Turkistan from time immemorial. If you want to brew it you catch a number of the poisonous spiders, put them in a glass, and throw in some scraps of dried apples or apricots. The furious brutes fling themselves on the food and bite into it. They thus inject their poison into the dry fruit, which you then mix with fermented grapes. Thirty or forty tarantulas make about a quart of the deadly brew. A tiny glass of this liqueur is enough to drive a man insane. Half an hour after he has drunk it the victim is so paralysed that he cannot move; an hour later he is raving mad.

The caretaker of the caravanserai used to dope his guests with this tarantula schnapps, and as soon as paralysis set in he threw them to the bear, who did the rest. The Russians condemned the man to death, but in the night the Sarts broke into the prison and fetched him out into the desert. They tied him with ropes to the saddles of two swift camels, stuffed pepper in their behinds so that the infuriated animals dashed out into the desert dragging the body of the hundredfold murderer after them. A few days later his skeleton was found, picked clean by the vultures.

I listened with great interest to the old man's tales. He had been born in the mountains and reared amongst robbers. He frankly admitted that he had formerly belonged to Madamin Beg's bandit gang and had later fought with Enver against the Reds. I listened eagerly, thinking I might at last get the final truth about Enver Pasha's death. My host was dropping off to sleep by now and in answer to my questions murmured: 'Next time you get to Deh i Nau, ask Agabekoff. He knows better than any one.'

Next morning I set out uphill once more along the

banks of the Izfairan. Singing birds of every sort were twittering in the branches of the junipers. The rain had apparently wakened them to new life, for there had been none to be heard before. I had met neither nomads nor goods caravans since I had left Qizil Qaya. The mountain plateau was silent and deserted. The loess had now given place to pure rock. Every now and then I heard the thunder-like roar of a stone-avalanche in the distance. As the sun mounted, its burning rays poured vertically down into my narrow gorge, and in a twinkling dew and rain dried up. At noon I halted for a rest, cooked a little rice in mutton fat, and took a dip in the ice-cold water of the torrent. I had taken off my clothes and shoes and resumed my pilgrimage as naked as Father Adam. I wanted to continue the march until I had found a suitable camping-place. Night had fallen. My two donkeys stopped at intervals, as if to remind me that it was high time for bed. Soon the moon rose and the high-lying glaciers gleamed with milk-white magic light. The gorge opened out a little, stones and boulders merged into grass, and presently I saw lights ahead. I slipped on my cloak and went up to the first house. The owner led me along to the *chai-khana* and on inquiry I learned that I had reached the little *qishlaq* of Chikoi. (Plate 40.)

The next day was bitter. Yesterday I had been marching naked even after sundown. To-day I put on my two padded cloaks one on top of the other and still was nearly frozen. Not till midday when the road, which had climbed steadily up, was some 750 feet above the river, and the sun shone straight down into the narrow crack of my ravine, was it warm enough for me to take the cloaks off and throw them on the donkey's back again. High above me there was a more than life-size

human figure in ancient-looking dress, carved in the rock. I tethered the donkeys and climbed up to examine the giant relief. I knocked off a few specimens of the adjacent rock and found it was of an extra hard type of stone, yet the figure had suffered seriously from weathering. All sharp edges had been rounded off and parts of it had cracked. In places where it was sheltered from the wind, the original form had been preserved uninjured. It must have been hundreds of years since some Mongol or Uzbeg artist had here exercised his skill. What strange impulse had prompted him to choose this remote and lonely mountain track?

As evening drew on, I heard the notes of a horn and I soon found myself standing in front of an almost wholly ruined mill. (Plate 38.) The miller's living-room was in a cave below the water-wheel and he was glad enough to share it with me. He complained that for the last few years custom had been very slack. In olden days dozens of caravans crossed the Dengiz Bai every day in summer, but since Soviet rule had come the route was being less and less used, and the nomads had betaken themselves into Chinese Turkistan, where they enjoyed more freedom. The caravans always used to carry grain and rice for the journey and none of them would pass without getting some flour ground for themselves in his mill.

The miller warned me that about an hour's march farther on the Izfairan had carried away the bridge, and that I should have some trouble in getting myself and my animals across the river. At my request he came with me to the place, and plunging breast high into the raging water he *carried* my donkeys across one by one on his shoulders! I offered him five roubles for his trouble, but he refused them with a laugh, saying that Allah

would one day reward him, for the Quran enjoined on every man to offer help to travellers. I had difficulty in persuading him to accept even a handful of Farghana tobacco, though this must have been a welcome and costly rarity to him.

After the non-existent bridge the road widened and developed into a regular highway. I heard later in Jidinji that this part of the road had been built in 1916 and 1917 by Austrian and Hungarian prisoners of war from Skobeleff. It was designed to follow the Izfairan all the way to Qizil Qaya, but it was never finished. The Communist Revolution came and war broke out between the bands of Sarts and Tajiks. Not far from Surmach a Qirghiz showed me a small graveyard in which thirty-seven Austrians and Hungarians are buried; they had been killed by accidents or died of sickness when working on the road. So even here, at a height of close on 10,000 feet, in this most remote corner of the Russian Empire, and close to the Chinese frontier, victims of the World War are sleeping their last sleep. A few simple wooden crosses bore illegible inscriptions; I was not able to decipher even the names of the dead. I stood for a long time in front of the tumbled-in graves of my fellow countrymen who had been fated to die nearly 4,000 miles from home.

Before long I struck the first advance posts of the Qara Qirghiz and my further wanderings led me through their grazing territories. Donkeys, horses, and camels supply their only means of subsistence. The mares' milk yields their beloved *qumiz*, one of the mainstays of life both to nomads and mountain-dwellers. The milk is filled into sheepskins and rocked about until it ferments and becomes thick and buttery. Camels' and sheep's milk

provide the scarcely less beloved *airan*, which, in the mountains, is eaten mixed with snow or ice. The Qara Qirghiz know nothing of butter-making, which is practised only in the oases and the lower valleys.

