



MOUNTED KHIVAN AND BOKHARIOT.

THE SONS OF THE STEPPE.

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THE region with whose inhabitants we have now to do lies between the Irtish and the Oxus, and descends from the parallel of London to the mountains of the Pamir: an area amounting to one-twentieth only of the Russian Empire, but larger than any two of the other states of Europe. Roughly speaking, we may call it Russian Turkistan, with the provinces added of Akmollinsk and Semipalatinsk, which two were formerly part of western Siberia. The surface is of the most varied character. After the Himalayas it contains some of the highest mountains in

the world. It possesses, too, enormous plains, fruitful valleys, and barren wastes, as well as sandy, brackish, and marshy tracts. More than half the soil is desert; nearly all the remainder is pastured by nomads, and the portion under cultivation is only about two per cent. of the whole.

The climate of this region is as varied as its surface; for in the north it is sometimes as cold as in Greenland, whilst in the south, in July, the heat equals that of the Cape Verde Islands, which are nearer the equator by 1700 miles. In fact, there is

МОНТА АОНКАРА





A KIRGHESE OF THE ADAEF TRIBE.

a difference of as much as 122° Fahrenheit between the temperature of the hottest and coldest days. Dryness is the peculiar characteristic of the climate. Rain in the summer, except in the mountain districts, is an exceedingly rare phenomenon.

One result of this want of humidity in the Turkistan mountains, valleys, and plains is the gradual drying up of the soil during the present geological period, as testified to by the basins of the Syr-Daria and Oxus rivers, wherein are seen old river-beds partially filled up, while numerous rivers that of old were tributaries of some principal stream now stop half-way and lose themselves in the sands. Small lakes have evaporated by hundreds and by thousands, leaving behind only beds

of salt. Great lakes like the Balkash, the Aral, and the Caspian have shrunk; others have disappeared.

By reason of this desiccation a large portion of the country has been transformed into Steppe, not only in the lowlands, but also in the mountains, where a depression in the surface is often a Steppe, with vegetation singularly limited both as to the number of species and their period of growth. The climate, in fact, in such cases, is scarcely more favorable to vegetation than in the arctic regions, so that the natives of Siberia, of whom I wrote in a former paper, have this point in common with the children of the Steppe, that the yearly development of plants is limited in both regions to about three months;



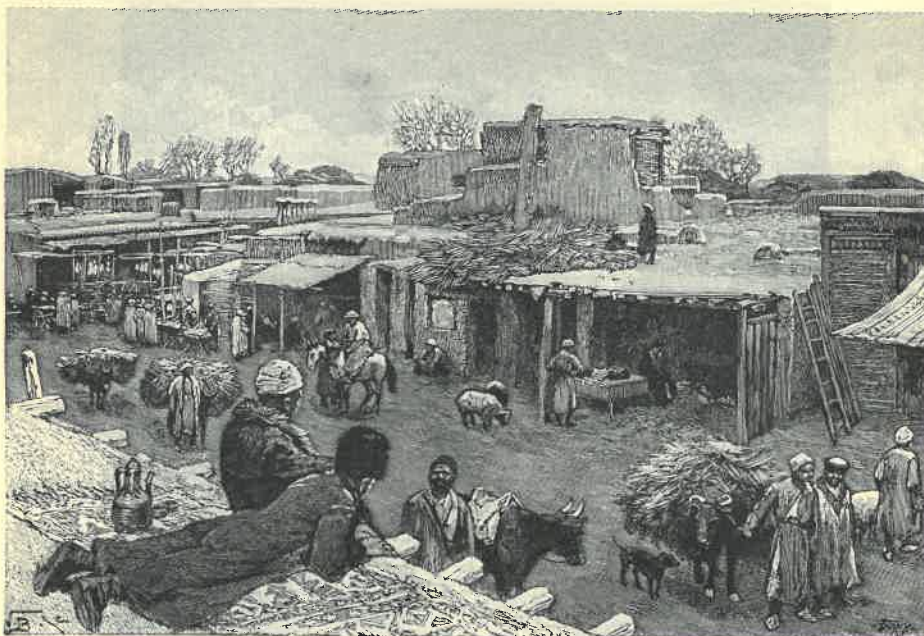
A KIRGHESI BRIDE.

the Adaf Kirghese, who wander in the vicinity of the Sea of Aral, made of sheepskin, something in the shape of a baby's hood, the flaps covering the shoulders. It was by no means elegant in appearance, but a great protection from the wind of the Steppe to a man perched for days and nights on the hump of a camel. The foot-coverings are slippers in summer and leather boots in winter, for both sexes, those for women being colored, and often embroidered.

