step, the palm of one hand laid upon the back of the other, and with a dejected expression of countenance, such as a man might wear if he had woeful intelligence to impart. All this is meant to convey intense humility, and the idea of being the humble servant of the new comer. The host suddenly thrusts out both hands towards him, he following suit, each taking one hand of the other in his two. Then follows a series of minute inquiries after our relative healths, and as to whether there

is any fresh news going, as if we had not seen one another for six months or more. We took our seats upon a raised earthen platform, such as is to be found alongside the door of every person of consideration, and where he sits during the evening hours with his friends. It is surprising what a difference this elevation of a couple of feet makes in the temperature of the breeze. The layer of air in immediate contact with the earth, still heated by the sun's rays, is as hot as if it passed through a furnace; while a little higher up it is cool and refreshing. As for the conversation of the select party with which I found myself, it was like that of most Turcomans, distressingly inane. I tried to turn its current towards the subject of the old ruins we had visited during the day; but I could elicit little more than a parcel of the most uningenious tales about gins and divs and *pihambers*, or prophets who had stuck their thumbs in the ground and made water spring from the desert, or who had driven the Giaours from their stronghold by a puff of their breath. I was becoming fairly distressed in mind, when a matronly woman came forward and announced that dinner was ready. The matron was the widow—one of them—of the late Noor Berdi Khan, of Yengi Sheher and Merv. Her name was Gul Djemal (the Beautiful Flower). She wore a long shirt of dark purple silk, reaching almost to the ankles, and closely fastened at the neck by a massive silver arrow. Around her neck was a ponderous collar resembling that of a Newfoundland dog, and from it, suspended by numerous chains, was an engraved plate chased with gold arabesques and set with cornelians, not unlike the urim and thummim of a Jewish high-priest. On her wrists were ponderous bracelets, set also with flat cornelians. The breast and stomach of the shirt were so set over with closely-hung large silver coins as to give her the appearance of wearing a cuirass of silver scales. On her head was a

casque of open silver work, showing the red cloth beneath, and surmounted by a spike like that of a German soldier's helmet. Her entire appearance in her silver panoply was Minerva-like in the extreme. This silver casque, which among the westerly Turcomans, such as the Goklans and Jaffar Bais, is worn only by unmarried girls, seems here the head-dress both of maids and matrons. The Yamud women wear a frightful head covering of the size and shape of an ordinary band-box, the front hung over with a multiplicity of gold and silver coins, having attached to the top and falling over the shoulders to the loins a mantle of red, green, or blue cloth. Anything more awkward, more unbecoming, or more generally ungraceful, it would be difficult to imagine. On inquiry I learned that up to thirty or forty years ago the Merv women wore the same kind of abomination, but since their exodus from the neighbourhood of Sarakhs it has been entirely discarded. The Turcoman women seldom put off this finery, the matrons especially doing all their household work in full costume. As we rode up to Yussuf Khan's house we met a lady in a resplendent crimson shirt, and even more than usually decorated, accompanied by her four daughters, all, pitcher at back, going to a neighbouring stream to procure water for the evening.

Makdum Kuli led the way up the precipitous stairs to the *bala-hané* or upper chamber of the tower, where our evening repast was laid out. Nothing could be simpler than this meal. Some brown cake-bread of the coarsest description had been broken up in wooden dishes a couple of feet in diameter, and over it had been poured a quantity of mutton broth, the meat and bones resting on the top. With each dish was a rude wooden spoon, the bowl four inches in diameter, the handle a foot long. This instrument was intended for the broth; one ate the meat and bread with one's fingers, each of the half-dozen persons

around each dish taking the spoon in turns. This is the unvarying manner of eating, even in what may be styled the 'highest society' of Merv. A number of hungry attendants sat cross-legged around, eyeing the bowls with wolf-like eyes, and no doubt inwardly anathematising the extensive appetites that were rapidly lessening their contents, for the remnant of their superiors' repast was all they had to expect. However long I might live amid such surroundings, I could never get accustomed to them, or insensible to the wolf-like eyes of the attendants; and often on similar occasions, I have given over eating before my hunger was half appeased, lest I might have too heavy a weight of maledictions to carry; for the greater part were sure to be levelled against the unbelieving Giaour who was thus consuming what should more properly find its way into the stomachs of true believers. A Turcoman is ready at all moments to devour any amount of food, of any description, which may be placed before him. He seems never thoroughly satisfied even with the heaviest meal, and in five minutes more is ready to face the biggest dish of *pilaff* or broth that can be put before him. The appetites of Turcomans seem really phenomenal. Supper cleared away, we sat in the gloaming looking out over the dimly-lit plain, listening to the lowing and bleating of the homeward-driven flocks and herds as they entered the various walled enclosures where they were placed for safety during the night. A curious Turcoman superstition here came under my notice. As, lost in reverie, I sat by the window half unconsciously I commenced whistling softly some snatches of tunes. I noticed a general movement of dissatisfaction among my companions. They shifted in their seats, looked uneasily at each other and at me. At length Makdum Kuli touched me on the shoulder and said, 'For God's sake, Sahib, don't whistle any more.' I feared that I had

unwittingly committed some great breach of decorum, and accordingly, excusing myself, relapsed into silence. After a while I whispered to the moullah beside me, and asked why Makdum Kuli objected to my whistling. 'Is it possible you don't know,' returned the priest, 'that at this hour the ghouls and gins are abroad and are wandering to and fro? If they hear you whistle they will suppose you are calling them; and, Bismillah, we have no desire for their company.' I afterwards learned that to whistle in the daytime is a token of defiance, and not considered proper when others are by. A primitive lamp, excavated from among the ruins hard by, was brought in, and shed a flickering smoky light over the swarth countenances of the group within the chamber. The form of this lamp struck me; and, on examining it, I discovered that its material was white bronze. It was doubtless a relic of the earlier days of Merv. Our host, Yussuf Kkan, informed me that it had been found while excavating some irrigation trenches in the vicinity of the old cities. Seeing that I was greatly interested in it, he generously presented it to me. It is about four inches in height, and of the form of the ordinary antique lamps sometimes found in Greek and Roman sepulchres, save that the neck between the cup and the stand is taller than usual. The side of the spout had been damaged, and the resulting holes soldered up with pure gold; the composition of the original material being at the time apparently unknown. A portion of the margin of the stand had been melted off, probably during some conflagration, and replaced with iron rudely rivetted on. The handle had disappeared, but two small protuberances marking its position remained. The opening in the top was closed by a rude iron cover, the hinge of which worked in the original old bronze sockets. It had probably been added at a comparatively late period. Around the top of the lamp is a series

of straight and curved scratches—whether attempts at decoration or inscription, I am unable to say. Among the Vekil Turcomans, earthen lamps of the old Greek form are frequently met with in daily use. In all likelihood they are obtained from the neighbouring ruins. Among the Turcomans generally, one sees quite a different form of lamp (*chiragh*), an iron rod, a third of an inch in thickness, two to three feet in length, and sharply pointed at its lower extremity. It branches at its upper end into four, supporting a rude, shallow iron cup, of about four inches square, the corners of which project in the form of short spouts, and serve to hold one or more wicks of crude cotton. The flame is fed with oil or melted fat. The pointed extremity of the support is stuck in the earth of the floor. The Yamuds of the Caspian littoral, who can obtain petroleum refuse (*astatki*), use an earthen lamp with long tubular spout, such as I have described under the head of Gumush Tepé.

Looking around the figures that squatted within the rude room, their arms piled or hung against the earthen wall, I could not help thinking what some of my friends at home would think could they but see me sitting among the *crême de la crême* of the prime brigands of Central Asia, far, far away from the remotest chance of succour, unknowing how long my detention there might last, and entirely dependent on myself as far as my ultimate fate was concerned. With the lamp came myriads of those pests of this country, the *chivin* or sand-fly, which makes night for all but the natives of the place a time of groaning and swearing. How I envied my companions as, having divested themselves of their tremendous hats and lengthy tunics, they stretched their limbs on the felt matting and went soundly to sleep. After a weary vigil I had the questionable advantage of seeing the faint saffron morning come up palely, throwing the cupola of Sultan Sanjar into

bold black relief, as the sable ibises, swans, and other aquatic birds fled with shrill cries across the flooded fields. Apart from the natural irritation caused by the loss of a night's rest after a pretty fatiguing day's ride, the recollection of an undertone conversation I had overheard among my companions of the previous evening as they disposed themselves to rest was not calculated to put me in good humour. Makdum Kuli had gone downstairs to his own wigwam, and I was left alone with my route companions. The speakers were the Khan of the Otamish division of the Tekkés, and a miserable *khodja*, or scribe, to whom I had lent one of my horses to enable him to come with us. He was a constant guest at my house, and the recipient of numerous 'presents' in cash, in return for his literary services. Said the Khan, 'Did you see the Ingles sahib to-day when we were praying at the tombs of the Sheiks? He was leaning on his sword and looking on as if he didn't care anything about us or our prayers.' 'After all, he is only a kafir' (unbeliever), said the scribe half apologetically. 'What are we to do to-morrow?' replied the Khan; 'we can't stop here any longer, we have received our three days' hospitality.' 'But,' said the scribe, who was evidently hungering after the unwonted meals which Makdum Kuli's flesh-pots afforded, 'you know that a Mussulman has a right to *nine* days' hospitality.' 'Yes,' returned the Khan warmly, 'Mussulmans—yes, but a kafir like that!' and he intimated me with a movement of his head, 'a *Yaman kafir* (wicked unbeliever) like that, we couldn't share hospitality with him for more than three days.' This was peculiarly good, in view of the fact that the reception by Makdum Kuli was altogether given in my honour, inasmuch as I had sent him presents when he was fighting at Geok Tepé, coupled with a request to be allowed to come and look on, and had also given him some of no small value since my arrival at Merv. He would

have seen the other Khan and his followers at Jericho before he would have killed a sheep worth ten shillings to entertain them, as they treated him as an intruder at Merv. All the foregoing was spoken *sotto voce*, and in the belief that I was asleep. Then the Khan added, with a good deal of bitterness, 'He gives presents to *haram-zadés* (scoundrels, good-for-noughts), but he gives nothing to Khans.' 'Yes,' returned the scribe, to whom I *had* made presents, 'it is only to such people he gives anything.' The recollection of this conversation, as may be imagined, did not amuse me as I sat looking out into the coming da . I recollected that if a man were shot, no one, save his wife or eldest male relative, had a right to claim justice. The worst of it is, that these people will next day be as pleasant and obsequious, in expectation of a 'present,' as if they never entertained any but the kindest and brightest thoughts about you. We were early astir; but Makdum Kuli would not let us go without another meal from the wooden bowls, washed down by green tea.

While we were on our horses at the gate taking our final pull at the water-pipe which was handed round as a valedictory ceremony, a number of men, old and young, gathered round us to hear what news was going, and to ask the usual absurd questions about things in general. A cousin of Makdum Kuli, who had lately been despatched to Askabad as a *jansus*, or spy, and who had been severely wounded in the right hand by a rifle bullet during the storming of Geok Tepé, wanted to know if I could give him any *moomia* to apply to the injury. This *moomia* I was for a long time at a loss to make out. I subsequently learned that it is bitumen. The Turcomans look upon it as a kind of panacea. They apply it to wounds, and take it internally, an infinitesimal portion being swallowed as a cure for nervousness, and a larger amount in cases of fever. It is

to be found, I was informed, in the mountains of the Derguez, usually in inaccessible places, whence the nodules of it are dislodged by firing bullets at them. Matthi, the Jew trader at Kouchid Khan Kala, asked as much as two francs for a piece of *moomia* less than the eighth of an ounce in weight. When Makdum Kuli's cousin had done speaking, an old man came up to me to ask whether some minute objects he held in his hand were valuable. On examination they turned out to be small pieces of semi-transparent quartz, looking as if water-worn. Their owner informed me he had taken them from the gizzard of a *doornah* or stork. As there are absolutely no stones of any kind in the Merv oasis, even the smallest fragment of a material like quartz which is picked up, as in the present instance, is supposed to be something very much out of the common, and of exceeding worth. Just before turning our horses' heads from the door, some of our party drew from their pockets small pear-shaped gourds, from which they poured into the hollow of their hands a quantity of an olive-green, damp-looking powder, which they placed under their tongues, allowing it to remain there during the remainder of the journey, much in the same fashion as tobacco chewers do. This powder is named *gougenasse*. It is of vegetable origin, but what its European or scientific name is I have been unable to ascertain. *Preusské*, or ordinary tobacco snuff, is sometimes put in the mouth in the same way.

Our course lay due west, towards the large mound known as Geok Tepé, and which is an excellent landmark for caravans traversing the plain. It is distant about six miles from Makdum Kuli's village, and some thirteen from the more easterly of the ruined cities, Giaour Kala. Right and left of our route, which lay through well-tilled fields, were numerous wooded villages, though in this easterly

portion of Merv trees are by no means so frequent as they are westward. Geok Tepé is situated close to the western bank of the main easterly branch of the Novur canal, which throws out numerous irrigation trenches, some serving to water the fields bordering on Bairam Ali. To judge from the great depth to which it has excavated its bed, I should say it was coeval with the mound close by. There are numerous vast patches of giant reed in the hollows along its channel, and dozens of rude turbine mills are to be seen in groups. Leaving Geok Tepé, we took a more or less south-westerly direction towards the large mound named Marma Khan Tepé, lying nearly in a right line between Geok Tepé and Kouchid Khan Kala. Around Marma Khan Tepé is a waste space of arid earth, bearing a few scraggy shrubs, and strewn over with brick fragments, indicating the site of a former town, of which now but a few wall foundations remain. This space was alive with snakes a couple of feet long, of a leaden-grey colour mottled with black, and extremely slender for one-third of their length immediately below the head. We spent half an hour hunting these up and killing them with our whips, in consonance with the invariable Turcoman custom. Within half-an-hour's ride of the north-easterly ramparts of Kouchid Khan Kala we stopped at the house of Kara Khan, the Karaoul-bashi, an officer charged with the direction of the patrols told off to look after the Ersari raiders on this side of the Murgab. Here we had some fermented whey of camels' milk, a very peculiar beverage, and very refreshing, in hot weather. Then crossing the entire breadth of the new fortress, the interior of which was covered with luxuriant corn and melon crops, the vivid green of which contrasts strongly with the scorched yellowish-brown of the surrounding ramparts, we reached our circular huts at the 'capital' about an hour after sunset.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE TRIUMVIRATE.

Preliminaries—Conjunction of circumstances—A false position—Insinuations—Roused from sleep—The entry of the Khans—A thaumasha—Baba Khan's cavalcade—Red and white standard—State etiquette—Aman Niaz Khan's procession—An uncommon spectacle—Artillery salutes—Ceremonial water-pipe—My crimson banner—Allegiance to England—Oriental diplomacy—Inauguration ring—A political harangue—Message to England—The policy of the future—Yaghmour Khan's protest—Kidaieff, the Russian prisoner—The question of Baghur Khan—Possibilities—Festivities—Toktamish and Otamish flags—Addition to the population—Public games—Mutual presents—Merv and Akhal Tekké embroidery—Money disbursements—Public crier and poets—'Dower, dower, Sahib Khan!'—Celebrated thieves—Arrack—A meritorious Serdar—An unexpected concert—My *takht*—Insatiable appetite—A Bacchanalian finale and exit.

During my absence at the old cities of Merv, the revolution, the commencement of which I have already described, had been growing daily more complete. Though Kadjar Khan was practically no longer the director of affairs at Merv, the fact had not been publicly announced, and it was resolved that a demonstration should take place, which, by manifesting the number of adherents of each party, would leave the matter no longer in question.

On May 14, 1881, my house was all day long, and far into the night, filled with various Turcomans of prominence, who talked over the political prospects, and the chances *pro* and *con.* of having to fight the Russians. I learned definitively that each of the two hereditary Khans had resumed his old jurisdiction over his respective division of the Tekkés, and on the morrow would come to take up his residence

close by where my *ev* was pitched—the spot which had been settled upon as the administrative centre of the oasis. I was further told that I was to be associated with the two Khans in the direction of affairs, in the capacity of representative of the English nation, and intermediary between the Mervli and the English Padishah. I had over and over again protested that I had no pretensions to represent the British Government, and that my mission to Merv was undertaken purely with a view of ascertaining the true state of affairs, and keeping the British public informed as to the relative positions of Russians and Tekkés. All my efforts were in vain. It seemed to be a matter of perfect indifference to them whether I were or were not a representative man, so long as they chose to confer such a distinction upon me. One of the circumstances which helped to defeat all my attempts at disowning the official status which was thrust upon me was that my arrival at Merv had been exactly synchronous with the cessation of the Russian advance along the Akhal Tekké oasis; and, on the principle of *post hoc ergo propter*, the chiefs of Merv persuaded themselves that I must have something to do with this happy event, if I were not indeed the direct cause of it, and viewed me in the light of a small saviour in my way. At any rate, finding that my assertions in regard to my non-official position were useless, and feeling that I had protested to the utmost of my ability, I began to perceive that by passively accepting the situation I might doubtless have greater facilities for the investigations which were the object of my journey, and, subsequently, for leaving the oasis with greater ease and safety than could otherwise be the case.

Kadjar Khan had not been to see me since the last evening on which he had remained all night at my house, but his sons, and some of his adherents, paid me frequent

visits, trying to impress me with the idea that those who were overthrowing Kadjar did so with a view to the more effectually handing over the Mervli to Russia or to Persia.

It was early on the morning of May 15, as I slept profoundly upon my felt mat after a night's weary wrestling with the mosquitoes—the interregnum between the departure of these pests and the arrival of their daylight successors the *singak*, or house-fly, and the only portion of the twenty-four hours during which I was ever able to secure any rest whatever—I heard an unusual tumult around, and, not knowing what might be the matter, I sprang from my couch, and throwing my sheepskin *kusgun* around my shoulders, rushed to the door. Everyone was astir, and the main avenue of Merv was thronged with a vast concourse of people, mostly newcomers. Many were on horseback, and fully armed. At my door I found the attendants who had been told off for the service of my establishment, the chief of whom was named Mehemet Nefess Beg, a Kethkoda of some prominence. I asked him what was the matter. He informed me that the two hereditary Khans were making their entry into the capital, and that they were about to take up their abodes close to my redoubt.

Away towards the western end of the ramparts of Kouchid Khan Kala a large crowd of horsemen was seen approaching. In their midst, borne on a high pole, fluttered a red and white standard. In front, and on either side, armed horsemen dashed to and fro, their sabres gleaming in the early morning light, some of them, careering at full speed, rapidly discharging their muskets. A genuine 'gathering of the clans' seemed in progress. A *thaumasha*, or *fantasia*, as it would be called by the Algerian Arabs, was being gone through in celebration of the events transpiring. As the body of men, numbering four or five hundred, drew near, those gathered together in Merv, both

mounted and on foot, moved out to meet them. When within a hundred yards, I could make out that at the head of the approaching cavalcade rode Baba Khan himself, and that it was at his side that the red and white ensign was carried. Around him were his kinsmen and Kethkodas, all decked out for the occasion in their finest costumes. Many of his followers bore lances—an arm which has now almost disappeared from among the Turcomans, and which is only carried on state occasions, and then rather for show than anything else. Most of them were decorated with banderols of the same colours as the Khan's standard.

Mehemet Nefess now hinted to me that it would be only courteous on my part to go forward to meet Baba Khan, and, as I knew this to be the proper etiquette, I followed his advice. When within fifty yards of the front of the advancing cavalcade I dismounted, and awaited the approach of the Toktamish chief. As soon as I appeared outside the parapet of my redoubt, I was surrounded by a great mob of the inhabitants of Merv, all eager to catch a sight of one of the rulers of the place in his new capacity. Surrounded by the crowd of sight-seers as I was, Baba quickly espied me, and immediately, in pursuance of Oriental courtesy, dismounted, and advanced on foot to salute me. Holding each other's hands, we advanced slowly to a space, near the parapet of my redoubt, on which a large felt carpet had been spread, and where the *medjlis* of Merv had already assembled.

It was a singular spectacle. The morning light fell slantingly on the circle of grenadier-hatted, swarthy councillors who awaited the approach of the cavalcade, with its gaily attired warriors, glinting bannerets, and flashing sabres, headed by Baba Khan and myself, our hands joined in friendship. At the same moment, from the opposite direction, clouds of dust announced the approach of another

procession. Aman Niaz Khan was drawing near, surrounded by a retinue similar to that of Baba Khan. The latter chief and myself, accompanied by the principal elders, went forward to meet the ruler of the Otamish. The latter dismounted some distance from the assembly, and we all three marched solemnly towards the carpet of honour laid at one extremity of the great felt mats placed for the accommodation of the councillors. Aman Niaz also brought with him a standard, but of plain white, which, together with Baba Khan's, was reared close to the spot upon which we took our seats, and around which the entire council gathered, backed by an enormous crowd, hemming us in on all sides. The cannon boomed from the ramparts, where some had been placed expressly for the occasion; and for the next few minutes reports succeeded each other in quick succession, to usher in the new order of things. Neither Kadjar Khan nor his partisans attended the council, protesting by their absence against the revolution, the consummation of which was being celebrated. The discharge of artillery continued long into the afternoon, sometimes from the fortifications, and at other times from an open space some three hundred yards distant from us. The courtesies usual on such occasions were exchanged, and then the most gorgeous water-pipe which had come under my notice while at Merv was handed round. At Merv, that portion which in the Constantinople *nargheelah* is made of glass, is invariably fashioned of wood, if it be not a bottle-shaped gourd. In the present instance it was of wood, slightly ornamented with silver. On the sides were lozenge-shaped panels, set with rough turquoises, and what I suppose were pieces of green glass, for they would have been of fabulous value if genuine emeralds. The upper portion, bearing the lighted tobacco, was of silver, and richly decorated with small turquoises and rubies. It was, in fact, a pipe of state, only

to be used on such occasions. When this had duly circulated, some desultory conversation took place, fresh members of the council arriving at each moment. After the customary salutations on each occasion, the never-failing query, 'Nemeh khaber var?' (What is the news?) was repeated *ad nauseam*, and very unnecessarily, for each of the questioners was perfectly aware of the affairs of the day.

We remained half an hour thus seated, receiving various newly-arrived elders and chiefs; and, when the entire number had arrived, the two Khans, each taking me by the hand, led me back through the entrance of the redoubt to my residence. Here I found, lashed to the door-post, a tall flagstaff, from the summit of which floated a bright crimson banner of silk, about three feet square, which, I was told, was the emblem of my office as one of the triumvirate, and, as I afterwards discovered, the president of it. It was also supposed to represent the English flag, and the hoisting of it at my door was intended to indicate the formal adhesion of the Merv nation to the British Government, whose envoy they did me the honour to insist that I was.

A large number of rich carpets had been spread upon the ground in front of the door of my *ev*. Upon these myself and the Khans, accompanied by the principal members of the *medjlis*, took our seats, those of lesser grade seating themselves in a circle upon the ground, outside the margin of the carpets.

It was a curious sight that I gazed upon from my door. The Murgab flowed sluggishly by; the huge mass of nearly completed ramparts rose against the morning sky, covered with thousands of spectators, who availed themselves of every coign of vantage to catch a sight of the doings within my redoubt. From moment to moment the guns thundered out, their echoes rolling away across these historic plains,

the snow-white smoke clouds from each gun sailing glidingly in procession through the still air until they were lost to view in the far distance. The crimson flag flapped and fluttered above our heads; and the warriors and chiefs of Merv, in their best and brightest apparel, grouped around, some sitting, some standing, presented a spectacle the theatrical effect of which was only surpassed by its political interest.

The moment had come at which to enter upon business. The ordinary crowd had perforce to remain outside the parapet and ditch of the enclosure, and sentries guarded the two entrances by which access was had to the interior. Eastern diplomacy was notably conspicuous on this occasion. The three chiefs sat in silence, each pretending, through politeness, to await the first word from one of the others, whereas in reality he was only carefully measuring the words he would have to speak when forced to do so, and trying to fathom the thoughts of his associates. There was a certain jealousy and rivalry between the two hereditary Khans. To this, in great part, I owed my association in authority with them, by way of rendering it possible to come to a decision in executive matters. When we had consumed the usual amount of scalding hot green tea, and it appeared to me absurd to sit any longer in silence, I found myself constrained to speak. I asked whether there was any matter of pressing interest to be discussed. Baba Khan nodded to Aman Niaz, and Aman Niaz nodded back to Baba; then the latter, addressing me, said that the council would like to hear something about the actual state of affairs as regarded the Russians and the English Government, and my advice as to the best course to be pursued under the very difficult circumstances which at the moment appeared to him to exist.

Politics, in this part of the world, are to be eschewed as much as possible, but it is difficult for a member of a

governing triumvirate, especially on such a critical occasion, to follow the advice of old diplomats, and 'talk for a long time without saying anything.' Baba Khan reminded me that the people of Merv had now accepted the British Government, and were ready to follow its instructions and commands, and, as I was in communication with that Government, they looked to me for instruction and direction. They were all—himself, the Kethkodas, and the people of Merv—my *naukers*, and I had but to command. Saying this, he took from his finger a singular-looking ring, which he wore as senior Khan, and placed it upon mine. This, I believe, is the form of inauguration, but as I never, before or since, witnessed any such ceremony, I am unable to say whether on that occasion it was specially adopted or not.

The utmost eagerness to hear what I had to say on the foreign and interior policy of Merv now manifested itself throughout the assembly; and it was time for me to begin my oration. I had little to say to them that I had not repeated fifty times to different members of the gathering, but I thought it well that they should hear my ideas repeated once more, that they might all the better appreciate them, and consult together upon them. I reminded them that there was very little use in putting themselves under the protection of England without announcing the same to the English Padishah; that I would do the utmost in my power, so far as I was personally concerned, to make their wishes known to the British public at large. I told them that they need have no fear; but that a certain action upon their own part was also required. It would be necessary to draw up a formal document, stating their intentions and desires; that this document should bear the seals of the Khans and leading members of the *medjlis*; and that it should be forwarded direct to the Vizir Mukhtar

(ambassador) at Teheran for transmission to England. The next question to which I drew their attention was the necessity of warding off all chance of hostility with Russia, and of obviating all possibility of invasion under any pretence. As succinctly as I could, I pointed out the immediate causes which led to the subjugation of the Akhal Tekké tribes; how, in spite of warnings, they continued their raids along the Russian border, and against the caravans passing to and from Khiva; and that swift and condign vengeance had not failed to overtake them. That the same fate awaited the Merv nation, I said, was indubitable, unless there was an entire and immediate cessation of attacks against neighbouring countries. If they wished to be at peace with Russia, they should not make war against her, either publicly as a nation, or privately by individual raids. Neither should they attack Persia or Bokhara. Bokhara was under the protection of the Russian Empire, and the latter was bound to avenge any wrong done to its people. No more Persian subjects should be carried into captivity to be held to ransom. 'You ask alliance with England. Do you think that the English or any other Padishah will unite with thieves, or support them in their action? Neither will they hear of prisoners, subjects of a friendly Power, being held in bondage. If England herself were to act so, all the other Powers of Frangistan would make war upon her.' Here I was interrupted by a member of the assembly who had heard my proposition with angry astonishment, and who asked how in the name of Allah they were going to live if raids were not to be made on one side or the other. This protest was made so energetically, and with such evident good faith, that it was with difficulty that I could retain my gravity as I replied that doubtless in the event of a Russian conquest, the people of Merv would find themselves under the necessity of living without raid-

ing, and that what would be possible then was feasible now. I pointed out how Russia had extinguished the slave markets of Khiva and Bokhara, how the occupation of Merv was thenceforth necessarily gone, and how, from every point of view, reform was not only expedient, but necessary. I spoke of the ruins which I had so recently visited, as standing evidences of what Merv once was—a centre of civilisation, and an emporium of commerce, which by its prosperity had won for itself the title of Queen of the World, 'Merou Shahou Jehan.' I appealed to my listeners to believe that both climate and soil were still the same as of old; that the capabilities of Merv to-day were the same that they were a hundred years ago, and that it depended upon them to revive her departed glories by the adoption of a policy of peace and industry. If they did so, their gains would be far greater than those accruing from a desultory and predatory existence, without the hope of achieving anything beyond a bare sustenance to-day, or the possibility of a dream for the future. I tried to show that were the passage of caravans across the oasis from Samarcand to Bokhara and Khiva unimpeded, the income to be derived from a small and legitimate impost on goods *in transitu* would far exceed the spasmodic and uncertain gains of the brigandism of to-day; that the might of the invincible Ferenghi was due to the adoption of a policy of peace and commerce such as I recommended to them; and I asked for at least a trial of the same methods. Robbery should cease, and all prisoners, whether Russian or otherwise, should immediately be set free and allowed to return to their homes.

Here Yaghmour Khan, the Yassaoul-bashi, grew very indignant, and said that it was a very poor compliment on the part of a Dowlet adam (public personage) like myself to insinuate that the Mervli were robbers. While he

admitted that there were thieves (*ogri*) and bad characters in the place, he denied that the entire people were given to these bad habits.

I went on to say that if the measures I proposed were carried into effect, and the policy I suggested adopted, there was but little doubt that Merv would meet with the support, not only of England, but of every other civilised country, which would not look idly on and see her territory overrun and her people conquered in the interests of mere aggrandisement. I repeated what I had told the members of the privy council, that the Russians had halted for the moment at Askabad, and that, in view of their having done so, the English troops had halted at Kandahar; that for the present they need have no apprehension of an invasion by either army.

When I resumed my seat I had ample assurance that the principles and policy I had set forth were freely accepted by far the great majority of the *medjlis*, who entered with the utmost zest into the idea of carrying out the proposed reforms. It was then and there resolved that two thousand *yassaouls* should be summoned from every part of the oasis, and made to take up their permanent abode at Kouchid Khan Kala, so as to be on the spot to carry out the orders of the executive for the suppression of brigandage, and to see to the safe transit of caravans through their territory. Later on it was agreed to draw up a fixed tariff. Meanwhile, the old regulations for the charges made upon laden camels and other beasts of burden were to hold good—ten krans for a laden camel, and half that amount for a mule or a horse. These dues were to be devoted to the payment and maintenance of the *yassaouls*, any surplus being applied to other pressing executive needs.

I was pleased to find that only one Russian prisoner was detained at Merv, and I made it a *sine quâ non* of my com-

municating with the English Government in their behalf that this man, by name Kidaieff, a young artilleryman, captured seven years previously in some obscure skirmish in Khiva, should be immediately set at liberty. I offered, on my own part, a thousand francs, if they would accede to my proposition, and stipulated that his irons should be removed without delay. The latter request was fully granted, but the release of the prisoner was, for the moment, refused on the ground of private interest. I was, however, allowed to believe that if everything went well, and no Russian advance took place, Kidaieff would be at my disposal. To impress the necessity for releasing him still further upon their minds, I pointed out that his detention might be the direct cause of a resumption of hostilities, for now that the Russians were close by they would not tolerate one of their nation being kept in custody. I told them that when they had been compelled to release him they would probably also, instead of receiving ransom, be obliged to pay a heavy compensation to the captive for the sufferings which he had undergone.

With regard to future relations with the English Padishah, I remarked that nothing whatever could be said or done until they had despatched the document of which I had spoken, and had taken some initiative in the direction of reforming their evil ways. There would then be time enough to formulate their requirements.

The question of Baghur Khan, the Persian envoy, was then discussed. I advised that, under the circumstances, it would be well to have nothing to do with the Persians in the way of making themselves subjects of the Shah, but that in the meantime they should hear what the emissary had to say for himself. I recommended that he be allowed to leave the outlying village, beyond which he had not been allowed to pass, and invited to Kouchid Khan Kala.

At this point a general conversation took place, and the various items which I had brought to their notice were discussed by the council. After another hour the assembly broke up, each member going in search of his evening meal.

Looking back upon the circumstances about which I am writing, and judging by the efforts which I saw the Tekkés making to enter upon a more peaceful path of existence than they had hitherto tried, I believe that if ever so little had been done in the way of tendering them aid, or of sending some duly authorised persons among them, a vast amount of good might have resulted, and it is more than likely that by the establishment of a kind of small Central Asian Switzerland at a point, where so many contending interests meet, a very serious peril might have been averted—not, perhaps, indefinitely, but for a very considerable period.

The remainder of the day and the evening were passed in the kind of rude festivity usual on such occasions. Towards sunset both Aman Niaz and Baba sent me by some of their principal officers the flags which had been carried before them on entering upon their new domiciles. This was in recognition of my position as chief of the triumvirate.

Baba Khan's new residence was pitched within about a hundred and fifty yards east of mine, and Aman Niaz and his followers set up their *ees* about the same distance to the southward. When my house was erected in the middle of the redoubt, the space outside the parapet, for a very considerable distance, was quite unoccupied, and by evening the numerous followers of the two Khans, and some of the *yassaouls*, pitched their huts close to my boundaries, and completely filled the vacant space.

The entire day had been given up to festivity, and

everything was done to impart due solemnity to the events which had transpired, and to the public entry of the triumvirate into office. Rude games of different kinds were set on foot. There were horse-racing and wrestling—the latter being a sport upon which the Tekkés pride themselves very much. Indeed, the title *pehlvan* (wrestler) is one of honour among them. Prizes were offered by the two Khans and myself for the victors in these games. The chiefs exchanged presents. I say 'exchanged' because each one was supposed to give something to his associate, and would have been very offended indeed unless he received something of equal value in return. Baba Khan sent me an extraordinary silken mantle, of pale salmon tint, striped with dark emerald green and crimson, with intermediate groupings of embroidered flowers; and Aman Niaz presented me with a robe similar to the singular one which he himself usually wore, in which all the colours of the rainbow, and especially vermilion, yellow, and purple, were splashed in irregular dashes. With it was a *beurg*, or skull-cap, such as the Tekkés invariably wear under their great sheepskin shakos. It was of cloth, finely embroidered with silk, in yellow and pale purple, with a little admixture of green. Makdum Kuli Khan had on a previous occasion given me another similar cap, and I was able to compare the different patterns of each, which, like the Scottish plaids, distinguish the Merv and Akhal Tekkés from each other. The Merv skull-cap was covered with ornaments in the form of small Saint Andrew's crosses, grouped in rows, while that bearing the Akhal Tekké pattern was decorated with rows of upright ordinary crosses. This is the only difference I have ever been able to distinguish in the colours or patterns of the dresses worn by the two nations.

Aman Niaz, too, sent me a thick cotton stuff quilt, covered with dark red-purple silk, heavily embroidered

with gold and silver; and Murad Bey, the maternal uncle of Makdum Kuli, presented me with a rude four-legged bedstead, with rope netting as a support for the bed, and thick, double-folded felt mattrass. The bedstead was styled a *takht*, and is one of the very few articles of furniture raised above the floor to be met with in Turcoman households.

I was at a loss to know what to give in return, for I was at the end of my selection of presents brought out from Meshed, and all my European goods had long since been given away. To Baba Khan I sent a large prismatic compass, in order that he might properly discover the *keblah* towards which to turn in praying, but, feeling that this was not at all a sufficiently valuable present for the occasion, and that as I had given Kadjar Khan a sum of money, I supplemented the compass with an order on Meshed for twenty-five pounds. To Aman Niaz Khan I forwarded a like gift in money, and to Murad Bey, in return for his *takht*, the sum of fifty krans. All these gifts had to be supplemented by donations to the bearers of the presents to myself, and then we (*i.e.* the members of the triumvirate) had also to do with the public crier, and several poets who recited odes in our honour. The mode of proceeding was for a couple of poets to enter one's *ev*, and, after pronouncing a series of the most fulsome compliments, and drinking some tea, to recite an ode, extempore or composed, I could not make out which, couched in terms the most laudatory possible of their momentary host, one taking up the theme the moment the other had exhausted his stock of verbiage or imagination. I had by me a large bag of silver krans, and when the performance was at an end I gave a handful to each—twelve or fifteen shillings' worth, perhaps—whereupon the public crier, who had taken his stand outside the door, uttered in a voice that could be

heard for fully half a mile, 'Dower! dower! dower! Bahadur Sahib Khan gives so much money to the poets!' The same thing was repeated at all the *evs* of the principal persons at Merv, and without leaving his own house, each one was aware of the gratuities given in each of the others. Of course the crier had also to receive a gratuity, which he duly announced, generally with exaggeratic ıs, in order to show how highly his services had been esteemed.

Following the Tekké custom on such occasions, I had a sheep killed for the entertainment of my own immediate retinue, which by this time had swollen to most alarming proportions, and there was general r joicing within the parapets of my redoubt. I was introduced to celebrated robbers, serdars (generals), as they were called by courtesy —people who had deserved the gallows a hundred times— hook-nosed ruffians, with buff-leather boots, like stage brigands, and who entertained me with stories of their successful raids, and the number of Persians they had made captive and sold in Bokhara and elsewhere. These men, almost without exception, freely drank arrack, as I found to my cost, for mounted messengers were kept constantly plying between my house and the establishment of Matthi the Jew, bringing up the necessary supplies in soda-water bottles. These bottles had made their way into Merv from Bokhara and Khiva, and bore stamped on the glass the names of Russian manufacturers. The arrack, however, was manufactured by the Jew himself in Merv.

An hour after sunset, Aman Niaz Khan, doubtless having learned that arrack was to be found, presented himself, accompanied by his maternal uncle, Nazar Ali Beg, and a small regiment of acolytes. The house, by this time, was as full as it could hold, and some of the persons of lesser rank were obliged to go outside to make room for the newcomers. In his following was a noted raider, his right-hand

man, in fact, a serdar, named Meredh Ali, an exceedingly picturesque-looking vagabond, with a very humorous expression of countenance. The Khan strongly recommended him to me, and told me that he was one of the men most deserving of a 'zat.' This was an unmistakeable hint, and the result was that I handed the serdar two pieces of gold of the value of twenty francs each.

To judge from the expression of the Khan's face, he was evidently keeping some pleasant surprise in reserve, but it was only an hour afterwards, when under the influence of the arrack, and when the entire assembly was becoming boisterously hilarious, that I perceived what was in store for me. Aman Niaz suddenly pulled from under his silk robe a wretched, tawdry-looking, two-and-sixpenny concertina, which he had purchased from Matthi the Jew, who had procured it either from the bazaar at Meshed or from Bokhara. It was made of stamped gilt paper—one of the toys usually given to children. The Khan intended to astonish me with this unwonted marvel. He had not the slightest idea of how it should be played, and sawed away until I felt dazed and stupefied. He seemed to think no explanation or introduction whatever necessary. The thing was too novel, too magnificent, too overpowering, in the eyes of the mass of the auditory, for any prelude to be requisite. The worst of it was that his improvisations had the effect of attracting all the loafers within earshot, who came crowding round the house and crushing through the doorway, their mouths and eyes agape with astonishment at the unwonted and extraordinary scene. I really believe that unless some of the serdars had jumped to their feet and driven off the crowd, the house would have come down over us. The Khan felt himself to be the hero of the moment, and sawed away unceasingly with his concertina, grinning and giggling with exultation. To say that the

others admired him and his instrument would be t· convey but a very slight idea of the feeling which the rapt expression of their countenances indicated while listening to these impromptu performances. When the Khan w· , tired, the vile instrument had to be passed round from on to another, and each one must needs try his skill upon it for fully five minutes.

I had now erected my *takht* at one side of the apartment, and covered it over with the gorgeously embroidered quilt with which Aman Niaz had presented me, and there I sat throughout the night, cross-legged, observing the proceedings from my commanding point, devoutly praying that it would soon come to an end. So long, however, as anything in the shape of eatables and drinkables was going, while arrack or green tea held out, or dishes of cold mutton fat and bread and broth were to the fore, there was no possibility of getting rid of my visitors. Their appetites seemed insatiable. The mass of the Merv population seems to be underfed. With the exception of a few of the superior Khans and Kethkodas, anyone among them will grasp eagerly at the chance of a meal. Intense cupidity is one of the characteristics of the Turcoman nature, and the idea of eating and drinking at the expense of another heightens the desire to gormandise. A stranger who would feed a dozen persons daily is the ideal of the moment, and I found, to my sorrow, that it was not with impunity I had allowed myself to be pitchforked into my elevated position of Ichthyar. A Khan is supposed to keep more or less open house, and all strangers and travellers are entertained at his expense. Persons came in every day, without ceremony, and seating themselves upon my floor, seemed to take it as a matter of course that they should be fed as long as they could swallow a morsel.

The morning had well broken before the festivities

which celebrated my elevation to the dignity of a Merv ruler came to an end; and Aman Niaz Khan, leaning upon his uncle and his serdar Meredh Ali, was with difficulty conducted to his own home. I could hear him, during his progress, whooping and hallooing, and uttering various other Bacchanalian sounds.

CHAPTER XLVII.

ADMINISTRATIVE CARES.

Attempts at privacy—The obligations of a Khan—Desire of hoisting British flag—Objection and excuses—Branding horses—A Georgian prisoner—A hostage—Afghan claimant of British nationality—Old Persian Colonel—The Derguezli raiders—Protection certificates—Adjem Serdar's watches—An arrangement—Kara peshkesh—Baba Khan's trick—News from Derguez—Persian Government extortion—Owez Bey's lost property—Compromise—Tweeduk adamlar—A serenade—Dutar.

THE first use to which I tried to turn my newly-acquired dignity was to secure a little more leisure than, since my advent to Merv, I had hitherto been able to enjoy. I had been ruthlessly intruded upon, day and night, the Turcomans seeming not to have the slightest regard for one's convenience or privacy. There was much which I desired to commit to paper, and there were details to be noted, for which, owing to their multiplicity and the strangeness of the names associated with them, I could not possibly trust to my memory. Judge, then, of my dismay when, on giving instructions that, except to the two Khans or to some important personage on business, I would be invisible, I was gravely informed that it was out of the question to think of carrying out my orders. 'A Khan's door is always open, and he must see and entertain everyone who calls on him,' said Mehemed Nefess Bay, my major-domo. This information filled me with despair; for I had begun to hope that now at least I might have some respite from the continued annoyance I had hitherto suffered at the hands of

sight-seers and pot-hunters, who had rendered my life miserable since I entered the oasis. I discovered that I was to be a public personage in more senses than one, and my experience of that 'bad eminence' commenced forthwith.

It was deemed advisable to hoist a genuine British flag as soon as possible, and I was requested to draw a design from which an *ustá adam* would manufacture the necessary ensign. Pieces of red, blue, and white cloth were procured, and I was desired to begin at once. I thus found myself placed in a very serious dilemma; for I feared that, in case of compliance on my part with the desires of the council, I might get myself into some scrape for thus taking part in an unauthorised hoisting of the British flag, an act for which I might perhaps be afterwards called to account should events so turn that some indignity were offered to the flag. At length I hit upon an excuse for postponing the manufacture of the Union Jack. I said that it was not enough for the Council of Merv to be willing and desirous to hoist the British ensign; but that the sanction of the British Government was also indispensable. I pressed my associates to hasten the signing of the document to be forwarded to the Minister at Teheran, and assured them that when the due authorisation should arrive from England, I would at once see that a proper ensign was manufactured and displayed; if, indeed, one were not sent out expressly. Meantime, the red flag flying over my house would, I said, meet all immediate requirements; and, without unnecessarily forestalling the consent which would indubitably be given for the more formal proceeding later on, quite adequately express the feelings of amity entertained by the Government of Merv towards that of England. As my arguments seemed reasonable enough, and as I undertook to assure the Khans that there was no danger whatever of an immediate Russian advance so long as the advice I had given

with regard to abstaining from hostilities was followed, the making of the flag was postponed; and I thus, in this matter, obtained a respite for a while. I hoped in the meantime that, having made all necessary observations at Merv, I should be able to devise some means of getting away to Meshed or Bokhara.

Another matter, however, cropped up, which it was impossible to escape. With a view of practically demonstrating a Merv-English connection, and at the same time putting an obstacle in the way of their horses being confiscated, should by any chance Russia press on to Merv, Baba Khan proposed that all the horses should be branded with a mark similar to that of the English military horses. Before this proposition was made, the Khan asked me to draw for him the Government horse mark. I did not know what mark is used in the service, but on chance I sketched a V.R. surmounted by a crown. The Khan quietly possessed himself of the design, and the same evening he showed me an iron brand bearing the design I had drawn, and which he had got made without a moment's delay. He would not postpone for a moment the execution of his design, and forthwith ordered his own charger to be brought out and marked. When the brand was duly heated, a man rode the horse into the steep-sided ditch of my redoubt, so that the operator might be secure against harm in case the animal should kick. The brand was successfully impressed; but as the maker had exactly copied my design, the mark on the horse was naturally reversed, and what is more, the operator turned it upside down. Several other valuable horses were also marked, and have possibly by this time come under the notice of some of the members of the Russian caravans which we hear have succeeded in entering and leaving Merv unmolested. I am very glad to hear that this last has taken place; as, when leaving Merv, I took every pains to

impress upon the assembled representatives the necessity of allowing caravans of every nation, Russia not excepted, to pass freely, pointing out that this would redound not only to the good character of the Tekkés, but also to their pecuniary advantage.

