

THROUGH THE HEART OF ASIA.

(*OVER THE PAMİR TO INDIA.*)

CHAPTER IX.

FROM THE AMU TO SAMARCAND.

The ruins—Patta-Kissar—Tents of the nomad and of the sedentary Turkoman—Kakaïti, training—The Kazaks—Remains of an aqueduct—Straw tent—In sight of the mountains—A quarrel—Sorcery—The court of a baffled pretender—Baïssounne—At Tchiraktchi—A justiciary—Hope.

November 7th.

WE are at Tchochka-Guzar, where we find our baggage and horses, with Seïd, the Arab whose domestic troubles I have already described. Seïd has got fat, and is delighted to see us. We are not best pleased at having to retrace our steps just as we are reaching the goal. We can but take things as they come, and direct our steps elsewhere. There is no mistake about the pleasure which our mirza feels at being back again on the soil of Bokhara. He walks with a figure far more erect, giving his orders in short, sharp tones, while his turban is stuck jauntily upon his head, instead of being rolled in a half-hearted sort of way, and looking as woebegone as the face of its wearer. He is girt in at the waist, and puts his hand upon his sword, which he

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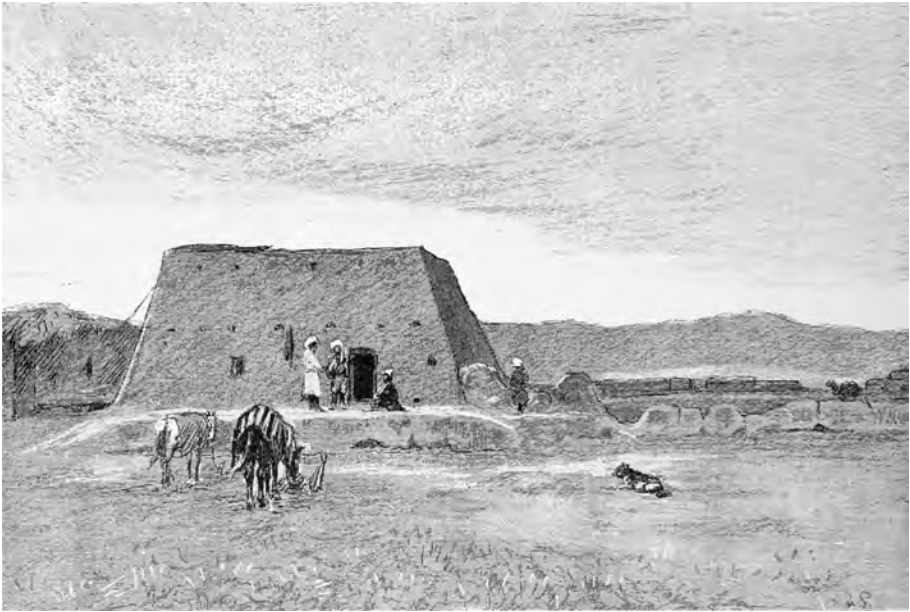
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would draw from its sheath, had it not been for years stuck fast to the scabbard, which is worn out at the bottom, but not on the battle-field.

We spend the day writing letters, and looking across the river at the chain of hills at the foot of which stands Balkh, just to the north of Tchochka-Guzar. We look and look again, heaping curses on the head of the Afghans, but at the same time we try to make the best we can of the new situation in which we find our-



TCHOCHKA-GUZAR.

selves placed. The ruins of Termiz are close at hand, so we intend to inspect them carefully and make a few excavations. Allah alone knows what the future has in store for us, and it may be that the check will be but temporary. To-morrow we intend going to Patta-Kissar.

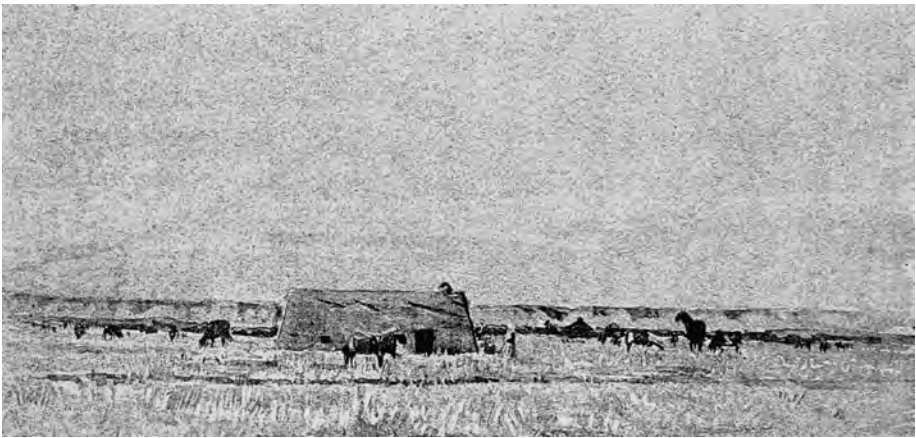
November 8th.