A Kirghese is proudest, however, of his girdle, often richly covered with silver, and from which hang bags and wallets for money, powder, bullets, knife, and tinder-box, or flint and steel, but not a tobacco pouch, the Central Asian represent-

ative for this being a small gourd, which serves for a snuff bottle. Finger-rings I saw among them of silver, and in the Ili Valley I bought from the thumb of a native an archer's ring of jade.

The women dress much like the men, except that the under-garment resembles a close-fitting shirt. Above this they wear a *khalat*. The poor women swathe their heads with calico, forming a compound turban and bib, but the rich wear sometimes a square head-dress of huge proportions enveloped in a white veil, or again an embroidered cap from which falls a kerchief of silk. The hair is plaited in small braids, and adorned with coins and tinkling ornaments. To these may or may not be added necklaces, bracelets, etc., but



TARANCHI MARKET AT KULDJA.

there is one thing rarely omitted from female costume, which is a silver amulet hanging on the breast, in the form of a kernel, cylinder, or triangle, containing Muhammadan writing or perhaps prayers, and given by the husband at the time of marriage.

The various circumstances connected with marriage among the Kirghese remind one strongly of patriarchal times. Fifteen is the marriageable age, and preliminaries are commenced by the parents of the bridegroom sending a deputation of match-makers to the parents of the bride, offering presents, and among them a dish specially prepared for the occasion of liver and mutton fat, which signifies that they mean matrimony. After this the compliment is returned by presents and a similar dish sent by the girl's parents to those of the bridegroom. The bride's father then summons a meeting of kinsmen to consider the *kalim*, or gross amount to be paid for the bride. The *kalim* may consist of forty, sixty, or one hundred sheep, or from nine to forty-seven head of cattle, besides which *kalim* the bridegroom has to give at least two presents of camels, horses, cows, fire-arms, or *khalats*. These

things decided, the bride's father sends to the bridegroom's *aul* for the *kalim* and one of the presents, after which the bridegroom takes the other present and goes to see the bride for the first time. Not that he can easily change his mind when things have gone thus far, for the delivery of his present virtually seals the marriage contract, and he is so firmly betrothed that should he die before the time of marriage, the intended wife has to go home to his parents, and be taken for the wife of the next son. *Vice versa*, if during the period of betrothal the girl should die, her parents are bound to give instead their next daughter, or in default of one to return the *kalim* and pay a fine.