During my absence at Makdum Kuli's village, and my visit to the ruined cities, a small raid had been made somewhere between Geok Tepé and Askabad, which had resulted in the capture of a considerable quantity of stores—among them some cases of champagne and a quantity of hams, together with a Georgian sutler from Tiflis whose property the captured stores were. I was very anxious to obtain one or more of the hams, for I had not tasted any for a very long period, but I learned to my disgust that as soon as the raiders discovered what they had got they immediately buried them. The champagne, however, was regarded with a more lenient eye, principally coming into the hands of Aman Niaz Khan, whose clansman had captured the convoy. The Georgian sutler was a prisoner, held to ransom. Like most of his countrymen, he had been very gorgeously attired when captured; but his red silk tunic, silver-laced cloth coat decorated with enamelled cartridge tubes, his silver belt, decorated *hanjar*, and lamb's-wool hat had all been taken from him, and he was given instead a wretched tattered garment of quilted cotton, a pair of dilapidated Turcoman drawers, and a very sorry hat of shaggy sheepskin. His long boots of Russian leather had been replaced by rude sandals of untanned cow-skin; and his outfit generally was of the shabbiest description. He presented himself before me, and begged I would try to get him released, stating further that he was unable to pay the ransom asked by his captors. I gave him some European clothes which I had by me and a pair of boots, of which he stood badly in need; and I further succeeded in getting his

ransom cut down to something like two hundred roubles paper money—20*l.* He tried to pass himself off as a Mussulman; but I was given to understand that he broke down in the ordeal of saying his prayers. However, I was glad to learn that a few days later, his ransom having arrived, he was conveyed to within a short distance of Askabad and set at liberty. When once a ransom is paid, the Turcomans never fail to liberate a prisoner, partly owing to their own rude ideas of honour, and partly to the fact that did they fail in doing so on any occasion they might afterwards be forced to send in the captive before any money was paid, and in that case faith might be broken with *them*.

The next captive who came under my notice was a wretched-looking elderly Persian peasant, carried off but a few weeks previously from some village some miles to the south of Meshed. His case was an unusual one. A Tekké raid was made in that direction, and one of the marauders had been captured by the Persian patrols. He was then a prisoner at Meshed, as usual, held to ransom. His brother, being either unable or unwilling to pay the required sum, solved the problem by executing a raid on his own account, and carrying off a captive from the same village whom he held as a hostage for his brother's safety and offered to exchange for him. Of course, under the circumstances, I could not possibly do anything to effect the release of either captive. The Persian exhibited to me his naked feet, blistered by walking over the scorching marl, and begged me to give him a couple of krans to purchase some kind of shoes. I gave him some money; but, as his captor was by, the money was doubtless very soon transferred to the latter's pocket.

One of the most interesting cases I met with was one of an Afghan merchant who had been captured during an

attack on a caravan proceeding from Herat to Meshed. He was evidently a well-to-do man, and, in view of his being a Sunnite Mussulman like the Mervli, was comparatively well treated and not deprived of his clothes. He was a native of Kandahar, and in view of that place being then occupied by British troops laid claim to the privileges of a British subject. The Turcomans were inclined to look favourably upon his demand to be liberated on this score, but brought him before me in order that I might certify whether or not he were entitled to the protection which he claimed. I asked him if he had any papers testifying as to his identity and nationality. He said that he had not; but that he was well acquainted with Abass Khan, the consular agent at Meshed, who could answer for him. I told him I could do nothing for him till he produced some proof of what he put forward; and that I regretted that under the circumstances I could take no measures to have the five hundred pounds sterling taken from him at the time of his capture restored. Soon after, he was set at liberty, Abass Khan having, I was informed, written about him to his agent at Merv.

The only other prisoners to my knowledge remaining were the unfortunate white-haired old Persian colonel captured many years previously during the disastrous expedition against the Merv Turcomans, and whose beard had grown white during his captivity, and two Derguezli raiders who had been caught in the act of cattle-lifting within the Merv borders. I thought it as well not to meddle with the case of the former, but to leave it to Baghur Khan, the envoy still detained in the outlying Sitchmaz village in the south of the oasis, and who was shortly to be sent for to head-quarters, in order that he might explain his mission. As regarded the Derguezli raiders, whom I had an opportunity of seeing every day as they sat listlessly, cumbered with their chains,

on the edge of the ditch of my redoubt, I did not feel called upon to interfere, as they were simply thieves and robbers who richly deserved to be held in bondage. The raids organised, not only by the warlike Kurd and Turkish borderers of the Persian province, but actually by their governors, as I have already had occasion to describe, were just as unceasing and ruthless as any which the Turcomans directed against them. The prisoners of whom I speak were two black-bearded men of colossal stature and unmistakeably robber aspect. As is the custom, they had been stripped of their own garments, and clothed in miserable rags which barely kept together. Neither of them had anything more than a dilapidated pair of calico drawers, a wretched tattered garment of quilted cotton material, and a piece of shaggy black sheepskin, fashioned anyhow into a hat. Each had fetters confining his ankles, so that he could only shuffle slowly along, and heavy iron collars, locked round the necks of both, were connected by a massive iron chain, each link of which was nearly a foot in length, the iron composing it being an inch in diameter. They looked the picture of misery as they sat all day long in the burning sun, for no shelter was afforded them. Their only occupation, so far as I could see, was that of removing the vermin which covered their rags, or perhaps, at the command of some matron, turning the heavy stone hand-mill with which the flour was prepared. The ransom asked for each was but trifling—something like 10*l.*—but even this sum was far beyond the reach of either of the families of these raiders, who rarely, throughout their lives, succeed in amassing any considerable sum in specie. Besides, these men were totally undeserving of sympathy, owing to the criminal character of their calling, and, moreover, had any of the Tekkés, whether engaged in a marauding expedition or not, fallen into their hands, they would have been treated

just as badly if not worse. Possibly, if a ransom were not forthcoming, the heads of the Tekkés would have been sent to Meshed, with the object of securing the gratuity offered, and this, at least, was a form of barbarity of which the Tekkés could not be accused.

The effect produced upon the minds of the mass of the Mervli by the entry of the Khans, the establishment of a government, and, above all, my participation in it, was very great. They seemed to think themselves perfectly secure, and that they had little more to dread from the Russians. Their belief in their having been accepted as British subjects was so great that, from the outlying districts to the westward, and especially from Chacha, Méněh, and Dushakh, numbers of persons either came themselves, or else despatched messengers, begging me to give them certificates of their desire to become British subjects, to which my signet should be appended. This I willingly did, as the only thing required of me was that I should certify that the bearer of each document had expressed his wish to place himself under British protection.

As it is the custom in the East never to approach a superior without a present of some kind, I was overwhelmed with all kinds of articles for which I had no earthly use. Some sent me water-pipes, others articles of horse-trapping, and others, more practical, made me presents of tea and sugar. Some, who had but little to give, offered me small embroidered tea-bags, slippers, and knitted silk gun-slings, made expressly for myself. Each, after receiving the document which he required, went away rejoicing, and I only felt sorry the signature upon which he placed so much value could not be of more real service to him.

It was late in the evening of the day succeeding the entry of the Khans and the formation of a government that

several horsemen from Dushakh drew up before my door. They were sent by Adjem Serdar, the first Merv chieftain of any importance with whom I had come in contact when on my way to the oasis, and who had warned me about the horse thieves in his village. Two of his relations, by name Chariar and Sariar, brought with them three silver watches with rather gaudily gilt and painted dial plates, which they offered for my acceptance on the part of the Serdar. It seemed that after the fall of Geok Tepé and the occupation of Askabad, some bodies of Russian cavalry pushed forward to the eastward, escorting the officer, who penetrated as far as Kelat-i-Nadri, on the Persian frontier Various presents were given to the Awlilis and other Turcomans inhabiting the border, with the view of winning their friendship. Among these were a number of watches. Two of these had been given to the *chaoush* (head man) of Kaka, and the third by some means had been sent to Adjem Serdar. Neither the *chaoush* nor the Serdar had the slightest idea of what these mysterious articles were, or what their value might be. Knowing, however, that I was at Merv, they sent them to me as 'presents,' that is to say, as something they wished to sell. I was glad to receive them, for I was in want of presents for some of the Merv notabilities, so that I told the messengers I would gladly accept the watches. The only difficulty about receiving them was, as I have said, that at the moment I had not to spare the necessary funds with which to make the return *peshkesh*. I said that if the senders would trust me with the articles in question for a little while longer, I would unfailingly forward the money to them from Merv, or at any rate as soon as I should reach Meshed. Hereupon a Merv Tekké Serdar, who was sitting opposite to me, observed brusquely, 'Why not take them as a *kara peshkesh?*' (or 'black present'); meaning that I should receive the watches, or

rather appropriate them, giving nothing whatsoever in return, inasmuch as they were in my possession, and there was no necessity for my parting with them; a course, doubtless, that he would himself have adopted under the circumstances. This, however, I declined to do; but the messengers, thinking perhaps that it would be unsafe to receive them back, as they might be despoiled of them before quitting Merv, said, willingly or otherwise, that I might keep them, and transmit the money I wished to give in return, at my earliest convenience.

I do not believe that such a thing as a watch had ever been seen in Merv before, and many were the visitors who crowded in to look at the extraordinary articles—the *sahat namehs*, or hour indicators, as they named them after I had informed them of their use. Before long the news had spread all over Kouchid Khan Kala that I had received the watches; and one of Baba Khan's noted cavalry leaders called upon me and said that the Khan was extremely desirous of seeing a *sahat nameh*, he never having seen such a thing. I had destined a watch for Baba, and unhesitatingly committed it to the charge of the Serdar.

From my seat before the door of my house I could see Baba Khan and his friends curiously examining the wonderful machine, and in half-an-hour the Serdar returned to me, but without the watch. He said that the Khan was delighted with it; so much so, indeed, that he intended to keep it, and that he thanked me very much for the present. Though I had intended it for him, I had not said so to his messenger, so that the act was one of barefaced swindling. The only revenge I could take was to tell the Serdar that the Khan was welcome to the watch, but that I had intended to give him a gold one later on. Now, however, I had countermanded the instructions which I was about to send to Teheran for the purchase of the more costly

present. I do not know what was the precise effect of this message upon the Khan, but he seemed to be impressed with the truth of the proverb about the bird in the hand, and I heard no more from him on the subject.

The Turcomans who had brought me the watches also gave me some interesting information about the state of affairs in Derguez. Supplies, they said, were being constantly forwarded from Lutfabad to the Russian camp at Askabad, and the Persians and Russians seemed on very friendly terms. The Governor of the place there had just been arrested by order of the Prince Governor, and sent under escort to Meshed, and his brother, Seyd Ali, of Lutfabad, had fled to the Russian lines for protection. As I afterwards learned, it was because the Governor and his brother failed to meet the extortionate demands for tribute made upon them. He had already paid in his annual tribute—six thousand tomans, I believe—but the Meshed authorities believed that, owing to his constant intercourse with the Russians, he must be able to afford a great deal more than that amount, and pressed him for a further contribution. Moreover, the Prince Governor, having received an inkling from Teheran that he was about to be removed from the government, was squeezing as much money as he possibly could out of all the local governments under his jurisdiction previous to going away. Mehemed Ali of Derguez was either unable or unwilling to pay any more than he had done, and hence his imprisonment. This will give a good idea of the state of affairs on the frontier, where, beyond the mountains, the local chiefs are nearly independent, and the yearly tribute, which varies with circumstances, has generally to be wrung from them by threats, and often by armed intervention.

During the day I had a visit from one of the more respectable of the Mervli, by name Owez Bey. He was a

Kurd by birth, but in his infancy had been carried off by the Tekkés during a raid, and, subsequently marrying among them, had become naturalised. He appeared to be tolerably well off for a Turcoman, and devoted himself almost entirely to agricultural and commercial pursuits. A few days before his visit, an angry camel had taken his hand into its mouth, and inflicted a severe bite, the long fangs of the animal piercing through the palm. The hand was very much inflamed, and, in the extreme heat of the weather which then obtained, I was fearful that serious results would accrue. I prescribed for him what I considered the proper course of treatment, and, after having lanced his hand to give exit to the pus which had accumulated under the fascia, I ordered a cooling lotion of vinegar and water. I directed him to procure the vinegar from Matthi, the Jew, but to this he was strongly opposed. 'How do I know,' said he, 'but that that Moussai would give me poison?' Such was the estimation in which this poor Jew, one of the most honest men in the whole community, was held.

Owez Bey, when the surgical operation was at an end, proceeded to unfold to me some grievances of his own, of long standing. He said that some years previously, while engaged in a raid against the Kelat-i-Nadri territory, he had carried off a cavalry officer of some note belonging to the suite of Beybud Khan, of that place. When the latter applied to him, he generously sent home the captive without ransom, after having kept him several weeks at his own expense. A few weeks previous to his interview with me, however, a number of the Kelat-i-Nadri marauders had descended upon the Merv oasis, and captured a considerable quantity of spoil; among the rest three white asses, four camels, and one wife, all belonging to Owez Bey himself. The latter had, he said, repeatedly applied to Beybud Khan

for the restoration of his property, but in vain, and he appealed to me as to whether this course of action on the part of the latter was not altogether scandalous, considering the manner in which he had sent him his cavalry officer. He was aware that I had been staying at Kelat-i-Nadri just before my advent to Merv; and as I was well acquainted with the Khan of that place, my visitor requested me to use my influence with him for the restoration of his property. In case, he said, that the stolen goods might have been disposed of, and were not at present within reach, he would accept a money compensation of twelve hundred and fifty krans (50*l.*), this sum including payment for the abducted wife. I unfortunately promised to write to Beybud Khan on the subject, and from that moment to the day on which I finally quitted Merv I was continually persecuted by this old citizen, who regularly called to know whether I had heard anything about his effects or the compensation.

While Owez Bey was reciting his grievances to me, a portion of the inaugural ceremonies, which had not been completed on the previous day, was carried out. Owing to the extreme heat of the weather, I had caused the outer reed mat of my house to be removed, and the thick felt wall lining to be raised at a point opposite the doorway, so that a free current of air could circulate through the room. I was thus exposed to the view of the passers-by, and in a very short time, as was usual whenever I made my appearance, a considerable number of people had assembled, and seated themselves on the ground immediately adjoining my lattice, two musicians appearing among them. They were what were styled *tweeduk adamlar*, from the kind of instrument on which they performed. The *tweeduk* is a kind of large clarionet, made of bamboo, and about three feet in length. It is furnished with six holes for the fingers, at the back being a seventh, which is stopped by the thumb.

There are the *dilli tweeduk* and the *karga tweeduk*; the former being the treble instrument, the latter the bass one. Both are cylindrical, and neither is furnished with a bell-mouth. The end is finished off with a kind of flat brass ring. The *dilli tweeduk* produces a sound like the note of a thrush, while the sound of the *karga tweeduk* is not unlike the drone of a bag-pipe. The musicians seated themselves upon a piece of felt which had been brought expressly for them, and commenced a low, dirge-like tune, which grew gradually quicker, the principal exhibition of skill consisting of running up the gamut to the highest possible pitch, and then down again, on the part of the *dilli*, accompanied by a monotonous droning by the player of the *karga*. As the rapidity of the fingering increased, the performers seemed to get excited, rising to their feet, and piping faster and faster each moment. They piped to the right, then to the left, and then, making right about face, piped to the rear, at each bar bowing their bodies until the mouths of the instruments touched their feet. This turning, bowing, and piping continued until the pipers were completely exhausted, when they resumed their seats; but it seemed to be a matter of pride to recommence as soon as possible after gaining sufficient breath to blow their *tweeduks*. There was nothing that, speaking strictly, could be called an air, but simply a succession of notes which conveyed an impression of wild sadness, followed by a monotonous running up to frequent climaxes of acuteness. The second player never on any occasion varied his drone. On the whole, the performance was not disagreeable; at least, it did not seem so to me, so interested was I in this first serious musical display which I had ever witnessed among the Turcomans. The only other instrument I ever saw used by the Turcomans, Tekké or otherwise, with the exception of Aman

Niaz's concertina, was the *dutar*, which exactly resembles a mediæval lute. Its body is of a hemispherical shape, and it has but two strings, generally of silk, but stout horse-hairs are sometimes used in their stead. I have alluded to this instrument in speaking of my departure from Dushakh. It is usually played to accompany some of the wild recitative chants which pass for singing in this part of the world.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

AMAN NIAZ KHAN'S VILLA—KIDAIEFF.

Kidaieff's letters—Early morning—My menagerie—Kindness to animals—Water pitcher—Setting out—Alasha canal branches—Cultivation—Oil mill—Aman Niaz Khan's country residence—Vineyards—Storage of corn—Kidaieff sent for—Tea drinking—Tea-leaf eating—The rishté—Treatment of—Causes of—Kidaieff—Conversation with—Indulgence in opium—Large ransom—Tortures—Arguments for Kidaieff's release—On the house-top—Arrack—Sunset—Medical advice—'A black cow or a brown'—Charm against fever—Eagerness for quinine.

HAVING repeatedly received letters from the Russian prisoner Kidaieff, some in Russian, written by himself, and others in Jagatai, written for him by some local scribe, but neither of which I could understand, I resolved to seek an interview with him. For some reason or another, those in whose immediate custody he was objected to his coming to see me at Kouchid Khan Kala. They feared, perhaps, that if he were once safely lodged in my house, I might bring influence to bear to prevent his returning to the care of his captors. As his place of residence was among the Bakshih, a tribe of the Otamish division, and, consequently, under the immediate jurisdiction of Aman Niaz Khan, I applied to that chieftain for permission to visit the prisoner. Aman Niaz readily consented, and appointed the following day for the proposed interview, saying that at the same time we could visit his own personal estate on the south-western border of the oasis, among the Karatchmet branch of the Sitchmaz tribe, at a distance of about fifteen miles from Kouchid Khan Kala.

I rose very early on the morning in question, as we purposed starting shortly after sunrise, the hour before and the hour after that time being almost the only tolerable portions of the day during which there is sufficient light to travel by.

As I stood at the doorway of my house, looking out towards the coming day, great flights of wild ducks, ibises, and cranes passed at intervals overhead, winging their way to the distant marshes of the Tejend. Now and then a broad-winged heron (*kothon*) went flapping heavily by, bound in the same direction. Some sleeping forms were still to be seen outside the huts, for at this season of the year the Turcomans sleep out of doors, on account of the excessive heat within the houses. Here and there a huge sheepskin hat, protruding from under the blanket, showed where the sleepers lay. Around were the recumbent camels, which had not yet commenced their daily groaning chorus. The women, early risers at Merv, were dusting the carpets. A flock of sheep was bleating on its way to pasture. The saffron light of morning threw the huge mass of ramparts into bold relief as it dawned behind them. Then the eastern horizon burst into a blaze of light, and the sun peeped above the fruit tree thickets beyond the walls of Kouchid Khan Kala.

My principal servant was engaged in feeding a number of pet animals which I had gathered round me in my *ev*, for the people of Merv, knowing that I was interested in natural history, had almost overwhelmed me with zoological specimens—for a consideration, of course. I had a beautiful specimen of the antelope of the plain, the *geiké*, *geran*, or *ahou*, as it is variously styled in the dialects of different localities on the frontier; a ger-falcon (*itelgui*), three young jackals, a wolf cub, two black cats, and a hedgehog (*kerfi*).

The extreme fondness of Turcomans for all species of

dumb animals, and the contrast of their tenderness towards them with their occasional ferocity towards human beings, is very notable, and the continuance of the same idea may still be observed in the manner in which the dogs of Constantinople and other Turkish towns are cared for and allowed to roam unmolested. I was exceedingly amused by one of my servants, a raider of celebrity, who had grown old in harness, seated upon a heap of fresh clover from which my pet antelope was feeding, and laughing himself into convulsions by watching the antics of a black kitten who was executing a series of circular bounds with ludicrous rapidity in pursuit of its own tail. This old man, who would have cut down women and children without the least compunction when engaged upon the war-path, would put himself to inconvenience to find food and a comfortable lodging for the animals which I entrusted to his care.

I had already got in my stock of water for the day, for later on the water in the irrigation trenches would be unduly heated by the sun, and it would be impossible to cool it to the necessary extent during the day. The water pitchers at Merv are of large dimensions. They come to a point at the bottom. They are placed in the houses on the side opposite to the sun, and shifted round according to the hour of the day. In fact, the position of the water pitcher at any given time was the only approach to an index of the hour of which I could avail myself while at Merv, without going outside to observe the position of the sun.

The sun had scarcely appeared above the horizon, when I saw Aman Niaz Khan, who, with his household, had been sleeping out of doors upon a raised mud platform some four feet in height, surrounded by a parapet of a few inches in height and thickness, rise and proceed to his morning ablutions; and in another half hour we were ready for the road. Old Dowlet Nazar Beg and some other persons of

standing, some of them men of advanced age, mounted their horses to accompany us for a certain distance, this being a tribute of respect to the Khan. In this country, when setting out on a pleasure trip of twenty miles or so, the traveller arms himself like a freebooter on desperate emprise intent, for when one moves about in the Merv oasis he never knows what adventure may befall him before the end of the day. As our troop of a dozen cavaliers rode out over the ricketty bridge spanning the Murgab, we might be taken for a party of *Kalthaman* (raiders) setting out upon some predatory expedition.

The branches of the Alasha canal come very close to the western bank of the Murgab, and in some places the waste water overflows into it. Our progress was very slow, for there were large numbers of quagmires and trenches filled with liquid mud, across which it was necessary to proceed with caution. Here and there were rude bridges of hurdle work, but as a rule they were in a sad state of dilapidation, and we preferred to ford the various water-courses rather than trust to their doubtful solidity

Half a mile beyond the river our elderly companions turned back, and with an escort of half-a-dozen horsemen we went on our way. The oasis is perhaps richest at the south-east. We passed through a succession of well-cultivated fields, in which the castor-oil plant alternated with expanses of vineyard, and groves of apricots and peaches formed an almost unbroken line along our route. There were large fields, too, where a plant from which the *Kundji yagh*, the oil used alike for cooking and illuminating purposes, is produced. It grows to a height of four or five feet; its square stems, opposite leaves, and lipped corolla indicate it to be of the labiate family. I do not know its botanical name.

In each of the numerous villages through which we

passed were one or more mills for the production of oil from the grain of this plant. The construction of these mills is peculiar. A stump of a large trunk, about four feet in height and three in diameter, was hollowed into a kind of rude mortar, in which was a pestle of hard, heavy wood, in shape closely resembling a large Indian club, and weighing, perhaps, two hundredweight. This was made to revolve while pressing against the sides of the mortar by means of a beam six or seven feet in length, which was in turn attached to a straddle fastened to the back of a camel. The camel walked round and round the mortar in the very small circle which the length of the beam permitted him to make. A rude thatched roof, raised upon four tall poles, sheltered the animal from the heat of the sun.

At each village the elders came out to salute us, seizing our right hands in each of theirs, as is their method of salutation, and then stroking their beards. Many were the invitations we received to dismount and partake of *gattuk* and sheep's-tail fat at the Kethkodas' houses. It was near mid-day when we drew near Aman Niaz Khan's country residence, as I suppose I must call it, in contradistinction to his home at Kouchid Khan Kala. Some twenty acres of ground, copiously watered by branches of the Alasha canal, were enclosed by a tall mud wall. One-half of this was under clover, which here grows to a very great height; the remainder was devoted to *arpa* (barley) and melon; while around the house, and enclosing the vineyards, were pretty extensive groves of apricot and peach.

The Khan's house, situated in the centre of a small grove, was an oblong structure of unbaked brick, plastered over with fine yellow loam, and still exhibiting some attempts at decoration about the entry and windows. It was two stories in height, flat roofed, and about fifty feet by twenty long and wide, and fifteen in height. The Khan told me that

he seldom inhabited this, as he preferred living in an *ev*; moreover, he used it as a storehouse for corn and fruit. Though it was early in June, the grapes were rapidly approaching maturity. They were of a dark red variety, and very small, a fact probably attributable to the density with which they were allowed to grow, for in most instances the clusters were so compact that the grapes were forced at their sides into a hexagonal form by mutual pressure. I pointed this out to the Khan, and he said it was true enough, but that nobody could take the trouble to arrange them in any other way. In the vineyards which were better looked after, as in the case of those of Matthi the Jew, at Kouchid Khan Kala, the grapes attained very large dimensions, some of the white varieties, of an ovoid form, being fully two inches in length. Close to the Khan's house were numerous villages, also surrounded with fruit trees and vineyards. They were inhabited by the chief's own immediate clansmen, the Kethkoda of each being a close relation of his own. He took infinite pains to show me over his ground, of which he appeared to feel very proud. We then pressed a short distance northward, to a rather populous village, of which one of his uncles was chief. Towards its western side was a kind of low square tower, with terraced top, to which access was given by stairs on the outside of the building. The lower story, or the interior of this house, was used for the storage of corn. This, however, is not the usual manner in which corn is kept, for buildings of this description are not sufficiently common in Merv to afford anything like adequate accommodation for the large amount produced each harvest. The usual method is to place it in hamper-like baskets, a couple of feet in diameter, the top being covered with a little straw or hay, and then plastered over with a thick covering of loam. This is when the corn is intended for transport.

When it is stored for local consumption, shallow pits, two or three feet in diameter, and as much in depth, are used, the corn being covered with a thick layer of straw, and then again with earth; this is a very usual method of storage in this part of the East. One can trace the sites of former villages and nomad encampments by the honeycombing of the ground by these pits, which often render it exceedingly dangerous to cross the ground on which they occur on horseback in the dark.

We were entertained by one of Aman Niaz Khan's kinsmen in a spacious, well-carpeted *ev*, from the summit of which a pair of inflated *tooniks* hung conspicuously. Hung against the wall was the only matchlock I ever saw in Merv. It was of exceedingly rude construction, and even the Turcomans themselves looked upon it much as we should upon some of the antique specimens preserved in an ancient armoury, for all their guns of to-day have percussion locks. Even flint locks are completely out of date among them.

Aman Niaz told me that he had sent for Kidaieff, the Russian prisoner, who would make his appearance a little later. Meantime we took our siesta, after which a number of visitors came in, to assist at a general tea-drinking. Every Turcoman carries with him in his pocket a small bag filled with green tea; and should he happen to call at a house where the inhabitants are too poor to afford the luxury, he calls for hot water, and produces a handful of tea for the refreshment of himself and his host. It is only among those who are well to do that sugar is ever seen, and even then it is considered a luxury. It is generally white lump sugar, of Russian make, but one also frequently sees crystallised sugar candy. It is brought here from Bokhara. The tea-pot is a tall copper jug, about a foot in height, and furnished with a cover. This, filled with water, is placed upon a fire, and when the contents boil, a handful of

green tea is put in. Every Turcoman, when on the road, brings with him his tea bowl, which is of Chinese porcelain, about five inches in diameter, and four in depth. It is white inside, and of a greyish olive on the exterior. These are the only domestic utensils in use among the Turcomans which are not either of wood or metal. They are carried in a peculiar leather case, resembling a hemispherical sauce-pan with a long handle, which is slung at the saddle-bow of the rider. The guests sit in a ring. The host, having two or three bowls before him, fills and hands them to his neighbours in the order of their seniority or dignity. The sugar—if he have any—he generally keeps in his pocket; and when he wishes to distinguish any person especially, he takes out a lump and pitches it across the ring to the favoured individual. His every-day visitors are by no means treated in this manner; nor is the sugar ever placed so that each one can help himself. If it were, it would immediately disappear, the Turcomans, apart from their natural covetousness, being extremely fond of sweets. I recollect that, on my first arrival at Merv, I was in the habit of placing in the middle of the circle of my visitors a large bowl of broken sugar. Each guest, before filling his bowl with tea, more than half filled it with sugar; and then, taking a large handful, he put it into his pocket by way of guaranteeing a supply for the next bowl, for he knew full well that unless this precaution were observed the others would take care to seize all that remained. A Turcoman likes to drink his tea as hot as he can possibly bear it. When he has finished his draught, the manner in which he returns the bowl to be refilled for some one else is a matter of nice etiquette. By a sudden twitch of the wrist he throws the vessel with a spinning motion into the middle of the carpet, affecting an air of nonchalance as he does so. When a stranger arrives from a distance, or any person of distinc-

tion comes in, he is supplied with bowl after bowl of tea until he chooses to desist, which he signifies by placing his tea-bowl upon the carpet, mouth downwards. Black tea is practically unknown among the Turcomans, nor will they drink it when offered to them, unless it be very highly sweetened. Green tea is willingly drunk without any sweetening. When the jug of tea is exhausted, the host shakes out the leaves into one of the bowls, and then, sprinkling them with sugar, proceeds to eat them, unless he favours some of his guests by sharing them with him.

After tea, Aman Niaz Khan sent for one of his nephews, who had returned a short time previously from Bokhara, in order that he might show me an example of the peculiar kind of entozoon termed the *rishté*, by which so many people of that country are tormented. The nephew was a lad of about fourteen years of age. A bandage was unwound from his ankle, and a small poultice of boiled vine leaves removed, disclosing an inflamed spot of about an inch in diameter. From its centre protruded a yellow, thread-like body, which was wound round a morsel of twig. This was the *rishté*, as it is termed in Merv and Bokhara, the worm of Pharaoh, as it is styled in Abyssinia, or the Guinea worm, by which latter name it is known to English-speaking people along the shores of the Persian Gulf and in Africa. A caravan scarcely ever arrives from Bokhara without a large number of its members being afflicted with this disagreeable entozoon. Aman Niaz informed me that anyone who drinks the stagnant water of the rain-pools, or that of the tanks of the caravanserais, is certain to take into his system the egg of the *rishté*, which will then infallibly develop itself. It generally makes its appearance where the bone has little more covering than the skin, as at the ankle, the knee, or the elbow-joint. A small pimple is seen, which after a time opens, and a small black head,

furnished with two minute hooks, is seen protruding. This is laid hold of and drawn gently, the body, which is of a bright primrose colour, and about the thickness of the E string of a violin, following, to the extent of about half an inch. This operation is repeated twice in the day, care being taken to drawn the worm very gently, lest it should break. As it is drawn out, it is wound upon a quill, a fine twig, or some such small object. As it dries it loses its fresh yellow colour, and exactly resembles a violin string. Should the *rishté* break during extraction, serious results are apt to follow. The entire limb swells, and suppuration sets in along the track of the worm. After seven days of intense agony, the entire body of the creature is discharged, and the wound heals up. Should the constitution of the sufferer not be of the strongest, however, he is in great danger of losing his limb, which in such countries is almost equivalent to losing his life. Aman Niaz informed me that there is another method by which the *rishté* may be extracted, without the tedious process of drawing it out day by day, half an inch at a time, and which occupies occasionally a month or six weeks. The worm sometimes amounts to a yard in length. By a judicious pressure of the fingers, with a kneading motion, round the orifice whence the body of the entozoon protrudes, it can be gradually worked forward, and its entire length extracted in the course of a few hours. There are men who devote themselves especially to this, and, as Aman Niaz told me, they generally make use of a couple of small silver coins, with which to press around the orifice. The Khan himself, he told me, had extracted as many as forty of these worms from his body in the course of a year. In many instances, he had not patience even for the process by which it is extracted in a few hours, but, on its first appearance, plucked away the head, thus causing suppuration to follow. It is a curious fact that while this *rishté*

prevails all over Southern Bokhara, it is never found in the Merv oasis—a circumstance for which I felt truly grateful. This may be owing to the fact that the Mervli have a plentiful supply of river water at their disposal; and the inhabitants of Bokhara who use running water, or that from wells, or boil their water previously to using it, are never afflicted by this entozoon. I subsequently saw several cases of the *rishté* among the caravans which arrived at Merv from Bokhara. I remember seeing this worm mentioned by Bruce, in his 'Travels to discover the Source of the Nile;' and the mode of extracting it, as adopted in Abyssinia, is exactly that in use in Bokhara, and, as far as I am aware, in every country in which it obtains.

It wanted but two hours of sunset, as I sat alone within the *ev*; Aman Niaz Khan and our host having gone to look at some vineyards at a short distance. I was engaged in taking some notes of the day's occurrences, when the door opened, and some Turcomans entered. They wore their swords, and were booted as for a journey. In their midst was a man who had neither sword nor boots, although he wore the regular Turcoman costume. This was the Russian prisoner Kidaieff. Had I not been so informed, I should never have known that he was not a Turcoman. Though only about twenty-five years old, he looked considerably over forty. He seemed worn to little more than skin and bone; and his pale, leaden-coloured face was wasted, and ghastly to look upon. He resembled a walking corpse rather than aught else; and his dull, glassy eyes had a fixed and mindless expression. I motioned to him to be seated. He addressed me in Russian, of which, unfortunately, I understand but little. I then spoke to him in Jagatai Tartar, which he spoke with some fluency. He thanked me for the money which I had sent to him, and stated that he was very grateful for the improved treatment which he had

experienced since my arrival at Merv, the irons upon his ankles having been removed at my request. I asked him about the treatment which he had met with at the hands of the Turcomans since his capture, but could get but little information on this score, for his gaolers were sitting beside him, and he did not dare to answer. I could see, however, from his emaciated frame and the expression of his countenance that his sufferings must have been great indeed. The traces of these sufferings upon his lineaments had been still further emphasized by the use of opium, for his captors, occasionally taking pity upon him, supplied him with this drug to enable him temporarily to forget his miseries. Little by little he had indulged in this pernicious habit, until he had become a confirmed opium eater and smoker.

He told me that that was his seventh year at Merv, and that though he had repeatedly sent letters to Russia, imploring his friends and the public to ransom him, nothing had been done, the sum asked by the Turcomans being too large, amounting, I believe, to something like 2,000*l*. This was to a great extent his own fault; for he had given himself out to be an officer of high rank, notwithstanding his youth, when captured, and the Turcomans believed him. He had further stated that his father was a general, and Governor of a province. Hence the exorbitant sum demanded for his ransom. He had been subjected to all kinds of torture. During the cold winter nights he had been forced to sleep outside the house securely manacled, so that he could make no attempt at escape. I learned, too, that his gaoler, to stimulate him to greater efforts to obtain a ransom, used to torture him by placing pieces of lighted charcoal upon the surface of his stomach, and afterwards washing the wound with scalding water. As I have this story from some of the Turcomans themselves, I suppose I may attach credit to it.

Kidaieff begged me to use my influence to get him released, and I promised to do so. I asked him whether he were a Mahometan or a Christian. He answered that he had not changed his religion, though overtures of the most pressing kind had been made to him in this regard on more than one occasion. Had he consented to receive instructions in the Mahometan religion, and to abandon Christianity, his lot would have been a comparatively mild one, for, with the exception of not being allowed to quit Merv territory, he would have been in all respects as free as any of the Mervli. He spoke very highly of the late Kouchid Khan, saying that he had been indebted to that ruler for many kindnesses in the shape of food and clothes, and that the death of the old chief had been a great loss to him. After a somewhat lengthy conversation, Kidaieff withdrew, in charge of two of his custodians, who had never lost sight of him, night or day, during the entire period spent by him at Merv.

I now proceeded to speak to some of the others on the question of the prisoner's release. I said that I was willing to pay one thousand krans (40*l.*) if they would set him at liberty immediately. This proposition was scouted in the most contemptuous manner, as being in no way commensurate with the rank of the prisoner. Besides this, they said that the value of the food he had consumed during his residence at Merv amounted to more than the sum offered. I argued the question with them. I told them flatly that Kidaieff was not an officer of high rank, or of any rank at all; that he was only a private soldier of the artillery; and that I was surprised to see such a want of intelligence displayed by the people of Merv in giving credit to any statement he might have made about his superior rank. 'He has been here,' I said, 'for the last seven years. When taken, he was only a boy of seventeen; how could a person of that age be a superior officer in the Russian army?'

This seemed to stagger them somewhat, but one of their number quickly replied that, if Kidaieff himself were not of high rank, his father was. This, too, I denied, telling them it was not likely that the son of a general and Governor of a province would be a private soldier in the Russian army, or that, having been captured, he would have been allowed to languish so long at Merv. I piled argument upon argument of this kind upon each other, and in the end succeeded in shaking the belief of the Turcomans in Kidaieff's ransom value. I greatly fear that at the moment I was not doing poor Kidaieff any service, if I may judge from the growing irritation manifested in the countenances of his custodians, who were disgusted and enraged at the idea of having cherished fruitless hopes so long, and undergone the expense of feeding their captive for seven years, to discover in the end that he was a person of no account. 'At all events,' said one, 'we can keep him as a hostage; and, should the Russians advance, we will kill him.' To this I replied that they must be very short-sighted indeed not to perceive that such a threat would not have the slightest influence in retarding the Russian advance, should such a thing be decided upon. 'You have seen,' said I, 'the storming of Geok Tepé. You have seen how many men were sacrificed, and how much treasure was exhausted, in order to secure its possession. How, then, do you imagine that the death of one humble artilleryman will prevent Russia from coming to Merv, should such be her desire?' 'And,' I continued, 'you must remember that after you have sacrificed Kidaieff, the lives of many of you will have to answer for it; and instead of receiving any ransom or compensation, you will yourselves pay for the sufferings you have inflicted upon him.'

I am glad to say that in the end my arguments prevailed. This day's interview with Kidaieff and his gaolers,

coupled with my addresses to the Merv *medjlis*, ultimately operated to secure his liberation.

Towards evening the captive was brought in again, and partook of the evening meal, together with Aman Niaz Khan and myself. Among the Turcomans it is customary to retire to rest immediately after supper. The evening was excessively sultry, and our sleeping carpets and quilts were carried to the terrace of the square tower close by. The evening breeze was delightful. It was wonderful what a difference, in regard to the temperature of the air currents, some few feet of elevation above the scorched earth produced. Aman Niaz had brought two large bottles of arrack, a liquor without which he rarely stirred any considerable distance from home. This he shared with myself and the half-dozen Turcomans who had accompanied us. Kidaieff, too, had his portion. It was probably the first time within many years that he had tasted the beverage. As far as I could see, in my presence at least, there was no difference between the treatment of Kidaieff and that of any of their companions by the Turcomans; but this, I strongly suspect, was only the case when I was in his company.

The sun went down redly, streaking the plain with those wonderful tints belonging to evening hours in Eastern climes. Out of the luminous haze a string of camels came winding wearily over the plain, a part of some caravan from Persia, wending its slow way in the direction of Bokhara. The solitude of the wild, wide, trackless plain was all the more emphasized by these specks of life upon its surface. How often, during all those weary years, Kidaieff must have gazed longingly westward, watching the camels as they receded towards the setting sun! How tantalizing to have seen men pass to a land of liberty and return, and he to remain still in hopeless captivity! It must have been a

moral torture far exceeding any physical suffering which his captors could inflict.

At early dawn Kidaieff was removed to his ordinary quarters, in a village at a short distance from where we passed the night. I never saw him again, though I frequently received letters from him. Not long afterwards he sent me a present of a trained falcon, in return for some little money presents which I had made to him. I stayed with Aman Niaz for another day at the village, and then we rode back to Kouchid Khan Kala.

Before starting, some Turcomans applied to me for medical advice and assistance, as was generally the case whenever I appeared at any of the outlying villages. One brought with him his son, whose hand was badly inflamed. I prescribed a poultice of bread and milk, and gave detailed instructions as to how it was to be made. The man listened with attention, and, thanking me, took his leave. When he had gone half a mile, he came back again, to say that I had omitted to tell him what should be the colour of the cow whose milk was to be used. He had, he said, a brown cow and a black one. A woman, too, whose daughter was suffering from fever, brought me a handful of camel's hair, and asked me to manufacture from it a charm for the cure of her daughter's illness. As I had not the slightest notion of what the nature of the charm might be, I addressed myself to Aman Niaz Khan, who immediately undertook to instruct me. By means of a spindle the camel hair was spun to a stout thread, the Khan all the time droning some verses from the Koran, or some necromantic chant. When the thread was finished it was of considerable length, and, folding it three times upon itself, he respun it. Then he proceeded to tie seven knots upon the string. Before drawing each knot hard he blew upon it. This, tied into the form of a bracelet, was to be worn on the wrist of the

patient. Each day one of the knots was to be untied and blown upon, and when the seventh knot had been undone the whole of the thread was to be made into a ball and thrown into the river, carrying, as was supposed, the illness with it. I had some quinine with me, which I unluckily gave her, the result being that I was nearly torn in pieces by a crowd of excited matrons who desired to procure some of the drug for their children who were ill of fever.

CHAPTER XLIX.

A VISIT TO THE BAZAAR.

On the ramparts—An accident in the Murgab—Traders' stalls—Frequenters—Merchandise—Corn—Oils—Fruits—Cheese and yaghourt—Flesh meat—Game—Bokharan goods—Meshed articles—Merv manufactures—Russian rifles—Jew traders—Dried fish—Prejudice against—Money—Horse and camel bazaar—A magistrate's court—Punishments—An escort of yassaouls—A tribute from the Jews—Turcoman horses—Appearance and qualities of—Prices—Heterogeneous weights—Town crier—Purchasers—Fuel—Moullah Safa—Baghur Khan's arrival—Nature of his mission—Refractory yassaouls—Summary proceedings—Religious madman.

THE bazaar at Kouchid Khan Kala is held twice in the week—on Sunday and Thursday. On each of these days there is a very large gathering of the inhabitants of the oasis; eight to ten thousand persons being usually present. On each bazaar day the annoyance which I underwent from inquisitive visitors was quadrupled, and from the earliest dawn my *ev* was filled with unbidden guests, all seeking for the news about things in general of which they supposed me to be the unfailing recipient. The day following that on which I returned from Aman Niaz Khan's country house was bazaar day; and, with a view of being out of the way when my troublesome visitors began to arrive, I rose shortly before daybreak, and wended my way towards the southern gate of the fortress. Clambering up the steep ascent, I took my place upon the ramparts to watch the sunrise over the plains, and see the various dealers and customers arrive at the bazaar. For nearly an

hour I was left in undisturbed quiet. Owing to my wearing Turcoman attire nobody had taken notice of me when crossing the inhabited portion of the ground. Very soon, however, the relays of workers on the ramparts began to arrive. I was immediately espied, and, as usual, a dense throng formed round me, persecuting me with their senseless questions. The sun was well above the horizon before there was any great influx of visitors to the market, but towards seven o'clock the throng became very large indeed.

From my lofty look-out post, I saw an accident which threatened to turn out fatally, and which resulted in serious loss. The tall, rickety bridge across the Murgab, which I have already mentioned, was, owing to the passage of the Merv people with their beasts of burthen, sadly shaken and dismantled. It was hardly safe to cross it on horseback. A Turcoman, with a laden horse carrying various commodities for sale at the bazaar, seeing the dilapidated condition of the bridge, preferred fording the Murgab to risking himself and his animal upon the shaky framework. The river was at this time rather high, though there were many places at which it could be crossed with ease. This Turcoman, however, chose a dangerous spot, where there was a hole in the river bed. When half across, the horse lost his footing, and, with his load and rider, disappeared beneath the surface. The current was unusually strong, and when they next appeared they were twenty or thirty yards lower down the stream. The man had held to the bridle, and struggled hard to keep his own and the animal's heads above water. On one occasion they disappeared so long that I felt confident both were lost. At least fifty on-lookers threw off their scanty garments and dashed into the water. They succeeded in disengaging the struggling rider, who seemed none the worse for his ducking; but the horse, borne down by his load, remained at the bottom. Divers

immediately set to work, but could not discover the carcass. Then about twenty persons formed a chain across the river and swam against the stream. At every stroke the swimmers allowed themselves to sink, until their feet touched the bottom, feeling for the drowned horse, which they at length succeeded in discovering. Several of them, diving, laid hold of it by the bridle, and, keeping all together, towed it ashore.