I put in two days rest here to refresh myself and my asses. I should have been only too glad to linger longer in so idyllic a spot. As soon as the Qirghiz were convinced that I was no Bolshevist they showed me the greatest confidence and hospitality, and a sheep was slaughtered and roasted in my honour. I watched the preparations for a festive feed with acute interest. A deep trench was dug and almost completely filled with juniper wood, which was then set on fire. When nothing but glowing coals remained, a log was laid across, to the under side of which the cleaned carcase of the sheep was slung. The trench was then completely covered in with earth and branches. About two hours later the perfectly roasted sheep was taken out and divided. The *aqsaqal* and I, as the guests of honour, were each allotted a hind leg, while the balance of the meat was shared between the remaining nine. In less time than it takes to tell, the eleven of us—including some children—had polished off the whole of a fairly large sheep. Enormous earthen jars of *qumiz* and *airan* were dragged to the fore and disposed of almost as quickly.

For the last twenty years the Qirghiz of the steppes had been more or less under the domination of the Russians; not so the Qirghiz of the mountains. On the northern slopes of the greater and Lesser Alai, in the Great Alai Valley, and on the Pamirs the Qara Qirghiz have continued to live the same independent existence as their forebears in the days of the Golden Horde. Subject to no man, free of all taxes and all restrictions, they

trek through the country with their flocks at their own sweet will. If I was to get to know the genuine Qirghiz life I must push on into the valley of the Alai. Who knows, thought I, how long their freedom there will last? Perhaps in ten, perhaps in twenty years, the victorious march of western civilization will have destroyed the last traces of their natural nomad life.

The Qirghiz are divided into two: the Qirghiz Qazaq and the Qara (Black) Qirghiz. The Qazaq—who have of course no connection whatever with 'Cossacks'—range from the Volga to the Ebi Nor in Dzungaria and from Afghanistan to Siberia, while the Qara Qirghiz consider the mountains of Turkistan and western China as their hereditary grazing grounds. The greater bulk of the Black Qirghiz, numbering perhaps 300,000 souls, live in the Alai, the Farghana mountains, and the Pamirs. They profess themselves Sunni Muhammadans, but are not unduly afflicted with religion. Ceremonial ablutions, prayers, and Quranic observances are as good as unknown amongst them. What they associate with Muhammad's teaching is the ceremony of circumcision, the shaving of the men's heads, and a passion for religious legends and fairy stories, to which they listen with delight. For the rest, they are superstitious in a very high degree. Their *baqsis* (medicine men or magician-priests) exercise a great deal more influence on their everyday life than even the most respected mullas. Contrary to Qurānic injunction, their women go about unveiled. The reason of this may be that their wandering life permits them no mosques or madrasahs where they could hear the Qurān expounded or be exhorted to follow its teachings.

The magician-priests are their doctors, and are sup-

posed to banish ill luck, conjure good fortune, and control the weather. To keep up their prestige they walk on glowing iron, eat burning charcoal, and swallow nails, whips, and broken glass. From ashes and bones they foretell the future, and they brew magic draughts for the miscellaneous contingencies of human life.

Despite the sketchiness of their religion, the morals of the Qirghiz are very high. They are honourable and faithful. Their hospitality is exceeded only by that of the Yomut Turkomans. They have no shadow of piety towards the dead. Now and then you come across the mound of a Qirghiz saint, decorated with horse-tails; you can then be very sure that it marks the grave of a powerful magician or a famous *batir*. A *batir* is a cattle-thief who has accumulated riches by his skill in stealing horses. His grateful heirs then erect a gravemound, or even a mud mausoleum, to his honoured memory. Robbery and horse-stealing, when committed against another tribe, are considered a virtue rather than a crime, a fact perfectly consistent with the lofty code of honour above mentioned. Except where they come in contact with the law as administered by State judges in civilized centres their legal code is well adapted to their philosophy of life. They never willingly seek redress in ordinary law courts, but prefer the judgement of their own tribal assemblies. The highest penalty that can be imposed is a *qun*, namely a fine of five hundred sheep, fifty horses, and twenty-five camels; this serves also as the unit of punishment. According to the gravity of the offence, a whole, half, or quarter *qun* is imposed. The whole family of the offender, the whole *aul*, even the whole tribe, is responsible for paying up the fine. If a man is condemned because of a theft he must not only restore the stolen

property and pay the fine, but forfeit his own weapons and clothes to the family of his victim.

The whole wealth of the Qirghiz lies in their flocks and herds, to which they owe everything they possess. They weave clothes and carpets from the hair of their camels, and they also trample it out to make their felt rugs, which they need to hang round the walls of their yurts and to spread over the floor. In districts where timber is scarce they dry camel and ass dung to make the fuel with which their yurts are heated through the winter. Carts are unknown, and all their goods are carried about on camels, which are much stronger than the African or Persian camel. A load of four to five hundredweight is the average, and with this a Qirghiz camel will cheerfully march thirty to forty miles a day. Though they keep large numbers of horses they use them only for hunting or playing games on horseback. When they are on the move the herds of horses follow the march unladen.

They have immense numbers of sheep of the fat-tailed kind, the tails of which yield on an average 30 or 40 lbs. of fat each. There are families who possess 20,000 head of sheep and more, while their stock of cows is very small. Where the height of the grazing and camping grounds runs to over 6,000 feet, yaks are the usual beasts of burden. These yaks are of Tibetan breed; they are coal-black and look most sinister and terrifying. Their looks belie them, however, for they are in fact quite harmless and extraordinarily good tempered. No other mammal gives milk so good or with so high a fat-content, but they can only be kept at, or above, a height of 6,000 feet. At lower altitudes they perish.

After my two days rest I quitted Langar, 6,600 feet

above sea-level. Light snow had fallen during the night but the Turkistan sun had melted it again before midday. The road now mounted between dark rock walls and lofty juniper woods alongside the roaring Izfairan. The uncanny red rock cliffs are so steep and high that it is only when the sun reaches its zenith that any sunshine penetrates these deep gorges.