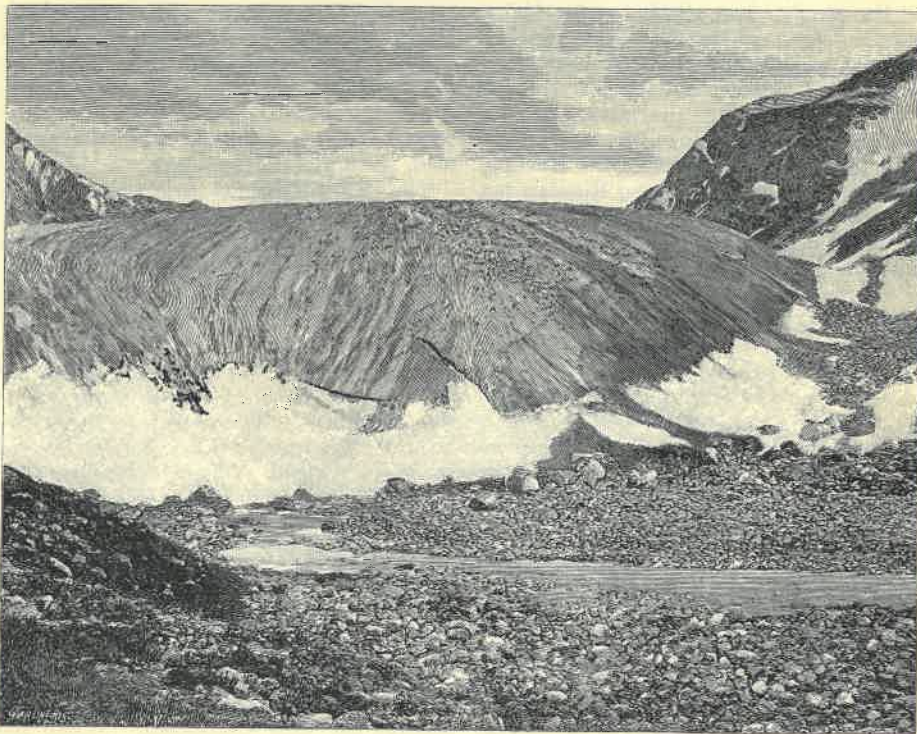
When the period of betrothal is at an end, the bridegroom goes to the *aul* of his bride, who is given up by her parents, with a dowry of a tent, a camel or riding-horse, cattle, and a bride's head-dress, besides a bed, crockery, and a trunk of wearing apparel. On the wedding night the *mulah*, or priest, places the bride and bridegroom in the midst of a tent, puts before them a covered cup of water, and begins the prayers. Then he asks the contracting parties if it is with their full consent

they engage themselves to be married, and three times gives them the water to drink. Mullahs sometimes put in the water vessel an arrow with a tuft of hair tied thereto from the mane of the bride's horse, or one of her ribbons; others dip therein a paper of written prayers. The happy completion of a marriage is followed among the Kirghese by feasting and games, and then the newly married depart to the bridegroom's *aul*, with the camels carrying the trousseau, and the portion of his wealth which a father gives to each of his daughters on her marriage.

The Ili Valley is a continuation of the Steppe, southeast of Lake Balkash, running in the shape of a wedge between the Ala-Tau and Thian-Shan mountains, the base of the triangle being open to the Steppe. It is the most accessible depression by which the great plateau of Central Asia may be reached from the Turkistan plains. Hence the district about Kuldja has served as a resting-place for the vast hordes whose migrations, conquests, and defeats have formed so important a chapter in the history of Asia. Thus the Ili

Valley has become a half-way house between the Turanian races of Central Asia and the Mongol races of China. Here meet the settled Mussulman, Taranchi, and Dungan, with the Buddhist Sibo, Manchu, and Chinese, as well as the nomad Muhammadan Kirghese and the lamaist Kalmuk.

The most numerous of the Ili populations are the Taranchis, so called from their occupation as agriculturists, or millet sowers, *taran* meaning millet. Long contact with the Chinese has modified some of their Turkish customs, for, except the mullahs, the men do not wear turbans, but fur caps, whilst women and girls adorn their heads with low cylindrical hats having conical tops. I saw ordinary patterns displayed in large numbers costing 20s. each, but wives of sultans have their caps adorned with jewels, sometimes to the value of over £100. Now and then one sees among the women a pleasant face, but they are all browned, being accustomed from childhood to work in the fields—a striking contrast to their Muhammadan sisters further west, who



GLACIER OF THE KORA.

remain shut up in the house. The males shave their heads, and one of our curious sights in the bazar was a baby boy squalling under this operation. Married women braid their hair in two, maidens in three, long plaits, and both blacken their eyebrows, but do not paint. Most of the Taranchis speak Chinese, but their own tongue is eastern Turki.

The Taranchi bazar in Kuldja has shops somewhat more roomy than those of Central Asia generally, and the street is not covered from rain or sun. It is paved with small stones, and enlivened by mounted horsemen, as well as bullocks laden with brushwood, timber, and fruit.