When the bazaar was well thronged, I came down to look at the proceedings, for up to this time I had not had an opportunity of inspecting a genuine Turcoman market. The market-place itself is within about two hundred yards of the gate of the Kala, and is situated between it and the river Murgab, which here makes a bend to the southward, enclosing the space upon which the present town of Merv stands. There are two parallel lines of mud wall, each one hundred yards long, and about sixty apart. From these walls spring short partitions of the same material, forming recesses at right angles to the general line, and turned inwards towards the interior of the bazaar, in which the habitual traders display their wares. Overhead, each one has a kind of rude roof of reed matting or felt, to keep off the sun's rays. Within these booths the merchants squat upon the ground, surrounded by their wares. Those who have not regular stalls sit up in the middle of the open space exposed to the full glare of the sun, and others under cover of curious square cotton umbrellas, such as may be seen any day in a southern Spanish market.

The people who throng the bazaar, to the number of 6,000 or 8,000, are principally Mervli, though there are a few Khivans, Bokharans, and, very occasionally, a trader or two from Meshed. The latter are very few indeed, for the Persians do not care to trust themselves among the Turcomans, and those traders from that place who are present

are generally Turcomans who have settled there, or else natives of the Derguez or other Turkish districts. No charge is made upon the merchants who frequent the bazaar for the accommodation afforded them in the stalls, except in the case of Jews, who pay half a kran (fivepence). The only expense incurred by the traders is that of keeping in repair the pathways across the fields and rude bridges spanning the irrigation trenches. That such repairs are sometimes needed will be seen from the anecdote about the drowned horse, given above.

The local Turcoman traders supply the bazaar with corn, some kinds of oil, fruits, fresh provisions, and articles of home manufacture; besides horses, asses, and camels. The corn is principally of three kinds—the *kaourga*, a kind of slightly bearded wheat; *arpa*, the ordinary barley; and *jowâne*, a grain resembling millet. The *jowâne* is white in colour, and of a spherical form. The plant upon which it grows is exactly like the maize plant, save that the grain is borne in a tufted plume upon the summit of the stalk. I do not recollect ever having seen maize growing at Merv, or exposed for sale in the bazaar. The *kaourga* is used for the manufacture of the finer kinds of bread, and is generally mixed with *arpa*. The *jowâne* is the grain upon which horses are fed, and of which the poorer classes make their bread. There is another grain, called *shali*, which is a kind of oats. It is exceedingly small, and of a brown colour. Rice, too, is occasionally brought from Meshed and Bokhara: it is not grown to any extent at Merv, the water supply not being sufficiently abundant.

Two classes of oils are to be met with; some of which are used both for food and lighting, while others are employed exclusively for the latter purpose. The *zeitun yagh* (olive oil), which is really excellent, is brought from Bokhara and Khiva. It is beautifully clear and sweet, and so thick

as to resemble syrup. Then there is the *kundji*. I have already alluded to the plant which produces this. It is the oil ordinarily used in the preparation of both rice and barley *pilaff*. It is also used for lamps. Three other species—*zigur*, *adji*, and *indow*—are only employed for lighting purposes. These are local products. The plant which produces the two first, I have never seen. The *indow* I believe to be identical with colza, or cabbage-seed oil.

Almost throughout the year the bazaar is plentifully supplied with fruits, all of which are of exquisite flavour. Merv has from time immemorial been celebrated for its fruits. Its melons are occasionally exported to Persia, in which country persons of rank send them to each other as presents. They are beyond all comparison superior to those produced along the frontier, or in the interior of Persia.

The fruits of Merv are—(1). The *kedou*, or bottle-gourd, which often grows to an enormous size—sometimes nearly to that of a four-gallon pitcher. These gourds are commonly used as water-pitchers. The smaller varieties are made into powder-horns, and bottles for containing snuff (*preusské*), and the peculiar olive-green powder known as *gougenasse*, which, as I have before mentioned, the Turcomans place beneath their tongues, and chew as Europeans do tobacco. This practice is very general among the Tekké Turcomans, and conduces to the aggravation of their ordinary slobbering pronunciation. The *kedou*, when of moderate size, and only just ripe, is also cut into slices and boiled with *pilaff*, to which it forms a very agreeable addition. Gourds of middle size, about a foot high, are used as the bodies of *kaliouns*. (2). The melon and water-melon (*kaoun* and *kharpous*). The *kaoun*, when ripe, is of a bright golden-yellow colour, and usually fourteen or fifteen inches in length. It is very sweet, and in the hottest season preserves its interior quite cool.

Before eating it the Turcomans have a curious habit of plunging it for an instant into boiling water. After this they believe that the interior is still cooler than it would otherwise be. Immense quantities are grown at Merv. The surplus not consumed during the year are stripped of the thicker portion of their rinds, cut into slices and dried in the sun. This preparation is termed *kâk*. In taste it is very similar to a freshly dried fig, but with infinitely more aroma. The dried slices are twisted together into ropes, several feet in length, which are doubled upon themselves like rude rolls of tobacco. This is one of the few exports from Merv to Persia. The *kharpous*, the interior of which is of a pink colour, the seeds being black, do not bear this kind of preparation, and are consumed while fresh. (3). Grapes (*uzum*) are of two varieties, purple and yellow. The purple ones are poor and small; the yellow are of the muscatel kind, and very large, sometimes growing to the length of an inch and a half. They are also made into raisins, and the villanous spirit arrack is distilled from them by the Jew merchants of Merv. (4). The peach (*sheptali*) is also delicious. One variety, the rind of which is of a deep crimson colour, known as the *shanik*, is smaller than the ordinary peach, and is without exception the most exquisite species of this fruit which I have ever tasted. (5). The apricot (*errik*). (6). The jujube (*igde*), a fruit which abounds at Merv. In external appearance it is very like a small date. It has also a stone like that fruit. The inside, however, is of a dry, husky nature, slightly sweet, and produces intense thirst. It is perhaps the fruit least adapted for consumption in an Eastern climate. The only other fruits I have seen at Merv are walnuts (*khoz*), which are chiefly brought from Persia, and apples (*elma*). These latter are very poor and woody, the climate being apparently too hot for their successful cultivation.

The bazaar is always plentifully supplied with food. The following are the chief articles exposed for sale.

Cheese (*penir*), which is white and slightly salted. It is also to be found in an indurated condition, and is then termed *sismah*, and *mastichikih*. In this latter form it is used by raiders, when going on a distant expedition. It is sold in the form of small, indurated balls, of a greyish colour, some two inches in diameter, and is as hard as a stone.

Yaghourt, or *gattuk*. This is boiled milk, which is allowed to coagulate.

Large cakes of bread, two feet in diameter, made from *arpa* and *jowâne*.

The principal flesh meats are goat (*getchi*); mutton (*kouyun*); and, very rarely, beef (*gau*), and camel-flesh (*devé*). The vendors of flesh meat generally take their stand in the open space between the line of booths, accompanied by a small flock of goats and sheep, which they kill on the spot, according to the demand, the heat of the weather being in summer so great that it would be risky to kill the animals on mere speculation, as the meat would not keep.

At times, too, the flesh of the wild ass (*colon*), and of the antelope (*geran*), is to be met with; and one is always sure of a couple of dozen pheasants (*karagool*), or partridges (*kaklik*), and an occasional hare or rabbit (*taouchan* and *alaka*). The ordinary fowls (*tavouk*) are sometimes exposed for sale; and eggs (*yomulta*) can be bought at the rate of four for a penny.

The merchants from Bokhara chiefly bring cloth of different kinds, coarse silk, cotton, and woven camel-hair. They also offer for sale *tumbaki* for the water-pipes, green tea, and sugar—either ordinary white lump or crystallized candied sugar, both being of Russian manufacture.

The traders from Meshed deal chiefly in the finer kinds of cloth, Russian printed calico, Chinese tea-bowls, tea-pots, and glass tumblers. The tea-bowls are of Chinese manufacture, the Turcomans seeming to have some particular prejudice in favour of these. A bowl of this description, five inches in diameter at the mouth, will cost as much as four francs.

The Merv traders, apart from food, sell wooden spoons and dishes, clothes, sheepskin hats and overcoats, knives, and occasionally arms. At the time about which I write, Russian rifles, both long and short, were offered for sale every bazaar day, four pounds sterling being the price asked for each. A large quantity of perfumed leather of the kind commonly known as Russian, and coloured red on one side, is also to be had.

The few Jews who have stalls at the bazaar deal in almost every kind of article which is to be found for sale, drugs included. In fact, it is only at their stalls that medicines of any kind can be procured. Quinine, aloes, rhubarb, and Epsom salts are the principal ones. The hat and dagger merchants keep apart, towards the eastern extremity of the bazaar. The hat dealer has a number of upright posts fixed in the ground, on the top of each of which is stuck one of the huge grenadier shakos of black sheepskin worn by the Turcomans; and the dagger merchant arranges his glittering wares in rows on the ground hard by.

Sometimes, but rarely, one sees dried fish exposed for sale. It is brought from Bokhara and Khiva, and is caught, I believe, in the Oxus. The fish are entire, and resemble medium-sized pike. They are prepared by simple sun-drying. Though there are many varieties of fish in the Murgab, it is never consumed by the Turcomans, as they have an idea that it produces fever.

The money in use is chiefly Persian and Bokharan, but

an occasional Russian imperial, which they value at about twenty-one krans, may be met with. The Persian pieces are the *toman*, or ten-kran piece, styled by the Turcomans *bajocci*, a term which may possibly have come down from the days of the old Genoese and Venetian traders; the *kran* (silver), equal in value to one franc; and the *pannabat*, or half-kran. The Bokharan pieces are a gold one of twenty-two krans, and the *tenga*, three of which are equal to two krans. Copper money, or *kara pool* (black money), will not be accepted as a medium of exchange. Very little gold indeed is in circulation at Merv, and the little that there is fluctuates in value according to the prejudices of individuals. There is a vast amount of spurious silver coin, and some unstamped morsels of silver; the latter the only approach to local Merv money which has come under my notice. Both are the cause of endless discussions and squabbling in the course of buying and selling.

In the open space at the western end of the bazaar, horses, asses, and camels are assembled for sale.

On each alternate bazaar day, the Khan of the Otamish and Toktamish hold a kind of court for the settlement of claims and disputes among their respective clansmen. On this occasion it was Baba Khan's turn to sit in judgment. The court was held upon an earth mound, about forty feet in length and fifteen in height. It was the remnant of a battery erected by the Turcomans to protect a ford of the Murgab during the fighting with the Persians, when the latter were so completely vanquished. The Khan sat upon a carpet placed on the summit of this mound, surrounded by some of his Kethkodas, and aided by a cadi—an old man, learned in the law, named Moullah Safa,[1] who decided all cases in which technical knowledge was required. As I approached, Baba Khan rose to his feet, as did the

[1] See his seal (Frontispiece to vol. ii.).

Kethkodas, and room beside the Khan was made for me on the carpet.

A vast concourse of people was gathered about the foot and on the slopes of the hill, some of them being spectators, others litigants, and a considerable number culprits in custody of the yassaouls. I have explained that the able-bodied young men were obliged to give four days' labour per month in the erection of the fortifications, or, in default, to forfeit the sum of two krans for each day missed. The defaulters, both in labour and money, were numerous; and, one by one, they were brought before the Khan for judgment. Failing the immediate payment of the fines, their outer garments were stripped off, and their elbows lashed tightly behind their backs by means of sashes. Then, their hats being removed, they were forced to stand in the sun for two or three hours. Thieves, too, were under arrest, individuals charged with pilfering articles in the bazaar. These were punished by their hands being tied behind them around a stout wooden stake fixed in the ground; their hats being removed, they were kept in this position until evening. Very inveterate offenders were sentenced to be thus pilloried during several consecutive days. Sometimes witnesses had to be called, or culprits sought for. These were fetched by half-a-dozen yassaouls armed with stout staves. One of these, being somewhat remiss in promptly executing the order given to him by the Khan, the latter seized a large stick from one of his lictors, and proceeded to belabour the recalcitrant upon the back until the instrument of castigation fell to pieces. Never in any instance did I see the slightest attempt at rebellion against the Khan's decision, or even against the rough exercise of his own displeasure.

I told Baba Khan that I wished to pay a visit to the bazaar. He at once told off several yassaouls, armed with

staves, to accompany and make way for me through the dense throng which crammed the spaces between the booths, as well as to insure me against insult or molestation. The unaccustomed spectacle of a more than usually well-dressed person, accompanied by an escort of yassaouls, moving slowly through the bazaar, speedily attracted attention. I was soon recognised, and had the oppressive, surging crowd behind and around me, eagerly listening to every syllable that dropped from my lips. I stayed at a few of the stalls, and made trifling purchases, by way of ascertaining the current prices. With the exception of meat, fruit, and corn, everything was horribly dear. Coarse tea costs from six to eight shillings per pound; and sugar, both ordinary white lump and crystallized candied sugar, called here *kand*, were over one shilling and eightpence for the same quantity.

I was very much amused by an incident which occurred during my promenades. As I was making my way back, after having traversed the entire length of the bazaar, a Jew merchant placed himself before me, and, making a profound reverence, presented me with a small bag of silver coin, containing about fifteen krans. In some surprise, I asked him what was the meaning of this proceeding. He replied that it was a gift to me from the Jewish merchants of the bazaar, by way of testifying their respect. This is a common Eastern custom; a gift offered to a person of high position being intended to conciliate his good-will, and secure his influence on any needful occasion. He would not take back the money, so I handed it to the yassaouls for their trouble in accompanying me.

The western extremity of the bazaar is devoted to the sale of horses, asses, and camels. Some fine horses are to be seen at times, at prices varying from 30*l.* to 60*l.*; but, as a rule, animals of this price are not brought to the

bazaar, few of its frequenters being willing or able to invest, for them, such serious sums. The price of a good Turcoman horse is generally a fancy one; asked, not so much with reference to the animal's beauty or apparent physical development, as in consideration of some wonderful exploit, real or imaginary, which the vendor declares he has performed, of swiftness or staying power. As, however, Turcomans are too well acquainted with each other's powers of mendacity to place much confidence in a mere statement on such a subject, the really excellent animals are kept for their owners' own use, or else purchased by some one who has had an opportunity of testing or witnessing their prowess. A great deal has been said about Turcoman horses —I am fain to believe by people who make their statements from mere hearsay, but who never had opportunities of forming just opinions of the wonderful qualities they so freely announce. During my stay at Merv, and a pretty long one among the Yamuds, I had ample means of observing the merits of Turcoman horses, and of hearing their praises sounded by no cold partizans of the breed, viz., the Turcomans themselves. Yet I never witnessed or even heard of such exploits as European travellers mention in speaking of them. I have over and over again made searching inquiries about the powers of these Central Asian steeds. A first-class Turcoman horse, after a month's special training, and with ample and special food, will go from sixty to seventy miles a day, and keep up that pace for an apparently unlimited period. This sustaining power is probably their only excellence which has not been overrated. For mere speed over a mile or two they cannot hold their own against the higher class of European horses. As a rule, the Turcoman horse is very 'leggy,' but extremely graceful of limb. His chest is narrow, but very long, as is his shoulder also. His head is usually handsome, but in

the main rather large; and the neck, far from having the proud curve of the Arab horse, is not even straight. It is slightly concave from above, and gives to some otherwise elegantly formed animals a lamentable likeness to a strangely abnormal camel. At the point of junction with the head, the neck is usually very constricted, giving the animal a half-strangled appearance. When crossed with the Arab breed, the Turcoman horses become really beautiful animals.

There are not, generally, more than half a dozen horses exposed for sale on any given day; but the numerous frequenters of the bazaar, almost all of whom are mounted, are ready to part with their horses should an adequate price be offered. Asses are generally forthcoming in great numbers; and, so far as my experience of them is concerned, they are in no wise larger or stronger than the humblest specimens of their kind at home in Europe. It is true that the large white ass is used in Persia by persons of distinction, especially by Moullahs, and that they rival horses in price, but I never saw one at Merv.

A bazaar day is a great occasion for gossip and the exchange of news. It is also generally the day on which the *medjlis* is called together. In the market-place, indeed, more gossip than business seems to obtain, and everybody seems more engaged upon his neighbour's business than upon his own. I saw one group of half a score of men sitting as closely as possible around eighteen eggs, as if their business were to hatch, and not to sell them, eagerly chatting about politics. Merchants were selling salt and meat by the weight of the shrapnel and unbroken shell which the Persians had fired at them twenty-two years previously. There were no regular weights. In serving tea and sugar, the merchant placed his dagger, or perhaps his slippers, in the opposite scale, and many were the

altercations as to whether the counterpoise in question were of sufficient weight or not.

It approached mid-day, and the sun's heat was becoming intolerable, as I turned away from the bazaar. The town crier, mounted on a broken piece of mud wall, was announcing the disappearance of a child, and alternating his descriptions of its dress and appearance with the statement that at a certain stall the flesh of a sheep could be purchased at a reduced rate. There were some men, also, walking up and down the bazaar, and crying out the names of the articles which they wished to buy. In a European mart one would expect the sellers to cry out their wares, but at Merv it is the contrary. A man goes along the row of booths shouting, 'I want six eggs,' or 'I want two fowls.' Should the stall-keeper be sufficiently emancipated from his habitual reverie, or from quarrelling with his neighbours, perhaps he will reply, but no dealer ever takes the trouble to put his goods *en évidence*.

The camels were groaning laboriously, and the horses were standing around in dissatisfied silence in the white heat of noon. The frequenters of the bazaar were beginning to make their way to their own houses or those of their acquaintances, to indulge in the habitual siesta, and I directed my steps towards my redoubt. In the outskirts of the bazaar I passed large piles of the gnarled stems of tamarisk (*odjar*), brought from a distance of some twenty or thirty miles westward to be sold for firewood. Charcoal, too, in rude sacks, was being disposed of, for Turcomans of the better class use it for lighting their water-pipes, instead of the balls of dried horse-dung which the humbler citizens of Merv employ for the purpose.

On reaching my house I found that Moullah Safa was before me, anxious to consult me about some knotty points which had arisen in the bazaar, and which he did not feel

competent to decide upon without due conference with the authorities. He was over eighty years of age, as deaf as a post, his nose was broken, and he did not speak distinctly, so that though he roared at me for an hour, and took the utmost pains to explain the difficulty to me, all I could make out in the end was that two camel drivers had quarrelled about the payment of two krans. After listening to him until I was driven nearly distraught, I was compelled to give the matter up in despair.

Baba Khan called upon me the same evening, and told me that Baghur Khan, the Persian envoy, who had been so long kept waiting in the border Sitchmaz village, had obeyed the summons to Kouchid Khan Kala, and, together with his attendants, had encamped close by. The general tenor of his mission was to obtain the allegiance of Merv to Persia, under pretence of guaranteeing them against Russian invasion. He promised that a subsidy for the support of the yassaouls should be paid, but required that twelve Kethkodas of importance, with their families, should take up their residence at Meshed, as hostages for the fulfilment of the terms which should be agreed upon. Baba Khan was very much opposed to this, and Aman Niaz Khan still more so. I gave my candid advice, and told them I believed they were quite right in objecting to the terms of the mission; that I quite agreed with the opinions they had formerly expressed, viz. that Persia was neither able nor willing to protect them, and that probably the hostages to Meshed were in reality wanted to answer with their lives and liberties for any incursions of the Tekkés along the Persian border, whether such raids were officially authorised on the part of the Khans or privately undertaken. The whole matter was to be considered as soon as possible by the entire *medjlis*. Baba Khan also told me that the entire complement of horsemen for executive purposes and yassaoul

service was not yet concentrated at Kouchid Khan Kala, and that it would be necessary, on the following morning, to despatch a large body of horsemen to an easterly Vekil village, at which a local bazaar was to be held, in order to punish thirty families who had been summoned to head-quarters, and ordered to bring their houses and families there, but who had neglected to do so. The method proposed was that the horsemen should suddenly fall upon the unfortunate culprits with long sticks, give them a sound thrashing, and then bring them as prisoners to the seat of government. There were also a number of fines to be collected from yassaouls who had neglected their duties. One fine of fifteen krans was for not responding to the call of the Yassaoul-bashi, at any hour of the night or day, and there were fines of seven krans apiece to be inflicted on several who at a general inspection, such as took place once a week, either had not horses, or had not them in condition for immediate action.

About this time I was mightily troubled by an odd character who chose to attach himself to me. He was a half-witted man of about thirty years of age, who had been surnamed by the Mervli 'the Diwan.' This word literally signifies 'inspired,' but it also means a semi-lunatic of a harmless nature. The word 'deli,' which also means 'mad,' has a more objectionable rendering of the same kind, signifying a wicked or disagreeable lunatic. The peculiar hobby of the diwan in question was to imagine himself a moullah, called upon to summon the faithful to prayers about every five minutes during the twenty-four hours. In the intervals between these summonings he occupied himself by going through the most extraordinary genuflexions, and pronouncing, in a loud voice, prayers suitable to his own peculiar state of mind. He would summon about him a number of the idlers of the place, and,

taking his seat upon the parapet of my redoubt, hold forth to them upon various subjects, including religion and poetry, invariably winding up with some of his grotesque antics. Far from being offended by this mimicry of their religious ceremonies, his auditory seemed delighted with his proceedings, and I have seen even the old *azauchi*, as the Turcomans style the chief *muezzim*, laughing until the tears rolled down his cheeks at the oddities of his crazy rival. He rarely stirred from the neighbourhood of my redoubt, and at all hours of the night and morning I was startled from my sleep by his prolonged cry, sounding drearily over the waste, like the cry of a bell-bird in some Mexican forest. Often, too, he would take up his quarters within my *cv*, and stay all day long close by me, watching my movements with intense earnestness as I wrote out my notes or letters. Sometimes he would quote to me at length passages from Hafiz, whose soul he seemed to imagine had entered into him. Unlike the Turcomans in general, he very rarely ate, and exhibited none of the repulsive covetousness of food which is characteristic of the great majority of his fellow-countrymen. A little time before I left Merv he suddenly disappeared, and I never saw him again. I believe that he went on a pilgrimage to some shrine in Bokhara or elsewhere.

CHAPTER L.

COOKERY AND OCCUPATIONS AT MERV.

Frugal living—Sheep's-tail fat—Bread and broth—Tchorba—Pilaff—Chapati—Ounashe—Eulim—Dewé chal—Pheasants, partridges, &c.—Wild goose and duck—Sumsa—Beg Murad's thievery—A disagreeable episode—A peace offering—A compromise—Love of eating—Covetousness—Everyday life—Martial tendencies—Working for hire—Free land—Female occupations—Valuable carpets.

With the exception of some of the well-to-do classes, the Turcomans live but poorly. Their diet is ordinarily of the most frugal kind. Even among the more opulent there are few luxuries indeed. Opium, tumbaki, tea, and arrack, with occasionally a little *hashish* (*Cannabis Indica*), snuff, and *gougenasse*, are the only extra indulgences of the Turcomans. With the exception of water-pipe smoking and *gougenasse* chewing, in the great majority of instances these are not habitual.

The morning meal generally consists of fresh-baked griddled bread, hot from the oven, and weak green tea, though the latter is not always forthcoming. The women, who are astir long before sunrise, grind the corn in their horizontal stone mills, and immediately afterwards bake it in the circular mud ovens placed a few yards in front of the entrance of each *ev*. In the early dawn, looking across the plains, the site of each village is marked by the red glow hanging over it as the rude ovens are being heated with the bramble and grass fuel in common use. This is the invariable practice of rich and poor alike.

At midday there is another meal, usually of bread and *ǧattuk*, supplemented, perhaps, with fresh or indurated salty cheese. During the great heats many dine on bread, with melons, grapes, or other fruits. It is not usual, except when entertaining a guest, or on some festive occasion, to eat flesh meat at this midday meal.

The principal meal of the day occurs after sundown. It is at this time that one sees Turcoman provisions in all their variety. In a Khan's house, during at least four days in the week, the *pièce de résistance* consists of mutton broth and bread. Every day a number of sheep are killed in each village, chiefly by speculators, who realise a small sum by so doing; or, should anyone have a guest whom it is absolutely necessary to furnish with meat, he kills a sheep, takes what is requisite for his own purposes, and sends the crier round the village to announce that he has slaughtered the animal, and is prepared to dispose of the remaining portions at the ordinary prices.

At Merv a sheep usually costs from seven to twelve shillings. The animals are of the big-tailed variety, and all the fat of their bodies seems to concentrate itself in the tail, which cannot, on the average, weigh less than twelve pounds, and is the dearest portion of the carcass. When a sheep is killed, the tail is first made use of. It is skinned, and cut into pieces, which are placed in a large hemispherical iron cauldron of about two feet in diameter. In this the fat is melted down to the consistency of oil, and, when it is at a high temperature, pieces of lean, chopped small, are thrown into it, and the pot is removed from the fire. The contents are then poured into a wooden dish, somewhat larger than the pot, which is placed upon the carpet in the midst of the guests. Each person dips his bread into the melted grease, now and again fishing out a morsel of meat. Owing to the high temperature of the fat, these morsels are

quite calcined, and taste precisely like greasy cinders. It is a peculiarity of the Turcomans that they like their meat exceedingly well done. When all the meat has been picked out from the dish, and the liquid within has attained a moderate temperature, the master of the feast takes the vessel in both hands, places it to his lips, and swallows a pint or so of the fat. He then hands it to the guest nearest to him, who does likewise, and so it makes the circuit of the party. When nearly all the grease has been thus consumed, and if there be present any person whom the host especially designs to honour, he offers him the wooden dish, and the recipient gathers up what remains by passing his curved finger round the interior and conveying it to his mouth.

The meat of the sheep is generally kept as long as possible before being cooked, Turcomans seeming to have a predilection for meat the odour of which is rather higher than that which would be pleasant to European nostrils. It is cut into small pieces, and placed, bone and all, in the pot. The resulting broth is poured into a dish partly filled with morsels of bread, and the meat is arranged upon the top. One or more of these dishes are placed among the guests, each being accompanied by a couple of large rude wooden spoons. Each guest drinks half a dozen spoonfuls of the broth, passes the spoon to his next neighbour, and proceeds with his finger and thumb to fish out morsels of bread and meat from the dish. This is the ordinary meal of a well-to-do Turcoman family, the fat tail being considered an extra-luxurious dish. As a rule, the Turcomans are extravagantly fond of fat and oily matters; and the almost universal derangement of their digestive organs is probably owing to the consumption of so much fatty matter during the extreme heats. It is a rare thing to meet a Turcoman whose liver is not out of order, and who does not suffer to a very great extent from biliousness. But what-

ever ills he suffers in this regard, he would bear them all sooner than abandon his beloved grease-pot. The bread and broth dish is termed *tchorba*, and the melted tail *kouyun yagh*. These two dishes constitute the *beau idéal* of the diet of the Turcoman, if I except the rice or corn *pilaff*, with which meat and dried prunes are boiled. At Merv, however, rice is so expensive an article that it is seldom used as food except on very express occasions.

The *pilaff*, whether of rice or of barley, is prepared by first boiling the grain in water. The contents of the pot are then tumbled upon a piece of fine reed matting, laid over another vessel, through which the water runs off, the grain being only two-thirds cooked. It is then replaced in the pot and gently heated, to drive off as much of the water as possible; and subsequently the olive or *kundji yagh* used as dressing is poured in. When it is desired to make a very uxurious *pilaff*, the rice is boiled with meat chopped up into small pieces and two or three handfuls of dried prunes. The prune is used pretty frequently in this manner. A good *pilaff*, thus prepared, has every grain perfectly distinct, the mess being considered quite spoiled if reduced to the semi-gelatinous consistency of European rice-pudding.

The poorer classes seldom or ever indulge in *pilaff* or sheep's-tail fat. Instead, they make large use of an article called *chapati*. In the preparation of this, some edible oil is placed in an iron pot, and heated to a high temperature. Sheets of dough, a foot or eighteen inches in diameter, and rolled to the thinness of paper, are, one by one, placed in the oil for two or three minutes. They are withdrawn, and laid one upon the other, until the entire supply is cooked. This preparation is by no means unpalatable, especially when, as sometimes, it is sprinkled with powdered white sugar. Owing to the extreme heat of the oil, the dough is rapidly and thoroughly cooked, becoming of a

light, flaky consistency. There were at Merv some families who made a business of preparing this *chapati*, and every day, at a certain hour, two or three men would come among the houses, announcing in a loud voice that *chapati* was to be had at such and such *evs*.

A less expensive dish, called *ounashe*, is also largely prepared. This consists of thin sheets of dough, similar to those used in the making of *chapati*, but instead of being cooked in oil they are boiled in *gattuk*, or thick coagulated sour milk. This is a dish to which I could never accustom my stomach.

Very often, too, the evening meal consists of bread and *eulim*, the latter being a *gattuk* made from camel's milk, and which is considered much more nutritious than that made from the milk of sheep or cows. The whey of camel's milk fermented, and which is called *dewé chal*, a kind of koumiss, is very refreshing in hot weather. When fresh it is slightly effervescent, and is drunk in enormous quantities.

At the bazaar, as I have said, one can purchase rabbits, hares, pheasants, and partridges. Three pheasants in very good condition are to be bought for a franc, as also are half a dozen plump partridges. A good-sized hare costs one franc, and two rabbits can be purchased for a similar sum. Strange to say, though game abounds, very few indeed ever go in search of it, the Turcomans preferring to sit at home and munch their dry bread, to taking the trouble and making the exertion necessary to procure it. Neither do they much care for it. In the majority of instances the pheasants and partridges are not shot. When a party of horsemen are abroad, and by chance cross a piece of ground affording any cover, they are sure to put up some dozens of partridges or pheasants, and then, forming line at short intervals, they drive them towards the open, the birds, after the first two

flights, rarely ever again taking to the wing. They are then run down until exhausted, when the riders spring from their horses and catch them alive.

I have occasionally been able to procure wild goose and duck. The former is really excellent, though the ducks were little more than skin and bone, probably owing to their being shot during summer. The black ibis, which haunts the flooded spaces in great numbers, is also eaten. The flesh of the *colon*, or wild ass (in Persian *gurré*), especially when young, is an excellent meat, though, owing to the difficulty of taking the animal, one seldom sees its flesh in the bazaar. The Turcomans are very fond of the flesh of the antelope (*geran*), but it was too high-flavoured for my taste. An entire antelope can be purchased for the sum of two francs. These meats, like all others, are usually boiled, the Turcomans considering it wasteful to roast them. Unlike the Persians and Osmanli Turks, they seldom indulge in the *kebab* or *shishlik* (spitted meat), which is supposed to be so typical a Turkish dish.

There is one preparation of meat which the Turcomans carry with them when they go far afield for any purpose. It is called *sumsa*. A thin, circular cake of dough, a foot in diameter, is covered with meat finely minced, and highly flavoured with spices and garlic, a little sugar occasionally being added. The cake of dough is then doubled over, and the edges are united. The whole is placed in an oven and baked for half an hour. This kind of mince pie is one of the most palatable dishes to be found among the Turcomans, especially when they can be prevailed upon to lessen the ordinary modicum of garlic.

I subsisted largely upon *sumsa*, which I got specially made by Matthi, the Jew merchant. Subsequently, however, I was obliged to abandon this diet. When it was once known that I was in the habit of ordering a dozen meat

pies of the kind, I had always a large number of guests at my house, patiently awaiting the moment at which I should produce my breakfast or dinner, in order that they might partake of the *sumsa*, which they looked upon as a great delicacy.

This dish was the occasion of an amusing incident, which, at the time, however, was to me the reverse of diverting. Beg Murad, the fat, humorous-looking ruffian whom I have mentioned as having met on the day of my arrival at Merv, was extravagantly fond of this minced preparation. I had, in my unsophisticated days, largely supplied all comers with it, Beg Murad among the number. Finding that there was an apparently never-failing supply, the old ruffian, far from being shy of continually repeating his visits, seemed to have grown to consider breakfast and dinner at my expense a standing institution. Observing this, I directed Matthi not to bring me any more *sumsa* until I should send him further word. Great was the disappointment of the pot-hunters when, on arriving each morning and evening, they discovered that I was confining myself to a diet of bread and *gattuk*, with an occasional egg. Turcoman etiquette made it necessary that I should offer my visitors a portion of what I was eating; and often, out of what would otherwise have been a substantial meal, I have scarcely been able to secure a couple of mouthfuls for myself. It was hateful to eat with these people. Each raced with the others, as it were, in eating, so as to obtain the greatest possible supply of food for himself. It was quite sufficient to prevent one from enjoying his food to witness the rapacity and eagerness with which they devoured what was laid before them, lest they might be outstripped by any of their companions. Sometimes, with a view of disappointing them, I have abstained from food for a whole day, leaving them, from early dawn to long after sunset,

with no other nourishment than that which they could extract from their water-pipes. My own servants, who were highly disgusted at this system of abstinence, inasmuch as it forced them, as well as myself, to fast on occasional days, again and again urged me to tell my visitors to go out; but I did not wish to commit such a breach of etiquette, and preferred the more passive form of showing the intruders that I thought they were carrying the joke a little too far. When by these means I had succeeded in getting rid of the more rapacious of my acquaintances, I ventured to order a fresh supply of *sumsa*, which I kept concealed in my saddle-bags, pending a possible opportunity of consuming it unobserved. However, someone betrayed the secret of the hidden sandwiches to Beg Murad, who now made a practice of visiting my house about dawn, when I was asleep, helping himself from the bags, and coolly sitting down upon my carpet to enjoy his breakfast, after which he had the audacity to wake me up and ask whether I was not going to get him any tea. At first I was highly amused at his *sang froid*, but this system of breakfasting surreptitiously at my expense began at last to assume the form of a serious annoyance. I have often awakened, to see the last portion of my day's allowance of *sumsa* vanishing down Beg Murad's throat, he not feeling the slightest concern as to how I should procure my breakfast.

At last matters came to a crisis. Baba Khan and Aman Niaz Khan were desirous of consulting me upon some serious matter connected with the government of Merv, and, with several of their principal followers, one morning paid me a visit. Taking their seats, they waited patiently until I should awake, for, as I have said, it is a matter of strict etiquette among the Turcomans, at Merv especially, never to disturb a sleeper. When I awoke, I noticed, as usual, Beg Murad, rapidly swallowing my *sumsa*, and I could perceive

by the broad grins on the faces of the others, that they had been informed of the joke, and were intensely amused at it. This was too much for me, and, sitting upright upon my *takht*, with a very sour expression of countenance I commenced to think over the means whereby I should put a summary end to the objectionable proceedings of the Beg.

The conversation turned upon the doings on the previous evening of some *ogri*, or thieves, who had infringed the new regulations as to raiding upon their neighbours. 'Oh,' said Beg Murad, with his mouth full of mincemeat, 'I believe that the Bahadur Khan (myself) thinks we are all *ogri* at Merv.' This gave me the desired opportunity, and I replied, rather fiercely, 'I do not believe that you are all *ogri* here, but a great many are, and it is my opinion that you are the chief of them (*ogri-bashi*).' This provoked inextinguishable laughter among the audience, which had the effect of irritating me still further, and, resolving to push the matter to an extremity there and then, I continued, 'Beg Murad, finish that *sumsa* which you are eating, and then immediately go out of my house; and if I ever catch you within the door again it will be the worse for you.' With this I imperiously pointed towards the door. Beg Murad, who was a man of very high standing at Merv, was completely taken aback at this sudden change in my long-suffering attitude, and as he perceived from the demeanour of his superiors who were present that I should be supported in my command, he rose, and left the *ev*, darting an angry look at me.

I then explained to Baba and Aman Niaz Khans how for a long time I had been victimised by the Beg, and that no other course than the one I had adopted was left open to me. They said that I was quite right, and that Murad's reputation was the same all over Merv; that he was a very

greedy person, and endeavoured as much as possible to live at the expense of others, while never on any account would he offer hospitality to his friends.

In the course of half an hour the Khan left me, and, as I was engaged in writing, I noticed an unusual stir outside my door. Then the carpet which hung curtainwise before it was thrust aside, and two Turcomans appeared, dragging by the horns a large fat-tailed sheep. 'Stop!' I cried, 'where are you bringing that animal to?' 'It is,' said one, 'a present from Beg Murad.' It was, in effect, a peace-offering on his part, for he had thought it more prudent to try and be on good terms with me, especially as he had a suspicion that ere long some substantial presents might be distributed among the leading inhabitants. He had therefore pocketed the affront which I had put upon him. However, I would not hear of any compromise, and peremptorily ordered the sheep to be taken away, saying that I would have no dealings of any kind with a man of Beg Murad's character. Observing, however, the ludicrously dolorous expression upon the faces of my servants and henchmen, who, by my refusal of the sheep, saw themselves deprived of a prospective meal of sheep's-tail fat and mutton broth, I so far rescinded my original decision as to consent to buy the animal. I asked my chief servant to appraise its worth, telling him not by any means to undervalue it, as I did not wish to be under any obligation whatever to the would-be donor. He said that thirteen krans (nearly eleven shillings) would be ample purchase money, so I handed that sum to the man who had brought the sheep. To make my action all the more patent, I had the animal slaughtered upon the spot, and despatched a leg of it to Beg Murad's *ev*, with the message that, if so disposed, he could make *sumsa* out of it for himself. To do the Beg justice, I must admit that he saw the humour of the proceeding. When I subsequently

became reconciled to him, previous to leaving Merv, he laughed heartily over the affair. In conversing with Aman Niaz Khan about my relations with the Beg, who was one of the principal of the Otamish ruler's Kethkodas, that chief told me that until I had been installed in the position which I then held, Beg Murad, owing to my having arrived at his village, and having been brought by him to Kouchid Khan Kala, looked upon me as his prisoner, and considered me to a certain extent obliged to furnish him with anything in my possession to which he might take a fancy. My position would have been a gloomy one indeed had the Khans permitted this theory to be practically carried out.

When a Turcoman is not eating one of his regular meals, or smoking *tumbaki* or opium, or chewing *gougenasse*, or taking snuff, he likes to have something upon which to employ his teeth, and generally has his pocket full of a mixture of parched peas and small raisins (*kishmish*), which he is continually munching. Some, who can afford it, eat pistaches (*pisté*), which are rather dear, being brought from a considerable distance within the Persian frontier. The ordinary material for occupying his teeth is either burned corn or the dried melon seeds to which I have alluded as causing the curious serration of the front upper incisors.

Eating seems to be the main object of a Turcoman's life, and, provided he has an adequate supply of the better class of nutriment, such as I have described, he will remain inactive and indolent. He will not even go upon a *chappow* or *aleman*, those species of raids which for the younger members of the community have the double advantage of mingling pleasure and profit. At the bottom the Turcoman is not fond of fighting; he would much rather supply his wants by some other means, though he decidedly prefers raiding, with all its concomitant risks, to anything like

steady labour in the fields or other industrial pursuit. In this regard, Beg Murad was a typical Turcoman. He never on any occasion sallied forth upon a foray, but he had in his service a number of young men whom he equipped and sent out to pillage for him. Apart from this he carried on a small trade with Bokhara and Meshed, and was reputed to be very rich.

Many of these Turcomans have the reputation of being the masters of large amounts of treasure, earned principally during the prosperous days of the man-stealing trade, and before Russia had closed the slave markets of Khiva and Bokhara. Whether these treasures be real or fictitious, with very few exceptions these people act as though they did not know where to find their next day's food. A Turcoman will go any distance to get a meal gratis; and, if he thinks there is a likelihood of any unusually good food, he will sit patiently in another's *ev* 'from morn till dewy eve,' in the hope that his host for the nonce will be starved into bringing forth the desired viands. The habitual hunger and apparently insatiable appetite of an ordinary Turcoman, coupled with his natural covetousness, make him a very disagreeable person in this regard.

The everyday life of a wealthy Turcoman is a very indolent one. He rises a little before dawn, which he can well afford to do, inasmuch as he spends the best part of the middle of the day in siesta, and retires to bed at an early hour in the evening. Having washed, and lighted his water-pipe, he sits smoking, awaiting the production of the hot fresh bread which the female members of the household are preparing, and then, having made his breakfast, and smoked again for half-an-hour, he talks with the people who drop in to arrange his ordinary matters of business, whether in connection with his flocks and herds, or his traffic with Meshed. The rest of the day is spent in the

idlest possible fashion, and, if he be an opium-smoker—for the Turcomans, unlike the Persians, do not eat opium—as soon as the mid-day meal is concluded he stupefies himself for the rest of the day, barely arousing himself to partake of his evening meal, after which he smokes *tumbaki* and opium again. Those who do not use opium, and are not forced by their position in life to do any labour, spend the entire day in talking with their neighbours, or paying visits, in the hope of coming upon some party engaged in consuming sheep's-tail fat. During harvest time he often proceeds to his fields, and, under a sunshade, sits watching the younger members of his family who are at work upon the crops, or supervising the cutting of the irrigation trenches. Of course there are men, like the *yassaoul-bashi*, or the director of the water-works at Benti, or the *karaoul-bashi* (the captain of the guard, whose duty it is to watch for and pursue Saruk and Ersari raiders), whose official positions give them ample occupation, and the remuneration which they receive, though not very large, is sufficient to supply themselves and their families with everyday necessaries. Those who are compelled to work proceed, immediately after breakfast, to toil in the fields, or follow their avocations as sheepskin dressers, shoemakers, or the like. At Merv, those who follow any occupation of this kind are few indeed. Once a man passes the age of forty, he delegates all his work to the younger members of his family, and never dreams of doing anything himself. In the event, however, of raids or defensive fighting, men of comparatively advanced age deem it to be their duty to take part with the youngest in the necessary martial toils; but as a rule the lives of men of mature age are absolutely indolent lives, and their sole aim seems to be the winning of the necessary means of indulging in this *beau idéal* of existence.

It often happens that a Turcoman's sons are so numerous that he cannot find occupation for them all upon the grounds which he cultivates, or in looking after his cattle while grazing. In cases like this, some of them either hire themselves as camel drivers to and from Bokhara and Meshed, or else work at wages of two krans a day on the farms of some of the richer Turcomans, particularly at harvest and irrigation times. Should anyone feel so disposed, he has always plenty of unoccupied ground from which to choose a site for the planting of crops on his own account; but as a younger son of this description can rarely raise the necessary funds for the seed, and at the same time support himself while engaged in the preliminary labours of cultivation and until his crops have ripened, such as these are few indeed. It is only when a Turcoman marries, which he seldom does until he has accumulated or received from his parents some small capital, that he ever sets up as an agriculturist on his own account. He then purchases a house, a second-hand one, costing from seventy-five to a hundred krans (3*l.* to 4*l.*), and settles somewhere in the neighbourhood of one of the secondary irrigation streams branching from the Novur or Alasha canal, accordingly as he belongs to the Toktamish or Otamish, and proceeds to dig a minor watercourse for the irrigation of the land the cultivation of which he undertakes, which must be within the particular district inhabited by the clan or subdivision of which he is a member. Some, especially those inhabiting the western border of the oasis, the Sitchmaz, for instance, occupy themselves in collecting the tamarisk trunks which are to be procured in abundance in the neighbourhood of Dash Robat. These are sold, sometimes in their natural state, and sometimes burned into charcoal, both on account of the convenience of carrying it in this form, and of its inherent value.

The female members of the family are mainly occupied in household duties. They do all the cooking and fetching of water, and the daughters for whom there is no other occupation occupy themselves in the manufacture of embroidered skull-caps, carpets, shirts, saddle-bags, and socks of variegated tints for the better classes. The silk and cotton robes worn by the men and women are made by special persons. The women manufacture their own garments, the cloth being purchased from the merchants at the bazaar. When a Turcoman is blessed with a large number of daughters, he contrives to realize a considerable sum per annum by the felt and other carpets which they make. In this case an *ev* is set apart as a workshop, and three or four girls are usually occupied upon each carpet, sometimes for a couple of months.

Each girl generally manufactures two extra fine carpets, to form part of her dowry when she marries. When this has been done, she devotes herself to producing goods for the markets at Meshed and Bokhara, where the Turcoman carpets fetch a much higher price than those manufactured in Khorassan or beyond the Oxus. Sometimes these carpets are made partly of silk, brought from Bokhara. They are generally twice the size of the ordinary ones, which are made from sheep's wool and camel hair mingled with a little cotton, and are almost entirely of silk. They fetch enormous prices. I have known as much as fifty pounds (50*l.*) given for one measuring eight feet square.

CHAPTER LI.

EVENTS AT MERV—DIFFICULTIES.