The side valleys of the Alai now become larger and more frequent. At the little hamlet of Jatrabad the red river I mentioned above flows in from one of the side valleys and dyes the Izfairan for the whole of its course to the valley far below. I left my baggage and my two donkeys in the *chai-khana* at Jatrabad, to go and explore the valley of the red river. After about an hour's march it widened out into a rich and well-watered meadow where a large nomad family of a hundred yurts or so had pitched their camp. A three hours' march brought me to the place where the unnamed stream acquired its colour. Above this spot a bright, clear spring gives birth to a pure crystal waterfall, which tumbles into the valley to flow through a stretch of brilliantly red earth over three hundred yards wide. The water must absorb enormous quantities of this red soil, but without appearing to diminish its mass. In order to be able to justify my existence as a State geologist—in case the authorities should later make any inquiry into my pursuits—I took some samples of the red earth with me. It is amazing with what riches Mother Nature has endowed the mountain world of Turkistan. This one tiny valley contains millions and millions of pounds of the purest natural mineral dye, absolutely ready for use! There must also be quantities of mercury in the immediate neighbourhood, for this is always found in close conjunction with

cinnabar. On the way back to Jatrabad four great eagles rose so close in front of me that the wind from their wings swept across my face. They had their eyrie on a jutting cliff many hundred feet above. They flew up and alighted on it, gazing down with astonishment on the human intruder who had disturbed their peace.

Next morning I resumed my climb towards the *chai-khana* of Jidinji, the last rest-house of any kind before the actual pass itself. The walls of rock tower up a full 3,000 feet and the narrow precarious track winds up their face in countless zigzags. I reached the snow line just before Jidinji and when I got to the *chai-khana* I found it deep in snow. It was crowded with people, for a large Qirghiz caravan coming up from the Alai valley was halting here to rest before engaging on the downward march into Farghana. A few groups of Tajiks from the Qara Tegin region were also in possession. They had come on foot from Khoqand and were returning to their own mountains. Next morning I rose bright and early for my final assault on the pass. Late the night before yet another caravan, laden with rice and cotton, had arrived; it was also bound for the Dengiz Bai, en route for Daraut Qurghan. I attached myself to it and we started off together.

After an hour's going the valley widened greatly into a high plateau. We were soon in the middle of a strange snow-landscape unaccountably decorated with long icicles. When the sun topped Mount Kauffmann (to-day known as Mount Lenin) and flooded its snow-fields and glaciers with rosy light, I recognized that these bunches of icicles concealed bushes of dwarf juniper—a very forest of them, of considerable extent. After leaving the juniper woods behind us, the Qirghiz turned off into a side valley and halted on the bank of the Iskandar Kul

—the Lake of Alexander. Oddly enough, there are no less than five Lakes of Alexander in Turkistan, and each of them claims to have seen Alexander the Great camping beside its waters. Our lake was stiff with fish; it almost looked as if it were used as an artificial hatchery. I marvelled at this, and the Qirghiz explained that it was a holy lake. Any impious person who ventured to eat one of the sacred fish would inevitably die.

When the Qirghiz marched off again I purposely remained behind, not to hurt their susceptibilities by letting them see me catch one of the fishes of the holy lake. I made a fishing net out of a handkerchief and soon had a small fish, seven or eight inches long, flapping about in it. I killed it, wrapped it in snow, and folded it in a cloth. Later I dried it in the sun without gutting it, and months afterwards I gave it to a Balti doctor in Charjui. I told him my story of the holy lake and he set about to analyse my catch. While doing so he thoughtlessly threw the dried innards out of the window into the courtyard, where his watchdog greedily devoured them. Half an hour later the unfortunate animal died after the most dreadful howling. The doctor honoured him with a post mortem and diagnosed heart-failure due to some unknown poison which had also caused decomposition of the blood. This revealed the secret of the holy lake and its sacred fish. Granted the deep-rooted superstitions of the Turkistan natives, it is not to be wondered at that after a few people had died as a consequence of eating these poisonous fish, they should have dubbed the lake 'holy'.

The road on was one of toil and strain, for my feet sank in at almost every step. At last, about four in the afternoon, we reached the pass at a height of some 12,500 feet. The last 600 or 700 feet of climbing over an im-

mense moraine was a severe tax on the lungs. Giddiness and headache accompanied the mountain sickness. The pass itself is a cleft between steep rock walls which cut off any immediate view. When I struck along the track to the right, after getting free of the rock wall, the sight that met my eyes was all the more overwhelming. There was a clear and distant view away to south and east and west. In the south-east towered the mighty peaks of the lofty Pamir plateau, the so-called Roof of the World, lifting its glaciers and its fields of ice like gigantic magic fortresses to heaven. In the east the summit of Mount Kauffmann, 23,386 feet high, glimmered a blueish white, with Qizil Aghin alongside it on the left; from west to east ran the great chain of the Trans-Alai. In the north-east rose Mount Baba, 19,500 feet, the highest point of the Alai. In the west, like a blue-green ribbon the great ice-field of the Zarafshan glacier wound its way downwards to the valley below.

Late that night I reached the small, half-ruined mud village of Artaq, which is already across the border in the province of Qara Tegin. I had some difficulty in finding shelter in the *chai-khana*. Every self-respecting bandit would protest if I damned the rest-house of Artaq as a den of robbers. I have spent the night in many filthy and questionable holes in the course of my wanderings, but the *chai-khana* of Artaq easily heads the list. The *chai-khana-chik* shared his only room with his donkeys, sheep, and hens. To mitigate the savage cold to some extent a great fire of juniper was blazing in the centre of the room, and despite the many gaps in roof and walls its biting smoke could only very partially escape, and my eyes watered continually. I should have preferred to pitch camp in the open but the cold was too

severe. With my contribution of two donkeys we had altogether four donkeys, three sheep and a dozen hens in the wretched hole of eight or nine square yards. To spread out my bedding I had to sweep aside the animals' dung. This greatly surprised my Qirghiz host, who assured me that donkey dung was far the best preventive of lice and bugs.