We pass through a country the aspect of which is the same as upon the left bank of the river. It is also inhabited by Turko-

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mans scattered among the fields which they cultivate. They possess small patches of ground, intersected or skirted by irrigating canals, with a *sakli* (mud hut), having a flat roof, in the centre. Near the hut is a vast felt tent for the rich, while the poor have a smaller tent, or perhaps only a straw hut. With these dwellings dotted about over the landscape, now grey with autumn, the country is not a very cheerful one; while, as there is no agglomeration of houses, or anything which resembles a European village, one does not get the impression of anything like a solidly organized society. There is, in short, a want of cohesion.



GHURAB.

We find a lodging at Patta-Kissar, with an acquaintance of Rachmed's, a one-eyed man, with whom he exchanges vigorous embraces. He is one of the principal men in the district, being entrusted with the collection of taxes, and his fellow-citizens treat him with great respect. He formerly lived in the neighbourhood of Samarcand, but having got into trouble, he fled to Bokhara territory upon the arrival of the Russians. The father of the reigning emir received him very well and confided various posts to him; so he has at last settled down right upon the frontier, where he has become a wealthy landowner and the husband of

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several wives. He has also some splendid horses. He is what we should call a “very respectable” person. He has only got one bad habit, but every one overlooks that on account of his amiability.

From Patta-Kissar to the remains of the fortress of Termiz, destroyed by Gengis-Khan, is a good hour's ride. Up to the 20th of November we spent all our days among the ruins, and came back to sleep at Patta-Kissar. We worked away as long as the



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temperature would allow us, and so far as was possible with a few workmen provided with very indifferent tools.

I will not say more here about Termiz than that we believe it clearly demonstrable that it was abandoned for want of water; that it was inhabited by men of Turkish race who were influenced by the neighbouring populations, and whose habits differed but little from those of the inhabitants of the valley of the Zerafchane, whose history they shared. In fact, we found at Termiz very much the same objects as have recently been exhumed from the

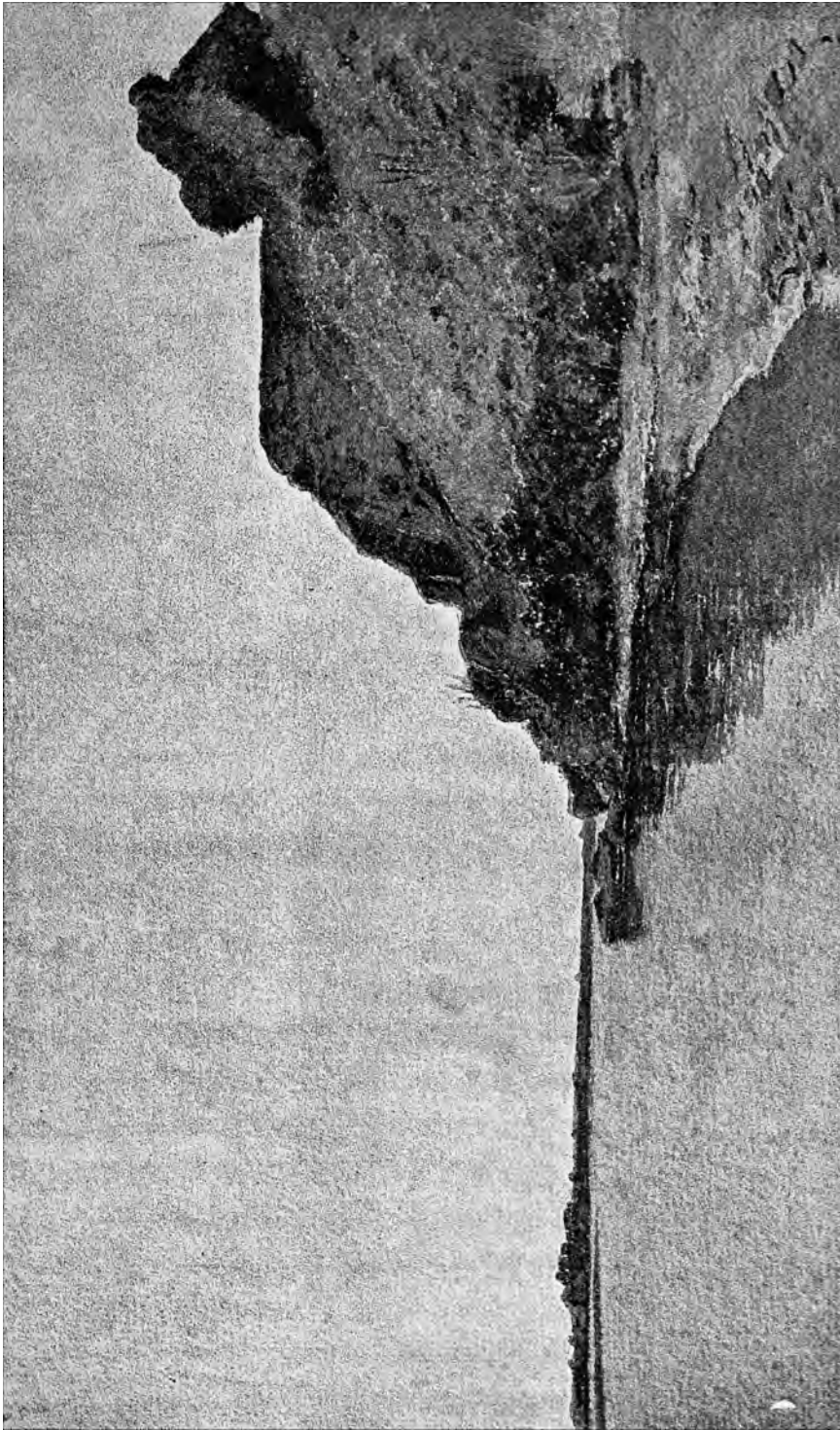
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RUINS OF THE FORTRESS OF TERMIZ.