Proselytism—Matrimonial proposals—Objections to my leaving Merv—Illusions—News from Kandahar—Reasons for my departure—A suspicious Turcoman—Dismissal of Baghur Khan—Aman Niaz's blood feud—Merv allegiance to Turkey—Turcoman demonstration against Baghur Khan—Salor fears—Their intended flight—A call to arms—Salor delinquents—My intercession for them—An unfortunate letter—Abass Khan suspected—A state document—A distinguished scribe—My guest's snuff and opium—A discussion—Letter to British Minister—Kadjar Khan's intrigues—The Kethkodas and the flag—My opinion on the matter—Fear of false steps—Awaiting a reply.

MATTERS were going fairly smooth for me, and the Turcomans had begun to look upon me as naturalised among them. I was able to talk to them about Koranic doctrines; let them see that I was acquainted with the fact that Adam, Noah, Moses, and David were prophets, and had even renounced my heretical doubts as to Alexander the Great being a *pilhamber*—one of the inspired elect. I had made such progress in the favour even of the moullahs, that one day a Seyd (descendant of Mahomet), one of their number, called upon me, and said that as I was so well acquainted with Mussulman tenets, he saw no reason whatever why I should not openly embrace the true faith. Issa (Jesus) and Moussa (Moses) were, he said, quite as much respected by the adherents of Islam as they were by my own co-religionists; and I required only a short course of instruction in the form of prayer, and some minor matters connected with

the practice of the Mahometan religion, to enjoy all the privileges accruing to the membership of his faith. Even Makdum Kuli Khan entered into the matter with ardour. He was sorry I expressed any desire to leave Merv. He said that probably I desired to return to my wife. He could not believe that it was possible I was unmarried. 'Once you openly acknowledge yourself a Mussulman, we will find you another wife here, or two if you wish.' I was in no slight degree alarmed at this proposition, for it looked like the preliminary to an announcement that leaving the oasis was a thing not to be thought of. Grasping at the Khan's hypothesis about my being married, I replied that I couldn't think of marrying any other wives, as the Christian religion forbade it. 'But,' said the Khan, 'when you are a Mussulman, you will have the privilege of having even four wives if you choose.' My position was very precarious—I feared to give the slightest ground for saying that I was trifling with their religious and matrimonial proposals; and at the same time I feared to bring on a crisis by a peremptory refusal to entertain for a moment the propositions made to me in evident good faith.

The Turcomans were evidently very much in earnest, and acting in thorough good faith when they offered their alliance to the British Government, and even to become British subjects. They were completely possessed of the conviction that when once Ayoub Khan's resistance at Herat was overborne, the troops would march from Kandahar to the latter place, and thence to Merv, to assist them in repelling any further Russian advance. They had made up their minds to consider me the representative of the British Government, and further, that I should either remain with them as a kind of security for the co-operation of England, or that in case I left it should only be on my being replaced by some Government official sent among

them as a Resident, or, if their allegiance were accepted, as a Governor.

For me the situation was a peculiar one. I was thoroughly installed as a member of Merv society, and my advice and decision were called for on every measure connected with public policy. Keen observers like the Mervli had a sufficient experience of my relations with Abass Khan, the British Agent at Meshed, to know that I could not possibly be a Russian Agent; and notwithstanding my efforts to ameliorate the lot of the Russian prisoner Kidaieff, to demonstrate that I had no connection with the forces menacing their safety at Askabad. The idea that I was a friend had thoroughly taken root in their minds. To me, they thought, they owed their impunity for the moment; and they were unwilling to part with a palladium who, so far as they could understand, had by his mere presence turned back the tide of Russian invasion. All my assurances to the contrary were in vain, for some of these crooked-minded people clearly thought it was only a ruse on my part, so as to be able to disclaim opposition to the Russians in case the latter should be victorious. Others were kind enough to believe that my disclaiming the importance attached to me was but an indication of graceful reserve and modesty.

Up to the time at which my personal safety was guaranteed, it was of course expedient for me to allow public opinion at Merv to run as much as possible in this channel. At the same time, however, I felt how dangerous it would be to indulge them in hopes which might after all be but illusory, and at any moment disappointed. I could not tell but that at any hour a pro-Russian party might come into power. Germs of such a party were already in existence. I had, of course, less objection to allowing myself to be nominated by the Tekkés themselves to a position of

authority among them; for though in one way my doing so raised obstacles to my departure, it also afforded me facilities for communicating with Teheran and with my friends at home, which up to that period had been very limited indeed—communications which had hitherto been carried on at the greatest peril to myself. My going to Merv had by no means been a case of *facilis descensus*, and the retracing my steps promised to be infinitely more difficult. The Turcomans could see no reason why, having come voluntarily among them, and risked much to do so, I should entertain any desire to leave them. As old Dowlet Nazar Beg said on one occasion in my hearing, speaking of myself, 'He did not come here as a raider, with his horse and his sword alone; he brought his saddle-bags with him. He is our *mihman*, and his wishes should be consulted in every respect.'

This was about the beginning of June, and in view of the situation in which I was placed, and the facilities afforded me for thoroughly attaining the object with which I had come to Merv, I would willingly have prolonged my stay, in order to make myself thoroughly acquainted with the peculiarities of the Turcomans, and to acquire a perfect knowledge of their language. But, thanks to the bulletin of telegraphic news regularly forwarded to me by the courtesy of the Minister at Teheran, I was aware that the question of withdrawing the troops from Afghanistan territory was being discussed; and from what I knew of the hopes of the Mervli with regard to English co-operation, I felt that a reaction might set in which might possibly terminate fatally for myself. From this moment forward, while apparently entering heartily into the schemes and aspirations of the Turcomans, I bent all my energies towards bringing about a condition of things which might afford me a plausible pretext for leaving Merv. At my request, the

British Minister at Teheran directed Abass Khan to write to me stating that my presence was required at Meshed. On the arrival of the letter, I communicated its contents to the Khans. I told them that I merely wished to make a passing visit to Meshed, and that when my business there was arranged I would return. The proposition was entertained with the greatest disfavour. The Khans maintained that any business could be quite as well arranged by letter. I said that I was not sufficiently acquainted with the Persian tongue to communicate in a proper manner all I wished to say to Abass Khan, and that my not being allowed to have a personal interview with him would only result in an indefinite postponement of the arrangements which they wished to make with the British Government. I told them that dozens and scores of letters would pass and repass, all of which would be of no avail in such an important matter as that on hand; and I further hinted that my not being allowed to reply to the summons, and my detention at Merv, would tend to excite in the minds of the British authorities a suspicion that the Merv chiefs were not as genuine and hearty in their proffers of friendship to England as they would have it believed. I went so far as to say that a definite refusal to allow me to go to Meshed would be little short of a declaration of hostility, and altogether dissonant with the political action they had proposed. I pointed out that Persian and Bokharan subjects were allowed to come and go freely, and that I, the subject of a Power from which so much was expected, and on whose services so much depended, should not be hampered in my movements, and that, if I were so obstructed, they, the Mervli, could only blame themselves for the miscarriage of the policy which they had decided upon.

These arguments seemed to have considerable weight with the more reasonable of the leaders, but there were

some who were too distrustful to regard my proposals with favour for an instant. They seemed to look upon my presence as a guarantee for the success of their plans of alliance, and felt that if I once left them the British Government might break off all communications with the Turcomans, or at least make stricter conditions with them than they would while I continued to be held, even though in a friendly manner, as a sort of hostage. There were some who seemed to be thoroughly penetrated with the idea that I had come to Merv purely with the intention of obtaining as much information as possible in case of further possible complications, that I did not come expressly as a friend, and that I might be a friend or not accordingly as external circumstances might vary. Thus, when I again and again urged the necessity of going to Meshed, in obedience to the summons from Abass Khan, while some heard my request in silence, others were loud in their expression of objection to my doing anything of the kind. I overheard one Kethkoda, who had charge of the waterworks at Benti, say, *sotto voce*, to one of his companions, 'If once he gets within sight of the gates of Meshed, depend upon it we shall have seen the last of him.' I was somewhat disconcerted at this, but at the same time I could not help inwardly complimenting the speaker upon the extreme justness of his ideas; however, I held my tongue.

On the same day, I was informed that the proposition made by Baghur Khan (the Persian envoy) had been unconditionally refused. He had been told that the Tekkés would willingly accept a subsidy towards the support of the police force raised for the purpose of keeping the road open and facilitating the passage of the Meshed and Bokharan caravans; but they were in no way willing to place themselves under the dominion of the Shah. I had not an opportunity of speaking to Baghur Khan, though his

pavilion tent was pitched not more than two hundred yards distant from my [illegible]. I saw him, however, on two occasions, when, with his attendants, he was seated on the bank of the Murgab, smoking his silver water-pipe. I had been given to understand by the Khans that no good could come of my having any conversation with him. He was, apparently, a man of advanced age, his long beard being perfectly white. He stayed but a day after the refusal of his proposals, and then retired again to the outskirts of the oasis, among the Salors, where he had been quartered so long. From these, during several days, he continued to send letters requesting the *medjlis* of Merv to reconsider its decision. No terms, however, were made with him, especially as he had not come direct from Teheran, but had only been commissioned by the Prince Governor of Meshed, a gentleman who was by no means in good odour with the Turcomans, owing to his harsh treatment of such of their number as had fallen prisoners in his hands. Aman Niaz Khan himself told me that whatever the rest of the *medjlis* might decide on, he and his Otamish would have no dealings with the Persians, as his family had a blood feud with them, some of his relations having been treacherously killed by them some years previously, when on a visit to the capital of Khorassan.

The Persian envoy urged again and again that some more favourable answer might be given, even if it were only for his sake, inasmuch as he might fall into disgrace on returning home, on account of the non-success of his mission, and no salary would be given to him. The Tekkés, however, were inexorable, though they gave him leave to present himself again on condition that he came armed with a commission from the Shah himself, countersigned by the Vizir Mukhtars (Ministers of England, France, Austria, and Turkey). The object of this countersigning

was to obtain security that the envoy sent by the Shah did not come merely as a Russian agent (for they were convinced that Persia was a mere cat's paw in the Czar's hands). Their great idea was that the European Powers represented at Teheran, with the exception of Russia, should guarantee the independence and integrity of Merv as a neutral state, the Turcomans, in return, agreeing to give security that all predatory incursions should cease, and that they would do their best in every way to facilitate commercial relations with the countries on their borders. Of course the Turcomans knew nothing whatever about France or Austria. The only states of which they were cognizant were England, Russia, Persia, and Turkey. Of the last-mentioned country they knew, if possible, less than they did of France and Austria; but the tradition lingered with them that the Ottomans and themselves were of kindred race and common origin, and they lovingly clung to the idea that they were still subjects of the Sultan—of the Khalif, in fact, who was, they said, the only sovereign to whom their allegiance was due. I was much amused, during my earlier discussions with the chiefs, when speaking of the probable advent of troops to Kandahar, by their being very careful to make the provision that, if British troops came to their aid, the Crescent standard of the Sultan should float beside the British ensign with each regiment. It was through me that they learned of the existence of the other European countries, and the fact that Austria, Turkey, and France were represented at Teheran. They conceived an exaggerated idea of the power of Turkey when they were informed that her representative was the only ambassador (*elchi*) at the Shah's capital, and that the others had only the rank of minister (*rizir mukhtar*).

Baghur Khan, in the end, became exceedingly importunate in his prayers, the result being that, when his last com-

munication arrived, Baba Khan, in presence of the entire *medjlis*, and before the eyes of the messenger, tore the letter into fragments and scattered it to the winds. Upon this Baghur Khan took his leave, being very glad, I believe, to have permission to do so, for I am aware that at one time he had certain misgivings on the subject. I believe that he largely set down the miscarriage of his mission to my influence, though in so doing he was very much mistaken, inasmuch as I troubled myself very little about its result. He got this notion into his head on one occasion when, with his followers, and escorted by some Turcomans, he was shown round the fortifications then in progress. I happened to be looking at the works also, together with Aman Niaz Khan and an imposing train of armed horsemen. I was in advance of the Persian emissary, who could see the respectful manner in which all the workmen stood to attention and salaamed as the Khan and myself passed. When Baghur went by, fierce shouts and howls of derision broke from the working party, and at one time I was fearful that violent hands were about to be laid upon him. This was notably so when he neared the place where the captured Persian cannon lay, and I dare say that he thought that Aman Niaz and myself had passed the word to the workers to give him a disagreeable reception.

On leaving the village at the outskirts of the oasis Baghur managed to discharge a Parthian shaft which created immense excitement at Merv. The Salors among whom he was quartered, and who were settled along a branch of the Alasha canal named the Sukdi Yap, numbered about a hundred and fifty families. While enjoying perfect liberty of action within the oasis, they were nevertheless kept in a state of subserviency by the Tekkés, and were not allowed to move about freely as the other Turcomans were. In fact, they were a remnant of the old population which,

together with the Saruks, had inhabited the oasis previous to the advent of the Tekké Turcomans. At the time of this last irruption into Merv, when the Saruks fled southward along the Murgab and settled on the Afghan border, many Salors accompanied them, the greater portion, however, taking refuge at Sarakhs, where they still remain. A few groups of families like those along the Sukdi Yap, however, were compelled by the victors to remain. While residing among them Baghur Khan had filled their minds with visions of the advantages which would accrue to them from being under the Persian dominion, and alarmed them by tales of the certain advent of the Russians and the slaughter and pillage which he said were sure to ensue. He counselled them to retire to Sarakhs, where their companions were, assuring them of a hearty welcome and immunity against Russian aggression. This proposed move was kept profoundly secret, and it was only two days after the departure of Baghur Khan that the result of his negotiations with the Salors became known at Kouchid Khan Kala.

About two o'clock one morning I was aroused from sleep by an unusual commotion, and heard the public crier, shouting in a stentorian voice, summoning the *yassaouls* to assemble and go in pursuit of the Salors, who were reported to be moving *en masse* towards Sarakhs. In a few moments the din of preparation resounded on every side, and in less than half an hour five or six hundred horsemen were in the saddle and moving off southward into the darkness. The crier, by instruction of the Khans, had told them to arm themselves with their best weapons and a plentiful supply of ammunition, as it was rumoured that a Persian cavalry regiment stationed at Sarakhs had made a movement towards Merv to cover the retreat of the Salors. I was most anxious to accompany this expedition, and to witness the genuine border fray which bade fair to take

place, but the Khans would not hear of it. They said a number of things about my life being too precious to be risked, &c., &c.; but in reality the idea was that if during the foray I got within any reasonable distance of Sarakhs I might not be in a hurry to return to my old quarters at Kouchid Khan Kala. The leader of the *yassaouls* on this occasion was Ana Murad Kafur, in his capacity of *yassaoul-bashi* of the Otamish, he being responsible for order on the territory west of the Murgab. Early on the following evening a portion of the expedition returned, bringing with them as prisoners the principal men of the Salors. Many Salor families had packed up all their effects, and had begun to move in the direction of Sarakhs, when the Tekké horsemen came upon them. At the moment, however, the great bulk showed no signs of going. Half the *yassaoul* force had remained in order to see that the exodus was not carried out, while the others conveyed to head-quarters the delinquents who were caught in the act of escaping.

Baba and Aman Niaz came to my house, and the captive Salor chiefs were brought before us. They could not deny the fact that they had been in the act of withdrawing from Merv, but sought to excuse themselves by saying that it was at Baghur Khan's instigation, who had narrated to them their danger in the event of their remaining until the Russians arrived at Merv. The Khans were furious, and it would have been a bad day for Baghur Khan if he had at that moment been within reach of them. They felt inclined to punish the Salor prisoners severely, and seemed rather aggrieved when I interceded in their behalf. I asked the two Khans whether they had formally forbidden the Salors to go to Sarakhs, or anywhere else that might suit them. On their replying in the negative, I said that they could hardly attempt to punish the would-be fugitives for disobeying orders which had never been given. I believe that

some small fines were inflicted, and that there the affair ended.

A few nights afterwards, another alarm was given that the Salors were on the move, and a similar scene of preparation was enacted, but Ana Murad Kafur came back in three or four hours, to say that the alarm was a false one, and that the Salors showed no signs whatever of departing.

On the day after the first Salor episode, a letter arrived from Abass Khan, summoning me to Meshed. He had already despatched two letters of a similar nature, which had been quite unsuccessful in inducing the Turcomans to part company with me. On this occasion, owing to the unfortunate miscarriage of a letter intended for his own private agent, Khodja Kuli, and which fell into the hands of Baba Khan, I was placed in a very difficult position, and one which threatened to have serious consequences for me. Abass had written a letter to the Khans, humouring their ideas with regard to an English alliance, while at the same time he had communicated with his agent, asking for certain information about Merv politics, and giving him some instructions which, so far as I was able to learn, were favourable to the acceptance by the Turcomans of Persian sovereignty, and urging upon him the necessity of doing all in his power to bring about the desired end. It appears that, embodied in his letter to the Khans, directly opposite sentiments were expressed. The three letters were delivered by the messenger to Beg Murad, the *sumsa* stealer, who, well knowing for whom they were severally intended, handed them all to Baba Khan. When the latter became aware of their contents—and he did not fail to open the communication addressed to Khodja Kuli, who was regarded with the greatest suspicion at Merv, owing to its being rumoured that he was a foreign agent of some kind—his indignation knew no bounds. He hurried to my house,

and threw the letters on my carpet. 'The British Agent at Meshed,' he said, 'is a traitor. You must have no dealings whatever with him. See what he writes to me, and how differently he writes to Khodja Kuli! He is evidently in the pay of the Persians, and we can attach no credit to anything that he says. He summons you to Meshed; I do not believe that the Vizir Mukhtar asked you to go there. It is simply a plot on the part of Abass Khan to take you away from Merv, in order that he may carry on his own machinations all the more freely. Who knows what would happen to you if once you fell into the power of the Prince Governor? In future we will pay no attention to the letters from Meshed, but only to those which come from the Vizir Mukhtar (Minister) at Teheran or the British Government in England.'

I was, of course, in a very disagreeable dilemma, for, as owing to Abass Khan's previous communications I had been recognised as a British, and not a Russian, subject, I had counted upon this summons to me to Meshed as a sure means of getting away from Merv. All these hopes were now demolished. I did my best to explain the situation. There was no gainsaying the fact of Abass Khan's double-dealing, for his letters were lying side by side, so I asked Baba Khan to recollect that Abass was a very subordinate person, who might very possibly be under Persian influence; but that it did not matter in the least what views he expressed, or what advice he gave as to the best policy for the Mervli to adopt. I said that I was quite in accord with him (Baba Khan) in his idea that attention should be paid only to direct communications from a superior authority. I felt that in thus acting I was very considerably prolonging my stay at Merv, as, at the very earliest, a reply to a letter to Teheran could not reach me in less than a month. However, it was the only course left. The incident gave

me an opportunity of reminding my colleagues in the triumvirate of the advice I had given at the last *medjlis*, when I recommended them to forward to Teheran a document, bearing their seals, in which their views about an English alliance should be fully set forth, and I inquired whether any measures had yet been taken towards drawing up such an instrument. I was informed that it had not yet been sent, but that, in view of Abass Khan's action, no time would be lost in preparing and forwarding it.

On the very next day a *Khodja*, or scribe—a man of great repute at Merv for erudition—was summoned to headquarters to act as amanuensis in the matter of this important state document. He was of Arab descent, and carried about with him in a long cylindrical tin box a roll of documents signed by the Sherif of Mecca, the Khans of Khiva and Bokhara, and other Oriental potentates, testifying to his direct descent from Ali, and to his right to the title of Seyd. He was always employed when documents of importance had to be drawn up. At this time he was the guest of Khodja Nefess, the theological teacher who directed the collegiate establishment of Merv, where aspirants for the priesthood were educated. He was received at Kouchid Khan Kala with great ceremony, and lodged at the house of Beg Murad, the gormandizing individual whom I had found it necessary to expel from my house, and who had subsequently tried to reconcile himself to me by sending the sheep as a peace-offering. At his house unlimited hospitality was meted out to the Khodja; but I soon discovered that the luxuries lavished upon him were supplied at my expense. On the evening following his arrival, one of Beg Murad's family waited upon me, presenting the Beg's compliments, and requesting that I would forward to him the sum of four krans, to defray some of the expenses of my *mihman* (guest). It was rather puzzling to me at first to

understand by what process of reasoning it was arrived at that the Khodja was my guest. It was subsequently explained to me that, as the document to be drawn up was addressed to the British authorities, and suggested by me, the scribe who had been expressly sent for with a view of preparing it was necessarily my guest, even though he were not staying at my house. In fact, I was given to understand that the Mervli did not wish that I should be intruded upon in my house; but they were nevertheless generously willing to allow me to have the credit of receiving so distinguished a guest—provided I paid for it. I asked what expenses of my guest I was supposed to defray, and was told that one *nas* (portion of snuff), one *tiriac* (ration of opium), and one *tchai* (a day's supply of tea), was all that was required of me, and that four krans (3*s*. 4*d*.) would cover the cost of these articles. I handed the money to the messenger. He appeared again on the next day, with a similar demand. 'What!' I exclaimed, 'the Khodja has not yet written the simple document which it is necessary to forward to Teheran?' 'No,' replied the messenger, 'it is a matter of much weight, and requires grave deliberation.' 'Well,' I said, 'I will give three krans on this occasion, and if necessary I will contribute a further donation to-morrow, but only to the extent of two krans, and, if the document be not prepared on the following day, I will give nothing at all.' With this I waved my hand, as a sign that further discussion was needless and useless.

The document was ultimately drawn up, and the seals of the Khans and Kethkodas were attached. Half-a-dozen horsemen conveyed it to Meshed, to be forwarded thence to the British Minister at Teheran. I took this opportunity of writing myself to the latter, informing him how matters stood, and that owing to the miscarriage of Abass Khan's letters any summons on his part requiring me to go to

Meshed would be utterly disregarded by the Turcomans. I asked the Minister himself to address a letter to the Merv chiefs, saying it was absolutely necessary that I should come to Meshed, and to attach to it seals and signatures which they could understand, and whose importance they could realize.

While these events were transpiring, and notwithstanding the very definite expression given to the revolution which had taken place by the public entry of the Khans and the installation of the triumvirate, Kadjar Khan still continued to intrigue, in the hope of being reinstated in his former position. His expectations were based upon the fact that he had written a letter to Mr. Thomson, the British Minister at Teheran, signed by several Kéthkodas personally devoted to himself, in which he forestalled the Turcoman aspirations to an alliance with England. He had not yet received a reply to this letter, and he was not without hopes that such a reply would contain important and definite offers on the part of the British Government which might give him a sufficient weight to enable him to overthrow the new system of things at Merv. I was at the time unaware of Kadjar Khan's letter, and it was only after my arrival in Persia that I learned it had been sent.

The mishap with Abass Khan's despatches furnished me with matter for serious consideration, for the Merv chiefs now entertained a deeply rooted conviction that he was acting falsely with them; and, as he was an accredited representative of the British Government, they began to harbour misgivings as to whether that Government would act in good faith towards them. In view of the nearness of the Russians, and of the fact that messengers were passing between the camp at Askabad and some of the pro-Russian party at Merv, the situation might at any moment culminate in a very disagreeable crisis for myself. And now an

incident was remembered to which little importance had hitherto been attached. I had duly written to Teheran concerning the hoisting of the flag and the branding of the chief's horses with the British mark, and Abass Khan had been instructed to communicate with the Mervli asking them to send this flag to Meshed, accompanied by eight Kethkodas of the highest rank. His letter seems to have been misunderstood, for, as the Turcomans explained it to me, they seemed to believe that Abass Khan had asked for the Kethkodas to be sent in with a view of receiving a British flag, to be hoisted by them at Merv. I had been consulted as to the expediency of complying with the request of the British Agent, and I expressed the decided opinion that the Kethkodas should not be sent. I was perfectly convinced that such a thing as sending out a British flag to be hoisted at Merv could not possibly be intended; and I feared that Abass Khan, acting on his own responsibility, was entering upon measures to insure my escape from Merv by securing a number of important hostages, who should be responsible for my safety. I supposed that he wished to get some Tekké leaders into his power, have them seized by authority of the Prince Governor of Meshed, and hold them in order that they might be exchanged against myself. I could not, knowingly, acquiesce in such a plan, especially as I knew that it would be fraught with the most tremendous risks to myself. I consequently gave the advice to which I have referred—that it would be highly inadvisable to send in the Kethkodas asked for. I informed the Khan that I thought the request on the part of Abass Khan a most injudicious one, inasmuch as Persia would be jealous of another Power intriguing for supremacy at Merv, and that probably the Prince Governor, whom they well knew to be their enemy, would take measures to thwart the undertaking by seizing upon their

messengers. Of course I did not for a moment hint at what were my own real suspicions. The duplicity exposed by the miscarriage of Abass Khan's letters now led the Mervli chiefs to believe that that functionary, acting in complicity with the Prince Governor, wished to apprehend the Kethkodas whose presence he had requested; and I rose correspondingly in their estimation owing to my having, through good luck, advised them not to entertain the suggestion for a moment.

Such was the state of affairs as regards myself while I awaited the reply of the British Minister at Teheran to the state document forwarded to him by the rulers of Merv.

CHAPTER LII.

POLITICS AND RAIDING.

Waiting—An excursion northward—Har—Kara Shaitan Kala—*A sapook usta*—Egri Guzer—Karyab and Malyab—Hides and leather—Saruk deputation—Desire to attack Ayoub Khan—Rumoured advance of English troops—Colonel St. John—Request for horsemen—A letter to Kandahar—A meagre dinner—A raid on Aman Niaz's supplies—His indignation—Reprisals—Summoning the workmen—Works of fortification—Necessity of leaving Merv—An extensive raid—Abdal Serdar—Baba Khan's threatened resignation—Pursuit of the raiders—Difference of opinion—A visit to Matthi the Jew—His guest-house—Killidge-ak-Saghal again—'What are you going to give me?'—My horse—Recrimination—An unusual diet—Colonel M'Gregor—Death of Baba Khan's mother—My flag at half-mast—Arrival of the spoil—Aliar of Dergana—Offered presents—Baba Khan's offer—Aman Niaz's objections—An arrangement—A message from Seyd Ali—Robbers and robbed—The comet—A thunderstorm—An uncomfortable night—Release of Derguezli prisoners—A native toilette—Shampooing—Pleasant relations—Defaced money.

AFTER the despatch of the document bearing the seals of the Merv representatives, and until a reply could arrive, nothing was left to me but to wait as patiently as might be until the necessary time had expired. I devoted myself as assiduously as possible to still further studying the characteristics of the Turcomans, and never lost an opportunity of conversing with members of caravans arriving from the countries surrounding the oasis, with a view of becoming acquainted with the districts which I had not been able to visit.

Up to this time I had not extended my excursions to the extreme north of the cultivated territory. On expressing a desire to do so, a very intimate friend of mine, Owez

Agha, whose *ev* was near mine, asked me to spend a day with him at his *bagh*, or fruit-tree grove, situated due north of Kouchid Khan Kala. The intermediate country was exceedingly well cultivated, and rather too copiously watered to make travelling at all agreeable. The village towards which we directed our steps is called Har, and is close by the outlying fortalice known as Kara Shaitan Kala (the fort of the Black Devil). This was the principal station of Kara Shaitan, the *Karaoul bashi* of the Toktamish, who from this point kept an eye upon the movements of the Ersari Turcomans, and whose patrols radiated to all parts of the border in this direction. Owez's brother, who superintended the cultivation of the ground at Har, was, for a Turcoman, very well to do from a worldly point of view. To his profession of agriculture he added the trade of a *sapook ustá* (boot maker).

We stayed but one night at Har, and then proceeded to the last dam upon the main stream of the Murgab, at a place called Egri Guzer. At this point the water of the river is very much diminished in volume, owing to the quantity drawn off by the various irrigation canals springing from Benti. The small dam of Egri Guzer enables two lateral canals to be thrown out for the irrigation of the border district—the Malyab, flowing in a north-westerly direction, and the Karyab in a north-easterly one; whe what remains of the main stream of the Murgab flows in an almost due northerly direction, until it is lost some seven or eight miles further on in a swampy ground.

At Egri Guzer there is a very considerable *aoull*, its chief being Yaghmour Khan, the head of the Toktamish police, whose name I have often mentioned in connection with Kouchid Khan Kala. I was informed that from this place there is a considerable exportation of cow-hides to Khiva, and thence to Russia, the tanned leather being given

in exchange for the raw material. The Russian leather, which is used by the Tekkés for the manufacture of boots, slippers, sword-belts, and military accoutrements, is very stout, of the natural colour on one side, and on the other of a bright crimson marked with diagonal lines crossing each other at right angles. It has the peculiar perfume characteristic of Russia leather. While in Bokhara and on the Afghan border the red surface of the leather is turned outwards in the long riding boots used by the people, at Merv it is the coarse brown side which is exposed, the Tekkés considering a display of so brilliant a colour to be effeminate.

On my return from the Egri Guzer dam, I found that a deputation of Saruk chiefs had arrived at Kouchid Khan Kala. They were those who had written to me the document to which I have referred,[1] and they now desired to have an interview with me, and to ascertain what chances there were of an union between themselves and the Tekké tribes. The eight chieftains whom I met were of very large stature, and generally bore a much more civilised appearance than their hosts. They told me how much they had suffered owing to the disorderly state of affairs in and about Herat, and stated that all kinds of marauders were roving to and fro, taking advantage of the disturbed state of affairs to fall upon every one in turn. They were very desirous of obtaining some aid from Merv, with a view of attacking Ayoub Khan; for now that they saw he had little or no chance of establishing himself in the sovereignty of Afghanistan, they desired, like all people of their kind, to assist in giving him a final blow, and so to win favour with the victors. They told me that large bodies of troops were moving from Kandahar in the direction of Herat; and nothing I could say would induce them to believe that these

[1] See Appendix.

were not English soldiers, though from the news of the debates in Parliament which had reached me it seemed impossible that any expedition in the direction in question could have been undertaken. That Abdurrahman's soldiers might be marching upon Herat was quite within the bounds of possibility; but I was too well aware how little any information coming across country could be relied upon, and could draw no definite conclusion from what I had heard.

These chiefs told me that they had received a letter from Colonel St. John, then political officer at Kandahar, asking them to send forces against Ayoub Khan, and they now suggested that a thousand horsemen from Merv should co-operate with the Saruks. Four francs per diem would be paid to each horseman. The Mervli were most anxious to offer their services, and I was long and earnestly consulted on the matter. I stated that I was quite in favour of the enterprise, but that I could in no way guarantee Colonel St. John's authorisation of the undertaking, nor the payment of the promised stipend. I added, however, that, if the money were not forthcoming, a thousand Turcoman warriors would always know how to pay themselves.

For Turcomans, Kandahar is but twelve days' ride from Merv. Some affirm that the desert horsemen have accomplished the distance in as little as eight days. There were, of course, Ayoub's soldiery blocking the way, and it would be by no means easy for any one to pass through Herat. I told the Turcomans that, if they wished, I would write to Colonel St. John, asking whether he had authorised the despatch of these auxiliary horsemen, and it was immediately decided to send twelve mounted men to Kandahar to carry my letter. I considered this a good opportunity to make known to the authorities the views of the Merv Turcomans upon the situation, and I accordingly wrote the

letter a copy of which I have inserted in the Appendix. Among other things, I begged Colonel St. John to try to get me away from Merv under one pretence or another. I even offered to accompany the Tekké horsemen across Ayoub's lines to Kandahar, but the proposition was not listened to for an instant. My life, they said, was too precious to be risked, &c., &c. Whatever Turcomans might do to pass Ayoub's position, I should have little chance of being able to do so. I subsequently learned that my letter did not reach Colonel St. John. I was told at Meshed that its bearers, though they went by a very circuitous route, had been unable to reach Kandahar. I never saw them afterwards.

The Saruks remained but a few days at Merv, where they were the guests of old Kadjar Khan, the deposed Ichthyar. On the evening before their departure, Kadjar, accompanied by half-a-dozen of his immediate following, called at my house, and invited me to have dinner with him. To do me the more honour, he insisted upon escorting me himself. Whether he meant the invitation for a good joke or not I cannot say; but, much to my disgust, after being kept waiting for half an hour, seated on a great carpet before the door of his *ev*, chatting with the Saruks, a large cloth, which was brought in with much ceremony, was unfolded and nothing but a dozen large circular cakes of dry bread, smoking hot from the oven, were visible. These, together with a large wooden dish containing about a gallon of water, were placed before us, and constituted the entertainment to which I had been so pompously invited. When the meal was over, I bade adieu to the Saruk chieftains, assuring them that I would exert myself to the utmost to bring about what they desired.

On returning to my *ev*, I was glad to find there an invitation from my friend Owez to go and partake with him

of a mess of bread and broth. He could scarcely refrain from laughing when I described the sumptuous feast given by Kadjar. However, he amply compensated me for my former meagre repast.

While anxiously awaiting the arrival of the letter from Teheran, the time hung heavily upon my hands, though the Turcomans, to do them justice, exerted themselves to the utmost to amuse me in every possible way. I was, one evening, much diverted by an incident which occurred. Aman Niaz Khan had sent to Meshed for a large consignment of tea and sugar, and for some rolls of cloth wherewith to have garments manufactured for his family. Some of the *ogri* of Merv got news of the expedition, and, gathering together a considerable troop of the worst marauders of the place, waylaid the Khan's goods a little outside Sarakhs, scattering the little caravan to the winds, and carrying off the booty. The rage of Aman Niaz was ludicrous to witness. He would have considered it a capital joke if his own men had despoiled some other person's convoy, but was beside himself with wrath at the idea of the property of the Otamish ruler being seized by those of his own nation. He waited until his *yassaouls* could saddle their horses, and then sallied forth to wreak vengeance on the evil-doers. He remained away two whole days, and in the end succeeded in recovering nearly all the stolen articles. He also brought in half-a-dozen prisoners, who, however, were let off without any punishment, as they pleaded that they were quite unaware that what they had seized belonged to so high and mighty an individual as the Khan.

At this time the fortifications were very nearly completed. There only remained to be constructed a breastwork on the top of the great rampart, from under cover of which the defenders could fire, and to this end relays were working night and day. Every morning, an hour before

sunrise, the voice of the crier was to be heard, as that official passed from group to group of the houses, summoning the young men to work, and one repeatedly heard blows of a stick administered when any of the workers were not prompt in answering the call. The reason for all this urgency in the matter of fortifications was that just then the expectations of the Tekkés were at the very highest with regard to the advent of English troops to Merv; they were firmly convinced that when this took place a forward movement against the Russians at Askabad would be made, and they wished to be in a position to hold their own at Kouchid Khan Kala in case of any reverse. It was with the greatest anxiety that I watched this matter; for I felt that it was of vital importance to myself to be able to leave Merv before the evacuation of Kandahar could take place, or even news of the intention get wind.

At this juncture a raiding case of great magnitude was brought to my notice, and I tried to turn it to account for my own benefit by stating that I only remained in Merv on the condition that the promised reform would be carried out. Now that a most flagrant breach of the agreement entered into between me and the *Medjlis* had occurred, I could only conclude that the principles I had laid down, and which had apparently been accepted, were no longer in favour at Merv. Some hundreds of Tekkés had gone out to raid in the Derguez, under the command of a certain Abdal Serdar, a noted freebooter, who had gained many laurels as a successful brigand and cattle-lifter. He had formerly been engaged by one or other of the Merv Khans to act for him when the latter did not feel inclined to head a predatory expedition personally. Abdal Serdar was on the road to Derguez, in fulfilment of the expedition which he had organised. I sent word to Baba Khan that this sort of thing could not go on, and requested him to put a summary

end to it. He summoned the Council; but unfortunately there was not a full attendance, and those who did attend were principally Kethkodas interested in the success of the raid. They would not agree to recall the raiders, and Baba Khan threatened to resign. I supported this by other fulminations, and was prepared, if necessary, to make the people of Merv believe that the withdrawal of the British troops from Kandahar was the direct consequence of this raid. Baba Khan summoned his *yassaoul bashi*, Yaghmour, and gave peremptory orders to send men in pursuit of the freebooters. Aman Niaz Khan protested, and gave instructions to his own *yassaoul bashi*, Ana Murad Kafur, not to move against the thieves. I then declared that I would leave Merv immediately. Aman Niaz said that I was at perfect liberty to do so as soon as I liked; but the majority of the quorum constituting the Council did not appear to regard the matter in his light. They said I could not leave until the answers had come from Teheran. I retorted by threatening to haul down my flag as a declaration of war, and an annulment of all engagements between the Merv Tekkés and the Government which I was supposed to represent. The Council broke up in confusion, without having arrived at any definite resolve. Then Baba and Aman Niaz met, ultimately agreeing that the joint *yassawols* of the Toktamish and Otamish should proceed together and take possession of the spoil brought in by the raiders, after which the whole matter should be decided. Meantime, as I had almost broken off all personal relations with the majority of the officials at Kouchid Khan Kala, I determined for awhile to remove myself from their immediate vicinity.

A few days previous to this event I had been invited by Aman Niaz Khan to pay a visit to the domicile of Matthi the Jew, where it was the habit of the Khan to retire occasionally, for the space of two or three days, in order to

stupefy himself with opium and arrack, when he had no more active occupation on hand. The Jewish village was about a mile and a half distant from the centre of Kouchid Khan Kala, and situated at the north-western extremity of the fortress. It was the abode of by far the most thriving community of Merv; and one constantly saw, lying around the hut, bales of merchandise from Meshed and Bokhara. Vineyards and rose gardens were very numerous.

Matthi had constructed for himself a more permanent and substantial residence than the ordinary Turcoman *er*. It was a square mud castle, similar to Makdum Kuli Khan's guest-chamber, and adjoining it was a row of one-story buildings, in which he conducted his commercial pursuits. While waiting for him to prepare the upper story of his castle for our reception, we sat within one of his magazines, in which was stored a most heterogeneous collection of articles of merchandise. There were fur-bound caps from Bokhara, cotton and silk from Samarcand, china tea-bowls, copper utensils, and a very extensive assortment of drugs of different kinds, for Matthi was a professed physician, as well as a general dealer.

While Aman Niaz Khan and myself were turning over the Jew's goods, and endeavouring to select something which might be of use to us, I had a visit from Killidge-ak-Saghal (the Old Man of the Sword). We seated ourselves upon a kind of raised mud platform near the door, and smoked our pipes. The ak-Saghal fixed his eyes upon my horse, which was tethered to a tree near to us, and commenced a series of praises of the animal. This, among Turcomans, as I have said, is a preliminary to asking the owner to make him a present of the desired object. As, however, I seemed not to take the hint, he remarked that I had made very extensive presents to several of the Merv chiefs. 'What,' said he, 'have you given to me?' I replied that, as far as I knew,

I had not given him anything. 'But,' he rejoined, 'what are you going to give me?' Then interrupting himself, he said, 'I do not require money,' which I considered a fortunate circumstance, inasmuch as I had not any. 'But I will willingly receive your horse, which I admire very much.' I reminded the old Kethkoda that I required a horse for my own use, and that I could not very well proceed any long distance—to Meshed for instance—on foot; but that, if it were possible to find a sufficiently good animal for my own use, I would willingly make him a present of that which had taken his fancy.

Shortly afterwards, I mounted a break-neck staircase, a little wider than an ordinary chimney, and arrived in the upper chamber, which was some twenty feet square. One third of the floor was occupied by barley, piled half-way to the roof, the remainder by large carpets and voluminous cushions, among which Aman Niaz Khan had already installed himself, surrounded by his water and opium pipes, and half-a-dozen soda-water bottles full of arrack. After he had imbibed the contents of a couple of bottles, he began to inveigh against Baba Khan's over-sense of propriety in endeavouring to interrupt the raid, observing that he could not see why a thing which had gone on for so long, and which had always been looked upon as perfectly permissible, should now be found fault with. I reminded him of the near presence of the Russians, and of the extreme danger of the raiding parties coming in contact with the Russian patrols, which might give the invaders an excuse for advancing upon Merv. The Khan's ideas, however, were very much of the 'après moi le déluge' kind, and he evidently thought that the Merv machine would hold out during his time. We remained two days in Matthi's castle, and I was heartily glad to get away, for the diet of sour milk and bread, with the accompaniment of arrack and water-pipes,

was far from agreeable; especially in the blazing heat which then prevailed.

During our two days' festivities the Khan told me how disappointed the Mervli had been on several occasions that Europeans who had come to their very borders had not continued their journey to the capital of the oasis. One Englishman, he said, had come as far as Sarakhs, had written him letters and sent him presents of garments, and had been invited by him to come to Merv as his *mihman*, or guest, immediately under his own protection. He had learned, to his regret, that this gentleman had allowed himself to be influenced by the stories told him at Sarakhs, and had been afraid to trust himself among the Tekkés. This traveller, I think, must have been Colonel—now General—M'Gregor.

When we returned to Kouchid Khan Kala, I perceived that an unusual gloom hung over head-quarters, and on inquiry I discovered that the mother of Baba Khan had died suddenly, during our absence. In consequence, the senior Khan was confining himself indoors for the three days during which the etiquette of mourning obliged him to retire from public life. Among the Turcomans, in case of the death of a female, one does not see the noisy funeral ceremonies that are invariably indulged in during the obsequies of males. The women of the family only mourn among themselves, and, as in the present case, the closer relatives withdraw themselves from the public. Wishing to testify my respect for Baba Khan, I ordered my crimson flag to be hauled down to half-mast. This had scarcely been done when there was an extraordinary influx of people into my redoubt, and among them a messenger who had come direct from Baba Khan himself. The general impression was that, in pursuance of my threat, I had lowered my banner as an outward expression of a breach of agreement

between myself and the governing powers. The greatest anxiety prevailed; but it was changed to general satisfaction when I explained the reason of my proceeding, and promised to haul up the flag again on the following day.

In due time the *yassaouls* began to arrive, driving before them large flocks of sheep and cows, and in two days six hundred sheep and seventy oxen captured by the raiders were impounded at Merv. Then came the grave question of what was to be done with them. Close upon the rear of Abdal Serdar, who had distinguished himself on the occasion, came a person whose acquaintance I had formerly made in the Derguez—a chieftain of the Makdum Turcomans, named Aliar, the head-quarters of whose tribe was at the village of Dergana, not far from Abiverd. Of the entire spoil, four hundred sheep belonged to him. He first called upon Baba Khan, who sent him to me, stating that he would abide by my decision. I told Aliar that my decision was that the cattle should be given back; but that, in view of the fact that the *yassaouls* had been sent out to secure them, and had prevented them from being entirely lost and scattered among the Merv population in such a manner as to make it impossible to recover them, some remuneration should be given to these public servants. Aliar was profuse in his gratitude for my decision, and offered to make me presents of some dozens of sheep. I declined, however, to accept them. I shortly afterwards called upon Baba Khan, who told me that he was quite ready to return to their owner the whole of the sheep captured by his *yassaouls*. Aman Niaz Khan, on the contrary, told me that his portion of the spoil was already distributed among his men, and that he could not possibly ask them to give it up without paying them its value. An elder of his tribe, who was present, reminded him of the decision to which Baba Khan had come in reference to the matter. 'Pooh!' ejaculated the Otamish

chieftain, 'he is not like his father, Kouchid Khan; he cannot pretend to command both Toktamish and Otamish.' I reminded Aman Niaz that I, too, had to be reckoned with, and that I insisted upon the sheep being restored. Then we had a long debate, which ended in his agreeing that all the cattle should be handed back to their owner, provided a payment of two *krans* (one shilling and eightpence) were made in respect of each head of sheep and oxen, as remuneration to the *yassaouls*. Aliar spent the night with me, and was very profuse in his renewed expressions of gratitude. He said that he had a message for me from Seyd Ali, the brother of Mehemet Ali Khan of Derguez. The latter, as I have stated, was a prisoner in Meshed. The Seyd was with the Russians at Askabad, and had wished to be remembered to me, hoping shortly to see me in the Russian lines. This same Seyd Ali had been in Merv about twelve months before my arrival there, charged by the Prince Governor of Meshed to ask the Mervli to send their Khans to Teheran to consult with the Shah's Government. The upshot had been the mission of Kadjar, and his temporary tenure of office. Seyd Ali had complained to me very bitterly that though he had spent a thousand pounds in presents to the Tekkés, to facilitate his mission, he had never received a single farthing of remuneration from the Shah's Government, in whose service he was acting.