A caravan road runs north-east from Daraut Qurghan through the valley of the Qizil Su, which is twelve or thirteen miles wide. At the height of about 9,000 feet the road divides. One branch leads via Gulcha to Andijan, the other via Irkishtam to Kashgar in Chinese Turkistan, crossing in its path the Tüyä Murun Pass at over 11,000 feet. It is interesting to note that the Qizil Su changes its name when it leaves Turki-speaking territory; in Bukharan territory, after being joined by the Muk Su, it adopts the Persian name of Surkh Ab, both names in their respective languages describing it as Crimson Water. As the Surkh Ab it ultimately flows into the Amu Darya, Mother of Rivers.

I was now free to choose. I could either take the road towards the north-east, through the Alai valley by Sari Tash and the Qizil Art Pass up on to the Pamir plateau and thence reach the province of Bukhara again passing the Qara Kul, or on the other hand I could follow the Qizil Su downstream and get to Bukhara via Qurghan Tübe. In spite of the lateness of the season, I chose the first and longer route, up the Qizil Su, because it was unknown to me.

I again allowed myself a two-day halt in Daraut Qurghan both to get my pretty tattered wardrobe put into some sort of order and to take some sorely needed rest. (Plates 42 and 43.)

IX

Through the Alai Valley on to the Pamirs

A fairly good caravan road leads upstream along the Qizil Su, between the Alai and Trans-Alai ranges. It mounts pretty steadily through the loveliest valley in Asia. On the left the high rock cliffs of the Alai plunge steeply down into the valley, while on the opposite side, the right, rise the wooded mountain sides, to change presently into the precipices and ice-fields of the Trans-Alai.

The valley itself is a stretch of flowery alpine meadow of inconceivable beauty. Though the steep rock faces on the left were covered deep in snow, rare flowers of every brilliant colour bloomed in profusion amidst the grass at their base. Hundreds and hundreds of black Qirghiz yurts dotted the pastures, camels and yaks grazed peacefully side by side, flocks of innumerable sheep scrambled like chamois amongst the cliffs and rocks, while troops of tiny horse-herds drove their charges to the river to water them.

Here is the last stronghold of Qirghiz freedom. The Qara Qirghiz have most unjustly won a place in literature as wild and savage nomads. They are not unlike their own yaks, sinister and terrifying enough to look at, but just as good natured and harmless on a nearer acquaintance. (Plates 44, 45, and 46.) They take the wan-

dering stranger into their tents with eager hospitality, so long as he respects their habits and obeys their laws. The remoteness and inaccessibility of their country has so far protected them from being conquered either by Bukharans or by Russians, and has shielded them from contact with the latter's civilization—much to the advantage of the Qara Qirghiz!

Years before, in 1919 to be exact, some Austrians had found their way over the Dengiz Bai into the Alai valley. They had escaped from prison camps in Farghana and were hoping to make their way through the province of Bukhara into Afghanistan and thence home. Amongst them was a German, Schaufuss, from the Sudeten mountain country. Some thirty of them started out on the perilous journey; only four ever reached their goal. The others either succumbed to hardship and exertion or were attacked, robbed, and murdered. The feats of heroism these prisoners of war accomplished border on the miraculous, but no chronicler has told their tale. With a few handfuls of rice and dried apricots, without map or compass, insufficiently clad and shod, penniless except for a few Romanoff roubles in their pockets, and ignorant of the local languages, they challenged the Alai.

What a contrast between their grim adventure and the grandiose expedition undertaken by the Germans under Rickmers, who traversed the Alai and the Pamirs a few years after me! It consisted of twenty-five German and Russian scientists, with cooks and doctors in attendance, horses to ride, and a military escort to ensure their safety; and it carried thousands of pounds' weight of preserved foods, tents, tools, and instruments on two hundred pack animals. These later travellers had every possible assistance from the Soviet Government and

every conceivable luxury at their disposal on their way to make scientific researches in the Pamirs.

We need scarcely wonder that Rickmers reports that the Qirghiz demanded the most exorbitant prices for provisions supplied and specimens collected. He draws therefrom the false conclusion that the vaunted Qirghiz hospitality is dead. I refuse to believe that the few years which had elapsed between my journey and Rickmers' could have produced so radical a change in the century-old traditions of the nomads. It is more reasonable to assume that the obvious wealth of so well-equipped an expedition, and the presence of soldiers of the hated Red Army, provoked the phenomenon. I myself lived for months on the generous hospitality of the Qirghiz, and I can recall only a few negligible cases in which payment or services were asked from me in return. Such instances occurred only with people who had been to Samarqand, Bukhara, Tashkent, or Skobeleff and who had brought back with them the chaffering spirit of the town.

If I describe the daily life of one of these *auls* I describe them all, for their ways are uniform. According to their own standards the Qara Qirghiz are immensely rich. The 300,000 or so who inhabit the Alai regions own between them some 70,000 camels, a million horses, about half a million cows and yaks, and a good ten million sheep. Want and anxiety are as remote from them as drink and gambling. They neither smoke opium like the Bukharans nor *charas* like the Tajiks. The only passions they indulge in are games on horseback and eating the root of the gulchem. Gulchem root tastes and smells like rotting garlic. With practice and goodwill Europeans can get used to it. Rice and bread are both rare in the Alai. The Qirghiz occasionally barter sheep and wool

for them with the dwellers in the lower valleys. But they are always reluctant to part with their sheep, so in the main they content themselves with gulchem root, which they dry, pound into flour, and use for the flat cakes which are their substitute for bread.

In summer the men go off to hunt with their hawks and eagles, or shoot the nimble ibex with the ancient muzzle-loading matchlock on its forked rest. The ibex is almost extinct in Europe but still exists wild in great numbers in the Alai. I usually accompanied the Qirghiz on these hunting expeditions. With two days' supply of food the hunter climbs up into the steep ravines and proceeds first to observe the game's usual haunts and habits. When he has assured himself of these he props his gun on its rest, presents it, keeps the match ready for lighting, and when all is thus in order no power on earth will induce him to quit his post until the ibex crosses his line of fire—which may not be for days. Then there resounds a report like that of a small cannon, which echoes a thousandfold amongst the rocks with the most appalling din. I never saw an ibex get away. Every shot was a bull's-eye.