In this bazar I bought my first Central Asian grapes and nectarines. Apricots ripen at Kuldja in the beginning of July, and we were too late for them; but we found some late peaches that ripen early in August, flat in form, about an inch and a half in diameter and half an inch in thickness. They tasted fairly well, but there was little flesh on the stone. Vegetables and fruit in this bazar were abundant, large melons selling for 5 farthings each, the best apples—good-looking but tasteless pippins—at the same price, and the peaches just alluded to for $4\frac{1}{2}d.$ a dozen. These prices for local produce were not exceptional, for eggs cost from 5*d.* to 8*d.* a hundred, and fowls from $1\frac{1}{4}d.$ to $2\frac{1}{2}d.$ each. Before the advent of the Russians, chickens cost only a halfpenny each. Manufactured goods from Europe, however, were dear, and even Russian tea cost from 2*s.* to 6*s.* per pound. Throughout the Kuldja emporiums there is ceaseless movement, bustle, and noise, for the vendors of wares scream out to the purchasers, and amongst the inevitables are sheep and dogs, as well as crowds of children, some half naked and others wholly so, chasing one another about and increasing the general hubbub of the restless scene.

When I was in the Ili Valley the numerous peoples mentioned above were under Russian rule, but Kuldja has since been given back to the Chinese, so that many of the races just mentioned do not properly fall within the scope of this paper, but there are still on Russian soil a number of Taranchis who have preferred to remain under the government of the Tsar rather than return to that of their Asiatic rulers.

On leaving the Ili Valley I drove across the plains and came in sight of the northernmost range of the Thian-Shan Moun-

tains, the home of the Kara-Kirghese. The Thian-Shan mountain system is the grandest on the northern slope of the Asiatic Continent, whether regard be had to its area or its length, the height of its crests, the abundance of its snows, or the massiveness of its glaciers. Up to thirty years ago science knew nothing of this vast mountain mass, which now is found to be 1660 miles long, with its highest peaks rising everywhere above the snow line. The average height of these dominant peaks varies from 16,000 to 18,000 feet, and some of them exceed 21,000. The entire mass is estimated as twenty-five times larger than the Swiss Alps, and as forming a protuberance upon the earth's surface considerably larger than all the mountains of Europe put together. The total superficies would cover as much country as the whole of France and Spain.

Almost throughout the dominant range and in certain of its spurs, as in the mountains about the head waters of the Kora, there are glaciers, the number of which is computed to be not less than 8000. Snow bridges also in the Thian-Shan are often met with, much below the glaciers, namely, at 5000 feet or lower. These sometimes attain to a mile and a third in length, and one hundred feet in thickness. They are produced by avalanches, and therefore the snow in them is mixed with rubble brought down together with the snow from the surrounding crags.

The Kara-Kirghese are essentially a nation of shepherds and breeders of cattle, and think it a "come-down" in life when compelled to resort to settled occupations. They are not so rich as their brethren in the plains. Very few own as many as 2000 horses or 3000 sheep. Also they have fewer camels; but, on the other hand, possess an excellent breed of oxen for traversing the mountains. Their cows are large, but do not yield much milk. Yaks are kept by them instead. Their cattle-breeding claims far less labor than agriculture, but is exposed to great risks. For the support of a nomad family for a year are required eleven head of large and ten of small cattle, and to provide hay for the winter consumption even of this number exceeds the working power of one household.

I was much interested to see some of the Kirghese on the march. Their wanderings are thus conducted. When the pasture in a neighborhood is eaten, one or



INTERIOR OF A FAMILY TENT.

two of the young men are sent to select a suitable spot for another encampment, and to clean out the wells. This done, the women pack the tents and the men form the cattle in droves. The camp is ready and starts before dawn, the good women of the family riding in front. I met one old lady in this honorable position, mounted astride a bullock and looking anything but graceful. After her came the other women, variously mounted on the top of carpets, teakettles, tents, etc., the whole being made to wear, as far as possible, a festive aspect. The length of a stage is from 13 to 17 miles, and the *aul* traverses about 25 miles in 24 hours.