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ruins of Aphrosiab, as it is called, which are enfolded in modern Samarcand.

November 20th.

We re-ascend the valley, following the right bank of the Surkhane. At a distance of about a mile and a half we come to the commencement of the Aryk, which feeds the small oasis of Patta-Kissar. The population of this village has increased very considerably since our previous journey. The Turkomans who were the first to reclaim the reed-beds along the Amu have been reinforced by Uzbegs. The hamlet has become a small town, and a bazaar, which is very animated on market-days, has been built. A mosque will soon follow, and with a few more houses there will be a regular street.

The tents of the Uzbegs are very numerous along the river bank. They are smaller than those of the Turkomans, stronger and more pointed at the top, being regular nomad dwellings, easy to take down, to put up, and to move, the rain running off them very quickly, and the wind having little hold upon their sides. The Turkomans in this region are, as a rule, too poor to be nomad; they have not enough cattle to have any need to move from place to place, and their tents, put up between four walls, are chiefly used by them during the summer months. This is their way of going into the country.

At a day's march we came to Djar-Kurgane. The next day we crossed the Surkhane, and in another hour and a half we reached Kakaiti.



TURKOMAN.

November 21st.

The village has a fortress perched upon the edge of tall and steep cliffs, and it is inhabited by a beg. The houses below have

painted thatched roofs, which is a sign of damp. The bulk of the population is composed of Torkulik Uzbegs; others call themselves Nogai, and when one questions them as to their origin, they say—

“We come from Arka.”

“Where is Arka?”

“We cannot tell you.”

An old man asserts that Arka is beyond Aulie-Ata, upon the other side of the river of the Talas, not far from the land of Kuldja, where one meets people of Tsin (China).

At the foot of the Kakaiti cliffs, which form a semicircle, is a large meadow skirted by the river, with rose-bushes growing on its banks. The grass is green, amid which the cows are browsing, and there is but little blue in the cloudy sky; the scene being one which reminds one of Normandy or England. But it is suddenly animated by a troop of horsemen, who gallop up from the hollow road with shouts of joy. We see them suddenly throw a goat-skin to the ground, pick it up, gallop off, throw it down again, fight for it, jostle one another, and pursue the one who has galloped off with it. They frequently break off their game to talk, and the thing to do is to pick up the skin while at full gallop without dismounting. There is shortly to be a grand fête given by a rich man of the country to celebrate a marriage. Several goat-skins will be competed for, and the young men of Kakaiti are preparing for the jousts by training their horses and themselves.