People in Europe are frequently under the impression that the Qirghiz and other nomadic races roam from one place to another in pure wilfulness. This is of course sheer nonsense. They are compelled to change their pastures to preserve their cattle and themselves. Their large herds need immense spaces for grazing. Climatic conditions and the nature of the Turkistan terrain compel them to shift their camps. In the autumn they move down to the warmest and most southerly parts of their territory, while in spring as the snows retreat they gradually return to the high-lying plateaux.

Each Qirghiz family has its own definite section of pasture, and its rights therein are scrupulously respected by other families and tribes, so that quarrels about grazing rights are almost unheard of.

In the Amu Darya regions I had often had opportunity to observe Qirghiz hunting gazelle with eagles. The moment a herd of these incredibly fleet deer are disturbed they take to flight, with the Qirghiz, on their swiftest horses, at their heels. The eagle is perched on its owner's arm. At the right moment he snatches off its hood and flings the bird from him. Swift as an arrow the eagle overtakes the gazelles, swoops on its victim, and pecks out its eyes. The wretched deer falls to the ground blinded and in agony, and is whisked into the saddle by the galloping hunter, and borne home in triumph to his yurt.

Once in Burdalik I was able to watch how the Qirghiz train their hunting eagles. The heads of freshly slaughtered sheep were set up on poles and the Qirghiz taught the young eagles to go at once for the eye-sockets, which were filled with red chunks of raw meat continually renewed.

One day the *aul* suddenly throbbed with excitement. A troup of wandering entertainers had arrived—*kumancha*-players, dancers, and a story-teller. These people travel from camp to camp to cater for the nomads' amusement. That evening a great fire was lit beside the *aqsaqal's* tent. Carpets and felt rugs were spread round, boiling water for tea hissed in numberless kettles on their tripods, and the *chilim* circulated from mouth to mouth. The story-teller sat down near the fire and began to recite his tales in a monotonous voice. Though the listeners might have heard his stories a hundred times

before, they never failed to thrill to them afresh. Every eye watched the old man's toothless mouth and not a sound was to be heard save his voice and the crackling of burning juniper.

'O you brave heroes! O you rich owners of great herds! O you tamers of the bear! I will tell you the story of the lovely Princess Neppez. High up in the Pamirs, near the Lake of Qara'ul, there once dwelt a Qirghiz prince, Saghur Khan, whose riches and whose cruelty were notorious throughout the whole of Turkistan. Beside every river, beside every glacier, beside every field of snow, the Khan posted his watchmen and allowed no one to draw water who had not first paid his tax into the Khan's fort. The price of the water was a maiden. Soon the people had no girl children left to pay their water-tax, and the Khan then demanded from them skins and furs instead. When these had likewise been exhausted, he demanded sheep and camels, so that in a few years the Qirghiz of the Roof of the World were reduced to poverty and suffered untold hunger. One day Princess Neppez, the daughter of Saghur Khan, rode out to hunt. Before long she spied an arghali sheep and threw her spear. She hastened up to draw the spear from the wound, when, lo, a wonderfully handsome youth lay at her feet, with whom she promptly fell in love. A few days later some poor Qirghiz stood once more before the Khan and begged for the grant of a little water. The princess was present and saw that her beloved was amongst the petitioners. The Khan set his warriors on to drive the hapless Qirghiz off with whips, but the princess placed herself in front of her lover to protect him, so that the warriors did not dare to touch him. When the Khan saw this, he flung the youth and his daughter both into a dungeon. When

night fell the youth took Neppez by the hand, the wall opened like a door before him, and he led the princess out. He then confessed to her that he was the son of the mighty magician Baha ud Din and had been sent forth by his father to help the Qirghiz against the cruel Khan. Thereupon he uttered an all-prevailing curse and the Khan's castle with its owner sank into the waters of the Qara'ul. And since that day, the waters of the Pamirs are free to all.'

The men sat on in entranced silence. The narrator reached out for a *chilim* and slowly blew the smoke through his nostrils with enjoyment. This roused the Qirghiz to wild applause, for they do not know this method of smoking. After he had drunk a few basins of tea enriched with salt and fat, he began again.

'Do you know the story of Abdullah Bezdik? Nay, you cannot know it, for Allah revealed it to me in a dream. Listen, brave men! In the days of Tamerlane there lived at the court of Samarqand a certain mirza [scribe] called Abdullah Bezdik. The mirza had a great love of animals and could not bear to see them suffer. He used to go round the caravanserais of Samarqand and buy up every camel that he saw come in sick or wounded from its journeyings. One day the great Tamerlane heard of the mirza's doings and sent for him. Tamerlane was seated on a throne with a circle of many imams and mullas round him, when the mirza came in and prostrated himself again and again before the mighty Ruler of the World. Then Tamerlane asked why in the name of Allah he bought up a lot of sick camels which, after all, had no souls and were worth even less than so many women. The mirza answered that animals also had souls and suffered pain. The imams and mullas blenched at

such blasphemy and challenged the mirza to prove that the camel had a soul. If he could not prove it he must die. The mirza replied that he could not prove it, since it was not possible to prove that even men had souls.

'Tamerlane was still more enraged at this reply and bade them strike off the impudent fellow's head. Before this order could be carried out the Court Fool interposed:

' "Tell me, mighty Timur, had the late Diwan Begi a soul or not?"

' "By Allah," cried Tamerlane, "I shall execute any man that doubts it!"

' "And shall you let the mirza go free if I prove that camels have a soul?" asked the Fool.

' "By the beard of the Prophet, I promise to let him go free. But how wilt thou prove it, Fool?"

' "Right easily, thou favourite of Allah! Thou hast just now declared that the Diwan Begi had a soul, and how often, oh my Master, hast thou not thyself called him a camel!"

'Tamerlane, the imams, and the mullas laughed till the roof threatened to fall in. But the mirza was free.'