Both the robbers and the robbed spent the greater portion of the evening together in my *ev*, and it was truly amusing to hear the anecdotes which each related in turn. Abdal Serdar told Aliar of the various *ruses* by which he carried off his sheep and cows, at the same time escaping the notice of the patrols. Aliar seemed highly amused, and, on his own part, related other stories, explanatory of his method of capturing Mervli cattle. Both parties laughed very heartily, and complimented each other on the skill

exhibited on the various occasions. Aliar was very anxious to know my opinion of the comet (*Koorgli Yildus* or Wolf-Star) which was then very distinctly visible at Merv. He could not be persuaded that it had not something to do with the Russians, but whether it foreboded evil to them or to the Tekkés he had not quite made up his mind.

This was on June 27. On the same night a violent storm occurred—a very rare thing in these regions, for the *tenkis*, or westerly storm from across the Caspian, which does such havoc upon the Yamud plains, is never seen at Merv. The storm was from the south-east, and was accompanied by violent rain and incessant lightning. During twelve hours not a quarter of a minute passed without a vivid flash of lightning, and the rolling of the thunder was unceasing. My house was very full of visitors all the night, Abdal Serdar's men and part of Aliar's following being unable to leave owing to the state of the weather. Gradually, by the stress of the tempest, the rain-water was forced through the roof covering, and, after an hour, began to trickle down the inner walls of the hut, accumulating in pools along the inner edge of the lattice walls. This was exceedingly disagreeable; for the fluid which had saturated the felt was of the colour and consistency of treacle, owing to the quantity of bituminous smoke with which the roof was charged. The fire had gone out; and notwithstanding that the house was a good one, and as weatherproof as any of its kind, it was impossible to keep the lamp lighted. One by one the guests were compelled to take their quilts and carpets, and move further away from the wall, until at length we were all concentrated in the middle of the house, literally sitting upon each other. To add to our discomfort all kinds of venomous things—scorpions, and insects which ordinarily inhabit holes in the dried marl—were driven in by the weather. More than one person was stung. I

was glad indeed when dawn broke. With it the storm ceased.

Previous to leaving, Aliar had an interview with two of his fellow-countrymen, prisoners at Merv, to whom I have already alluded. They were then engaged as bootmakers, being allowed to earn money in this manner in order to procure the sum necessary for their ransom. Aliar, who required some one to conduct his sheep home, undertook to pay the remainder of the ransom, and they were accordingly set at liberty.

When on the point of setting out, Aliar and his newly freed companions made a most elaborate toilet, which, to tell the truth, the latter were much in need of, considering the time they had been clothed in filthy rags and chained together. The barber, a Merv Tekké, produced a razor which, from its extreme size and extraordinary appearance, was doubtless of home manufacture. He proceeded to sharpen this instrument, using the blade of my sword as a hone. The Turcoman invariably shaves his head entirely clean, with the exception of the small scalp-lock upon the top. Even this is not always retained. The Persian, on the contrary, when he shaves his head at all, does so only from the top of the forehead to the back of the neck, leaving the hair upon each side of the head hanging over the ears. After passing through the hands of the barber, each guest underwent a singular kind of shampooing, consisting of his being trodden upon as he lay upon the floor. Sometimes, too, he sat upright; and the shampooer, mounting upon his shoulders, stamped upon them with his bare feet until the requisite amount of suppleness had been produced.

Aliar once more expressed his gratitude to me for my exertions in obtaining his cattle for him, and again offered me presents of sheep, which I again refused. He insisted upon ordering a sheep to be killed, and giving a banquet to

all concerned in the restoration of his property. Aman Niaz Khan and the two *yassaoul bashis* were present; and, to judge from the social relations existing for the time being among the party, no stranger would for a moment imagine that the stealing of each other's sheep and oxen by the hundred was an act of almost daily occurrence. Having duly wiped their hands upon their beards (such of them as had any), and subsequently greased their boots with them, to remove the extra fat clinging to their fingers, my guests rose, and took their departure.

The money which Aliar handed to the *yassaouls* in compensation for their trouble consisted of *krans* and two *kran* pieces, to almost every one of which was soldered a small brass loop; for the money capital of the border, when not in actual use, is almost invariably used by the women as an adjunct to their personal ornaments. In these districts, indeed, it is almost impossible to procure any money not so disfigured; and when a ransom is sent in, the money, as a rule, is taken from their clothing by the wives or other female relatives of the captive.

CHAPTER LIII.

LAST DAYS AT MERV.

Anxiety—Persecution—Maladies—Demand for quinine—Parsimoniousness—Croton oil—Uses of a mosquito curtain—'Too hot'—An indignant patient—A subterfuge—Dandelion—Tea-drinkers—Appreciations of Turcoman character—News of Kandahar—Suspicions—Real state of affairs—Manœuvres—Baba Khan's offer—Requisitions—A visit from Matthi—Black-mail—Waiting.

As may readily be imagined, my mind was filled with anxiety during the interval which elapsed between the despatch of the Turcoman state document and the receipt of the reply thereto. The question of the evacuation of Kandahar, too, was of the most vital importance to me, and I eagerly awaited the arrival of each of the telegraphic bulletins from Teheran. Many days elapsed before it was possible that any communication from Teheran could reach Merv in answer to the letter of the Merv chiefs, and in the meantime I suffered the usual amount of persecution, in the shape of crowds of visitors, pot-hunters, and patients who flocked to my house in search of the infallible medicines which every Frank is supposed to carry with him.

I have already mentioned the great prevalence of diseases of the eye, particularly *keratitis*; but affections of this kind were so common at Merv that the inhabitants had almost ceased to regard them as maladies, and I was troubled very little with respect to such diseases. But, at the very lowest computation, fifty per cent. of the population, male and female, had badly diseased livers, and scrofulitic and scor-

butic ailments. The deranged livers I believe to have been the direct product of the consumption, during the exceedingly hot weather, of large quantities of melted fat, which it was useless to tell the people to avoid. Fever, too, was to be met with, though to nothing like the extent to which it prevails in the neighbourhood of the lower waters of the Tejend and among the Yamuds. As long as my quinine held out it was in great demand; but as I had from twenty to thirty applicants daily for this medicine alone it may be conceived that my store was very soon exhausted. This and other drugs were to be purchased at the establishment of Matthi the Jew; but the Turcomans of Merv seem to have an insurmountable objection to paying for medicines, or, indeed, for anything else which they have a chance of getting for nothing. They will linger on for months, suffering severely from the effects of intermittent fever, when two or three francs worth of quinine would completely cure them. Knowing that I had some store of the drug by me, the fever patients were incessant in their demands for it. A man would ride twenty or thirty miles, and spend two or three days in persecuting me on this score, when he might have procured as much as I was able to give him for a few pence at the Jew's shop. But no; he preferred to make the journey, to spend his days lying in wait for me, and even to lay out the amount of money necessary for his support at Kouchid Khan Kala, rather than go direct and buy what he wanted.

The medicine which, above all others, was in high repute with the Mervli, was croton oil. They had no knowledge whatever of this drug until I brought it among them. A Turcoman's idea of medical treatment is, almost solely, that of the administration of a strong aperient, and the delight was unbounded when the rapid operation of the croton oil was discovered. As a rule, a Turcoman or

North Persian will need a dose of any such medicine of at least double the strength of that which would suffice for a European, and I have frequently given three drops of croton oil upon a piece of sugar to an adult Turcoman without its producing any extreme effect. So long as this remedy lasted, I managed to get rid of my visitors quickly enough; but as it began to run short its reputation spread all the more throughout the oasis, and if I had possessed a gallon of it it would not have sufficed for very long, so large was my medical practice. Any traveller who would bring to Merv a couple of camels laden with quinine, Epsom salts, croton oil, antibilious pills, and their much esteemed *moomia* (bitumen), and would freely give away these drugs to all applicants, would be, while they held out, the idol of the people; but after the demolition of his stock he would fall from favour, as I did.

During the latter part of my stay at Kouchid Khan Kala, so great had become the daily influx of patients that I found it quite impossible to secure a moment for myself, either by day or night. At last, however, I hit upon a plan by which I secured a little more privacy than I had hitherto enjoyed. Happening one day to pay a visit to a neighbouring *ev*, I noticed a rude mosquito curtain, manufactured from a coarse muslin made at Merv, and which formed a sort of small tent, some seven feet in length, three in breadth at the top, six at base, and some four feet in height. I immediately purchased this treasure, paying a pretty high price for it, and had it conveyed to my house, where I at once set it up at the side of the *ev* opposite to the door. I then ordered the reed and felt covering of the adjacent wall to be removed, so that the air from outside might fall upon the wall of my tent, while I was at the same time sheltered behind its folds from the inquisitiveness of the passers-by. I could see with sufficient distinctness through the thin

gauze, and was perfectly screened from the observation of those who presented themselves at the door of my *er*. In this way I was able to go on with my writing in a manner which would have been altogether out of the question if I had tried to work under ordinary circumstances. I gave instructions to my servant to say that I was asleep, and, as the etiquette among respectable Turcomans makes it entirely inadmissible to disturb anyone during his slumbers, I managed to secure some hours per diem for my own immediate work. However, crowds of patients continually collected, generally at the shady side of the house, waiting until it should please me to awake. Very frequently one of the more impatient, entering the *er*, would thrust his head under the edge of my mosquito tent, and, discovering how he was being imposed upon, immediately summon his comrades. Then, of course, the persecution and misery continued unabated. One by one I was compelled to listen to the most vague and absurd stories and complaints of bodily illness, and to administer, daily, doles of drugs. At first I adopted the plan of dosing my persecutors to excess with croton oil, hoping that they would then stay away; but it was of no use. The more I dosed them the more quickly they came. Some of them must have had stomachs of cast iron to have borne the enormous doses of the oil which I administered to them.

On one occasion, during the very hottest part of the month, a man who had expressly travelled about forty miles to consult me, informed me that he was 'too hot,' and that he wished for some medicine which would make him cooler. I could not refrain from laughing immoderately, as I informed him that his complaint was common to a good many, myself included, and that if I were aware of any medicine which would make me less sensible to the temperature I should not fail to take it immediately.

When the croton oil had become entirely exhausted, a man one day pushed his way into my *ev*, and requested me, with evident anxiety, to give him a dose of it to carry home to some member of his family who was ailing. I showed him the empty bottle, and turned it upside down, in order that he might see that not a single drop remained; but he would not credit the fact. He said that he was sure I had a further relay of it concealed, which I desired to retain for more favoured individuals than himself. Again and again he importuned me to give him some, and as often I was obliged to explain that it was impossible for me to do so. Still he would not go. He sat patiently all day amid the ever-changing crowd, until towards sun-set, when he again appealed to me, only to receive a repetition of my former answer. At last, rising, with a lowering expression of countenance, he exclaimed, 'Well, am I to go away your enemy or your friend? If I have to leave without the medicine I shall be your enemy for life.' This was a serious predicament; but I was partly relieved from it by one of my younger acquaintances, a bit of a wag in his way, who, drawing me inside the mosquito curtain, whispered to me to get some dust, or material of any kind, and to wrap it in a parcel and give it to the unfortunate applicant, as the latter would have the same faith in this as in the real remedy.

One day, while strolling within the ramparts of Kouchid Khan Kala, I discovered a locality where dandelion grew abundantly. This was an immense relief to me, as it suggested a plan which, to a large extent, would rid me of the importunity of my patients. On each subsequent occasion I prescribed the '*gulizar*,' or '*sari-gul*,' as they style dandelion, and gave minute instructions how to pound and squeeze it so as to extract the juice. From that time forward one could not cross the inhabited portion of Kou-

chid Khan Kala without hearing the pounding of this herb and the extraction of dandelion juice going on in almost every house.

Apart from the medical persecution, however, there was the political one, which could not be so easily avoided, my only remedy against it being to remain constantly within my mosquito tent—my *arg*, or citadel, as the Turcomans began to call it. But for the seclusion afforded by it, I should never have been able to commit to paper the notes from which these pages are written. It was of no use getting up very early to work, for the Turcomans were always there, waiting for the dawn; and the moment the smoke of my fire was seen, as the morning tea was being prepared, an immediate incursion of visitors into my *ev* took place. I had either to go without any tea myself, or to supply at least a dozen persons—a serious inconvenience, considering the loss of time it involved, and the very considerable expense to boot. After my elevation to a position of importance, a certain number of the inhabitants appeared to regard it as their prescriptive right to inflict their presence upon me every day at dinner; and a small battalion of hungry persons were always prowling about in the neighbourhood of my redoubt, ready to pounce upon any viands which might be in course of preparation for myself or my immediate friends.

The utter wearisomeness of this kind of life was preying very seriously upon me. If relief had not shortly arrived I believe I should have become demented. The following extracts from my diary faithfully describe my feelings of irritability at the time, and the annoyances to which I was subjected:—

'These Merv Turcomans seem to have nothing to do but loafing about all day from hut to hut to see if they cannot surprise some eatables. They gorge themselves to

excess on every possible occasion with greasy food, and are continually ill from indigestion. They throng my house, partly to satisfy their curiosity by staring at me, and partly to devour the greater portion of any food I may have prepared for my own use. In this way, unless one is prepared to feed a dozen persons on each occasion, he has no chance of getting a mouthful from his meal. It is of no use saying that what you are eating is pig, for they eat pork readily. Covetous rapacity seems to be their leading characteristic. They appear to think the whole world bound to contribute to their support, they to give nothing in return.

'To say that both temper and patience have been severely tried during my stay at Merv would be to convey but a very inadequate idea of the physical and moral annoyance I have undergone from the crooked-mindedness and rudeness of these wretched Turcomans. Their craving after the smallest sums of money and their general greed surpass my worst experiences in other parts of the world. I would rather live in a remote Chinese province, or among the dwarf savages of the Malay Archipelago, than at Merv. Their power to inflict annoyance, and their obtuseness to any sense of delicacy, make them a most undesirable race to live among.

'No one who has not suffered as I have among the Merv Turcomans by being constantly intruded upon and persecuted in every way by their abominable presence could appreciate the exquisite luxury of being left in quiet solitude.

'A daily administration of half glasses of arrack to patients who require *arrack derman* (spirituous medicine) for internal ailments, aches in their stomachs, and the like. This is all a pretence. It is simply a method of getting half-intoxicated at my expense. From behind the awful mystery of my mosquito tent I give replies to the various

consultants—on foreign policy, improvements in the fortifications, pains in their joints and stomachs, and soreness in their eyes. I indiscriminately order dandelion juice, and scores of people are to be seen dotting the plain culling that useful plant, while in many an *ev* thumping and pounding can be heard as the juice is extracted. I have stated over and over again that my stock of medicines is at an end; but all in vain. The daily crowd of applicants for remedies for their various bodily ills remains undiminished. Many whose legs and arms have been badly injured by Russian projectiles feel quite scandalised that I cannot restore the use of their limbs, and leave with the profound conviction that I could cure them if I would. If I only had a hundredweight of antibilious pills, a stone or two of Epsom salts, and a quart of croton oil, I could get on famously, and be first favourite here.

'Relay after relay of these vile beasts of Turcomans render life insupportable during the day and the night too. One would think they imagined I derived intense pleasure from their uncouth, unfeeling, treacherous presences. The constancy of their intrusion passes all belief. Medical advice about their *kessels* (livers) is the pretence, and each passer-by eyes the door longingly, for he imagines there is a never-ending feast of fat mutton, rice, and arrack progressing within. They are like the pestilent flies who vie with them to render life miserable. Ten an hour is a minimum allowance.'

The constant annoyance which I was undergoing, coupled with the extreme anxiety which I felt concerning affairs at Kandahar, doubtless added undue acerbity to the foregoing passages, which, however, will serve to show that my existence at Merv, even in these later days, when I had attained to a certain position of authority, and was universally trusted, was by no means a desirable one. Had

I been certain of living at Merv with impunity, and of leaving it within a limited number of years, I should have been perfectly content with the situation, denuded though it was of those little conveniences which enter so largely into the pleasures of an ordinary life. But in such a place, and surrounded by such unwonted circumstances, I well appreciated that a crisis might occur at any moment which would culminate in the loss of my life, or, at best, a dreary captivity of many years among these Central Asian tribes.

In the midst of my anxieties, arrived from Teheran the definite intelligence that Kandahar was to be evacuated within two months. This decided me upon the course of action which I should follow. The Turcomans still entertained the belief that British troops would speedily march *via* Herat to Merv, if they were not already on the way. I felt that the inevitable disappointment of the Tekkés in regard to this matter would superinduce a state of affairs, so far as I was concerned, from which I should endeavour to dissociate myself. The moment had come for a supreme effort, and I began to arrange measures for quitting Merv, if possible, with the consent of the Turcomans, but, if not, without it. As a whole, the Mervli honestly believed that I had done them considerable service, and that I had been the means of keeping the Russians from their doors. To this belief was owing, to a great extent, their unwillingness to part with me. At the same time, I had my suspicions that the people in power wished to extract from me as much as possible in the shape of presents before they acquiesced in my departure. I had already bestowed considerable gifts in money, jewellery, &c., and I feared that even with a solemn engagement on the part of the leaders to allow me to proceed to Meshed, a renewal of these presents would be only to tempt my further detention, as they would then think that I was not yet at the end of my money resources.

Such were my ideas at the moment, but I afterwards discovered, as the sequel will show, that both people and rulers of Merv were loth to part with me until some other person from Frangistan replaced me among them as a representative of the British Government, to which they had already pledged their allegiance. In pursuance of the idea of the moment, one day, it being necessary to renew the store of corn for my horses, and to order some food for my servants, I declared that I had no money. Calling my chief servant, I told him to take one of my horses to the bazaar and dispose of him. The person addressed, Mehemet Nefess Beg, drew a long face, and, without saying a word, withdrew from my presence. He immediately went to report the state of affairs to Baba Khan. In a short time, he returned, saying that the Khan would not hear of such a thing as the sale of one of my horses. He said that the Tekkés would feel themselves disgraced for ever if one of their guests were obliged to sell his horse in order to be able to live among them. He did not, doubtless, wish to suggest that I could have money brought from Meshed quite as easily as had been the case on the occasion on which I had given presents to the chiefs. In so thinking he was not astray. Still, it was my policy to make it believed that I had no further resources, and so to remove the obstacle which I supposed their cupidity placed in the way of my departure to Persia. I replied by reiterating my order to dispose of my horse at the bazaar, and went so far as to send messages to several personal friends of mine at Merv asking them if they were willing to buy him. This animal had been given to me by the Khan of Derguez, Mehemet Ali, in return for some presents which I had made him during my stay at Muhammedabad. He was a capital horse, though given to a number of fantastic tricks, which had earned for him the epithet of the *deli at* (the mad horse). Several would-be

purchasers called upon me, but, learning from my servant that Baba Khan was opposed to my selling the animal, they immediately retired. However, I was determined to persevere in my course, at least until I could see to what extent it was likely to be successful. I remained one whole day without eating anything, my horses being in the same predicament, in order that it might be demonstrated to my neighbours that I was without resources. Then I had a visit from Baba Khan, and several of his councillors. They said they were sorry to hear that I was at the end of my funds, but reminded me that I was among friends, that all they possessed was mine, and that I had only to command their services, &c. &c. To this I simply replied by pointing to my empty platters, and to the horses tethered close by, who looked anxiously around for their accustomed food. Baba Khan was equal to the occasion. He said, 'You are a Khan among us, and you must not want. You shall have everything we can give you. You shall have clover and *jowane* for your horses; and mutton and sheep's tail fat, and unlimited tea and sugar, for yourself.' He said this with a magnificent air, and an appearance of asking 'What more on earth could you wish for?' I bowed my acknowledgments. The Khan continued, 'There are twenty-four *yaps* at Merv. We will levy daily upon each one a handful of corn, and that will more than suffice for your own bread and for the food of your horses; and the merchants at the bazaar will have contribution levied upon them for tea and sugar.' This, doubtless, was a very generous offer, from the Khan's point of view; but I steadily declined to accept it. I knew that in the end I should have to pay handsomely for the supplies offered to me, which, by the way, I had no occasion whatever for. The Jew merchants were quite ready to supply me with all the tea and sugar and other commodities which I might require, in return for my money orders upon

Meshed, and many of my Turcoman friends would have supplied me with meat on the same conditions; but, as I have said, I wished to make it appear that I was utterly destitute, and that in remaining at Merv I was casting myself as a burden upon the people. I said to Baba Khan, 'I came among you as a visitor. I did not come to live at your expense. I had ample money to support me when I came, but I distributed it among you in presents. I now find myself destitute. I do not ask anything from you except the favour of being allowed to go to Persia, where I shall probably be able to obtain in person, loans of money which no letters from Merv would procure for me. I will not receive any gifts; so that if you do not allow me to sell my horses both they and I must perish with hunger.' This brought matters to a crisis. Baba Khan replied, 'Were I to allow you to sell your horses, I should be for ever disgraced in the sight of the Tekkés as an inhospitable person who would not afford means of subsistence to his guest. I will send you everything that you desire.' Upon this he rose abruptly, and quitted my redoubt. Seeing that he was bent upon this course, I changed my tactics, and resolved to try the patience of the Turcomans to the utmost extent, so that when they were tired of giving me the offered largesse, and saw no return for it, they would be glad to be rid of me.

The same afternoon I heard the crier going round the entire neighbourhood, proclaiming the order of Baba Khan to the Toktamish that each *yap* should furnish a certain amount of fodder for my horses and of bread and meat for myself and my servants. Very shortly afterwards a small mountain of freshly-cut clover was piled close beside my *ev*, and a small sack of *jowane* was brought to my door, much to the satisfaction of my poor hungry horses, who could with difficulty be restrained from break-

ing from their tethering ropes at the sight of the food which they had lacked all day.

Then Matthi made his appearance with a very wo-begone aspect. He said he had received an order to furnish me with tea and sugar, and everything else I required, free of cost. He wished to know whether this was by my instructions. I explained the situation to him, and, taking him into my confidence, told him that he might freely send all I wanted, feeling sure that, as usual, I would pay him by order upon Meshed. I knew that I could thus far rely upon his discretion, for I had already a long credit with him. I owed him at least five hundred krans. He was a man of the most extreme prudence, and one who never spoke unnecessarily, either to friend or foe. This was the first time he had come to see me for many weeks, though I had repeatedly been to visit him at his mud castle. I asked him why he had not visited me oftener as had been his wont when I first arrived at Merv. He said that he would have been only too glad to do so, but that Beg Murad (the *sumsa* stealer) who looked upon himself, to a certain extent, as the supervisor of all my movements, had forbidden him to do so unless on each occasion he paid to the Beg the sum of one tenga; and Aman Niaz Khan had made a demand for a 'present' of a quarter of a pound of green tea on each visit, by way of going shares in the large profits which they believed the Jew gained by reason of his dealings with me. These exactions, Matthi said, would deprive him of all profit upon the articles sold to me during his visits to my *ev*. I felt very indignant at this, which I now learned for the first time; but, out of regard for Matthi's own safety, I said nothing about it.

Matters being thus temporarily arranged, I waited. In fact, there was no other possible course open to me, pending the arrival of Mr. Thompson's reply to the document despatched by the chiefs.

CHAPTER LIV.

LAST DAYS AT MERV.—*Continued.*

The ink question—Silk paper—Conical heads—Intrusion—Turcoman etiquette—Boredom—Tea and sugar—Turcoman peculiarities—Rumoured wealth—Aristocratic ideas—*Ogri*—Moullah Muquem—Mussulman and Christian oaths—An 'Armenian ass'—The yassaoul-bashi and the thief—Akhal Tekkés and Mervli—Moullah Baba—'Myself and the Ingles Khodja'—Turcomans and Ottomans—'Give it to me!' The stopped watch—'I wish it may stop!' English ink *v.* Turcoman ink—My young namesakes—Marriage—Turcoman wives—'Bâaluk.'

I HAD the solemn assurance of all the people in authority at Merv that, as soon as the reply to the official document despatched to the British Minister at Teheran arrived, I should be at perfect liberty to go to Meshed. As, under the circumstances, I felt that this arrangement was fair enough, I was satisfied, and disposed myself as best I could to pass the interval in the most agreeable manner. I intended to devote myself to writing up my notes and *souvenirs* of Merv; but I found myself very much in the situation of Robinson Crusoe. My small supply of ink was rapidly drawing to an end, and my pens had become thoroughly impracticable, and I had caught one of my servants in the act of extracting a thorn from the sole of his foot with my last steel pen. My paper, also, was exhausted; and I was compelled to have recourse to the curious parchment-like material brought from Bokhara, and known as *ypek kagus* (silk paper), which in texture closely resembles the note paper of the last century, with its

distinct water-marks, but is, unlike the latter, highly glazed. I could never learn whether the paper was manufactured from the refuse of silk fibre, or from the mulberry bark, but I am inclined to the belief that it is made from the latter.

It was all very well to resolve to take notes and write, but in practice this was not so easy. The general impression was that my stay at Merv was drawing to a close. All manner of people fancied themselves entitled to call upon me, and to sit all day long in my *ev*. Many a weary day did I pass, surrounded by these Turcomans, whose conically-formed crania, swelling at the base, and tapering almost to a point backwards, indicated egotism, firmness, and ferocity. I tried to put the best face on matters, and to appear cheerful and agreeable. I had not the least desire for the company of these Turcomans; but still, when they came in, I was supposed to give up work, and devote all my attention to my visitors. Again and again I told my servants to explain to everyone who called that unless he had some particular business with me I would rather be left alone; but all in vain. The crowd continued undiminished. Sometimes, when, in defiance of Turcoman etiquette, notwithstanding the concourse of people sitting round, I continued my note-taking and writing, some one would lay his hand upon my paper, and say, 'Khan, when you and I are here, there are two present; but when you are engaged with this' (pointing to the writing materials) 'there is but one.' On one or two occasions I said that that was quite true; but asked them to recollect that I did not desire them to call upon me, and informed them that I had a great deal with which to occupy myself. This produced a rather morose silence on the part of the whole company.

One of the most disagreeable results of these constant visits of large bodies of Turcomans was that I was forced to

spend entire days without food or tea, or else share it with the two dozen persons who ordinarily, at any given hour of the day, were seated upon my carpet. The utter weariness of the situation was inexpressible, and through these long dreary days of persecution nothing supported me save the hope that I should speedily take my departure for Meshed. 'It is worth while having been persecuted by a bore, to experience the relief of his departure; it is worth while to have suffered tooth-ache, to know the enjoyment which accompanies its cessation; and it is well worth while to have lived among the Tekkés, to know the ecstatic delight of parting company with them.' Such is one of the passages written by me in my diary during these days of *ennui* and annoyance. Sometimes, in sheer despair, I was forced to order numerous copper jugs of green tea, in the hope that it would stop the incessant gabble and senseless questioning to which I was subjected. Notwithstanding the disastrously high price of both tea and sugar at Merv, I preferred supplying a hundred people daily with this delicacy to undergoing the ordeal of listening to their inane talk and being obliged to answer their meaningless questions.

To people in these countries it may seem that, on an occasion like this, to feel aggrieved at the amount of tea and sugar spent upon my self-invited guests was to be rather over-economical in spirit; but it must be remembered that on the borders of Afghanistan it was a question of fifteen to twenty shillings daily, and that, too, at a time when my available financial resources were of a very limited nature. I was obliged to follow the example of Kadjar, and the other Khans, and keep the sugar, if not altogether in my pocket, at least under my own immediate jurisdiction, for these people treated the things set before them very much as they would the sheep or camels of the Derguezli or Persians.

Here is another extract from my diary: 'Locusts would

be more merciful on one's sugar than these Mervli. They fill their bowls and their pockets, and, when a stone weight has disappeared in a twinkling, and one apologises for having no more, he is coolly informed that there is plenty to be had at the bazaar.' It was not alone in the matter of tea and sugar that I was victimised. In these latter days, as soon as one had made a purchase even of hay and clover it was known, by some species of intuition, all over the place, and a flock of harpies were to the fore, borrowing armfuls of fodder and nose-bags of barley, never having the least intention of repaying them.

I lay a certain emphasis upon these peculiarities of the Turcomans, for, as I have already remarked in these pages, no one could be more generous to the penniless fakir or poor traveller crossing their territory. It is only when some one having the reputation of being wealthy comes among them that all their covetous instincts come to the fore. I have no doubt that, had I been among them in the capacity of a bare-footed traveller on my way to Bokhara, I should have received every hospitality, and that they would have deprived themselves of tea and sugar to give it to me; but the inbred instinct of depriving another of something shows itself when any one of standing comes amongst them. I have seen Indian fakirs pass across the oasis, and I can guarantee that, notwithstanding their non-Mussulman tenets, the manner in which they were received, as regards food and lodging, would bear favourable comparison to that in which one of their own clansmen would be treated.

Many Turcomans are said to have two and three camel-loads apiece of gold and silver stowed away; but, if this were so, I must say that they showed an amazing capacity for keeping every external evidence of the fact out of sight, in the presence of anyone who could fford to give them so much

as sixpence. For instance, I have known Baba Khan, who, as the son of old Kouchid, must have had very large sums of money bequeathed to him, send up to me for fifteen or twenty krans wherewith to buy meat and tumbaki for his guests.

There was one unfailing characteristic which I noticed among my visitors, no matter to what class or grade in life they belonged. No one was willing to allow that he was a simple individual who gained his livelihood by ordinary industry as a shepherd, or agriculturist, or trader. He was a Khan, a Bey, a Serdar, anything but a peaceable person. He seemed to despise the idea of making his living in an ordinary manner. Those who were really nothing but professional robbers, as most of the 'Serdars' were, were counted among the minor aristocracy of the place; and, as a rule, the glories of the Khans were based upon traditions of what their ancestors had done in the way of murder and pillage, and actual knowledge of their own exploits in the same direction. I suppose they are hardly to be blamed, as the same idea seems, indirectly, to be held in more civilised countries, where a trader no sooner reaches a certain pitch of prosperity than he wishes to disassociate himself from the means whereby his wealth has been acquired. Human nature is pretty much the same all the world over.

The worst of my visitors was that largely interspersed among them was a class known, even among the Mervli, as *ogri* (thieves), who, I supposed, would correspond to the criminal classes in this country, if thievery were looked upon in strictly the same light as here. Mingled with the more respectable of the inhabitants, they would come to my *ev*, purloin my spoons and knives, take sugar out of my saddle-bags when I was not looking, and even steal my slippers; but they would look monstrously indignant if I did but hint

that they had done so, or alluded distantly to restitution as an acceptable course of action on their part.

I met with one notable instance of theft in a quarter where I least expected it. There was a young student at the *médresse*, or college, of Khodja Nefess. He was a nephew of Kadjar Khan, and his father was a moullah. The latter wore a white turban cloth round his Turcoman hat, and was recognised as the chief ecclesiastic of the capital. Moullah Muquem, the person in question, was a young man of between eighteen and nineteen years of age. He seemed to have taken a remarkable fancy to me, and on every possible occasion was at my side, asking me questions about Frangistan, and telling me stories about his own country. I began to place implicit faith in him, and often trusted him with money wherewith to perform small commissions for me. On one occasion he brought me a pair of hand-woven saddle-bags, of crimson and white carpet stuff, as a present. Of course I knew what an Eastern present meant, and I gave him two pieces of gold, each of the value of twenty francs, asking him if he could find change for me. He said that he could do so in the Jews' quarter, but that two days must elapse ere he could find leisure to go there, as he would be engaged at his *médresse*. I told him that out of the change he should keep ten francs as a present from me, and that he should invest another kran in the purchase of some rude tallow candles, such as are manufactured in the oasis. He went away, promising to bring me the change at the earliest possible opportunity. A week passed, and I had no news of him. I sent a messenger to his house to tell him I was in need of money, and asking him to send me the balance. It was in vain; there was no reply. One day I came suddenly upon him, and inquired why he had so long delayed coming to see me. He replied that he had been looking in vain for change, and did not

wish to visit me until he had procured it. I was satisfied with the excuse. Some days elapsed, and I again applied to him for my money. He sent me about a pound of candles, and the message that he did not know what money I was talking about. He said that he had given me the change for the gold pieces which I had entrusted to him. At this I became indignant, and sent him word that if he did not immediately give me the money he owed me I should be obliged to adopt harsh measures towards him. To this I received no answer. Then I sent for my friend Yaghmour Khan, the *yassaoul-bashi*, and informed him how matters stood. I directed him, in his magisterial capacity, to call upon the culprit, and compel him to pay the money. At the expiration of an hour he returned to me with a sorrowful face, saying, 'It is of no use; he denies it. Were any witnesses present when you gave him the gold pieces?' 'Unfortunately, there were not.' 'I will try,' said he, 'once more.' He had an audience of old Kadjar Khan, and his brother—the father of the delinquent—but all in vain. The young scamp insisted upon denying that he owed me anything.

Yaghmour Khan, who was really my friend, and knew that I was incapable of making an unfounded charge of this kind, and also how liberally I distributed my money among his companions of the Khanate, demanded that Moullah Muquem be put to the test, and swear upon the Koran that he owed me nothing. This he declined to do, on the score that I was not a Mussulman, and that as a Christian my word could not possibly weigh against his. Yaghmour could scarcely refrain from tears as he returned to me. He said, 'I know that you have given him the money; I know that he is a liar and a thief, and'—concentrating all objectionable epithets into one —'he is an *Eshek Irmeni*' (an Armenian ass). Having said this, he had no more poisoned

arrow in his store of epithets. I remarked, 'It is well, Yaghmour Khan; you have done your duty; let him keep the money; you know how little difference a sum like that makes to me; let him keep it, but with it the titles of liar and thief, as you have said. I hope you will not forget his titles in the future.'

Untrustworthy though the majority of the Turcomans are in money matters, I must say, to the credit of the Mervli, that this young Moullah Muquem was to a great extent shunned from that day forward; for, excusable though it is deemed at Merv to cheat and rob, the swindling of a stranger who was their guest seemed to them the point at which the line should be drawn, if anywhere.

It is curious that, while red-handed murder and robbery were a recognised means of existence among the Tekkés, thievery, in the sense of stealing from the person, or filching an article from a stall of the bazaar, was despised. I was once speaking with some Turcomans of note—Makdum Kuli Khan's followers—about the battle of Yengi Sheher. The Kethkoda charged with the supervision of the Murgab dam at Benti, after listening for some time to my reprobations of the acts of the Akhal Tekkés, said, 'There is a great difference between Akhal Tekkés and Merv Tekkés. The Akhals are merely thieves.' It required a Turcoman's discrimination in order to be able to draw the line at which honesty ended and thievery began; but the fact is that the people at Merv considered themselves altogether as metropolitans, and looked upon their more western congeners simply as vagrants, provincials, and undesirable acquaintances. The Akhals plundered everybody around them with the utmost impartiality, the Mervli included. I have already said that in Merv there were two classes—the more or less respectable persons, who, having accumulated a certain amount of property, and not being

in want of daily necessaries, held in reprobation others who, being disinclined to work, took to the road. These latter belonged to the *ogri* class.

The proper title of Moullah Baba, whom I have mentioned in connection with my visit to the old cities of Merv, and whose conversation with Aman Niaz Khan as to my being a *yaman kafir* (wicked unbeliever) I have given in detail, would in Osmanli Turkish be Khodja, but so rare are the accomplishments of reading and writing among the Turcomans that they confer the title of Moullah upon any person who possesses them. This Moullah Baba gained his livelihood, to a large extent, by writing letters and keeping accounts for his more unlettered brethren. He had also a few sheep and half an acre of barley. Since the night at Makdum Kuli Khan's guest-house, I had taken a violent dislike to the Moullah; but notwithstanding my rather open expression of sentiment with regard to him, he continued to haunt my house unceasingly. He, like the others, saw that I was constantly engaged in writing, and, as a brother in the craft, appeared to imagine that he had a perpetual right of *entrée* at my dwelling. He used to speak of 'myself and the Ingles Khodja.' I mention this personage *apropos* of ideas of lying and thievery. One day, when, in a moment of irritation consequent upon being cheated and disappointed by some Turcomans, I said that all the Mervli were thieves and liars, Moullah Baba, after a few seconds' pause, replied, 'Yes, we *are* thieves and liars; we know it, and, what is more, we are not ashamed of it;' the fact being that a Turcoman of his type considered it very creditable to be able to steal and lie to some purpose, to conceal his own thoughts and to mislead others. He therein showed his kindred to his Ottoman relations. I dare say that if he were a grand vizir he would think it a very venial error

indeed to repudiate financial agreements, or at one moment to send a decoration to, and at another denounce, a political associate.

While speaking of Moullah Baba I may as well relate an anecdote in which he is associated with the *Lshek Irmeni*, the confiscator of my gold pieces. When on very friendly terms with the latter, I promised him a watch, and wrote to Teheran to have one sent down without loss of time through the medium of Abass Khan. Before it arrived he had perpetrated his theft. Hearing of the manner in which I had been treated by Muquem, and knowing that I had written for a present for that worthy, the Moullah asked, 'Why not give it to me? I never stole anything from you.' The two moullahs were enemies, and I thought I could not better pay off the thief than by handing the gift originally intended for him to his foeman. I accordingly did so. I spent an hour in explaining the mystery of the machine to Moullah Baba, and in expounding the division of time. When he left my *ev*, with the watch in his possession, he had the air of a Minister who has just received his portfolio. He had risen enormously in the estimation of the Mervli; and might be seen, at any given hour of the day, surrounded by a crowd of from thirty to fifty persons, to whom he was lecturing upon the wonderful article into possession of which he had come. Later on he often affected airs of *hauteur* as regarded myself. One day, however, a collapse took place. Opening his watch to display to his wondering auditory its interior mechanism, some grains of sand lodged in the machinery, and—the watch came to a stand-still. It would be difficult to conceive a more terrible shock to personal dignity than that which now took place. The Moullah hurried to my abode. His haughtiness was gone. He was the personification of abject humility. His watch had stopped. He felt that he

was at my mercy. He unwound several cloths, and ultimately produced the watch from its morocco leather case. If a young mother had laid her dying infant at my feet, and implored me to restore to it its fleeting breath, her accents could not have been more pathetic than were those of Moullah Baba when he said, 'Can you make the watch go on again?' Though not a watchmaker, I guessed that some dust or sand had lodged in the works. I was sufficiently acquainted with the Turcoman character to know that whatever I did to remedy the misfortune must be made a matter of mystery; so, drawing my large sheep-skin coat over my head, I muttered in audible tones some presumably mystic sentences, and, turning the watch on one side, struck it sharply a couple of times in order to shake out whatever might be impeding its action, which it immediately resumed. Removing the covering which concealed me, I majestically handed back the watch.

However momentary, the gratitude of Moullah Baba was deep, and he swore by Allah and the Koran that if anybody ever persuaded him to open that watch again he hoped it might stop! He wished himself no worse than that—to his mind an overwhelming calamity. Notwithstanding his gratitude, however, he could not keep his hands from pilfering. Next day, while sitting among my usual throng of visitors, when the conversation turned upon writing he remarked that Ferenghi ink could not compare with that manufactured by the Turcomans. I challenged this statement, whereupon he produced a scrap of silk paper upon which were written some characters in a decidedly blotched style. 'This,' said the Moullah, 'is the result of writing with English ink.' Then he produced another slip upon which was some fairly written matter. 'This,' observed he, 'is Turcoman ink.' I questioned him

still further on the subject, and asked him where he had got his 'English ink;' whereupon he produced from his pocket in triumph a flat tin canister of blacking which he had purloined from my saddle-bags, and which he had supposed to be the substance with which I wrote my rather microscopically-written letters.

About this time there came under my notice a custom of the oasis which at first considerably startled me. The town crier, accompanied by half-a-dozen other Turcomans, entered my house, each of them, to my intense amazement, bearing in his arms a newly-born child of the male sex. These children were presented to me with a good deal of formality. I could not catch the exact words; all I could understand was that one of the infants was O'Donovan Beg, another O'Donovan Khan, a third O'Donovan Bahadur; I forget what the others were. Visions of Western lands appeared before me, and to say that I was astonished is but a mild way of expressing my feelings. Restraining myself, I mildly asked why these babies were brought to my house, and what was the reason of this general presentation. It turned out that among the Tekkés newly-born children are, as a rule, called after any distinguished strangers who may be in the oasis at the time of the births or have resided there a short time previously, or after some event intimately connected with the tribe. I felt relieved by the explanation, even though I had to give a *peshkesh* of five krans for each of my youthful namesakes.

The subject of children naturally brings one to the question of marriage. In Merv it is the rare exception that a man have more than one wife. He cannot afford to have his, for him, short meals cut shorter by the addition of unnecessary mouths. The Mahometan law, which permits four wives, obtains, but enjoins that a separate

residence be provided for each—a provision which is usually religiously adhered to by the Turcomans. A Turcoman's courtship is not so difficult as that of his more westerly co-religionist. He has ample opportunity of seeing his destined bride every day, for, as I have had occasion to remark, the Turcoman women make no pretence at veiling their faces —except, perhaps, when some man suddenly enters an *ev* where a number of women happen to be, and then they seize the end of the handkerchief hanging from their heads and place it between their teeth. A man, having resolved upon marriage, waits upon the father of the desired spouse, and, if he be at all well-to-do, proffers the sum of 40*l.* sterling in return for the young lady. Possession of the sum of 40*l.* argues an amount of eligibility which gainsays a denial, and a new *ev*, or, as they term it, an *ak ev* (white *ev*) is prepared at the expense of the father. This means a house with felt coverings, as yet unblackened by the smoke of the fire. The affianced pair, accompanied by their male relations, assemble in this dwelling. The Moullah asks the father, before witnesses, whether he is willing to give his daughter to the bridegroom. Some paragraphs from the Koran are read, a 'present' of a few krans is made to the Moullah, and the newly-wedded pair are left alone to the enjoyment of connubial bliss.

As far as my experience goes, divorce is altogether unknown among these semi-nomads. The wife is the guiding spirit of the household, and, until she has grown-up female children, takes upon herself the entire household work. The husband has every reason for not wishing for a separation; for, in the first place, he is absolute master in his house, and were he to separate himself from his wife it would put him to the expense of another 40*l.* to find her successor who would rid him of petty household cares and annoyances. In the event of unfaithfulness on the part of

the wife, a knife-stroke settles the question, and *no one* has a right to interfere.

When writing about Gumush Tepé I referred to the difficulty of getting Turcomans to appreciate a drawing of any kind, with the exception of a ground plan, which they understand readily enough—witness Tokmé Serdar's sketch drawn upon the sand floor of my *er*, when I first met him on my advent to Merv. About this period, however, I had a most distressing example of the manner in which drawings in such journals as the 'Illustrated London News,' which are eloquent to our eyes, utterly fail to convey to these far-off Easterns any notion of the idea embodied in them. I had received some copies of illustrated papers by way of Teheran and Meshed. There was one full-page drawing, entitled 'Crowning the Hero,' which perhaps some of my readers may recollect. It represented a gallant major, returned from the Afghan war, and surrounded by a number of young girls in a drawing-room, who had flung over his neck a wreath of mistletoe. With extended arms and open palms he is protesting against the compliment. With a view of stopping the eternal clatter of these Turcoman tongues, I had thrown a number of these illustrated sheets broadcast among my self-invited guests. The above-mentioned picture seemed to attract them particularly. They looked at it from every point of view, and ultimately came to the conclusion that turned on one side, it was seen to most advantage. After fully three quarters of an hour of deep study and meditation, a Serdar who was present nudged my elbow, and, laying his finger upon the middle of the illustration, his eyes lighted up with joyous intelligence, exclaimed, *Bâaluk!* Bâaluk means fish. I cast my eye upon the drawing, trying, as a matter of curiosity, to find out how he could possibly derive the idea of fish from it, but I failed to perceive any clue to the mystery. Possibly

this Turcoman looked at the picture in the same way that persons sometimes, when staring in a state of abstraction at the paper on a wall, forget what I may call the positive design, the intervals between the objects delineated striking the eye more than the objects themselves.

CHAPTER LV.

THE FINAL MEDJLIS.

A diplomatic error—An ambassador's answer—Three *nan* years—Estimation of time—Uncertainty—An ultimatum—A mad horse—The new frontier—Apocryphal information—Difficulties—'This is the present'—A reminder—A Turcoman joke—Prince Demydow's letter—A disagreeable attitude.

It was close to the end of June. I cannot be sure of dates at this time, for I had lost all count of the days, and the Turcomans themselves never knew, within a fortnight, what their own month was.