This gathering at our feet coincides with another over our heads. A flock of rooks has assembled, no doubt in the hope that what they take for a kid will be left for them. They are resolved to have it, for they attack with warlike croaking a number of eagles which have been attracted by the same bait, the rooks being assisted by a number of magpies. The eagles are first of all driven off, and then comes the turn of some hawks, which cleave rapidly

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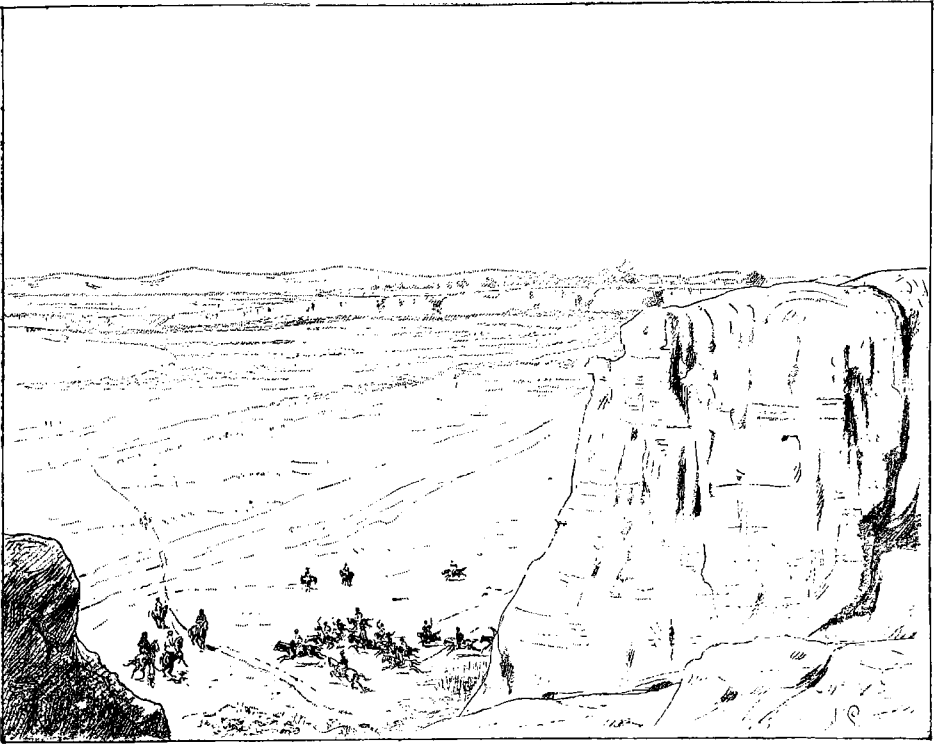
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through the air, but are driven off by the magpies and rooks, which then fight among themselves. At last the rooks begin to fight each other, and they enter into the struggle with great determination. Not one of them flies away, and when they are tired with the combat they go to rest upon the cliff or upon a tree, returning with renewed vigour to the battle-field.



KAKAÏTI.

But the horsemen ride off, taking the goat-skin with them, thus illustrating the truth of the proverb about catching your hare before you cook him.

Beyond the Surkhane are visible the steppe and the mountains of Shirabad, and one of the natives says, "This is where the Naimans live, Uzbegs who are not up to much."

November 22nd.

We start under a cloudy sky, following the river, the banks of which are well cultivated.

As far as Min-Tout, at the extremity of the large and small aryks, we see large or small villages, which are like fruit hanging at the extremity of the branches and sprigs which diverge from the trunk of the Surkhane.

Before reaching Min-Tout, where we cross to the right bank, we notice some two-humped camels, which we had not seen for a long time. Their presence in this country of dromedaries surprises us not a little, for they make us feel as if we had left the warm countries. They are smaller than the dromedaries, with longer hair and smaller heads. But they have two humps, two "silos" in which they store a double reserve of fat in order to be able to resist the severe winters and endless snow-storms (*bouranes*).

"To whom do they belong?"

"To the Kazaks" (Khirgiz).

"Where do these Kazaks live?"

"In the Kulab. Wherever you see white camels, you may be sure they belong to Kazaks."

The Kulab is a mountainous region to the east, near Pamir; it is very cold there, for the altitude is very great, and only northern animals can live there. In mountainous countries, one finds northern climates as one ascends; altitude is latitude converted into height.

At Min-Tout (the thousand mulberry-trees, probably so named because mulberry-trees formerly abounded there), we cross the Surkhane, with its steep cliffs full of crevices, and we are again in the barren steppe, in a regular Central Asian country. One might fancy one's self near the Ablatum or the Tedjene, in the neighbourhood of Sarakhs.

Rose-bushes wave about in the bed of the stream, which eddies