The story-teller was rewarded by loud applause and hearty laughter, such as only the children of nature know. When the *chilim* had gone the rounds again, he resumed:

'Now I shall tell you the story of Muqanna, the Veiled Prophet of Khorasan. Once upon a time he was obliged to fly from Merv to Bukhara, and there he built himself a fortress so strong that not a hundred thousand enemies could take it. He withdrew into his fortress with his five hundred wives and a young negro slave. None but the women and the slave ever saw his face. One day many

thousands of the Faithful gathered before the fort and begged Muqanna to withdraw the veil from his countenance. The Prophet sent them a message that if he were to grant their request they would all be shattered by the sight of his glory and would surely die. But the Faithful had no fear, and vowed that death would be sweet in the light of the Prophet's countenance.

'Thereupon the Prophet announced to them that he would show himself in the gate of the fortress towards the going down of the sun. They should await him there. When the rays of the setting sun were falling direct on the gate of the fortress the Prophet stationed in the court his five hundred wives with mirrors in their hands. Then the gate was flung open. The rays of the sun flashed from hundreds of mirrors and blinded the Faithful so that they fell to earth in terror. When the gates were closed again the worshippers of Muqanna remained many days in prayer before the fortress and glorified the irresistible radiance of the Prophet.'

The story-teller made a pause, and it was remarkable with what deep emotion his hearers listened after all these centuries to everything that had to do with the fate of the Prophet Muqanna. Presently the old man went on:

'The whole world hearkened to the teaching of Muqanna and was subject to him. Only the Prince Saiyid i Hirzi of Arabia was rebellious and threatened to make war. With innumerable warriors and slaves he advanced on Bukhara and besieged the fortress of the Prophet. The warriors of Saiyid i Hirzi had already conquered the town and the outer works of the fort; only that part of it which Muqanna himself defended still held out, proof against all attack. The Prophet's friends had fled from

him in terror, when they saw that defeat was inevitable, and Muqanna stood face to face with death. He would not, however, fall living into the hands of his enemies lest they should look upon his face, which no mortal eye had ever seen. He prepared a final banquet for his wives and poured poison into the wine. All drank of it. One wife alone had observed the Prophet as he poured the poison; she tipped her draught into the bosom of her dress, but feigned to die. This woman later told Saiyid i Hirzi what had occurred.

'Muqanna had had a large oven heated for three long days and into it he dragged all his treasures. Then he smote the head off his one male slave and with the young man's body in his arms he leaped into the flames and was consumed with all his riches. For days Saiyid i Hirzi kept watch before the glowing oven for the reappearance of Muqanna, but he was never seen again.

'When Allah then sent the True Prophet Muhammad to earth his first command to all Believers was to abstain from wine, which had caused the downfall of Muqanna.'

The old man went on story-telling for hours, till I was weary and lay down to sleep. But for a long time after I could still hear his voice, and next morning the *aqsaqal* told me that the sun had risen before the last tale was told.

If only time had not been pressing, I should have loved to stay longer amongst these magnificent and delightful people. As it was, I had lingered rather too long everywhere and I was getting afraid that the Pamir passes would be too deeply under snow to let me cross. When the time came to say farewell I was liberally supplied with provisions for the road, and when I started off half the tribe accompanied me the first part of the way.

For days I marched steadily eastwards along the age-old, now half-forgotten caravan route that links Bukhara with Kashgar and China. The valley grew narrower, the cliffs alongside grew steeper. Bushes of camel thorn and stumps of artemisia furnished fuel for my camp fire. As long as the weather was good I was glad to bivouac in the open, on the banks of the Qizil Su or one of the numberless small tributaries which flow down, more particularly from the side of the Trans-Alai. The ground was thickly populated with marmots. Wherever I turned, there they were, each like a sentinel at the mouth of his burrow, upright as if to beg, and diving like lightning out of sight, with a sharp whistle, the moment I came into view.

Ruined and crumbling mud houses, graves adorned with horse-tails and ibex horns, little tumble-down mosques, and uncounted animal skeletons bore witness to the fact that this road had once been one of the most important arteries of Asia. Seven hundred and twelve years ago Kuchluk, the Emperor of Qara Khotan, fled through this valley with Jebe, general of Chingiz Khan, hot in pursuit. Jebe overtook him at Daraut Qurghan, struck his head off, and brought it in triumph to Chingiz Khan, who mounted it in silver and used it to decorate his throne in camp by the Kerulen River.

For days past the summits of the Trans-Alai had been swathed in mist and the nights were growing colder. (Plates 49 and 51.) I had distinctly taken too long in coming and now anxiously determined to push on to Sari Tash as quickly as possible, hoping that I might be in time to get over the Taldik Pass to Osh before the heavier snows began to fall.

I ought easily to have managed the sixty-five miles

from Daraut Qurghan to Sari Tash in three days. By dawdling in the Qirghiz *auls* I had taken nearly a fortnight to the one short stretch. When I got to Sari Tash I found a caravan halting there which had come from Gulcha, and had been overtaken by a snowstorm on the Taldik, from which they had escaped with the utmost difficulty. Despite their haste and care, sixteen of their animals had died in the storm. The leader of the caravan assured me that no further crossing of the Taldik would now be possible until the spring.

Fate had banged the door in my face. The caravan was to start next day for Daraut Qurghan, whither it was bound. I summoned up all my wisdom and philosophy and decided to turn and go back with it.

X

On the Roof of the World

Some hundreds of camels tinkled their bells merrily in the early morning air, and my donkeys were already loaded up waiting for the start, when a lively hullabaloo was heard in the bullet-riddled rest-house. I went along to see what was happening. A horde of Qirghiz had just arrived, and as far as I could descry in the grey light of a bitter morning hundreds of laden camels were passing by us, taking the road to the Pamirs. (Plate 47.)