On arriving at the place of encampment it is the office of the wife to put up the tent. I chanced to see a woman begin to do so, and would not stir from the spot till I had witnessed the whole operation. The principal parts of a *kibitka*, or tent, are large pieces of felt to cover a frame-work that consists of lintel and side posts for a door, and pieces of trellis-

work surmounted by poles that meet in the centre. On this trellis-work are suspended arms, clothes, bags, basins, harness, and cooking utensils. Not that there is a large variety, however, of the last, for most of the cooking is done in a large open saucepan that stands on a tripod over a fire in the middle of the tent. Crockery-ware is not abundant, being of hazardous carriage, and metal goods are not cheap, so that leather has to do duty not only for making bottles (specially those for carrying *koumiss*), but also pails, some of which are furnished with a spout. I met with no small saucepans or teakettles of English shape, their place being supplied by *kurgans*, or water-ewers, somewhat resembling a coffee-pot. Round the walls of the tent are piled boxes, saddles, rugs, and bales of carpet, against which the occupants lean, the head of the household sitting opposite the door, and in front of him the wife in attendance.

I was honored with an invitation to dine in one of these tents, the dishes being



WELLS IN THE "HUNGRY STEPPE."

put before us according to our rank. I heard nothing of grace before meat, but I never saw anything to exceed the alacrity with which the dishes were cleared. Hands were knives and fingers were forks, the meat being torn from the bones as by the teeth of hungry dogs. It is considered polite for a Kirghese superior to take a handful of pieces of meat and stuff them into the mouth of an inferior guest, an elegance I saw practised on another, but from which, mercifully, I myself was excused.

Leaving the Kazaks of the plains, the Kara-Kirghese of the mountains, and the Chinese races of the Ili Valley, I went further south among the Iranian and Uzbek populations in the Zarafshan Valley, and visited the cities of Samarkand, Bokhara, and Khiva. Our route thither from the northern crest of the Thian-Shan lay across the "Hungry Steppe." Traces of old canals are here and there visible, showing that certain parts were formerly cultivated, but with these exceptions we know from the accounts of Chinese travellers of more than 1200 years ago that this Steppe was much the same then as now. Not far west of Murza-Rabat the traveller leaves behind him the Steppe and enters the most fertile oasis under Russian rule in Central Asia, namely, the valley of the gold-strewing Zarafshan. The valley is full of ethnological interest,

its peoples being at least eight in number, namely, Tajiks, Uzbeks, Persians, Jews, Hindus, Bohemians, Afghans, and Arabs. The Tajiks are the aboriginal inhabitants of the country.

The upper end of the valley, about the sources of the Zarafshan, is called Kohistan, and here live many of the mountain Tajiks, who are called *Galtchas*. They, in common with the inhabitants of Karategin, Darwaz, Shignan, and some other parts of the Pamir, speak dialects of Persian, and seem to have been driven to the mountains of Central Asia as were the Britons into Wales.

The *Galtchas* are allowed by the Russians almost to govern themselves. Each village has its elder, who bends to the decision of the majority. They are divided into two classes—the mullahs, or educated, and the poor. When sick they have recourse to medicaments and exorcism, as is to some extent the case with others of the Central Asian tribes. When a man dies his body is wrapped in a mat, placed in a small narrow trench, and covered with branches and earth. On returning from the burial a feast is given, and the family goes into mourning, but the widow may marry again after seventy days. Morality is said to stand high among the *Galtchas*, the adulterer being turned out of his house, and his goods confiscated. Polygamy is permitted, but the *Galtchas* seldom have



MOSQUE AT KHIVA.

more than one wife. Slavery appears never to have existed among them.

Very different is it in this last respect with the Tajiks and Persians of the plains, for the latter are descended from captives taken in Merv, and brought hither for slaves by the Emir of Bokhara in the middle of the last century. The Tajiks form by far the largest portion of the population of Samarkand, and represent the industrial class. They weave and knit, do blacksmith's and copper-smith's work, tanning, carpentering, joining, and turning, also boot-making, harness and saddle making, as well as dyeing,

pottery, and needle-work. Their products, however, are very inferior to those made in Europe, the implements in use in the factories being of the most primitive and unsatisfactory kind. The Tajiks weave both silk and cotton, but rarely hair or wool, except in the mountains. Among their products are striped glazed materials of cotton, of which a workman can weave about nine yards a day. For this he receives two and a half pence wages, though some weavers can earn as much as six-pence a day.

The sights in Bokhara led me to think of a visit to one of the kings of Israel.