I was lazily reclining within my mosquito-curtain tent, wondering what turn fortune would next take for me, when my servants announced the arrival of Baba and Aman Niaz Khans. These two gentlemen were rarely to be seen together, so that I felt that something important must have occurred. My curtain was raised, and I welcomed the khans to my house. Baba held in his hands a portentous-looking document. The first words that he uttered were, 'The Ingles Vizir Mukhtar is evidently in error. He has addressed his letter to the khans of the Otamish and Toktamish. The Toktamish chief is the senior, and I cannot understand why this slight has been put upon me.' As these Turcomans are hyper-sensitive upon such matters, I explained that it was through no want of respect to the senior khan that the ambassador had so misdirected his letter, but that the mistake was owing to the latter's non-

acquaintance with local circumstances; and thus this important point was disposed of.

The letter contained a succinct answer to the political document which had been forwarded to the rulers of Merv, the signatories being the hereditary khans and the kethkodas of the twenty-four *yaps*. I took down the contents of the letter, word for word, but, as it is a confidential paper, I only give a summary of it. The ambassador acknowledged the receipt of the letter addressed to him by the Merv chiefs, in which they stated that the tribes over which they presided had resolved to proffer their allegiance to the British Government, and that they had hoisted a flag in the English name, and branded some of their horses with an English mark, in token of their proposed submission to the Queen of England. He also said that their communication had been transmitted to Her Majesty's Government. He was glad to hear that the Merv tribes were animated by kindly sentiments towards the British Government, and told them that they might rest assured of the interest which was taken in their welfare. He continued: 'It is my duty, however, to state to you, with reference to the proffer of allegiance to the British Government, that the proposal that the people of Merv should become British subjects is one that, owing to various causes, physical as well as political, cannot be entertained.' The Minister further reminded them that I was, as I had myself said, not an emissary of the British Government, but an agent of the British public, whose duty it was to keep the latter informed of events passing in the oasis. The British public, he said, had always evinced a lively interest in the welfare of the Merv people, and were consequently desirous to obtain accurate information respecting their condition and prospects. 'Mr. O'Donovan, having now resided for some time at Merv, is in a position to supply trustworthy information

on these subjects, and it is now both desirable and expedient that you should, in accordance with the request that I have instructed the Agent of the British Government in Meshed to convey to you on my part, send Mr. O'Donovan at once to this country in order that he may personally communicate to me such information as may have been furnished to him during his stay at Merv.'

The terms of this document were definite, and exactly what I had requested the British Minister to place before the Merv chiefs. Having perused the missive, Baba Khan told me that I was at liberty to go when I pleased. 'But,' he added, 'there must be a general *medjlis* before you leave us.' 'Let it be called immediately,' I rejoined. I knew what 'immediately' meant—a fortnight at the soonest.

I knew that the time was approaching when, in accordance with their professions of friendship to England, I must be set at liberty, or else be declared a prisoner held to ransom. Anything in the nature of a crisis was delightful to me, after the weary monotony and uncertainty of the months which had passed. Time hung heavily on my hands, but I utilised it in gathering items of information concerning the society in which I was living.

Turcomans have little or no idea of the lapse of time. They cannot tell whether an event happened twelve, or twenty, or thirty years ago. They divide their years into cycles of twelve, as follows:—(1) *Sitchkan* (mouse); (2) *Sighur* (cow); (3) *Barse* (? Bear); (4) *Taouchan* (hare); (5) *Loo* (fish); (6) *Ylan* (snake); (7) *Ylki* (mare); (8) *Koi* (tortoise); (9) *Bigin* (lizard); (10) *Thakikah* (owl); (11) *It* (dog); (12) *Domous* (pig). The months composing these years are lunar months, for the Turcomans reckon time by the cycles of the moon, and not by the solar one. If you ask a Turcoman how old he is, he will try to recollect the au-

spices of which animal he was born under. Perhaps he will say, 'I was born in *domous* (pig) year.' Then he will calculate how many 'pig years' have passed him by, and tell you his age accordingly. Beyond the extent of his own life, however, he has little idea of time. When I was enquiring about the time at which the last city of Merv (Bairam Ali) had been destroyed (nearly a century ago), there was only one moullah—super-intelligent for his race—who could tell me that it was ninety-eight years beyond the time of my visit. The opinions of the others varied between two thousand and five hundred years. This will serve as an example of the difficulty of collecting any correct chronological data among a people of this kind. Consequently, in the dates which I have given, with reference to the various migrations of the Turcoman race from the Akhal Tekké to the Tejend, and from Sarakhs to Merv, I have only placed on record the nearest approximate dates that I could arrive at.

In regard to distance, the Turcoman's computation is equally unsatisfactory. From the Persians, and through the Koran, they have learned the word *saahat* (an hour), but they have not the faintest idea of what an hour means. They will talk to you about 'an hour's journey,' but in all likelihood it will prove to be three hours' journey. Their computation depends upon the distance which an ordinary horse can travel, at his usual pace, in the course of a day. They will tell the traveller that the distance from one place to another is *bir gidgé* (one day's journey), or *yarum gidgé*, (a half-day's journey), *cheriek gidgé* (a quarter of a day's journey). When the distance is less than the latter they will say that the place is not far off. They have a measure which is called an *agatch*. This is supposed to correspond with the Persian *farsang*, which conveys the idea of an hour's swift walking—about four miles. A

Turcoman *agatch* means an hour's riding, for no one walks in their country. As a rule it means about five miles, for a Turcoman horse, even when walking, will cover that distance in an hour. Literally, *agatch* is a piece of wood. I suppose that the name is derived from the custom of placing poles along the road, to mark the distance, just as in Russia we find the blue-and-white striped posts which indicate the versts.

During these weary days a hundred peculiarities of Turcoman society came under my notice, but I had no heart to mark them: I was disgusted. Old Owez came at regular intervals, to remind me of his property which had been carried off by the men of the Khan of Kelat-i-Nadri. 'Your worship,' he would say, 'they stole a white ass, my camels, and one of my wives.' Myself, *sotto voce*: 'Serve you right.' And then I would relapse into silence, thinking what a terrible fate it would be to have to spend years among these, to my mind at the time, repulsive creatures. Even when my brother Khans came to see me I wore an attitude of fierce defiance. I was resolved to let them know that I saw through their policy, and that I was not to be trifled with any longer.

At last the crisis came. I had been asking daily when I was to start for Meshed. There was always some obstacle in the way. The *medjlis* could not be got together, or one or other of the Khans was absent. On one day, one Khan was to the fore; the other had gone on a tour of inspection. When the latter was to be found, the former was sick, or he, also, had gone on a tour of inspection. Or, when both Khans were present, the waters at the Murgab dam were so high that every man was so occupied no one could come to the *medjlis*.

It was now some time since I had been living at free quarters among the Turcomans. Corn and clover for my

horses were freely forthcoming, and mutton broth for myself, and, as far as they knew, the supplies of tea and sugar brought to me by Matthi the Jew were at their expense. One day I made up my mind to send in an ultimatum. I despatched my chief servant to summon Baba and Aman Niaz and a number of Kethkodas. They duly met at my *er*. I said, 'I am going to leave Merv for Meshed within three days.' Objections were raised. I continued, 'I will hear of no objection; you have told me that since the arrival of the British Minister's letter I am free to go where I please. If within three days I be not in the saddle for my destination, I shall haul down my flag as a declaration of war.' This fell like a thunderbolt among them, for as long as my crimson banner was floating over Merv the confidence of the people was undiminished. I knew that its disappearance would challenge immediate enquiry.

The chiefs begged time to consider. I would give none. I said, 'I have had quite enough of living on your charity. I do not require it any longer. I will not have it.' I sent for the Serdar who had taken my watch to Baba Khan, and, pointing to my *deli at* (mad horse), said, 'I want to sell him as a bargain. There is no use in consulting with Baba Khan; if you do not buy him I will sell him to somebody else.' After some discussion we agreed upon a price, 20*l*., if I recollect rightly. The process of selling and buying was curious. We had an immense amount of haggling before we decided upon the 20*l*., but that was nothing to what came afterwards—whether I would give the bridle; whether I would give the new swathing wrapper; whether I would give the belly-band. All these minutiæ entered into the discussion, and at last, as I intended all this simply as a demonstration of my resolution to stay no longer at Merv, I exclaimed, 'Take everything; anything that belongs to him!'

As is usual in a community like that of Merv, no sooner had I effected the sale than it was known to every individual within the length and breadth of the place. A crowd of people of all ranks thronged my house. They begged and implored me to remain, asseverating that all that Merv was worth, was at my disposal. I pointed to the Serdar, who was preparing to lead away his newly purchased horse. I said, 'I am penniless. I have had to sell my horse in order to live. I will not accept your charity. I have asked Baba Khan to summon the *medjlis*. He is unwilling to do so. I shall mount and ride away. Prevent me at your peril. It will be a declaration of war with England if you do, and I shall haul down my flag.' By artifices like this I hurried on the meeting of the *medjlis*.

There were, fortunately, some circumstances which came to my aid. The Russian authorities were surveying the new frontier, and Tekké scouts brought word that Cossack horsemen escorted persons with divers wonderful and dreadful engines in their neighbourhood—the engineers with their theodolites, who were surveying the road to Sarakhs. I grasped at this as a drowning man at a straw. I imagined a meeting of the ambassadors of Europe at Meshed, convened for the purpose of deciding upon the new frontier; I declared that the fate of Merv depended upon that meeting. I reminded the chiefs that they were already cut off from Bokhara and Samarcand by the Russian protectorate of these places. Meshed and Herat were the only points from which they could derive their supply of percussion caps, without which their muzzle-loading rifles would be utterly useless. If the Russians were allowed to extend their line from Askabad along the Tejend to Sarakhs, Meshed, as a base of supplies, would be lost, and the proximity of Sarakhs to Herat would practically isolate the Turcomans from that point. Were they, I asked, prepared

to send an envoy to the Meshed meeting? My auditors enquired whether the ambassadors could understand Jagatai Tartar. I was able to assure them, most conscientiously, that in all likelihood the ambassadors would not be able to understand that language, and that so far as I could see I was the only possible representative they could despatch.

The chiefs withdrew, and the grave expressions of their countenances, even on that of Aman Niaz Khan, whose habitually *insouciant* character seldom allowed a trace of serious thought to be seen upon his face, showed that they felt the importance of the crisis which my imaginary meeting of ambassadors portended. It never seemed to strike them that the information I afforded them might be apocryphal. So it generally is with the semi-barbarian mind. Even under the pressure which I brought to bear, the natural inertia of the purely Turkish mind was not to be overborne in haste. There was that desire for delay, that unwillingness to come to a swift decision, the wish to gain time which has been only too painfully manifest in Turkish councils of these later days. I begged and implored that the general *medjlis* might be summoned without the loss of a moment. The Mervli were by this time very nearly at an end of their excuses for further procrastination, but there was still one undischarged arrow in their quiver. An important Kethkoda, by name Sari Beg, and who was remarkable for his gallantry with regard to the female sex, called upon me, and, in a last attempt to move my resolution anent going to Meshed, said that the ladies of Merv were greatly opposed to my going away! This, however, failed to shake my belief in the expediency of my getting out of the oasis at the very earliest opportunity. I had always the fear of the evacuation of Kandahar before my eyes, and a pretty good idea that the moment the news reached Kouchid Khan Kala my popularity would sadly sink

in the estimation of the Tekkés, if, indeed, disastrous results for myself did not speedily supervene.

It was towards the middle of July that the final council, in which I took part, met at Kouchid Khan Kala. It was an unusually large one, for all felt that a great crisis had arrived. The Bahadur Khan, the palladium of the Merv nation, was about to take his departure. Although, ostentatiously, my mission to Meshed was an act of self-devotion in the interests of the Mervli, still, the suspicion of *arrière pensée*, so inherent in the Oriental mind, could not be got rid of. I was supposed to entertain designs too deep for even the Turcoman mind to fathom. There was some *ruse* hidden behind everything I said. Foreseeing the difficulties which might be awaiting me, I had resolved to sacrifice all the pecuniary resources remaining to me in a last effort to destroy any barrier to my departure which the cupidity of the leading men might raise up. I had determined that the last hundred pounds, which I had kept in reserve for a desperate crisis, should now be utilised, and I had despatched confidential messengers to Meshed to bring me that amount in silver. It may seem strange that I should have trusted a quantity of coin like this in the hands of professional robbers, but I knew enough of Tekké nature to be aware that when I devoted the sum as presents to their chiefs, through whose hands it must inevitably filter into the pockets of their adherents, I was perfectly safe in confiding in them.

On the night before the *medjlis*, the money arrived. Aman Niaz Khan's uncle, Nazar Ali Beg, and Koorban Pehlivan, a near relation of Baba Khan, were the messengers chosen. The money arrived in four bags, each containing silver to the amount of twenty-five pounds sterling. Without a moment's delay I despatched one bag to Aman Niaz, another to Baba, a third to Murad Bey, and a fourth

to Yaghmour. In an hour's time, when the sun had set, and my lamp was lighted, the four recipients, surrounded by their henchmen, presented themselves. They saluted me ceremoniously, and seated themselves in silence around me. We exchanged the usual compliments, and then, Aman Niaz Khan led the way by drawing from the pocket of his silk robe a heavy sack containing my gift to him. 'Bahadur Khan,' he said, 'this is the present which you have sent to me. I thank you for it;' and he poured the contents upon the carpet, so that all might be witnesses to the fact that he had received them. Baba Khan and the others followed suit in like manner.

These Turcomans always wish to parade before their followers the fact that they have received a gift. As far as I understand the *rationale* of their conduct, it is this. They wish in the first place to acknowledge the donation, but they also wish to make it evident to their subjects that they are worth having presents made to them, with a view of raising themselves in social estimation.

Shortly after this little ceremony, Baba Khan left my *ev*, followed by Yaghmour. Aman Niaz and Murad Bey remained. The moment their brother potentates were well away from my dwelling, Aman Niaz drew from his pocket a quart bottle of arrack, which he presented to me with great ceremony. With great show of hospitality I poured out full measures for my guests, for, to tell the truth, I was anxious to get rid of as much of the deleterious spirit as possible before being obliged to drink any myself, for this newly-distilled arrack, charged with fusel oil, was perfectly poisonous.

When the bottle had been emptied, greatly to my relief, all my guests left me, with the exception of one Allah Kuli, the son of a former chief of great renown. To this personage I had given nothing, and, consequently, he did

not feel at all satisfied. When you find yourself alone with a Turcoman, which is not often, he will improve the opportunity by telling you that *he* is a *bouyuk adam*—a great man—not at all like the other people; and that he is more deserving of presents than any other individual. Allah Kuli confided to me this sort of information about himself. I reminded him that the sums of money which I had at my disposal were very limited, and that I was obliged by etiquette to distribute them among the senior Khans, though I would not fail to remember him when I reached Meshed. That I did not so fail, the list of presents described in the Appendix will prove.

Makdum Kuli had not taken part in this latest gathering, but his name also will be found among the recipients of the gifts which the generosity of the proprietors of the 'Daily News' enabled me to distribute among the Mervli, in order to extricate myself from the difficult and serious position in which I found myself.

It was July 19—a memorable day for me—when the general council of the Merv representatives met at Kouchid Khan Kala. The ordinary place of assembly was too limited to contain them. They took their places upon the sloping shores of the river Murgab, the waters of which were at this time rather unusually low. I had risen an hour before sunrise, for I was in too anxious a state of mind to be able to sleep. I heard the buzz and hum throughout the Merv capital as the various members of the council arrived, and I was all impatience to receive the summons to appear before them.

The morning passed. Mid-day came, and yet I was not summoned. It was two o'clock when Murad Bey waited upon me, and, with due solemnity, invited me to appear before the council of the nation. My horse was standing saddled, at the door, for, among the Mervli a

person of any importance cannot proceed any, even the smallest, distance upon foot.

At least fifty men, in their best attire, and fully armed, were standing around. As I mounted my horse, they all did likewise, and in solemn guise we marched slowly to the place of meeting. The murmur of conversation which was heard as we approached was suddenly hushed as I made my appearance. A large carpet was laid just within the circle formed by the chieftains and Kethkodas as they sat in an oval ring close to the water's edge. I took my place upon it. Behind me, to the left, sat Baba Khan, and near him was the Old Man of the Sword. Dowlet Nazar Beg, the former Vizir of Baba's father, sat by the senior chief, and close by was many a leader whose name and deeds had carried terror far within the Persian frontier. At the opposite extremity of the assembly sat some of the Otamish leaders. Aman Niaz Khan was absent, so was Kadjar Khan, though all his immediate followers were there.

It was an imposing spectacle, this gathering of chiefs beside the Murgab. Close by rose the frowning front of the newly completed fortress. Around me, in their picturesque garbs, were the redoubtable robber chiefs of Central Asia. Some thousands of people, grouped in knots, surrounded us at a short distance, and more than a hundred horsemen were close upon the edge of the circle, listening eagerly to every word that passed. There had evidently been a hot discussion in the earlier hours of the day as to the expediency of allowing me to depart, and at the time of my being summoned much that was interesting had passed by. I was sorry for this, for I should have wished to hear in their entirety the arguments adduced one way and the other. At the time of my arrival Baba Khan had evidently had it all his own way—in my favour. He asked me if I

would say a few words to the council previously to hearing the final decision.

I looked around, to gather from the expressions of the countenances surrounding me what the general feeling was. Anxious though I was about the result of the meeting, I could not help remarking the physiognomies of the members of the *medjlis*. With a few exceptions, when one saw a Kalmuck type—the prominent cheek bones and slit eyes—the countenances of the members of the assembly were such as would not provoke remark in any ordinary meeting of individuals in Europe. I was much struck by the rugged European type which characterised the assembled leaders.

I spoke at some length, though I had little more to say than on a former occasion, on which I had pointed out what I considered the best policy for the Merv nation to adopt, in view of the near presence and aggressive policy of Russia; but of course I laid considerable stress upon the imaginary *medjlis* of ambassadors at Meshed. I was listened to with the greatest attention; the only interruption I experienced being the continual going and coming of the individuals told off to supply the members of the council with smoking materials. In the further end of the space around which the councillors sat was a deep, narrow hole excavated in the ground, where a fire was burning, and from which the water pipes were lighted. When I ceased speaking, a silence fell upon the assembly. Only Baba Khan and his councillors whispered together. At length the tremendous bass voice of the 'Old Man of the Sword' broke the stillness. He proceeded to call the roll of the Kethkodas. Without exception they answered to their names. Aman Niaz and Kadjar alone were absent. 'Where is Kadjar?' said the Ak Saghal. 'He is absent,' said Sari Beg. 'Why is he absent?' 'He does not admit the jurisdiction of the council.' 'Where is Aman Niaz Khan?' said the Ak

Saghal. One of the Otamish Kethkodas replied that Aman Niaz was not at the council by reason of his eyes being sore, and he being unable to support the brilliant sunlight. Here the only joke I ever heard from Turcoman lips was perpetrated. 'You say,' said the Old Man of the Sword, 'that Aman Niaz's eyes are sore; how many eyes has he got?' 'Why, two, to be sure,' said Sari Beg. 'He has got two eyes,' said the Ak Saghal, 'and yet he is not here. Why, here is Baba Khan, who has got but one eye, and yet he has come.' Baba Khan, as I have said, had one eye completely destroyed by keratitis. He tried to smile, but it was only a ghastly attempt. His solitary orb flamed. It was more with indignation than with pleasure that he heard this allusion to his infirmity, common though it was at Merv. But apparently the Old Man of the Sword did not care a straw about his indignation. The proceedings were at a close. Baba Khan raised his voice, and asked whether there were anyone present who could say why the Bahadur Khan should not start for Meshed. A murmured conversation immediately arose all around the ring of councillors. Then, one ugly-looking Kalmuck-featured man said that he did not think adequate 'presents' had been made to all concerned. Baba replied rather hotly that he thought there had been. The ugly man rejoined, 'Oh yes, I know that yesterday you received a bag of six hundred krans; you are all right, but what about us who have got nothing?' I was now very much surprised by seeing the Old Man of the Sword rise to his feet, saying in an imperious manner, 'The Bahadur Khan came here to serve us, and he is going to Meshed to do the same. We Mervli may rob our enemies, but we do not rob our friends.' I felt deeply grateful to the Ak Saghal for his timely intervention in my behalf. I had, however, reason to know that he had received a letter from General Rochrberg, commanding at

Askabad, intimating that it would be agreeable to the Russian Government that I should leave Merv as soon as possible. I cannot be sure whether the Ak Saghal himself got the letter, or some of his friends, but, from a letter of Prince Demydow, the Russian Ambassador in London, I know that his Government were kind enough to exert themselves in my behalf. I have already said that there existed the germ of a Russian party at Merv, and to them was probably communicated the expediency of letting me go, and no longer having 'British officers haunting the oasis.' I may say here, to clear up all doubts which may have existed on the matter, that I was the only person from this part of the world who had been in Merv since the last traveller crossed the oasis previous to the arrival of the Turcomans. Of course I may add here, *en passant*, that when the Persian expedition, twenty-two years previously, was disastrously overthrown, De Blocqueville, the Shah's photographer, had remained a prisoner in the hands of the Turcomans.

Short time as it has taken me to describe my part in the *medjlis*, six hours were occupied by the deliberations, and the sun was already behind the horizon before the meeting broke up. We were sitting in the usual position which Eastern etiquette demands of those who are engaged in important business, viz., kneeling, and seated upon our heels. I had fears lest I might be permanently lame owing to the crippling which I underwent on this occasion, and it was with heartfelt joy that I hailed the signal for the breaking up of the council. My immediate friends gathered round me, felicitating me on the outcome of the meeting, and for the first time in many months I was exceedingly happy.

CHAPTER LVI.

LEAVING MERV—THE ROAD TO MESHED.

Further delays—Sheik Obeidullah—Possible invasion—Khodja Kuli—Further difficulty—Liberation of Kidaieff—Clannishness—Allah Kuli Khan—Parting gifts—Starting—My menagerie—My escort—Mirish—Ramazan—Topaz—Water for the road—The edge of the oasis—Fasting on the march—A singular pipe—Kala Bouroon—Charcoal-burners—Eshekli—Dash Robat—Solitary well—A caravan—Midday halt—Shor Kala—Dash Lalung—Turcoman commissariat—Banks of the Tejend—Game—Excessive heat—The *lengedge*—Summer floods—Kongali Guzer—Kushi Tepé—Distances—The Far-Eastern question—Importance of the Tejend—Apprehensions—Yazthi Tepé—Chacha—A last delay—The real frontier—Khalli Karn—Antelopes—Deli guzella—Pishikdernagh—The Derbend—An ancient wall—The fort—Light clothing—Sunnite scruples—A strategic point—The Tandara pass—*Sanduk Shikusht*—An extensive prospect—Hindelawa Kala—Mansar Kala—An arrangement—Meshed.

AFTER the decision of the *medjlis*, one would have expected that, even among Turcomans, all difficulties were at an end. Not at all. It would fill another volume to narrate the various excuses given why I should not start at once. Baba Khan had sprained his ankle; Aman Niaz's sore eyes were a fruitful source of disappointment; and last, not least, there was the hypothetic anxiety on the part of the Mervli lest I might fall into the hands of the Russian surveying parties.

At last I overbore all resistance, and on the evening of July 28, 1881, I was solemnly informed, after a conclave of the *élite* of Merv society, that on the following day I could start for Meshed. As I have already said, news travels but slowly in this part of the world, and about this time the

intelligence reached Merv that Sheik Obeidullah was marching on his victorious path towards Urumiah. The Turcomans think that a Sheik is a saint, and they burned with anxiety to co-operate with the Kurd in his onslaught on the cursed Shiites. The greatest desire prevailed to organise a large force to co-operate with him. I really think that, but for my presence in Merv at this time, serious consequences would have occurred. I told the Mervli that I had just as little love for the Persians, who had placed such obstacles in the way of my going to Merv, as they themselves had; but however much I might approve of their expedition to join hands with the Kurdish warriors under the walls of Teheran, I should be forgetting my duty to them as Bahadur Khan if I did not point out the proximity of the Russian forces, and that the moment they left their oasis it would be summarily occupied by their adversaries. But for the presence of the Russians so near to Meshed, I believe that the dissolution of the Persian empire would arrive somewhat in this manner. A simultaneous movement of the fierce, lawless tribes of Eastern Turkey, combined with the wild horsemen of the Trans-Caspian plains, would very speedily settle accounts with the disorganised, effete forces of his Majesty Nasr Eddin Shah. A very little encouragement indeed would transform the Kurd and Turkish guardians of the North-eastern Persian frontier into a force which Persia might well dread. However, the Russians are at Askabad, and whatever danger the presence of the Czar's legions may entail upon Persia, it has at least removed another one.

As it was my last day at Merv, I paid a number of formal visits to the leading persons residing at Kouchid Khan Kala. I was entertained by Ana Murad Kafur, the *yassaoul-bashi*, at a sumptuous banquet, at which sheep's-tail fat flowed in unlimited quantities, and even boiled eggs

were served out to the guests. Arrack was brought from Matthi's establishment. Then I called upon my old enemy Beg Murad—he of the *sumsa*—who was dreadfully ill from having eaten an excessive quantity of greasy food. He had much desired, he said, to ask my advice as a Frankish physician, but since our last stormy interview he had not dared to do so. He begged me to give him some medicine. Fortunately I had a large bottle of pepsin, a present from Lieutenant-Colonel Stewart when I parted with that gentleman in the Derguez, and which I lavished upon the fat Beg. I subsequently heard, in Meshed, that the cure effected was marvellous, and as I left the entire contents of the bottle with the obese chief I trust he has managed to digest his fat sheep-tails to his satisfaction. When I presented him with the medicine he said he had one other favour to request of me, viz., that I should give him with my *takht*, the rude four-legged bedstead of tree-trunks which Murad Bey had presented to me. This I gave him. I also sent back to Aman Niaz his gorgeous purple quilt, and, in fact, did all that I could in the way of little social amenities to restore a friendly feeling between myself and my associates of the past six months with whom I might have had any difficulty. There was but one member of Merv society with whom I was not allowed to have any communication—namely, Khodja Kuli, the agent at Merv of Abass Khan, the British consular representative at Meshed. Neither Baba nor Aman Niaz had forgotten the two letters in which Abass had displayed his duplicity, and, even though I was now on the eve of my departure, they said it was not right that I should have relations with any agent of his. The following entry in my diary was made at this time:—'July 29, 1881, six o'clock A.M. I have put on my boots with the resolution of not taking them off till I reach Meshed. I found everybody asleep. There seems

to be some inexplicable and ineradicable objection in the Turkish mind to prompt action. It seems against their principles. I spent half-an-hour last night trying to impress on the mind of Matchik, my servant, that it would be to my mind admirable if he got the horses shod that evening, or, failing that, before the sun was yet in the sky. What do I find?—Seven o'clock A.M. Matchik fast asleep, and the horse-shoes, which I gave out the night before last, under the bed. Then there is the explanation. The *ustá adamlar*—the artists!—had gone off on a tour, and would not be back for five hours. Moreover, Makdum Kuli Khan, who came in last night, has been cooking eggs for the past hour, with a view of giving me a parting entertainment. Therefore, there can be no hurry.'

Another extract. Three hours later:—'There is, truly, among these people, some ineradicable objection to do anything at once. It is now three hours after sunrise, and I sit here, waiting. Last night I delivered strict orders about being in the saddle at sunrise. I gave out the horse-shoes, even the nails. Now it seems that the "artist," the *usta*, as they are pleased to call him, has lent his hammer to some one who lives sixteen miles off. I am in a violent rage; but what can I do?'

These quotations will speak for themselves. I had everything packed up, and my horses were standing saddled at the door. But, like their relations the Osmanlis, the Turcomans wanted to gain some more time, even if it were only an hour, to see what might turn up. They knew that I was very much interested in obtaining the liberation of Kidaieff, the Russian gunner, so they kept the matter back by way of delaying me to the very last moment. Then came the chief Kethkoda of the Karatchmet, a subdivision of the Sitchmaz. He said that his people had decided upon setting Kidaieff at liberty, but before doing so he wanted an

order signed by me to that effect, and also a letter to the Russian commander at Askabad to say that the prisoner had been liberated at the request of the British representative at Merv. I wrote the letter, and it was with the most heart-felt satisfaction that I signed the order for the release of the poor captive. I congratulated the Sitchmaz Kethkoda upon the resolution which his clansmen had come to. I repeated to him what I had so often said, that, if they kept Kidaieff for the next fifty years, they would not only receive nothing in the shape of a ransom, but would in all human probability be forced to pay dearly for having detained him even so long as they had done, and that I felt sure that those who took him into Askabad would not only do an act indicative of friendship to Russia, but one to the last degree politic in their own behalf, and that they would be sure to receive handsome remuneration for their trouble —that their action in this respect would do more to ward off a Russian attack against the oasis than any force which the Tekkés could possibly array in its defence.

The last obstacle with which I had to contend, in starting on my journey to Meshed, was the irreclaimable clannishness of the Turcomans. Though for general purposes they are but one, still, among themselves, the greatest jealousy exists between the various subdivisions. A member of the Toktamish, on seeing a visitor leave my *ev*, has come to me, and said, with a serious visage, 'Do you know who that person is, who has just left your *ev*? *He is one of the Otamish*. No honest person could associate with a member of that division.' Then, again, the Toktamish, among themselves, would tell you, if the speaker happened to be one of the Beg, that it was giving away your life to trust yourself for a moment alone with one of the Vekil. The question now was how to choose, from among the twenty-four *aps* a fair re resentation of each to escort me o

Meshed, and so demonstrate to the Persians there that none of the Merv subdivisions had been overlooked or slighted. The delicate task of selecting the members of the escort was, fortunately for me, deputed to Allah Kuli Khan, a young man of some twenty-seven years, and one of the most reasonable and intelligent of all the chieftains with whom I had come in contact. His family had formerly occupied the ground around Méněh and Chacha. He had great hopes of being reinstated in his former position on that part of the frontier, and was concerned lest the new survey might throw this ground within the Russian territory. Firmly believing that I was about to attend a serious meeting of ambassadors at Meshed, he had been at my side during the last hours of my stay at Merv, impressing upon me the necessity of having the frontier moved as far as possible northward, and I of course informed him that I should not have the least difficulty in complying with his request.

It was near midday when the escort assembled. They were standing hard by, each man's hand upon his bridle, awaiting the signal to mount. Then there was another delay—this time, fortunately, of a more agreeable kind. It was necessary to make me presents on parting, in return for the very respectable sums which I had distributed among the chieftains. Baba Khan came in, followed by some attendants, and unfolded before me two genuine Turcoman carpets, of the finest style of workmanship. Aman Niaz Khan, not to be behindhand, brought me three, and Moullah Baba two. Allah Kuli presented me with another. I was sufficiently embarrassed with baggage, but I could not possibly refuse these eight carpets, though I knew they would sorely try the strength of my horses. Then old Kadjar Khan gave me a large copper jug, used in Merv for the preparation of tea, and Matthi, the Jew, begged my

acceptance of an iron-headed pipe, mounted in brass. Owez, the hero of the white ass and the wife captured by Beybud Khan of Kelat-i-Nadri, gave me a porcelain tea-bowl, with leather case, as a reminder that I was not to forget my promise with regard to that local potentate.

I overwhelmed all the donors with thanks, and was just leaving the door of my *ev* when Murad Bey came up, bringing me a suit of chain armour, and a huge steel helmet like a dish cover, which he said had belonged to one of his ancestors, in the days before fire-arms were introduced. Then, at last, the signal to mount was given. The entire population of Merv was out of doors, drawn up to see me depart, and a very large number of them were exceedingly outspoken in their statements that it was the utmost folly to allow me to go away, because, immediately I had left the oasis, the Russians would come in. This was an idea which I could never get out of their heads. Then there was the question of the standard, the red banner that was floating over my house. What was I going to do with this? I said that of course it should remain where it was until my return. I thought I was well clear of everything in the nature of delays, when Allah Kuli begged me to say to whom I would leave the small menagerie of animals which formed part of my household. He requested me to give him my tame antelope. Another begged for the ger-falcon, and others put in pleas for the jackal and wolf-cubs. To Sari Beg I left my black kitten, to be handed by him to the ladies who, he told me, took such an interest in me. And then we started. It must have been about two o'clock in the afternoon. Aman Niaz and Baba were on horseback, and with them were Makdum Kuli, Allah Kuli, Yaghmour, and Kadjar. Around them were some two hundred of their followers, fully armed; my immediate escort consisting of some fifty horsemen, two from each of the Toktamish and

Otamish *yaps*, Allah Kuli, as I have said, being their immediate commander.

Anxious though I was to quit Merv, it was not without some feeling of regret that I passed for the last time the entrance of my redoubt, and rode away towards the rickety bridge spanning the Murgab, which I had crossed under such different auspices nearly six months before. It was with the greatest difficulty that the whole of the male population of Kouchid Khan Kala was prevented from accompanying me. Very many had to be forcibly withheld, but, even so, before I had made a mile to the south of the river an enormous concourse of horsemen had assembled, arriving in groups from every point of the compass. The various presents which had been made to me by the chiefs were distributed among my escort, to carry for me as far as Meshed.

Our way lay in a south-easterly direction, for a large portion of the time close along the left bank of the Murgab. The ground was thoroughly cultivated, vineyards and melon-beds abounding. From the very outset it was evident to me that the Turcomans were not bent upon making one of their wonderfully rapid transits. They took every opportunity of lingering; and when I, in my impatience, pushed forward at a rapid pace, my conductors galloped up beside me, assuring that it was undignified to proceed at such a rate, as there was no necessity for doing so.

We halted, early in the afternoon, at Mirish, a Bakshih village, the Kethkoda of which was called Owez Nefess. There I wrote my last note within the Merv territory:—

'July 29th, evening. I am on the road at last. This village is called Mirish, one and a half-hour's ride from Kouchid Khan Kala. I am at the house of Owez Nefess Beg. To say that I am delighted to be on the road would be to convey a very slight idea of my satisfaction at leaving

Merv. D—— the place. We came here in a south-easterly direction. Sarakhs lies south-west.'

The day had been excessively hot. We dismounted, and indulged in a siesta of a couple of hours, and then we all shared in a banquet of bread and broth, given to us by old Owez Nefess. After sunset the moonlight was magnificent, and I wandered to and fro in the village, pondering over the time I had passed at Merv, and wondering whether, in reality, the Turcomans would let me go or not. They have so many *ruses* and tricks mixed up even with their every-day affairs, that I was afraid this apparent letting me go was only after the manner of the cat playing with a mouse. Shortly after going to sleep I was severely stung by a scorpion, and, notwithstanding the application of opium and assafœtida, the usual remedy in these parts, by sunrise next morning I was exceedingly feverish. Notwithstanding this, however, I hurried hither and thither, trying to get my companions to mount, but all in vain. Noon came, and I was still at Mirish. About two o'clock Makdum Kuli, Aman Niaz, and others, waited upon me in a body, and wished me God speed on my journey. They said that they were sorry they could not accompany me, as had been their first intention, as far as the river Tejend. This was the first day of the month of Ramazan, in which it is necessary for all true believers, whether Sunnite or Shiite, to abstain from food and water, and even from smoking, between sunrise and sunset. The chiefs had been up all night, and required to sleep during the day, and as at this early stage in the Ramazan they were not yet sufficiently accustomed to its abstinences, they felt that they were unable to stand the fatigue of the long journey with empty stomachs, and without water, during the mid-day blaze.

At last, about three o'clock, my escort, including Kadjar Khan, was mounted, headed by Aman Kuli Khan. Among

the others was Hakim Bey, of Benti, he who brought me the document the signing of which by myself had secured the release of Kidaieff, the Russian prisoner. Then came the parting with Hakim and the others, and we rode away in a due south-westerly direction towards the Sitchmaz village of Topaz, situated on the Sukdi Yap branch of the Alasha Canal, along which about a hundred and fifty Salor Turcoman families have their residences—the same who had attempted to escape to Sarakhs.

At Topaz, myself and my escort were most hospitably entertained; so much so, that two days elapsed before we were allowed to leave. I was still suffering from the scorpion bite, and was glad of the delay. Here I was told that for my own immediate water-service it was necessary to invest in a skin such as is used for the purpose, usually a sheep-skin turned inside out and from which the wool has been shaved, and enclosed in a rude camel-hair network to prevent it from being fretted on the outside by the movement of the horse.

When we made our final start from the edge of the oasis, we took a S.S.E. direction towards the village of Ana Murad Kafur, the *yassaoul-bashi* of the Otamish division. This was the last point at which water could be obtained, with the exception of the salt well of Shaitli, or the chance rain pools of Kizil Dengli, the latter being very unlikely to be met with at that particular season of the year.

We spent so much time in filling the water-skins of the party that it was one o'clock in the afternoon before we got away. There was a large gathering of all the tribesmen of the neighbourhood to see us depart. Then we went off in a due south-westerly direction, taking the road which leads both to Chacha and Ménéh. Very soon, long ridges of drifted marl-dust crossed our path, running more or less east and west, and corn and cultivation disappeared. Then we crossed

fields of melon and *kundji*, the latter being the last trace of cultivated vegetation which we met with, and reaching in long straggling spurs out into the sun-burned plain wherever a streamlet could be induced to flow. Its general appearance is not unlike what is vulgarly known as the white nettle, growing to an extreme height. Its flower and stem indicate it as belonging to the Labiatæ.

I took particular note of this route, for it is that followed by all caravans from Persia, whether they go by Chacha or Sarakhs. We marched at a foot pace, and many and anxious were the enquiries of members of my escort as to how many hours I believed the sun yet was above the western horizon; for until it disappeared they could neither taste water nor have a pull at their beloved pipes. Kadjar Khan, who had volunteered to accompany me even to Frangistan, or Yengi Doonyia (the New World), was particularly impatient for sunset to arrive. At last the red glow tinted the marly waste with crimson, and, lest a moment of time should be lost, each one flung himself from his horse, and commenced hurriedly collecting the *odjar* stems, to supply fuel for the fire, which would enable us to prepare our evening tea. The last glimpse of the sun had disappeared, when all manner of pipes made their appearance. Of course there were the usual gourd-shaped, wooden *kaliouns* which I have had such frequent occasion to mention. Then there was another, by no means so common among the Turcomans. It consisted of the *tibia* of a sheep, from which the marrow had been extracted, and which was pierced at its largest extremity. This was filled nearly to the top with *tumbaki*, the smoke being inhaled through a touch-hole-like perforation close to its smaller extremity.

It was a picturesque spectacle, the last glow of the red sunset mingling with the glare of a dozen fires, as the Turcomans lay around, enjoying a voluptuous smoke after

their day's abstention, and drinking green tea in unlimited quantities. The surrounding ground was covered with broken brick and tile, and in the immediate neighbourhood were extensive remains of earth-works. The place is known to the Turcomans by the name of Kala Bouroon, and I estimated it to be twenty miles distant from the Topaz village at which we watered, previous to leaving the margin of the oasis.

While we were at this point, Nazar Ali Beg rode hurriedly up, coming from Kouchid Khan Kala with a last present from Aman Niaz Khan. It was a bottle of arrack, and that, too, in the holy season of the Ramazan. Almost simultaneously, Ana Murad Kafur, the *yassaoul-bashi*, came riding swiftly in from the south-westerly direction. He had just despatched a caravan with a sufficient escort of his *yassaouls*, to see them safely through to the neighbourhood of Sarakhs. At 9 P.M. we mounted and rode away again. We were on a slightly rising ground, and I could see an immense way across the perfectly flat plain. At a couple of points I noticed a faint phosphorescent glow above the horizon; so faint that even the accustomed eyes of the Tekkés could make it out with difficulty when I called their attention to it. At last one horseman said, 'Ouallah! You have got the eyes of a Tekké.' It was the fires of the charcoal-burners in the *odjar* plain. As we continued our way the *odjar* became thicker and thicker, and the camel-thorn grew on every side. At a little after midnight we reached the ruins of Dash Robat, and then plunged deep into the tamarisk jungle, which I mentioned in describing my quick ride to Merv. When well in the midst of the thicket we heard the tramp of many hoofs, and all prepared their arms. We saw many dark figures between us and the horizon's light, and, in a moment, Allah Kuli exclaimed, 'They are the Eshekli (the ass men), coming from the hills

with *pisté* (pistaches).' We could hear the click of numerous gun-locks, and it was evident that the ass-men had their doubts about us too. Shortly, however, we mutually explained who we were, and with many salutes passed on. About an hour and a half's ride to the south-east of Dash Robat we halted in the thick of the *odjar* jungle to rest and make tea. Then, about two hours before sunrise, we were off again, and reached a point called Shaitli about two hours after sunrise. At Shaitli the drifted marl-dust forms hills of some sixty feet in height above the general level of the plain, and in the midst of them is found the only perennial water-source to be met with, after leaving the last irrigation canals, from the Murgab to the banks of the Tejend. We found a Turcoman caravan from Meshed encamped close by. There were some sixty camels laden with tea, sugar, and other commodities, and about a dozen horsemen. The well has an opening of but a little more than a foot, which is strongly bound with osier work of tamarisk branches twined horizontally. This opening gives access to a very deeply sunk subterranean tank, which I have no doubt dates from a very remote age. The only way of procuring water was to lower the nose-bags of our horses, by means of the tethering-ropes, to a distance of some thirty feet, as in the case of the wells at Bournak, north of Krasnavodsk. Here, at Shaitli, however, the water was still more saline than at the last-mentioned place, and our horses, thirsty as they were after their long ride from the Murgab, absolutely refused to touch the liquid.

We stayed chatting with the camel-drivers for an hour. They appeared to be very much excited by the rumours anent the new Russo-Persian frontier, and were very indignant at my coming away at such a crisis. They were not consoled by what I told them, viz., that I was about to do my best to arrange the frontier in their favour; and, had

it not been for my formidable array of Tekké horsemen, these caravan people would have seized upon me bodily and brought me back to Kouchid Khan Kala again. We were marching but slowly, for this was the fourth day since we left the Tekké capital. I had, on coming to Merv, done the entire distance from Méněh to the centre of the oasis in twenty hours' riding.

We continued our way for about half a mile beyond Shaitli, the way becoming involved among ridges of drifted marl-dust, ten to twenty feet in height, and where the *odjar*, mingled with many other desert plants, grew plentifully. There was one *lignum-vitæ* like bush, which the Turcomans called *yalgam*, and there was also the *yandak*, or camel-thorn, and the *shora*, the ordinary sage-bush of the western American plains. At this point we resolved to allow the hotter hours of the day to pass by, for the sun was becoming exceedingly disagreeable. Choosing out the larger bushes, we spread our horse-cloths and overcoats so as to form a screen above our heads, and, after making tea, tried to sleep away the burning noon-tide. Only two or three of my escort so far departed from the strict observance of the Ramazan as to partake of this tea with me.

By three o'clock in the afternoon we were again moving, pursuing, as we had done ever since leaving the outskirts of the oasis, a due south-westerly course. The marl ridges, which ran principally at right angles to the direction in which we were travelling, continued for upwards of ten miles, when we issued on the perfectly flat plain. Away to the left were some mounds, and I was told that beyond them were extensive remains of fortifications; and to the right was the earthen obelisk named Kizil Dengli, which I mentioned in describing the route from the Tejend to Merv. It marks the site of waterpools at certain periods of the year. This entire plain is known as that of Shor Kala. It

was formerly cultivated, and the Turcomans pointed out to me the traces of the old irrigation canal which supplied it with water, and which started from the Tejend a little above Sarakhs.

At sunset we halted for the first evening meal and smoke. Then we went on another thirteen miles, halting again in the midst of pitchy darkness, for tea, after which we marched continuously the whole night, until about an hour before sunrise, when, being among much broken ground, overgrown with *odjar*, we were obliged to stop for daylight, in order not to miss our way to the banks of the Tejend, now not far distant. This was close to a place called Dash Lalung, where the roads, or rather tracks, across the plain leading to Méněh and Chacha branch off. Half-an-hour before sunrise we marched again, and in two hours reached the Tejend itself, much to my relief, for I was perishing with thirst, my sack of water having been all used up at the last tea-making, and nothing remained but some water from the Shaitli well, which the Turcomans had with them. This is not only bitter, but is heavily charged with nitre and other salts. When it is further flavoured by an old leather bag, and has become lukewarm from contact with the horse's body or the sun-rays, it is quite impossible to drink it, and, much as I suffered from thirst, I preferred to hold out until we reached the Tejend. We were also almost out of provisions, for we had lingered much on the way, this being the fifth day since we left Kouchid Khan Kala. A Turcoman, when preparing for a long journey, takes with him nothing but a few leaves of *chapati* (dough stewed in oil) or else some pieces of ordinary bread. Each one carries the corn for his own horse, and water for himself, the commissariat of each being entirely independent of the others. This gives the Turcomans a great advantage in case of a precipitate retreat, for they are able to scatter

and conceal themselves, without at the same time being cut off from their supplies, as would be the case if a central commissariat alone existed.