A number of the new-comers were standing in a group with our caravan-*bashi*, amongst them the *aqsaqal* of the *aul* where I had spent my last six days. From him I learnt that my Qirghiz friends were in flight from detachments of the Tajik Red Army and some Soviet officials who had come into the Alai Valley to take a census of the nomads in their winter quarters. The Qirghiz didn't need to be told that such a census would be accompanied by a registration of their names and tribes, and would ultimately be followed by the imposition of taxes. Thousands of yurts were hastily struck, and the nomads were now retracing their steps to their summer grazing grounds round the Qara Kul, choosing rather to defy the horrors of winter in the heights

than let themselves be helplessly put through their paces by the Soviet officials. When the *aqsaqal* in all seriousness invited me to accompany them and spend the winter with them amongst the snows of the high Pamirs I jumped at the offer. Without taking further time for reflection I drove my donkeys off to join their caravan and fell in myself.

If the mountain-bred Qirghiz were prepared to face the Pamir winter why should I funk it? Where such a multitude proposed to live themselves, they would not let their guest and protégé perish in their midst. When I asked the *aqsaqal* whether his tribal brethen would not raise objections to feeding a feringi free for months at a time—for I wasn't in a position to pay very much —he laughed and promised that I should be his guest.

The *aqsaqal* and his companions stayed by the nearest tents till the whole tribe had passed through. The welter of men and animals forcibly reminded me of scenes during the World War. Long lines of camels and yaks, piled high with loads, passed by; armed men dashed hither and thither amongst them, brandishing whips and urging them to greater speed. Not a soul was left in the valley save the herdsmen in charge of the herds; every other living thing on legs was up and away. Other tribes and families from the many side valleys of the Alai had likewise taken fright and were off to the mountains too. They thrust themselves amongst our people and increased the confusion of the throng. I was surprised to see the enormous stores of fodder that were being brought along, and when I inquired about it the *aqsaqal* informed me that they had known for months that the Soviets had designs on their freedom and they had therefore taken time by the forelock and set about

accumulating large stores of food for their yaks and camels.

The sheep, cows, and horses had to be left behind because it would not have been possible to carry off enough to feed them through the whole long winter. Several thousand sheep accompanied our march, however; they were to be slaughtered at the Qara Kul and frozen for our winter meat supply. At last the peoples of the Qazaq had all passed by and we joined the train. The sun had now risen and I looked back down the valley. To an enormous distance I could see camel train after camel train; the entire horde was on trek, flying from the officials of the Soviets. The news of the Russian approach must have spread like a forest fire, and by the time the officials reached the grazing grounds they found the land empty save for the herdsmen, who, when questioned as to the whereabouts of the owners of the herds, just shook their heads and answered: 'Far away! Far away!'

After an hour of climbing up a height we had to descend again to wade across the Qizil Su. The animals had to be led one by one, and with the greatest caution, through the raging water at the one fordable spot. With such multitudes to be handled this caused great delay, and it was almost night before we were able to pitch a hastily devised camp at the resting-place of Bur Tapa, at a height of about 11,400 feet. There could be no question of erecting the yurts. After the animals had been attended to, each man wrapped himself in his felt blankets and rolled over close to some of the animals to share their warmth. We were to start early. I lay long awake, breathing the pure mountain air with delight, and listening to the howling of the wolves which prowled

round the camp, till the murmuring of the Bur Tapa torrent which flows down from the glaciers of the Qizil Aghin eventually lulled me to sleep. (Plate 50.) The whistling and howling of the dreaded Pamir wind woke me early, so that I was up and about by the time the Qirghiz began to load up.

Our road that day led us through narrow gorges and steeply upwards over innumerable zigzag tracks. We crossed the Qizil Art Pass at some 13,700 feet and found it deep in snow. At night we pitched a hasty camp, like that of yesterday, at the station of Kok Sai. Behind this pass, almost at the height of the summit of Mont Blanc, there stands a cairn. Some poles with horse-tail banners and numerous arghali horns proclaim the fact that a Qirghiz saint lies buried here, whose name is said to have been Qizil Art. The caravans make a practice of halting at this spot to offer prayers of thanksgiving that they have safely reached the Roof of the World.

The night at this height was bitterly cold, and by the morning mountain sickness had me in a powerful grip. I had the greatest difficulty in keeping my seat on the camel I had been lent, and was repeatedly sick. Though I filled my nostrils with snow according to the best advice I could not stem the tide of blood. Just in sight of the Qizil Kul I had so severe an attack of vertigo that I fell off my camel, fortunately without seriously hurting myself, for the soft snow received me gently. The Qirghiz packed me into a rude litter made of the poles of a yurt and tied me safely into it. When I began to feel a little better I stuck my head out and looked round. After we had crossed the Uit Bulaq pass, the almost inky waters of the Qara Kul could be seen somewhat below us in the distance, with icebergs over three feet high

floating on their surface. At Qara Kul we pitched our last camp but one. I still felt sick, and could not bear even the sight of food. The Qirghiz were much distressed, and kept plying me with hot tea, for which the *aqsaqal* nobly sacrificed great chunks of a sugar-loaf, since I energetically refused the ingredients of salt and mutton fat.

The farther we descended the more overwhelming was the immense view in every direction over the gigantic plateau in which the Qara Kul lake is situated. In the triangle formed by the two streams the Qizil Jik and the Aq Shilga we finally pitched the permanent camp, which, as it proved, was to be my home for seven months to come. At my request a separate yurt was set up for me, which I intended to make as cosy and comfortable as circumstances would permit. The Qirghiz made very merry over me when I tried to help the women to erect the felt tents. Mahmud Sharaieff, my friend the *aqsaqal*, disapprovingly explained to me that setting up the yurts was woman's work and unbecoming for a man. Whereupon I sat me down upon the ground nearby and watched the women with the dignity seemly in a man.