At this point, for fully a mile and a half on each side of the river banks, the ground, which falls in three successive terraces to the water's edge, is thickly timbered, the level of the outermost of these being at least fifty feet above the surface of the river at the time I saw it. Before reaching the first, or outer terrace, a line of low marly hills is traversed by a pretty steep gully. To judge by the tossed and tumbled driftwood, and the trees torn up by the roots, the rise of the river at flood times must be sometimes as much as thirty feet. There were great thickets of white poplar and willow, mingled with *arbutus*, the inter-spaces being choked by growths of giant reeds, and constituting a jungle entirely impassable, except by the paths forced through it by the wild boars when making their way to the water. At this point vegetation was much more luxuriant, and reached much farther beyond either bank, than at the point where I had crossed in the previous spring. The river was now very shrunken. Its greatest breadth was not over thirty feet, and its depth, as a rule, not greater than six nches. At places, in the midst of its sandy bed, divided into two or more tiny rivulets, and close under the steep, cliff-like banks, were deep excavations, evidently caused by eddies of the torrent, and which were now filled with cool, refreshing water. It was, it is true, very slightly brackish, owing, no doubt, to the return to it of the surplus of the irrigation trenches higher up, in which it passed over the salty surfaces. Still, it was delicious after the wretched saline liquid of the Shaitli well. It was delightful to refresh the eye with the profuse vegetation and copious water supply on all sides, after the fearful aridness and heat of the desert we had passed over. It was with the greatest difficulty

that we could restrain the eagerness of the horses as soon as they came within sight of the water. They had been twenty-four hours without any. After they had taken as much as was good for them at the moment, we put them all to a gallop along the low shelving banks for a quarter of an hour, this being the invariable custom of a Turcoman who gives his horse a drink after a long period of deprivation.

We crossed to the western shore, the horses scarce fetlock deep; and, rounding an immense earth cliff which stood in front of us, gained the shelter of a thick wood, where the young reeds afforded ample forage for the animals. Here we dismounted, and prepared to pass the day. This place is called Kongali Guzer, and is the ford by which caravans coming *viâ* Chacha cross the river on their way to Merv.

It was exceedingly pleasant, indeed, to lie down among the fresh foliage, with plenty of water to drink and to bathe in, and abundant fodder for our horses, and firewood wherewith to prepare our tea. Pheasants, in scores, ran along the water's edge, darting into and out of the brushwood within easy range of our guns; and magpies, which the Turcomans readily eat, were also plentiful. We had several fires soon blazing, and before long many dozens of fowl, of one kind or another, were brought in. All over the half-moist marl of the river banks, at the water's edge, were numberless foot-prints of wild boar, antelope, and wild ass.

The heat was frightful—the greatest I had ever experienced in Central Asia, and I narrowly escaped sunstroke while bathing in a side pool on which the sun-rays, filtering through the overhanging tree-branches, fell. Later on, when I tried to walk barefooted, owing to the scorching marl I was obliged to run back in haste to the water, and cry out for my boots to be brought before I could reach the place at which I had left my clothes.

I could perceive no fish in the waters of the Tejend, but it was thickly populated with an odd-looking, amphibious creature, some two inches in length, closely resembling a small turtle. Its colour was of the peculiar blue purple of an ordinary mussel-shell, from under one end of which protruded a small head and a pair of minute flaps, while from underneath either side of the rear end were swimming flaps of at least half an inch in length. This creature, which the Turcomans call the *Lengedge*, was furnished with a regular shelly coating underneath, jointed as in the turtle, the dorsal covering, however, being without joints. Leaving the water, it occasionally burrowed to considerable distances in the moist sand, throwing up a track like that of the mole.

Though at the moment the river was so very shallow, it was evident that a few days previously a vast body of water had filled the great ravine. Of this I judge by the fact that, notwithstanding the tremendous heat, there were pools of water at from twenty to twenty-five feet above the then level of the river still undried; and the masses of freshly fallen earth, swept away by the flood from the great cliff-like banks, and the still damp tree-trunks, piled at the edge of the flood-mark, showed that the summer freshets in the river had at times a breadth of from three hundred to four hundred yards, and a depth of from twenty-five to thirty feet.

About half-a-mile to the north of Kongali Guzer, and situated close to the western bank of the stream, is a large earth-mound, some forty feet in height, known by the name of Kushi Tepé. It is exceedingly useful as a land-mark for caravans seeking the proper point for crossing the river. An old Turcoman Serdar of great experience, who was one of my escort, told me that this point was exactly equi-distant between Sarakhs and the dam on the Tejend river at the

head of the swamp, where the village of that name is situated. The distance each way was two *menzils*. A *menzil* means the interval between halting-places when caravans are on the road; between fifteen and sixteen miles. From Kushi Tepé to Kouchid Khan Kala, by the shorter route, the Serdar estimated the distance to be four *menzils*. Above Pul-i-Khatun there were, he said, as many as twenty-four dams, all of which irrigated Afghan territory of the Herat district. Standing on this Kushi Tepé, as far as the eye could reach in a north-westerly and south-easterly direction, one great band of verdure, from one mile to one mile and a half wide, stretched away. It contrasted strikingly with the arid waste on either side. Though the waters of the Tejend are at ordinary times of such uncertain level as to be almost entirely useless as a medium of carriage, still, its forest-grown verdant banks form too happy a marching ground up to the very gates of Herat to be lightly overlooked. The resources afforded by the banks of this river will, beyond any question, play a most important part in the next great development of the Far-Eastern question.

Though it was exceedingly agreeable to linger amidst these leafy solitudes, I could not help feeling grave apprehensions as to the object of the delay. I was mortally afraid that my escort were purposely detaining me on the road in order to allow couriers from Merv to overtake us with some imaginary piece of intelligence or hypothetical crisis which would necessitate my return to the oasis, and I urged every argument to induce Allah Kuli Khan to give the signal for the renewal of our march.

At length, about three o'clock in the afternoon, we started from our camping ground, following, as before, a due south-westerly direction. We saw wild asses in great numbers, away along the western bank of the river. We had scarcely advanced half a mile on our way before the

ground again became entirely similar to the *odjar*-sprinkled desert beyond the Tejend. As we pushed on, we could see Yazthi Tepé, away to the north-west, the mound which I mentioned as being not far from Méněh. It was just barely visible on the horizon. We were proceeding at a very leisurely rate, and, as sunset approached, passed between two earth mounds lying to the right and left of the road, the smaller one to the north-west, the greater to the south-east. I could not ascertain whether they were known by any special names. Here we halted for tea, and then pushed on a short distance, reaching a vast expanse of reed and jungle-covered marsh, where the small Chacha river loses itself, just nine miles from the banks of the Tejend. From the entire absence of a channel in that direction it is evident that it never makes its way to the latter river, but is entirely absorbed in the marsh, or by irrigation. We carefully picked our way across the swampy ground, putting aside the giant reeds, until we reached a portion of the expanse which was tolerably dry. We cut down great quantities of the reeds with our knives for bedding, and, having deftly concealed our horses in the jungle, lighted large fires to protect us from the myriad mosquitoes which people the place. All night long we could scarcely sleep, owing to the thrilling whirr of the grasshoppers, which crowded upon us, attracted by the light.

Next morning, before sunrise, we were off again, following the banks of the little streamlet, and in half an hour reached the ruins of a small group of fortified mud buildings known as Dikan-i-Chacha, which, I suppose, means the village of Chacha. Here the river, or rather stream, had cut its channel very deeply, and was in some places nearly concealed by the growth of bushes and grasses on either bank. Far and wide were extensive tracts of cultivation, melon and corn fields alternating

These were not supplied directly from this portion of the deeply cut stream, but were irrigated by streams proceeding from above a small dam situated five or six miles southward. From this point the main branches ran to the north and south-east. The water was deliciously cold and perfectly free from any brackishness. The Turcomans told me that when Nadir Shah's army was camped along these mountain slopes he gave orders to have specimens of the water of all the mountain streams of the entire tract brought to him, and, having tasted that of this stream, commanded that his troops should be supplied exclusively from it. Away across the plain, some five or six miles distant, rose the first slopes of the huge mountain chain which extends away to the south-east until it terminates in some low hills near the Tejend to the southward of Sarakhs. The mountain pass, through which lay the road to Meshed, was directly to the south-west. Like all such openings in this range, it was known as the Derbendi, or Gate. A mile or so further on than Dikan-i-Chacha, which, by the way, was entirely uninhabited, was the only place in the district which could be considered even a village. It consists of a square mud fort, with flanking towers, some eighty yards square, within which ordinarily reside the twenty-eight families which form the entire population of the place. It is termed Arvat Beg Kala, after the name of the local chief. At the time, however, they had constructed for themselves a kind of rude encampment to the westward of its walls. By means of stout poles and coarse matting woven from reeds, they had erected sun-screens, under cover of which they habitually lived, while some had rude huts, built with sheaves of giant reeds leaning together and forming a kind of stack. A few, too, had rude earthen houses—mere oblong pits, in the ground, roofed with reeds, into which access was given by three or four steps descending to the interior.

The corn of the population was stored in shallow pits, the openings of which were closed by reeds and clay.

Apart from this little gathering of twenty-eight families, here and there, at long intervals, are to be seen solitary *evs*, or sun-shelters, where the watchmen guarding the melon-beds and corn habitually reside; but otherwise there is nothing else in the shape of a village in this district. The ruins of the old Chacha, or Kara Chacha, as it is called, lie about a mile and a half due west of Arvat Beg Kala. It seems to have been a pretty extensive place, to judge by the ruined houses, covering a very considerable area, and in the midst of which rises a very large earth-mound, the walls and towers which surround its brow being in a good state of preservation. It was with the utmost difficulty that my horse was able to mount the extremely steep slope leading to the gateway in the south-eastern front. This gateway was constructed entirely of baked brick, a material which also entered largely into the walls and towers. In the left-hand corner were the walls of what had doubtless been the residence of the Governor. They were of very considerable proportions. The inner surface of the fort was thickly strewn with broken bricks and fragments of coloured pottery. The place seems to have been one of military importance, to judge from the strength of the fortifications. It guarded the entrance of the pass leading towards Meshed, and was thus the key to one of the communications with the capital of Khorassan across the mountains. From the summit of this I took the bearings of Ménéh and Dushakh, as indicated to me by my companion Allah Kuli Khan. Both bore exactly N.W. in line. Sarakhs bore 20° S. of E. from the same point.

On the day of my arrival at Chacha I found it necessary to purchase a sheep wherewith to feed my escort, and also a dozen pheasants, of which there are immense numbers in

this locality, along the banks of the little river, to have cooked as provisions for myself for the road. The sheep was hardly killed and skinned before broth and sheep's tail fat were in course of preparation, and the Turcomans were hungrily awaiting their favourite meal. Notwithstanding the Ramazan fast, all their ideas of abstinence during the day were flung to the winds at the sight of melted fat and broth; and all, with the exception of old Kadjar Khan, who seemed *par excellence* the pious man of the party, plentifully partook of the unwonted luxuries. With the exception of one pheasant, which I consumed myself, the birds also disappeared into the general pot. The Turcomans do not give themselves the trouble to pluck a fowl; they peel off the skin, taking with it the feathers, so as to save unnecessary delay.

I had intended to go on the same evening, but it was impossible to overcome Turcoman reluctance to promptitude. I have mentioned the annoyance to which I was subjected at Kouchid Khan Kala about the shoeing of my horses. I had been promised that at the outlying Sitchmaz village of Topaz I should find an *usta* who would nail on the shoes for me, but when I got there I was told that at Chacha the thing would be better done, and that there was no immediate necessity for shoeing the horses, as the plain was soft and marly. Now, however, from Chacha to Meshed, the road was what was termed *dash yol*, a stony, mountainous one, where horses could not possibly travel any distance without shoes. To avoid any difficulties, I had brought with me both shoes and nails, and hour after hour I was promised that the matter would be attended to. As the sun was near setting, I was informed that the 'artist's' eyes were sore, and that he could not work. Then it was too late to start on a journey among the rocks, and in dangerous ground, so that I was obliged to put off my departure till the following morning. The interval was

full of anxiety for me, for this was the last point at which it would be possible to force me to return to Merv. Whatever line may be drawn upon maps, neither Chacha, Méneh, nor Dushakh, is really on Persian territory. The inhabitants merely pay so much for the use of the water flowing from the mountains, and which has its source within Persia. Until the mountain ridges are reached the ground is independent territory. Once southward of the first Persian fort, I might consider myself as perfectly at liberty. On the same evening I met with an old man who told me that he was the brother of Khalli Karn (big-bellied Khalli), who, together with another, had accompanied Tokmé Serdar to St. Petersburg, the three representing themselves as Merv leaders. I learned that he was Tokmé's cousin, and a native of Beurmà, near Kizil Robat, and an Akhal Tekké—not a Merv Tekké at all. His general reputation was that of a *haram zadé* (scoundrel).

On August 4, about two hours after sunrise, myself and my escort started for the pass. As we came among the first slopes of the mountains, we saw a great number of *geikés* (mountain antelopes), which galloped right through the midst of our body of horsemen. They were of very considerable size, and much larger than the antelopes of the plains. We followed a narrow valley for a distance of about six miles, the way winding among extremely well-cultivated fields, in which vine, and melon, and corn of all kinds grew in abundance, the ground amply supplied with water by the Chacha river, or, as it is styled at this part of its course, the Derbend-Su. Then we halted beside the stream, to prepare our midday meal. Here we met with a small caravan, coming from Meshed, with it being Kourban Pehlivan, one of my messengers, returning with letters and newspapers, forwarded by Abass Khan. Among the packets he brought were the telegraphic bulletins from

Teheran relative to the speedy evacuation of Kandahar, which made me heartily congratulate myself upon being well out of Merv.

The ground around us produced an abundance of wild flowers, among them a peculiar *alium*, the flower stalk of which grew to a height of four feet, and was known to the Turcomans by the name of the *deli guzella*. There was also a large amount of dwarf acacia, with exceedingly sharp, crooked thorns, from which it is almost impossible to extricate one's-self. It is known as the *pishik dernagh*, or cat's claw, from the shape of its thorn. After a halt of five hours we continued our journey, winding around the base of some low hills of light brown earth which here occupied the centre of the valley. Their surface was sprinkled with sheets and flakes of gypsum, of six inches to a foot in diameter, as transparent as glass, and which shone like silver in the blazing sun. About three hours before sunset, on turning the flank of one of these hills, we saw just in front of us a huge rampart of rock, from four hundred to five hundred feet high, its face varying in inclination from 60° to 70°, and which extended for miles to the right and left, completely blocking all progress in the direction in which we were going, save through a well-defined pass about one hundred yards wide. This was the beginning of the true Derbend, or 'door.' It had formerly been closed by a gigantic ancient wall drawn across it. It was built of alternate horizontal bands of huge cut stone masses, and red brick, as one sees in the old ramparts of Constantinople. It had once spanned the entire ravine, from flank to flank, and its remains on either side are still to be seen clinging to the steep, rocky slopes of the pass. It had evidently been at least a hundred feet high across the level portion of the pass just above the Chacha river, which traversed its midst. Floods had swept away its centre, ages ago.

hundred yards higher up the pass was a wretched rubble wall, ten feet high, with a rude gate in the middle, and an archway, through which the little river found exit. This wall probably dates from the days of Nadir Shah. On the right, somewhat in advance of the wall, was a rude watch-tower, connected with the ground beyond the wall by a covered roadway half way up the rocks. Here some Persian soldiers were on guard. This was really the limit of Persia on this side. Beyond, its jurisdiction was purely nominal. After some parley with the guards, and an explanation of our mission, the door was unbarred, and we were allowed to enter. Some hundreds of yards further on, the pass widened into a circular space, half a mile in diameter. A fort occupied a slightly rising ground to the right, and was concealed from the view of those approaching from the gate by a projecting mass of the cliff wall.

The fort itself was square, and about a hundred and fifty yards on each side, the wall well flanked by towers, and the whole in very good repair. Here it was resolved to pass the night. The commander of the pass, Kerbellai Jaffar, a Kurd, made no objection to our halting in his vicinity, for, apart from the fact of his recognising me to be a European, he could perceive that my companions were not on the war-path, owing to their style of outfit, and the presence of baggage horses. He would not, however, admit my escort within the walls of his fort, nor were the Turcomans willing to trust themselves there, lest some trick might be played upon them in the shape of confiscating their horses, or forcing them to pay black-mail as a ransom. The garrison were in the Persian uniform, and about fifty strong. The fort was capable of being well defended against assault, but it possessed the serious drawback of being commanded by a rocky crest to the north-east, the base of which was scarcely a hundred yards distant, its summit

being a hundred and fifty yards above the ramparts of the post.

I was the only one of the party whom the commander invited within his fortifications. The Turcomans camped on a sloping ground near the edge of the stream. I was glad to get into the shade, for the day had been dreadfully hot; and yet, very incautiously, I had clothed myself lightly. I wore only a tunic-like shirt, of white cotton, and over it a long crimson silk tunic. The result was that the upper portion of my body—breast, back, and shoulders—was red and blistered by the sun-rays. It is a great mistake, under such circumstances, to wear thin clothing. The Turcomans, at such times, carry a stout camel-hair mantle, and if they are forced to proceed during the mid-day hours, add to it a great sheepskin *kusgun*, or overcoat, to save them still further from the baking rays. In fact, the habit of Western countries is entirely reversed. Along the borders of the desert one wears a thick garment to keep himself cool, or, rather, to prevent himself from being roasted alive.

That evening, Kerbellai Jaffar prepared a large mess of bread and broth for myself and my escort, which, however, instigated by Kadjar Khan, many of them would not touch, on the score of it being Shiite cookery. Hungry though they must have been after their day's ride, they could not overcome their prejudice against the dissenting Mussulman sect. The only food given by their hosts which they would touch was dry bread. Shortly afterwards, however, a hunter made his appearance, carrying on his shoulder a large mountain antelope, fully as big as a good-sized fallow deer, and which he had just shot close by. I purchased it from him for two *krans* (one shilling and eightpence), and its flesh formed a welcome addition to the commissariat of my escort.

Though I was now certain of not being compelled to

turn back to Merv, I felt very anxious to reach Meshed as soon as possible. As I lay all night upon the flat roof-top within the fort, I could not obtain a moment's repose. The novelty of the situation, the white moonlight that flooded the landscape, the strumming of the *dutars*, and the hoarse Kurdish singing which went on all through that Ramazan night, conspired to keep me awake.

It was half an hour after sunrise as we started again, always in a south-westerly direction. Clearing the circular space within which Derbend Kala stands, and still following the banks of the river, we again entered the valley. Here the cultivation ceased, the entire ground being overgrown with giant reeds, with here and there a grove of trees amidst them. After a march of six miles from the fort, we halted beneath the shade of some large old willows. Here a stream flowing from the southward joins the Derbend-Su. The Turcomans, pointing along it, told me it was the road they generally followed when raiding into these districts. It led, they said, to the villages of Bathkalli and Tchikaman. Due northward from the same point lay the village of Karathken. South-westward, in the direction of Meshed, were, they informed me, the villages of Amirabad and Abgerim. Following the Derbend river, we rode on for fifteen miles, and were then brought to a halt by a large and dangerous morass, across which we made our way with difficulty, many of the horsemen narrowly escaping being swallowed up in its treacherous depths. It would have been entirely impassable but for the giant reeds which had been trampled down, and which, having been cut and made into fascines, were laid so as to constitute a kind of pathway. Clear of this, the valley opened slightly, and, just at sunset, we halted for our last meal before beginning the passage of the difficult portion of the mountain. The whole of the hill-side was covered with a growth of giant hemlock, such as I have

mentioned meeting with in the vicinity of Khivabad, and its withered stems were the only fuel obtainable. Two hours after sunset we started, and by the light of the bright moon went on into the Tandara Pass. It was dreadfully steep and rocky, about three quarters of a mile in length, and scarcely twenty yards across at its widest part. At its upper extremity, and on the left-hand side, was a group of chenar trees, under whose shade was a rock-girt pool, the *Chashma*, or spring in which the Chacha river originates. Close by, and terminating the ravine, was the Derbend, or 'Gate,' itself. It was like a vast doorway, with Cyclopean piers, of black porphyritic rock, towering vertically on either side. It was not more than fifteen feet wide. Once beyond this, turning to the left and then to the right, we commenced the ascent of the tremendous Tandara mountain. It was a terrible climb. There was absolutely no road, nor even a track. We clambered over or scrambled between gigantic boulders, up an incline which sometimes almost caused the horses to kneel, lest they should slide backwards. Even the strength and endurance of Turcoman horses failed under the terrible ordeal, and the best mounted of our company was forced to dismount and lead his steed. It was two o'clock in the morning, after a continued and arduous climb of at least seven hours, that we reached a plateau on the shoulder of the mountain, at an altitude, I should say, of three thousand feet above the level of the plain. Here we came up with a caravan from Bokhara, which had passed through Merv a couple of days before we left the latter place. The camel drivers were dreadfully alarmed on seeing us appear suddenly in their midst, as they felt convinced that we must have come in pursuit of them, for the purpose of pillaging their goods.

At this great altitude, and in the delightfully clear air, the moonlight was almost as bright as that of day, as we

arranged our bivouac for the night, each man lying down, fully armed, beside his horse, for the neighbourhood was said to abound with leopards, and even tigers, of both of which the Turcomans, for the sake of their horses, have much fear.

Long before sunrise we were on the road again, and reached the summit of the pass as the sun was showing over the Afghan mountains. This was what the Turcomans styled the 'robbers' road,' as it was across this break-neck height that they retired from Persia with their booty and captives, thus defying pursuit. The Persians style this particular portion of the transit Sanduk Shikusht, or 'smash the boxes,' doubtless owing to the fact that the sanduks and bales carried by the camels very often came to grief on the spot, owing to the nature of the ground.

I do not think that my eye ever ranged over so vast an expanse of ground as from that tall summit. Far away to the north and north-east was an apparently illimitable extent of plain. I fancied that I could almost make out the huge mass of Kouchid Khan Kala on the horizon. The Tejend there was no mistaking, winding like a vast green serpent across the bright yellow tract. To the southward lay the valley of the Keshef Rood, and beyond it, out in the saffron plain, like a minute patch, was Meshed itself, backed up by the mountains towards Turbat Hidari. Sarakhs, too, could be seen, lying due east, and we could plainly perceive the low hills into which the tremendous range, on the summit of which we were standing, dies away on the banks of the Heri Rood (Tejend). From the Sanduk Shikusht summit I took the bearings of Merv and Meshed as nearly as I could with my small prismatic compass, and found them to be as nearly as possible N.E. and S.W. respectively. On the whole, we appeared not to have deviated a single degree from the south-westerly direction in our march.

For some time we followed a long, stony ridge, sloping slightly towards the southern plains, and where it was utterly impossible to proceed on horseback, and then we commenced scrambling and sliding down one of the worst mountain sides it has ever been my lot to traverse. If possible the descent was worse than the ascent. These Turcomans call a 'pass' a boulder-strewn track, making a 'bee-line' over the extreme apex of a disastrously high mountain. Of course it is a pass in the sense that it is barely possible to get over it, but this is the only claim it has to the name. Three hours' scrambling brought us to the hills at the base of the vast mountain chain, where three long valleys branched off, one going directly south-west, and the other two W.S.W. and due south respectively. The former of these was called Jowar Towak, from the name of the fort which guards its entry. Following the central, or south-westerly valley, we arrived in front of an extensive mediæval-looking fortress named Hindelawa Kala, closing this main descent to the southern plains. Here we were upon comparatively level ground.

The peasants ran into the fort, and into the towers of refuge scattered around, as our troop approached, for Turcomans seldom made their appearance in that region with friendly intentions. Two of our number rode forward to parley with the Governor, who spoke to them from the ramparts of the fortress, on which, too, we could see riflemen swarming, to hinder our passage, in case we should be bent upon a hostile design. However, as Allah Kuli Khan happened to be known to the commander of the place, and as I also made my appearance, we were allowed to pass on. By ten o'clock we had gained the ruined fort known as Mansar Kala, captured and ruined by the Turcomans. Here we rested and slept for two hours in the midst of the most unspeakable desolation and loneliness. Bare yellow rocks

glared in the sun-light around us, topped with now deserted watch-towers. Here a large spring issues from the side of the hill, and, crossing the track, runs parallel to it for three or four miles, then turning abruptly to the south-east, and subsequently, I should think, joining the Keshef Rood further on in the same direction. Mountin a long and steep inclined plane, we reached the summit of the last undulation of any size separating us from the Meshed plain. At its base we crossed the channel of a tributary of the Keshef Rood, and which at the time was quite dry. On its banks were three fortified villages, two of them being inhabited. The larger one, known as Kouyuk Kala, was in ruin, having been stormed and dismantled by the Mervli seven years before, who took all the inhabitants into captivity. Many of my companions, Kadjar Khan included, had been present at the capture of the place, and told me that after the first Turcoman assault the inhabitants surrendered unconditionally.

My escort had now diminished to thirty, the others having been ordered by Allah Kuli Khan to return from Chacha to Merv. Amidst the ruins of the Kala we held a council on the best way of making our entry into Meshed without alarming the guards and population. It was decided that eight horsemen, Nazar Ali, the uncle of Aman Niaz, among them, should accompany me to the city, the remainder to halt at the village of Kené Kuché Kala until, on the following morning I should send them a message to come to me. Allah Kuli remained behind, in charge of this party. Then I pushed on towards the small town of Kanagosha, on the Keshef Rood (known also as the *Kara-Su*), which is here spanned by a substantial brick bridge of several arches. Thence, after a wash in the river, we rode on through vineyards and gardens, entering Meshed by its eastern gate, as the sun was setting, on August 6, just

nine days after I had left Kouchid Khan Kala. The guards at the gate were exceedingly surprised to see even so many as eight Turcomans, fully armed and accoutred, present themselves so boldly for admission. A few words of explanation, however, induced them to allow us to enter. My carpets, eight in number, were temporarily seized upon by the Custom-house officers, as a small duty has to be paid for introduction of Turcoman carpets to Persia. They were restored to me the next day on the application of Abass Khan, at whose house I was accommodated with lodgings.

CHAPTER LVII.

MESHED TO CONSTANTINOPLE.

Final presents—Caravanserais—Interview with Hussein Khan—His present—Turcomans and the telegraph—Leaving Meshed—Mendicants—Guardian of the well—Last glimpse of Meshed—The old water-seller—Along the way—A *café* in a tomb—Nishapur—Iskender Khan—An unexpected recognition—The Duke of Argyll's book—'Wanted, a wife'—Fever stricken—Kedjavés—Arrival at Teheran—Journey to Astrakan—The Volga frozen—Back to Constantinople.

THE afternoon after my arrival all the Turcomans I had left behind me under Allah Kuli Khan's command arrived in Meshed. They speedily presented themselves at Abass Khan's house to seek an interview with me. They reproached me with having left them without tea all the past evening. They wished to know what *zat* (present) I would give to each. Two hours earlier I had given the eight men who accompanied me ten pounds sterling in silver as a recompense, for here, in the East, you can do nothing, nor accept anything without a *zat* in return. Nothing is disinterested. I informed the claimants that two hundred and eighty *tomans* (100*l.*) would be given to them in presents, but that for the moment I had no more cash to distribute. I told them all to repair to one of the public caravanserais, and there await their recompense.

Shortly after my departure from the Derguez, *en route* for Kelat-i-Nadri and Merv, the Prince Governor of Meshed, a brother of the Shah, had been recalled from his post. His place was supplied by a *locum tenens*, pending the

arrival of the new Governor of Khorassan. It was only three days after my return to Meshed that the latter official arrived there. He was my old acquaintance the Sipah Salar Aazem, the Shah's Minister of War, and, when I first arrived in Teheran, acting Grand Vizier. In the Appendix I give *in extenso* the letter which he then wrote to me, complaining that I had not called to see him. He had done his best to prevent me from going among the Turcomans, even though he had given me a pass ostensibly allowing me to cross the frontier at any point I wished. Immediately on learning that I was at Meshed he sent for me. Abass Khan and myself waited upon him at the palace of the officer whose special duty it is to superintend the vast establishment attached to the mosque of Imam Riza. All my European clothes had been worn out long previously, through constant travelling, and as it was impossible to procure European garments at Meshed I was forced to present myself in full Turcoman costume, the same as that represented in the frontispiece of the first volume of this work, save that I had great yellow leather boots reaching to the knee, felt-lined, the pointed toes turned up in Chinese fashion.

Passing through the crowd of guards and attendants who filled the street opposite to the entrance of the palace, we went through several court-yards, and thence into a garden profusely planted with roses and 'Marvel of Peru,' those favourite Persian flowers. We were received by a colonel, who showed us into a great domed octagonal kiosk-like chamber, flagged with blueish marble, and having a water tank and fountain in its centre. The summit of the cupola was at least sixty feet above the level of the floor. Large Saracenic arched windows in alternate sides of the building allowed the breeze to enter. It was delightfully cool. The interior of the dome was decorated with that

peculiar honey-comb like structure so common in the East, and looked as if modelled in virgin snow.

The Sipah Salar was alone. He was enveloped in a robe of Kashmir shawl. He motioned me to a seat on an arm-chair beside that which he occupied, the two chairs being the only articles of furniture in the room. Though he was evidently vexed at my having succeeded in penetrating to Merv, despite all his efforts to prevent me, he put on a very cordial manner, and asked me about my experiences among the Turcomans. We had a long talk about the probable future of the place, and the feelings of the Mervli with regard to the Russians and Persians. We spoke in French. He took down the names of the chief men at Merv, which I gave him, viz. Baba, Aman Niaz, Yaghmour, Allah Kuli, Beg Murad, Killidge-ak-Saghal, Murad Bey, and Hakim Bey. He asked me whether I saw many Persian prisoners in the oasis. I told him that the only prisoner of any nationality still detained there was the white-bearded old colonel, who had been captured twenty-two years previously, when the Persian expedition was overthrown. I said that I had seen him, and that he bitterly complained of being left in captivity so long. The Sipah Salar said that the Shah's Government had repeatedly made offers to ransom him, but the sums demanded by the Tekkés were so exorbitant that no agreement could be come to.

We conversed upon a great number of other topics, and the Sipah Salar asked me if I intended to return to Merv. I frankly replied that, so far as I could see at the time, I decidedly had no such intention, whereupon he laughed, and said, 'No; I would advise you not to return; you have undergone quite enough hardship. It is much better for you now to return to your own country, and repose a while.' 'But,' he continued, 'why do you wear this Turcoman costume?' 'Because,' I said, 'your Highness, I have no

other costume to wear.' 'Oh,' replied he, 'I will supply you with a suit of European clothes. You know that I was in St. Petersburg on a mission from His Majesty the Shah a short time ago, and I was obliged to get some clothes made at Teheran for the occasion. I will send them to Abass Khan's house for you immediately.' I was profuse in my thanks, but endeavoured to dissuade him from giving me the promised garments, for, in the first place, the Sipah Salar was a man of small stature, and very stout. His clothes could not possibly suit me. In the second place I knew that, according to Persian custom, the servants who would bring a present from so high and mighty a personage would have to receive in return an *anam* fully equalling, if not exceeding, in value, the articles which they might bear to me from their master. However, he would hear of no refusal. He said that he was very glad to see me, and begged me to call upon him again before I went away. I did so on the morning of the day on which I left Meshed for Teheran. The servant duly appeared with the *Khilat*, or dress of honour, for such is the name always given to a present of the kind when coming from a dignitary of the rank of the Sipah Salar Aazem. The servants were ten in number, and brought me the clothes wrapped in the Kashmir robe which the Sipah Salar had worn on the occasion of my interview with him. In return, I was obliged to distribute the sum of 4*l.* among them, in silver krans, on receipt of which they went away, salaaming to the ground. As for the clothes, they were utterly worthless, as the trowsers reached only ten inches below my knees, and the big skirted coat was so ample in the region of the stomach that it would have enclosed two persons of my girth. As soon as I got clear of Meshed I presented the entire suit to my servant.

Three days after my departure from Meshed the Sipah

Salar died suddenly, after drinking a cup of coffee. The general belief was that his death was the result of poison, administered by the influence of the old Persian party at Teheran. He had been sent to Meshed, at which place he might be got rid of with less noise than at the capital.

I had frequent occasion to visit the telegraph office, the chief of which was Daoud Mirza, a great-grandson of Nadir Shah. I had access to the instrument room, and on one occasion Allah Kuli and Nazar Ali accompanied me. They had heard much of this mysterious Frankish device, and greatly desired to see it. With eyes starting from their sockets they gazed at the Morse instrument as they listened to its tiny clickings; and nothing could exceed their amazement when a message was sent to Teheran and an answer received in less than a minute. For fully half an hour they sat cross-legged upon the floor, their eyes fixed upon the instrument as anxiously as if it were a sleeping tiger that might at any moment spring up and inflict deadly injuries upon them. When we left, Allah Kuli Khan gave it to me as his unbiassed belief that it was all done through the intermedium of a *gin* (demon).

I satisfied the members of my escort about the Council of Ambassadors at Meshed by saying that the place of assembly had been changed, and that Teheran had been decided upon. I asked them to leave two or three of their number at Meshed, to receive and carry to Merv the presents destined for the chiefs, but that the bulk of the escort might as well return to their homes at once. In the Appendix will be found letters relating to these presents, and a formal list of them.

I will pass over my stay at Meshed. I have already described its interior and surroundings. My escort, in order to secure permanent lodgings in one of the public hotels which either the piety or interest of vizir pilgrims

to the ancient city of Shiism had erected, had only to pay an entrance-fee of one kran. This stay might only be for a day; it might be for a year; the fee was the same. There was no rent. Out of the hundred pounds sterling at Abass Khan's disposal, the other expenses would be paid.

I was very ill. The life at Merv and the hardships of preceding months had injured my resisting powers. I remained at Meshed a month. During that time I received a communication from the Turcoman chiefs (Appendix D). It will speak for itself. After the answer returned by the British Government, I had, of course, nothing further to say.

Then I started on my way to Teheran. As I was riding towards the town gate, Turcoman couriers arrived bearing another letter. Its t in facsimile and translation I subjoin in Appendix E.

Of the Turcomans who came in with me from Merv, none would accompany me as a servant to Meshed; so I was fain seek some one else. I hired an Azerbijan Turk named Allah Akbar and started on my way. It was the last day of Ramazan when I hired him, but over a week elapsed before I could set out. The backs of my horses were sore after the journey from Merv and the tremendous passage of the Tandara mountain. I had to wait till they were well, or else buy new horses.

I left Meshed on September 3, two hours before sunset. This is the usual time in Persia, during hot weather, for starting on a journey.

Two miles from the gate we issued by, there was a numerous collection of aged pilgrims, who having acted as mendicant hadjis or dervishes all their lives, now that they were too old to move about, took their stand by the roadway and subsisted on the charity of their more active *confrères*. One on the right-hand side had made himself master of a mud hut beside a spring. He was at least eighty years of age. He

came slowly forward with his water-pitcher; but before we were allowed to touch it he tendered to us a copy of the Koran swathed in a red envelope, which we should kiss ere we drank the water.

There is little worth recording along the way, save its dreariness. As a type of the whole road, I give the following description, taken verbatim from my diary :—

'*September* 4. Sherifabad.—I left Meshed yesterday, and since an early hour this morning have been climbing the rude arid slopes of the Nishapur mountains. Anything more dreary, more withered, or more hopeless-looking than these stony inclines and summits it would be difficult to imagine. As each successive ridge was gained, fresh glimpses were caught of the Meshed plain below, with its vast background of mountains fading in aërial perspective towards the Turcoman waste. The plain was a sea of mist streaked with darker phantom-colours, where woodland and grove broke the monotony of the expanse. In its midst, twenty-five miles away, was a faint refulgence, the golden gleam of Riza's dome, a beacon-light cheering the faithful onward to his shrine. It appears well-nigh impossible to get out of sight of this halo of departed sanctity. I have seen as much of it as I care to see, and a good deal more, during my stay among the Meshed mud walls.

'Near the culminating point of the hill range which I crossed on my way here was a dwarfed ruinous structure. I took it to be the tomb of some mountain hermit of bygone days—some natural masses of projecting rock; a few bricks baked and unbaked huddled together. Much of it had fallen to ruin. As I came nearer, I noticed that a tiny rill of water flowed from the low arched portico that served as an entrance. The eye following the rill traced it down the valley till a stream was noticed winding its way to Sarakhs, looming far away eastward. Beneath the porch,

crouched upon the rude rock-floor an aged man with flowing white beard. He seemed asleep, and one hand rested on an earthen pitcher of the most primitive pattern. Beyond where he sat was a square, door-like aperture, giving access to a cisterned water-spring within. Close to his feet was a pool, whence flowed the rill across the roadway. With his reverend form, sweeping beard, and aquatic accessories, he seemed no bad embodiment of a river-god of classic days. The tramp of my approaching horse aroused him; and, rising slowly and with difficulty, he stretched towards me his rude pitcher. I motioned to him to be seated, and, dismounting, took my place beside him, within his damp refuge. It was a welcome one after the dry, blinding glare of the steep, dusty road. He was an old man whose sole means of livelihood were the rare coins tendered by strangers in return for his frugal refreshment. His rude earthen pitcher and equally rude water-pipe were his only stock-in-trade. With trembling hands he filled the brazier of the *kalioun*, and kindling it with a few cinders from the little fire fed with mountain brambles he kept burning hard by, offered it to me. From cradle to old age he had dwelt on that mountain, formerly as a shepherd, now as guardian of the spring—its *jin*, one might well imagine. He was astonished at the largeness of the fee I gave him; about twopence. As I mounted and rode away, he said I was welcome (*Khosh geldi*). I couldn't help thinking how strange it must be to sit, day by day, and week by week, waiting for Death beside that lonely fountain. And some fine day that grim potentate will come, stalking across the burned hill-side, not to seek the contents of the old man's pitcher, but to offer his own lethal draught, perhaps not less acceptable to the aged water-seller than the latter's timely refreshment has been to me and many another scorched and way-worn traveller that passed his way.'

The road from Meshed to Teheran has been too often traversed and described to make any repetition of experience along the same way necessary.

Everyone who has read of Eastern travel knows of tower-flanked caravanserais like baronial castles, and of snake- and scorpion-haunted chambers. It would require another volume to chronicle such experiences of the road.

I jot down a few incidents along the way, taken, like the preceding, from my diary:—

'*Kadamgan.* Very ill; fever and fatigue. My pack horse's back is sore, and it is still twenty miles to Nishapur. Close by is Imam Riza's well. No person in any way remarkable for sanctity ever passed along a Persian road without sticking his thumb or his staff into the ground or cliffs and producing a fountain.

'What a number of fortified villages there are over the mountain slopes, and tall dust columns dancing and whirling along the wide valley! The immensity of the mountains is reduced by distance and the clear atmosphere to inches. We fancy some rusty thing that is lying thrown away on one side. The pine forests lining the vast gorges make one think that some crevices in the cracked chinks before us had somehow grown mouldy despite the sun.'

As we drew bridle half a mile outside Nishapur the tall tombs of the great cemetery on its eastern side were close to us. The burial-ground is of vast extent and seems to be the usual camping-ground of the bi-monthly pilgrim caravans which pass through the town on their way to and from Meshed. As usual, in the propinquity of the town gates were many large tombs of holy personages. Some dated back a couple of centuries; but as they were as a rule constructed of unbaked brick plastered with loam, few were older. Many were larger than some of the roadside dwelling-places of the living. Enterprising coffee-house

keepers had utilised some of them. One saw a party of pilgrims lying on their carpets under the pillar-supported roof, drinking tea and coffee. A fire burned in a corner, from which water-pipes were being continually kindled. From another mud mausoleum came the plaintive notes of some dervish's flute; and there was everything to remind one of anything but death as we threaded our way among the camped thousands to the time-worn, war-battered gate of Nishapur.

After the usual night's hypothetic rest at the post-house just outside the western ramparts, I started early in the morning for Sabzavar, the only *contretemps* being the refusal of my servant to proceed any further that day, on the score that there was a rumour that robbers had tried to stop the postal courier on the preceding day between Nishapur and Sabzavar. However, I managed to persuade him to go on by beating him with the flat of my sword until he agreed to do so. He evidently had compounded with the local police, the *Kara ghulam*, to obtain employment for them as an escort. At a lonesome village called Serdeh, about half way between Nishapur and Sabzavar, I had a curious *rencontre*. I had been resting during the mid-day hours in an old dilapidated caravanserai, and had just mounted my horse to ride on my way. A dozen horsemen drew up at the door. Their chief, to judge from his costume, was evidently an Afghan. He was a fine-looking man of some forty years of age, wearing a white cockaded turban, pale-green belt-girt tunic, and long black boots reaching to the knee. To my intense astonishment he addressed me in French, asking to what country I belonged. On my replying he immediately spoke in excellent English. He told me that his name was Iskender Khan, that he was a colonel in the Persian service, and that his brother Abdullah Khan, of the Afghan army, had been killed at the

battle of Girisk fighting in Ayoub Khan's service. He had been pierced by four bullets. Iskender Khan told me that he himself was on his way to join Ayoub at Herat.

'You,' he said, 'are Mr. O'Donovan?' In utter amazement at finding that he was acquainted with my name, I replied in the affirmative. 'I read all your letters in the "Daily News,"' he went on, 'and am glad to make your acquaintance. I was at Teheran when you came there, and would have called to see you if you had not been staying at the British Legation. As my country was then at war with England, I could not, of course, go there at the time. I always followed your adventures out here with interest. You must be made of iron to have stood all these fatigues, but I believe your countrymen,—you are an Irishman I judge from your name,—are accustomed to that sort of thing.

He then entered on a long dissertation about the absurdity shown by the English invasion of Afghanistan. 'After your former war with us,' he said, 'you spent millions in building up our power again. You gave us money and arms, and enabled us to organise an army which we, left to ourselves, could never have got together. Then, following some whim of your *pro tem.* rulers, you attacked us, and destroyed your own handiwork on the pretence that we were intriguing with Russia. We have fought for our independence against you more than once. Do you suppose that we have any greater love of Russian domination than we have of yours? I fail to understand your policy.' Then he asked me whether I had read the Duke of Argyll's book on the subject. He had read it himself at Teheran, and would recommend it to my perusal. All this time there was a large concourse of spectators gathered from far and near, listening wonderingly to the incomprehensible jabbering of an apparent Turcoman with

an evident Afghan. I felt much inclined to turn back with Iskender Khan and ride with him to Herat; but the orders recalling me to London were positive. We shook hands and parted. Iskender Khan had lived three years in Paris, and six in London. These lines may recall him to the memory of his former acquaintances in both these places. He told me that he was well acquainted with Mr. R. F. Thomson, H.B.M. Minister at Teheran; but that unfortunately, owing to the illness of that gentleman when he (the Khan) was leaving Teheran, he had been unable to bid him adieu. He begged me to present his compliments to the British Minister. I have only given a very brief summary of the substance of what he said to me. Possibly he may himself some of these days furnish the public with his ideas *in extenso*.

With my arrival at Sabzavar, I come to a point up to which I have already fully described the route and my experiences along the way. Suffice it to say, that my horses, broken-down and sore-backed by the journey, failed me. I was obliged to sell them for a trifle and hire post-horses in their stead. While waiting for the completion of the arrangements, I renewed my acquaintance with a gentleman whom I had met at this place the year previous. He was a postal courier. He had spent two years in London in the household of the Persian Ambassador, and spoke English fairly well. He was suffering under a domestic calamity. He had one wife at Teheran and another at Sabzavar. His spouse at this latter place died the day before my arrival; and he called on me with a view of soliciting a subscription towards the amount necessary to purchase a new wife at that postal station. Without one, he said, he rarely got his meals cooked properly, and found it difficult to get his shirts kept in proper repair.

On the way to Sharood a violent attack of fever com-

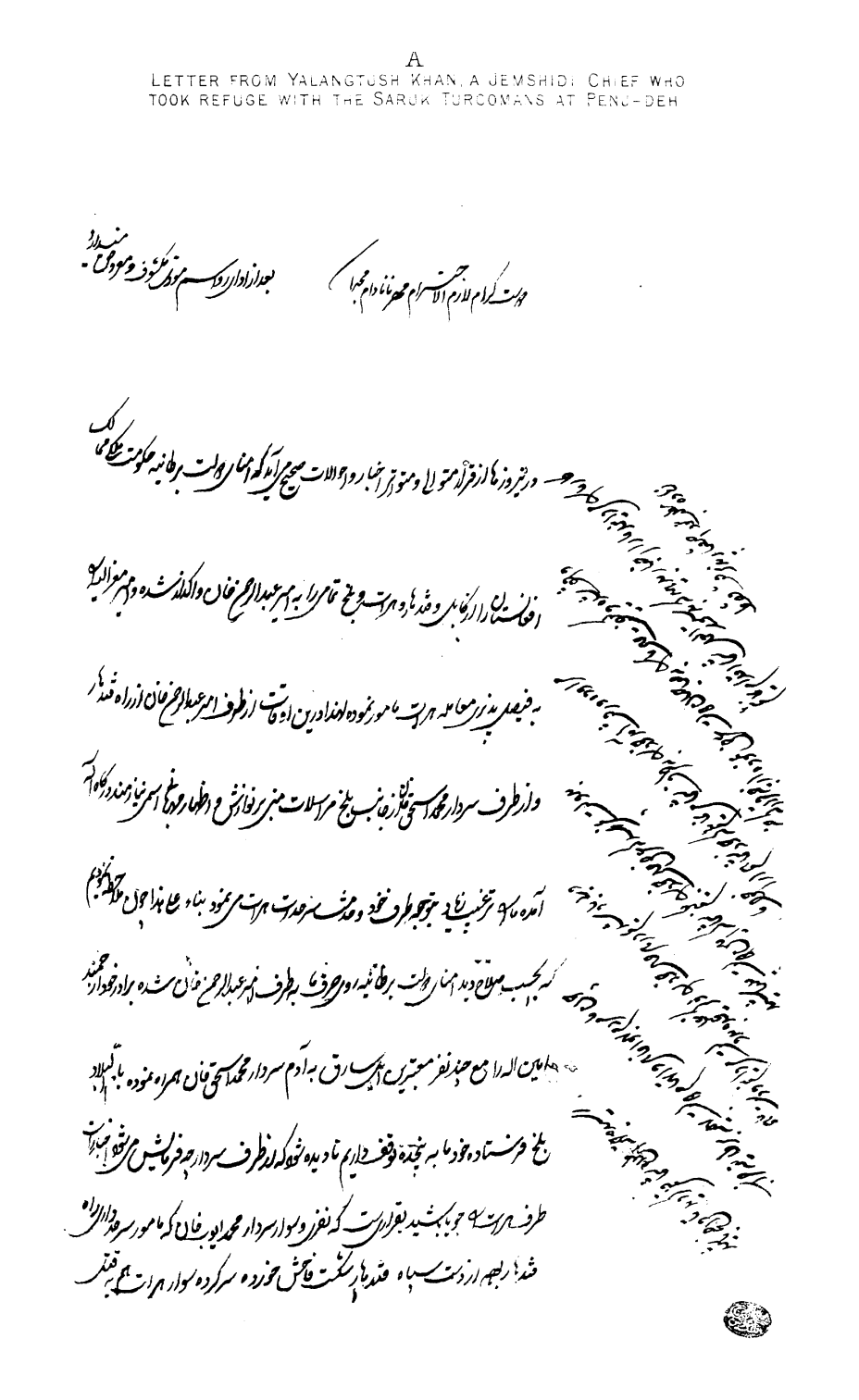
pletely prostrated me, and, unable to continue my road on horseback, I had to hire a pair of *kedjavés*. These are square wooden frames, like a large stool inverted, and which are hung, one on either side of a camel or mule. In one I put my luggage, in the other myself. My servant followed on horseback. I was more dead than alive when I reached Teheran, after a most painful and interrupted journey o twenty-seven days. The kindly hospitality of the British Legation set me on my legs again, and in a fortnight I was able to start on my way homewards. The journey from Teheran to Resht, on the Caspian, was very much as I have already described in these volumes, and I have dwelt already too much on Baku to say anything further about that place. I had hoped to be able to proceed to Tiflis by the new railroad, but discovered, to my sorrow, that it was only half completed. At Derbend, further northward, I found that the snow had rendered *troïka* travelling impracticable. I went on with the Russian mail steamer to Astrakan, only to find the Volga frozen, and to undergo one of the most disagreeable experiences of my life in reaching the nearest railway station, that of Zarizin, after a three days' voyage, broken by intervals of discomfort only to be experienced by those who try to travel in South-eastern Russia at that time of the year—November.

How I got on to Odessa and thence to Constantinople, scarcely enters into the scope of these volumes.

I got to the shores of the Bosphorus on November 26, 1881, nearly four months after I had left Kouchid Khan Kala and the Turcomans; and close on three years since I started from Trebizond on my way eastward.

A

LETTER FROM YALANGTUSH KHAN, A JEMSHIDI CHIEF WHO TOOK REFUGE WITH THE SARUK TURCOMANS AT PENJ-DEH



APPENDICES.

APPENDIX A.

TRANSLATION.

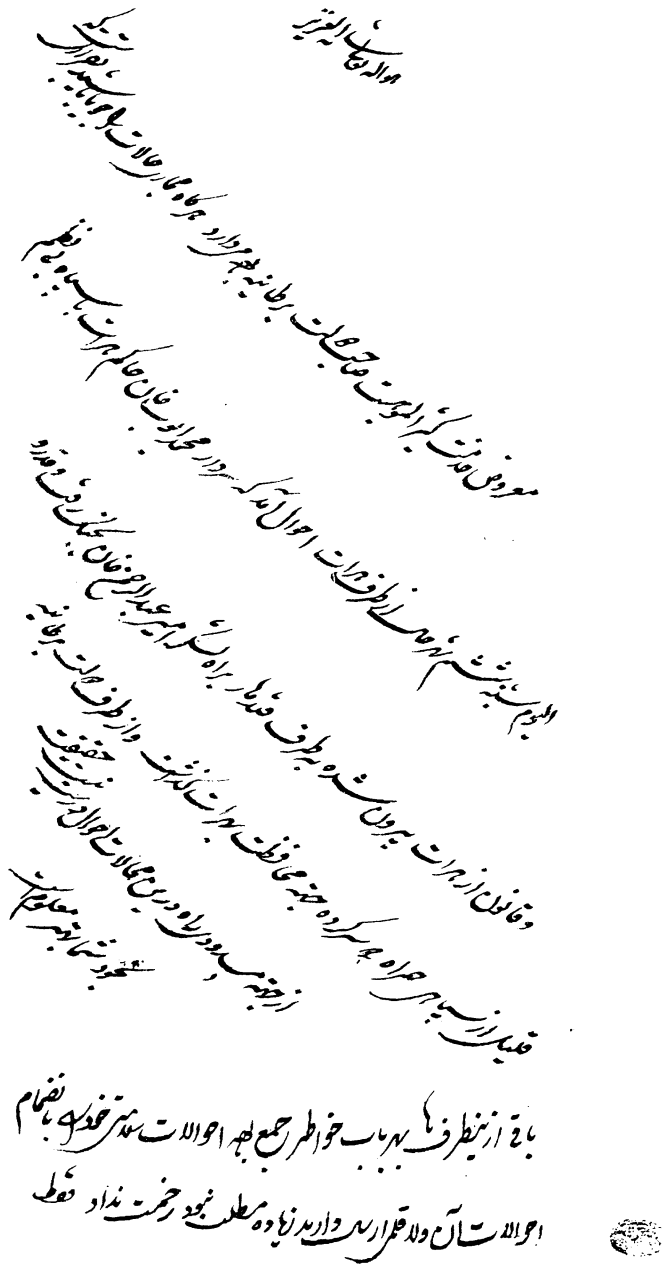
To our dear and kind friend worthy of honour. May his glory be perpetual!

In these days reliable tidings have come in regard to what has consecutively happened, to the effect that the agents of the British Government have made over the sovereignty of the dominions of the kingdom of Afghanistan from Kábul, Kandahár, Herát, and Balkh entirely to Amír Abdu'l Rahman Khán, and have appointed the aforesaid Amír to conduct the administration of Herát. Therefore, in these days friendly and conciliatory letters having come from the Royal Court of Amír Abdu'l Rahman Khán by way of Kandahár, and from Sirdar Muhammad Ishak Khán by way of Balkh, displaying persuasion on our behalf that we should do something in regard to the frontiers of Herát, accordingly, when we perused them and saw that according to the notions of expediency on the part of the British agents we should first turn our faces towards Amír Abdu'l Rahman Khán, we sent to the capital of Balkh our illustrious brother Amír Allah, with several honoured individuals of the Sarik (Saruk) tribe, in company with the man from Sirdar Muhammad Ishak Khán, while we ourselves remain at Panjdah (Penj-deh) till it is seen what orders will come from the Sirdar. Should you seek news from Herát, this is it. A person, together with the cavalry of Sirdar Muhammad Ayúb Khán, who was appointed Governor of the regions of Kandahár, has suffered a disgraceful defeat at the hands of the Kandahár army, while the commander of the Herát cavalry has been killed. We send this

line for your information, that it may be clear that since from our loyalty and zeal for the illustrious British Government we are destitute and ruined, in any case we consider ourselves peculiarly the servants of your Government. Our hand does not reach Government that we can place before them our case, but, you being an agent of the Government, we state our affairs and proceedings to you, for you yourself know our condition ; therefore represent the state of our case to the Sahibs of the Government in such way as you think best for us, and send us word, so that we may carry out your instructions. This is our sole object, stated in brief.

No date. Seal of Yalangtush Khan.

LETTER FROM YALANGTUSH KHAN, A JEMSHIDI CHIEF WHO TOOK REFUGE WITH THE SARUK TURCOMANS AT PENJ-DEH



مراسله ۹

مکاتب دولت برطانیه مقابله گردند ۱۶۴۲

APPENDIX B.

Praise to the great God, whose might is glorious.

Be it represented to the beneficent Sahib of the British Government. Seeing that you seek news as to the circumstances which are happening, this is it. On Saturday, the sixth of the present month, tidings arrived that Sirdár (Serdar) Muhammad Ayúb Khán, Governor of Herat, with an irregular army, issued forth from that city and went towards Kandahár to engage in battle with the troops of Amir Abdu'l Rahman Khán, leaving a few troops with two chiefs for the protection of Herat. There is no correct news here what the British Government sent to oppose his march. You yourself know best about that. Finally, all is well in these parts. Send a line regarding your health, as well as the state of affairs in that country. We have nothing more to say.

May the Sahib of the British Government peruse this letter.

(1642. Letter 2-9.)

Seal of Yalangtush Khan.

APPENDIX C.

TRANSLATION.

We beg to represent to the beneficent Sahib of the excellent British Government, the spreader abroad of the Christian religion. May peace be thereon!

Should you require news as to the events and occurrences of these regions and localities, it is this. Thanks to God, owing to the kindness of your illustrious Excellency, the course of events has run quite smoothly and pleasantly. All the tribes and peoples pass their time on the throne of peace and comfort in the discharge of their affairs. Secondly, we would represent that nowadays Muhammad Ayúb Khán, the ruler of Herat, since he understood that the late Ameér ud-Dowlah (Dowlet) Khan had been for some time the guest of the English Government, when the latter got leave to return with the view of repairing to his own house, and went to Herat, as soon as he arrived suspected him of being a well-wisher of the British Government and caused him to be killed; he also plundered all his goods and possessions, and placed the Jamshidi (Jemshidi) tribe in the oven of fire—thus he did and is doing every injustice and irregularity he could. This kind of proceeding on the part of Ayúb Khán is very distasteful and unpalatable to the minds of us tribes, who have eaten the salt of the late Ameér-ud-Dowlah's (Dowlet's) kindness. Nowadays his Excellency Yalangtúsh Khán, the true son of the aforesaid deceased, has come here amongst the Sarik (Saruk) tribe with two brothers of the above-mentioned, and a retinue of fifty persons from amongst his well-wishers and dependents, and we are entertaining them well. Since all this trouble and bitterness has befallen them on account of the British Government, we, too, recognising what is good for the Government, and firmly girding up the loins of our zeal as well-wishers of Government, both in matters offensive and defensive, will sever at once all connection and obedience from Ayúb Khán, and place our

طرف با آمده باشد از او بر آورده بدهد الخ

عالیجان محمد ابراهیم گوید صدق داشته

در مزبور ذکر شده معلوم شود حضار آمده

بدولت حضور فیض گنجور

معلمان کار و فیض هواخواه حال خود

در صورت عدم حضور

وکلای طرفین از عهده برآیند

از طرف

عالیجان محمد ابراهیم گوید صدق داشته

طرف با آمده باشد از او بر آورده بدهد الخ

عالیجان محمد ابراهیم گوید صدق داشته

reliance upon the aid of God. Therefore, at this time just deeming it goo for Government, girding up our loins we shall make our best endeavours against the distress and trouble in the regions of Herát and the ruins of Ayúb Khán's affairs. Seeing that, it is clear to your mind that Muhammad Ayúb Khán has become one of the principal opponents of the great Government, and is daily putting in motion the chain of opposition and rebellion, while he is, too, in communication with the Russian Government and is playing a waiting game, to give an opportunity to such persons in the territory and kingdoms of Government is far from wise. It is obvious that you are one of the principal agents of Government, and befriend us in every case; you should therefore protect and countenance us. You know the condition of our guests, and are aware that we are well-wishers to you, so represent our case to Government and send us every day news of yourself in order that we may act as you think advisable. This is all we have to say, stated briefly. Once again we beg to represent that in these days the Tekké thieves have carried off three persons and forty-three head of cattle from the Sarik (Saruk) shepherds. If they have come to your parts, please God get hold of them and send them back. Whatever Bashi Bái (Bey) says verbally accept as true.

No date. Eight seals of Saruk chiefs of Penj-deh.

APPENDIX D.

TRANSLATION.

To His Excellency the Associate of Majesty and Pomp Mr. O'Donovan.

May it be known to his honoured mind that after Your Excellency's departure Díkmah Sirdár (Tokmé Serdar) on the ninth of the present month Ramazán came to Merv; he it was who formerly went to the Emperor of Russia with several Akhal horsemen. No one of the chiefs or elders of the Merv tribe went to him to enquire as to his news or designs. As soon as he appeared they sent you this letter. It is most probable that the object of his arrival is to secure in any way that may be possible the submission of the tribe of Merv to Russia, and to incite and stir them up in favour of that Power. In this respect he will spread sedition and commotion amongst the Merv people, either with or without money. The tribes of Merv, after you came to Merv, firmly grasped the skirt of submission to the Queen of England. Now you must issue instructions in what way we should deal in this matter with Díkmah Sirdar (Tokmé Serdar). Assuredly send us a letter, for we will all do as you bid us. As for the rest, Kurbán Naze Bahadúr and Kuli Murad Bahadúr will represent matters to you by word of mouth; you must accept it as true. Dated twelfth of the month Ramazán 1298 (August 8, 1881). Salaam. Peace be on him who follows the right guidance.

Sealed with nineteen seals of Baba Khan, Aman Niaz Khan, and other chiefs.

عالیجاه جلالت و فخامت همراه اسپکاه از دولت صاحب [illegible] مشرف خاطر

تخت

بعد از تشریف فرمودن جناب شما بمشهد مقدس از جانب دولت [illegible]

روس تجمه سرلشکر بمرو آمده ایلات مرو را بجانب دولت [illegible]

و تحریص نموده در میان ایلات مرو میخواهد که فتنه برپا سازد و از جانب

روس خبوق در سلخ شهر رمضان المبارک ایلچی بمرو آمده که میخواهد

بال و اشیا ایلات مرو را بطرف دولت روس سیر بسیار

و عهد با شما مینماید و بولایت طرف نیز از جانب روس

دو آدم از طایفه روس آمده الحال بولایت طرف میباشند

و مسموع شد که از جانب بخارا نیز ایلچی از جانب روس بمرو

میآید و ایلات مرو هم خیلی از خوف از طرف روس بسیار احوال

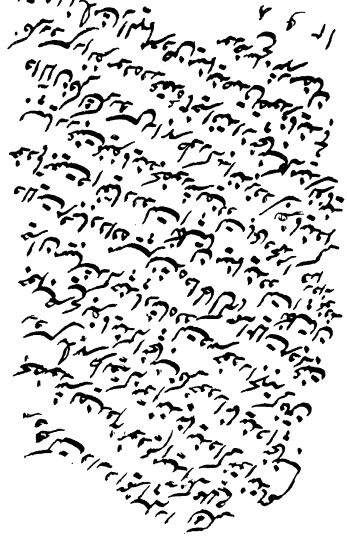
خودشان سرگشته و سرگردان میباشند و آدمهای ایشان

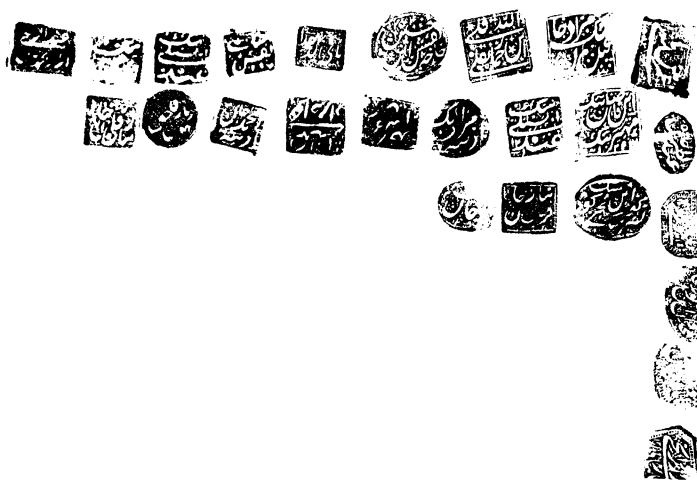
همگی که برفاقت شما بمشهد رفته بودند از جانب شاه شهید

العلی در ستر یافته با پنجاب آمدند صاحبا بعد از تشریف

فرمودن جناب شما بمرو ایلات مرو همه تبعیت دولت انگلستان

را اختیار نموده الآن که احتمال گاه دارد که لشکر روس بجانب





APPENDIX E.

TRANSLATION.

To His Excellency the Associate of Majesty and Pomp, the Seat of Hope, Mr. O'Donovan. May this be known to his illustrious mind.

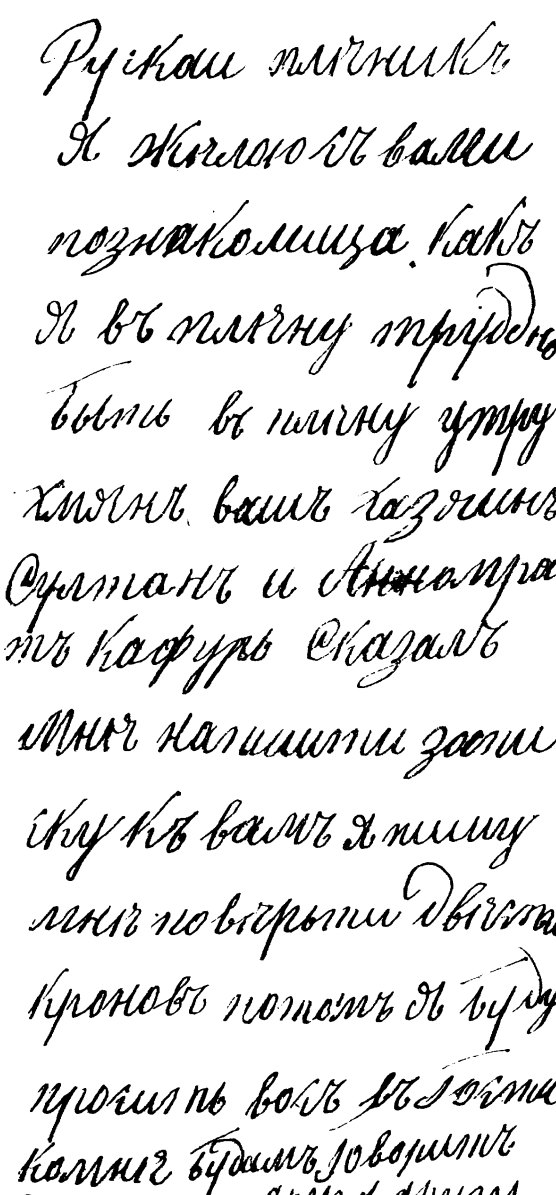
After you went to Mashad (Meshed), Tithmah (Tokmé) Serdar came to Merv from the capital of the Russian Government, and incited the people in favour of that Power, desirous of stirring up strife among the tribes. And on the last day of the month Ramazán an Envoy, by name Khuyák, came to Merv on the part of Russia, desirous with money and goods to make the tribe of Merv work effectually and strive jealously on behalf of the Russian Government. In the kingdom of Tajan (Tejend), also, two persons have arrived from the Russians, and they are at the present time there. It is heard, also, that an Envoy from Bukhárá (Bokhara), on behalf of the Russians, is about to arrive; so the people of Merv are very distressed and perplexed in their affairs through fear of the Russians. The men, too, from these parts who accompanied you to Mashad (Meshed), not having met with any specific instructions at your hands, returned to this locality. Oh, Sir! after your stay at Merv the people thereof all submitted to the British Government. Now that there is a strong probability that the Russian army is on its way to the regions of Merv, we send this letter to your Excellency in the hope that you will devise a remedy in any way you can against the Russian army, and if you cannot do so, send us an explicit reply, so that we may follow our own devices in this matter. We are surprised in this respect, that so many monarchs having scattered to the winds their money and their force to take Merv, and not having succeeded, yet now that all the people of Merv are willing and ready to submit to and obey the English Government, the latter are not very eager. Dowlet Bái (Bey) and Muhammad Murád are sent to your Excellency, so now let us

know as quickly as possible how you mean to deal with the Russian army; and should you not think of the Russians, or postpone the matter, do not put the blame on us. The rest will be represented by word of mouth by the two aforesaid persons. Be it accepted as true. Dated last day of Ramazán 1298 (August 26, 1881).

Twenty-five seals of the Merv Khans and Kethkodas.

F.

LETTER FROM KIDAIEFF THE RUSSIAN GUNNER CAPTIVE AT MERV.



APPENDIX F.

TRANSLATION.

The original is in ungrammatical, childishly written Russian, and is partly unintelligible.

1. Russian prisoner.
2. I wish to make your acquaintance;
3. Because I am in prison.
4. It is hard to be in prison.
5. to-morrow.
6. You landlord (? you are pre-eminent in the district).
7. Sultân Anomra Kâfir (Ana Murad Kafur).
8. told me
9. to write a few lines
10. I do write.
11. Send me 200 krans.
12. After that I will ask you
13. . . . . when you come to see me I will tell you.
14. Hearty friend.

APPENDIX G.

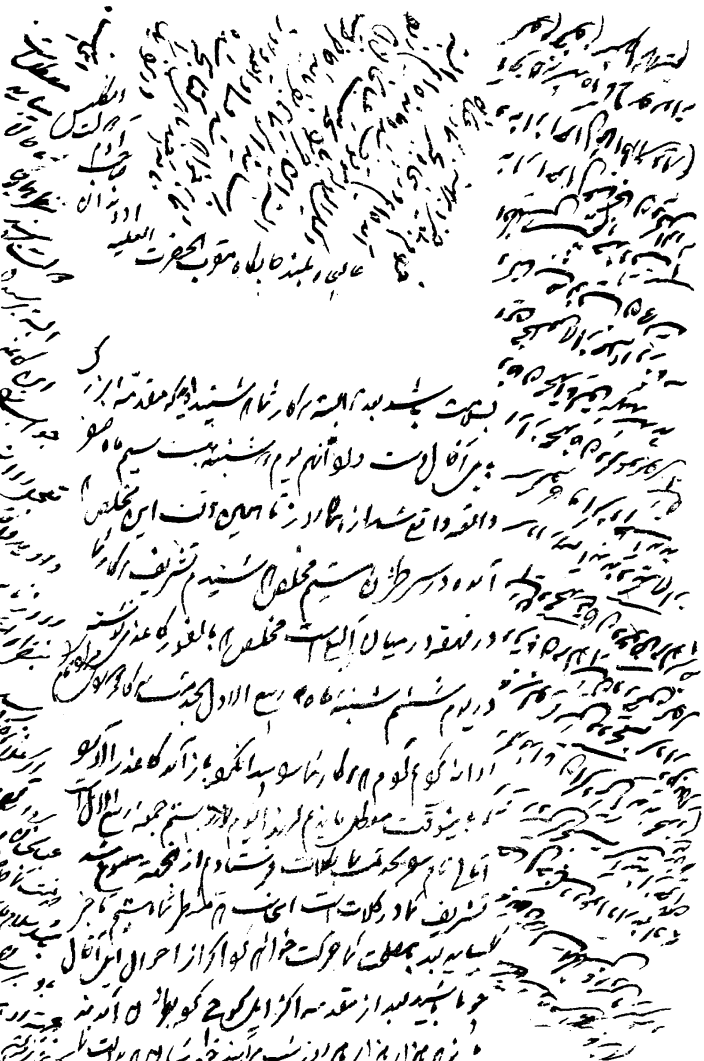
TRANSLATION.

To His Excellency the exalted and illustrious O'Donovan Sahib, the Representative of the British Government.

I hope you are well. Again, doubtless, you have heard that a great crisis has occurred to the Akhál tribe: it happened on Monday, the 23rd of the month Safar. From that day till this time I have remained at Tajand. I also have heard that you are in Fahga (Kaka) in the midst of the Iliats. I also immediately wrote you a letter on Saturday, the 6th of Rabi' al Aooal, and I sent it by the hands of Mirzá Murád, but the man not being able to find you returned: so we remained disappointed until now. Therefore on Friday, the 12th (?) Rabi' al Aooal, I sent one Atábí by name to you at Kalát (Kelat), as we had heard that you were in Kalát. We also are awaiting you in this direction till we get tidings about you, after which we will act according to your advice. If you seek news of this Akál (Akhal) tribe, it is this. After the crisis, most of the tribes having migrated came to Tahdan (Tejend): moreover, day and night they are coming by thousands; they are also relying upon your Government. Again, in company with the English Government, they contemplate making war against the Russians about Merv; but they have run away from the Russians and are come. Amongst the chiefs and heads most came. Makhdum Quli Khán, with his brother and Díkhma Sirdar, and Qul Bahádur, and Qurbán his brother, and Rahman his brother, and Muhammad Quli Khán and Ivaz Murád Sareha Sirdár, all came. Again amongst the elders most came. Iráz Muhammad Khán and his brother Korúná and Khan Muhammad Atálig were slain. As for me, who am one of the scribes and writers of the English Government, it is a long time since I have heard either of you or of Abbáss Khan, the Government Agent; so at length, being in despair, we sent away the Atálí and are our-

G.

ANNOUNCEMENT OF THE CAPTURE OF YENGI SHEHER, FROM MAKDUM KULI'S SECRETARY.



selves expecting you. We have come without anything, and destitute. We have stopped here waiting to hear news of you and of Abbáss Khan, the British Agent. Assuredly quickly convey this news to Abbáss Khán. If you order me, I will present myself before you. Yes, having written in a book the events and the daily occurrences of several months, they have remained useless, and it is fitting that they be now sent for the inspection of that Government.

As soon as you receive this letter, quickly send me a reply, and let the paper of news be sent to the Government. If Ghulán Rayás (Gholam Riza), the brother of Abbáss Khán's man, is in your service, give him my respects. I have also written him a letter, please show it to him.

No date, no signature, one seal.

APPENDIX H.

TRANSLATION.

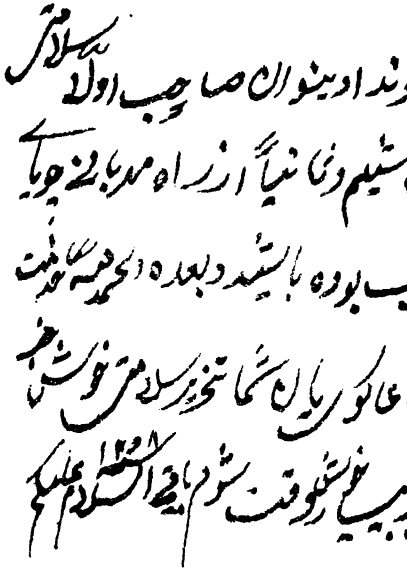
To my dear brother Edmund O'Donovan Sahib.

First of all we seek to know that you are well. Secondly, by way of kindness, you are anxious to get tidings of these parts. Furthermore, God be praised, we are your servants. Again we are your well-wishers. I was very much pleased to hear the good news that you had come in safety. Salaams. 1289 Hijrí, A.D. 1881.

No signature; three seals illegible.

H.

LETTER FROM BABA KHAN AND AMAN NIAZ KHAN, RECEIVED AT KELAT-I-NADRI.



APPENDIX I.

Letter to British Minister at Teheran.

MERV: March 19, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—I find myself rather in a scrape here, owing to the persistent suspicion of the *medjlis* that I am a Russian spy. My only chance of getting away is that a letter in Turkish or Persian, bearing unmistakeable signs of its coming from an English source, should summon me to Meshed immediately, as it were, on business with Abass Khan. By the same messenger who takes this I write to Abass Khan asking him to summon me to Meshed; but as he does not understand English, and will have to apply to Daoud Mirza, the Chief of Telegraphs, to interpret my letter, I am in serious doubts as to the result.

The Merv chiefs want me to mount the old guns they took from the Persians, and whose carriages have rotted, and to do a number of things quite out of my power; among them to make extensive presents of money. As, however, they are all quite in favour of England, a letter with as many stamps and marks as possible, indicating its origin at a British source, would be invaluable. Kadjar Khan, the chief of the Merv deputation last year to Teheran, is the person to whom communications should be addressed. He is the most influential of the whole of them. He says he saw you four times at the Embassy, and remembers Dr. Dixon. I must be brief, as I am narrowly watched, and write this in bed under cover of my quilt, pretending to read a book.

I remain,

Sincerely yours

E. O'DONOVAN.

R. F. Thomson, Esq.

APPENDIX K.

Extract of a Letter from Mr. O'Donovan (dated Merv, March 31*) to Mr. R. F. Thomson, H.M. Minister at Teheran.*

My own position is somewhat singular. Owing to the pressure of circumstances, especially the opposition offered by the Persian authorities to my going among the Turcomans, I was obliged to make a rush for this place, unprovided with credentials, which would duly weigh with the authorities here, whose name is legion.

I have with me the British passport, the Sipah Salar's pass, the letter in Persian of the former British Consul at Asterabad (Mr. Churchill), the pass of the Persian Foreign Minister's Agent at the same place, and another from the Persian Governor of Meshed. I had nothing specially addressed to Kadjar Khan; still, thanks to Abass Khan of Meshed, I have succeeded more or less in proving that I am not a Russian. But I can't prove, unfortunately, that I am unconnected with diplomacy, and a cowardly servant, trembling in his skin for himself, fostered the belief that I was a political agent by saying that I had come to hoist the British standard here. This illusion I of course did my best in broken Turkish to dispel. Still, I am looked on as the proper channel through which to transmit the accompanying document. At the same time, while treated as a friend, I am evidently a prisoner. These people think that by holding me they can guarantee some supplies.

I wish it to be distinctly understood that I neither claim nor ask any kind of official interference on my behalf. I don't think it at all necessary. But it would be satisfactory to the minds of the people here if I left them under circumstances that allowed no doubt as to my nationality. As in my former letter, I would ask you as a favour to send a letter through Abass Khan, *ordering*

me to come to Meshed immediately, and certified by as many imposing stamps and seals, both on letter and envelope, as might to the utmost impress the minds of the people here with an impression of its undoubted emanence from the proper source. Another, sent to Kadjar Khan, telling him that I am wanted at Meshed, would also be necessary.

APPENDIX L.

TRANSLATION.

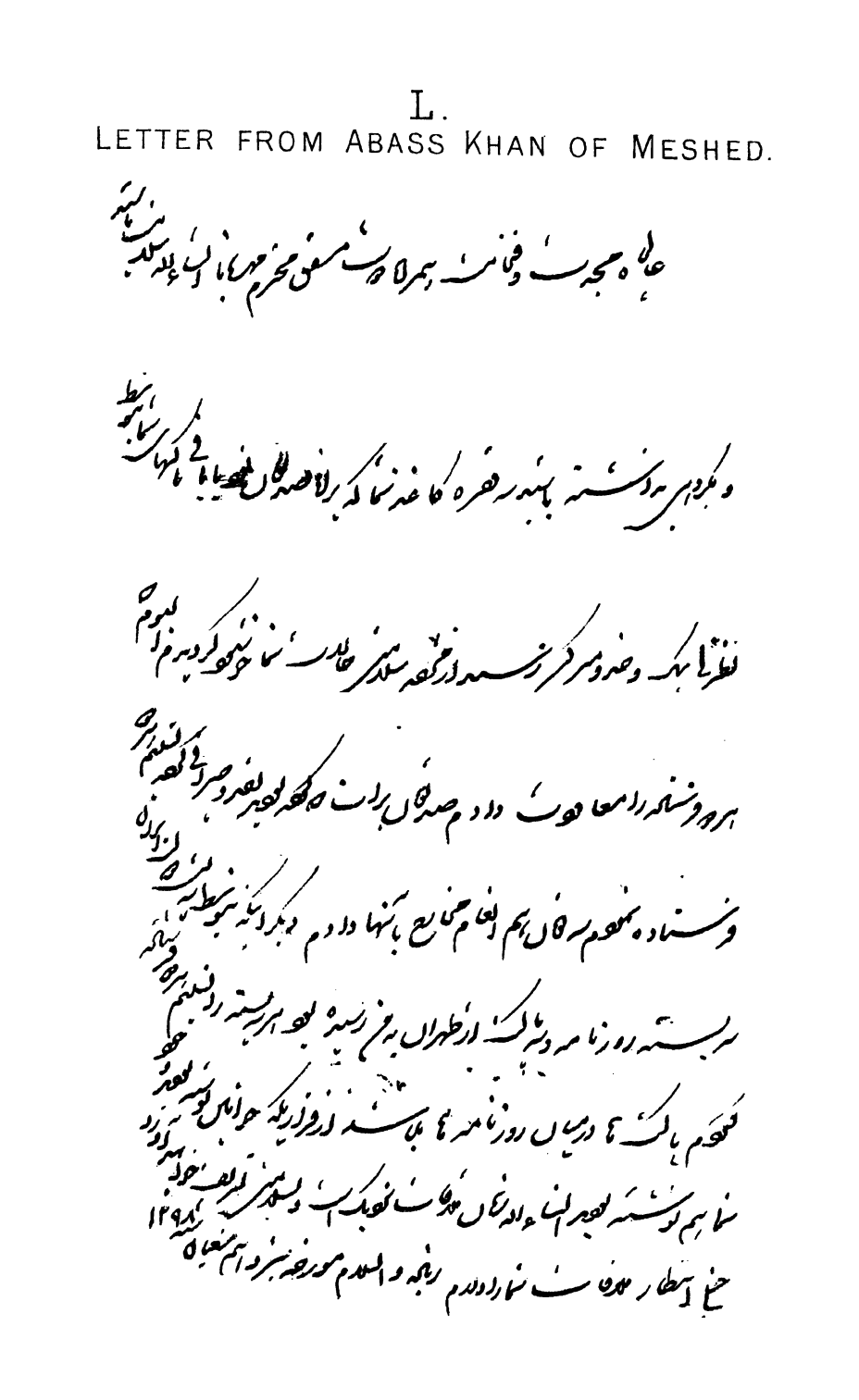
To the Exalted, the Associate of Greatness and Might, my dear honoured and kind Friend.

Please God you are well, and are not disturbed with aught. Your three letters regarding the bill for 100 tománs, with the rest of your packets, reached me through the medium of Nazarallí Bey and Khudúmír Khan. I was delighted to hear that you were well. The day on which I sent back your two emissaries, having examined the bills for 100 tománs which you drew, I entrusted the money to the two agents in question. I gave them also three tománs to cover their expenses. Again, by three posts from Persia, three bundles of newspapers and three packets reached me from Teheran. I made over all three bundles to the two agents, the packets being wrapped up inside the newspapers. According to what the Khans have written and what you yourself have stated, God willing, the time of meeting is near at hand, and I trust that you will arrive safely. I am eagerly expecting to meet you. Salaams. Dated 13th Shá báu 1298 Hijrí (July 11, 1881).

No signature; seal of Abass Khan.

L.

LETTER FROM ABASS KHAN OF MESHED.



APPENDIX M.

TRANSLATION.

Extract of Letter from the Merv Chiefs to Abass Khan.

October 8, 1881.—Your letter sent by Koorban Pehlivan and Nazar Ali Beg was duly received, and the chiefs and elders of the Otamish and Toktamish tribes felt that they were greatly honoured in the estimation of the other tribes by the favours and gifts you forwarded to us.

The presents and ready cash you sent by Koorban Pehlivan and Nazar Ali Beg, on account of the services rendered to Mr. O'Donovan, were as follows:—

Twenty-seven red cloth jubbehs with ninety-two tomans for sundry chiefs and elders of the said tribes.

Three shawls for Makdum Kuli Khan, Niaz Khan, and Allah Kuli Khan, with ready cash.

We are all very thankful, and are always ready to receive a Governor and instructions from the English Government.

[Translated by I. IBRAHEEM.]

APPENDIX N.

TRANSLATION.

Statement of Disbursements made by Abass Khan on account of Turcomans who sent and escorted Mr. O'Donovan to Meshed.

Paid in Cash:				Tomans.			
Sent to the tribes				92			
„ Allah Kuli Khan				3			
„ Khodja Kuli				5			
„ Makdum Kuli Khan				10			
Paid to Azar Ali, who remained in Meshed to take the presents				7			
Paid to Dowlet Khan and two others who brought letters for Mr. O'Donovan				6			
				—	123	0	0
Dresses of Honour:							
Twenty-seven red cloaks trimmed with lace, &c. Eighty-seven and three-quarters, at eleven krans			96	5	10½		
Twenty-seven bundles of lace and cording, at three krans per bundle			8	1	0		
Making twenty-seven coats, at three krans each			8	1	0		
						112	
Cost of three shawls, at twelve tomans each						36	
Tomans						271	7 10½
Balance in hand						8	2 9⅓
Total tomans						280	0 0

APPENDIX O.

Letter to Makdum Kuli Khan sent to Yengi Sheher.

Sharood: Wednesday, June 16, 1880.

Your Highness,—I am a correspondent of an English news paper called the 'Daily News.' I am sent to this country in order to know how the fighting goes on between the Russians and the Akhal Tekkés, so that the people in England may know the truth. Will you let me come with you? I do not belong to the Government of England; but I can at least let them know how things are going, and it is possible that I may be of use and of service to you.

Edmond O'Donovan,
Special Correspondent of the newspaper 'Daily News,'
London, England.

To His Highness the Commander-in-Chief of the
Akhal Tekkés.

APPENDIX P.

Answer of Prime Minister Sipah Salar Aazem to my Letter asking for Safe-conduct.

TÉHÉRAN : 27 Mai, 1880.

MONSIEUR,—En réponse à votre honorée lettre de ce jour je suis tout disposé de vous faciliter votre voyage en vous accordant un laissez-passer pour toute la partie de territoire Persan que vous aurez à passer ; mais il m'est impossible de vous donner un document valable au-delà de nos frontières ou pour les tribus qui sont en guerre avec la Russie.

Quoique vous soyez depuis longtemps en Perse et depuis plusieurs jours à Téhéran, cependant je n'ai pas eu le plaisir de votre visite ; j'attribue ceci aux reproches de conscience que vous devez éprouver comme correspondant du 'Daily News' de Londres.

Agréez, je vous prie, Monsieur,

Mes compliments distingués,

HOUSSEIN.

A Monsieur E. O'Donovan,
Correspondant du 'Daily News.'

TRANSLATION.

TEHERAN : May 27, 1880.

SIR,—In reply to your esteemed letter of to-day, I am quite willing to facilitate your journey by giving you a passport for the entire of the Persian territory through which you will have to pass ; but it is impossible for me to give you a document

which shall be available beyond our frontiers, or among the tribes who are at war with Russia.

Although you have been a considerable time in Persia, and several days at Teheran, I have not yet had the pleasure of a visit from you; I attribute this to the reproaches of conscience which, as correspondent of the 'Daily News' of London, you ought to feel.

Receive, Sir, the expression, &c.

HOUSSEIN.

APPENDIX Q.

Letter to Colonel O. St. John, British Political Officer, Kandahar.

MERV: June 10, 1881.

DEAR SIR,—Some three months ago I came to Merv in pursuance of my mission as Special Correspondent of the 'Daily News' of London. I am in a very peculiar position. The chiefs and people of Merv either will not or cannot understand my true position, and pretend to believe that I am a political personage. Though not, strictly speaking, a prisoner, still I am not allowed to leave Merv; I am held as a kind of political hostage, in order, as the Khans think, the better to secure a favourable answer to the letters and documents which they have from time to time forwarded to the British Government through Abass Khan, at Meshed, and the British Minister at Teheran. Should the telegrams which I despatched from this have ever reached their destination you will probably have seen in the newspapers a statement that the Governing Council of Merv have refused all overtures, either on the part of Russia or Persia, and decided to seek friendly relations with the British Government. The truth of this I can vouch for, as I was present at the Councils, and am in daily contact with the supreme chief Baba Khan, Kouchid Khan Ogli, and the twenty-four lesser chiefs. The Merv people seek to be taken under British protection, or at least to have their neutrality and independence guaranteed by England, Russia, and Persia. They promise to abstain from all raiding and marauding; and in everything to encourage caravan traffic through their territory. They would prefer a British Protectorate; but if necessary would be content with the joint guarantee I have alluded to above. In case they can establish direct relationship with England, or the 'Coompani' as they still

designate the Government of India, they would ask for some aid in the shape of arms and ammunition. They have about a thousand breech-loaders taken from the Russians, and thirty-six bronze field-guns and howitzers of various calibres, from 18 pounders to 4 pounders, taken from the Persian expedition, but they have little or no ammunition for either rifles or artillery, especially for the latter. They have heard that warlike supplies are being sent to Amir Abdurrahman at Kabul, and are encouraged to hope that they may be similarly favoured. At all events, they desire me to say so. It must be distinctly understood that I am not writing this on my own account, but by the desire of the Government of Merv, conveyed to me half an hour since by the supreme Khan, who sends a special messenger to-morrow morning *viâ* Herat to Kandahar, in hopes of finding you still there. I have written to Mr. Thomson at Teheran on the same subject; and the Merv people have twice sent documents written in Persian, and having the seals of the Khans attached, declaring their desire for friendly relations with England. Up to the present no reply has reached this, though ample time has elapsed, and the result is that I am detained here pending the arrival of an answer of some kind. I trust that on receipt of this you will send back a reply, which, whatever its nature, will have the effect of getting me away, either to Meshed or to Herat, for though personally I am well treated, a forced residence in such a place, and among such people, when one has fulfilled the object of his mission, is far from agreeable. A reply written in Persian, holding out hopes, if realities cannot be promised, and requiring my immediate attendance at Kandahar or elsewhere out of this, as it were to receive instructions, would be an infinite favour to me. If something of the kind cannot be managed, I can see no end to my present enforced residence here. The population of Merv proper is, I should say, close upon half-a-million, and together with the Ersari, Salar, and Saruk Turcomans, all now closely drawn together by the approach of Russia, might come up to eight hundred thousand. Of this, I calculate some sixty or seventy thousand fighting men, to a large extent mounted, could be put in the field. A very large fortification, about a mile and a half in length by three quarters of a mile broad, the ramparts forty feet in height and sixty at base, has been constructed on the eastern bank of the Murgab. Its length, running N.W. and

S.E., forms the chord of an arc made by the river towards the S.W. at this point. The works are not quite completed, and large numbers of men, working by relays, are constantly engaged on them. The twelve Turcomans who come with this letter will await your reply. I hope that, for my sake, they may be as well treated as possible.

I remain, dear Sir,

Sincerely yours,

E. O'DONOVAN.

THE END.

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