The yurt is unquestionably one of the greatest inventions Asia has brought forth. Its circular structure and dome-like roof combine the maximum of comfort with extraordinary stability. During my stay on the Pamirs the heaviest storms raged over the *aul* without a moment's cessation all through January, yet never once was even one yurt blown down. The skeleton of the yurt consists of strong wooden poles from five-eighths to an inch thick, which are lashed together with thin thongs. These form the side walls. On top of these, bent poles are attached which are lashed to a circular hoop about

the size of a cart wheel. This central ring, which forms the top of the tent, serves both as ventilator and chimney. The average height of a yurt is about eight to ten feet, and its inner diameter about twenty-six feet. The walls and roof are covered on the outside with thick felts, which are made fast with cords tied firmly round. The inner wall of the tent is also clothed with felt,

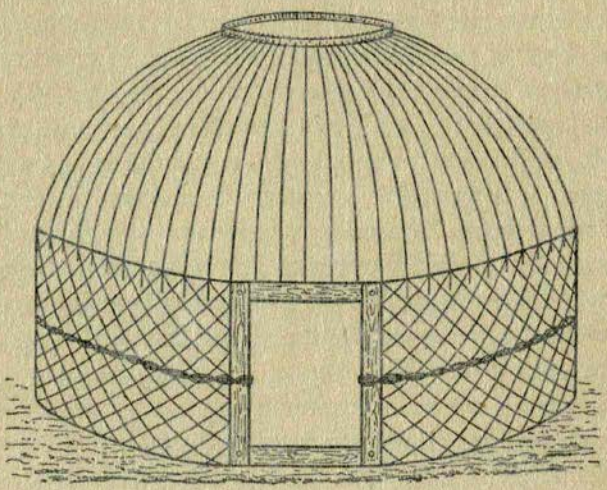


DIAGRAM OF A QIRGHIZ YURT

stamped with simple coloured designs. The inner wall may be further covered with gaily coloured carpets, which have achieved world fame under the collective name of Samarqand carpets. The reason of this is, no doubt, that even before the Great War wily traders used to buy them up from the nomads and export them from Samarqand. The floor of the yurt is spread with thin felt in summer. In winter, however, they first lay a thick

layer of felt on the bare ground, over this a layer of dried grass or dung three or four inches deep, with another layer of felt rugs on top. Even when the temperature is at its lowest this padded floor prevents any feeling of chill. In the centre of the yurt a round space is left free for the fireplace. In the valleys this is where the charcoal-burning *manqal* stands, but in the mountains, where charcoal is unprocurable, a fire built with cakes of dried cattle-dung smoulders here day and night. The door consists simply of a wooden frame; in the summer it stands open, but in winter the opening is screened with a multiple curtain of felt rugs and carpets.

After living for many months in the yurts of the Qirghiz I fully shared their dislike of the usual mud huts affected by the settled populations. These mud buildings are cold in winter and in summer exposed to invasions of every imaginable kind of vermin, while in the yurts I never saw vermin of any kind, with the exception of lice, nor any scorpions or tarantulas. The Qirghiz maintain that neither the giant spider nor the scorpion will venture to set foot on felt.

My host, the *aqsaqal*, placed two young Qirghiz girls at my disposal, to serve me. While I rolled about on my bedding of felt blankets, still in the grip of mountain sickness, they sat by the fire and sewed me a wonderful coat of ibex skins, and a warm fur cloak of innumerable marmot skins, to protect me against the cold. Every day at sunrise the womenfolk went out with camels and collected for firewood stunted bushes of such kinds as grew, sparsely enough, in the neighbourhood of the camp and round the lake. Soon whole mountains of fuel were stacked between the yurts, skilfully placed to enjoy either the shelter of the yurts themselves or else

the lee of some cliff, so that they could not be carried off by the storms.

After three weeks of illness I was at last well enough to come out of my yurt. I had unfortunately no thermometer to gauge the prevailing temperatures, so that I could only guess at them. The nearer we came to November the colder it grew. Soon the fire in the yurt had to be kept burning continuously by day as well as by night, and nevertheless water and milk were permanently frozen. As long as the weather was in any degree tolerable the men went off to hunt, and I with them.

The whole mountain basin in which the lake lay seemed dead and oddly unreal. All cliff and rock faces are rounded off, glazed and polished by the perpetual wind and sandstorms. Fine, yellow sand fills every crack and cranny in the rocks, so that the whole landscape looks as if it had been varnished over with a solution of melted yellow glass. The great Qara Kul lake is about seventy-five or eighty square miles in area, and its banks carry out the same scheme of decoration, for they are edged with shining yellow boulders. The only vegetation occurs where the snouts of great glaciers push their tongues out nearly to the lake and form great marshes in which a few species of mountain plant are able to flourish. All round the lake the ground is strewn with skeletons of camels and horses which have either starved to death or been devoured by wolves.

Every day we bagged numbers of ibex, wild mountain sheep, and marmots. Our hunting expeditions often lasted several days and my companions and I rode off towards the south in the direction of the Indian frontiers, as far as the source of the Amu Darya, which cuts

its way westwards through wild, romantic, and untrodden valleys. (Plate 48.)

While we were busy hunting, the women in the camp looked after the children, milked the camels and donkeys, made clothing, and collected dung for fuel. When we were at home I used to have to turn the two girls out of my yurt every night, for they showed signs of intending to settle down in it for good.

One day Fate, in the form of the *aqsaqal*, approached me. He came into my yurt one evening, sat down by the fire, and began to take long draughts of the tea I offered him. Then he let fly:

'You are no longer a stranger and an *urús* in our *aul*!' I guessed what the wily old man was trying to get at, and as I had long foreseen some such proposition I had an answer ready:

'You speak truly, O my father.'

'At home in your own country have you a lady wife who waits on you?'

Manfully I lied: 'Yes, my father.'

'It isn't right that you should live alone in your yurt. The days are short and the nights are long. Your lady will understand if you take a servant girl to bed.'

'In my country that isn't done, father. Besides I am poor. I have neither camel nor horse to offer as a bride-price.'

'No one will think of expecting a bride-price from you. The bigger girl who is serving you has no relations but a grandmother. She is willing to let you take the girl for nothing. I have talked the matter over with her.'

'I'll think about it, father.'

'You have hunted the ibex with us, and the marmot. You eat our sheep and drink our tea. No *urús* has ever

lived amongst us as you do. We all like you and we well understand that you cannot stay with us forever, but the girls weep and want to live in your tent with you.'

'But I should rather live alone and do my own work myself.'

I had said all this loudly and positively, which was a grave breach of Qirghiz etiquette, for serious matters between men are always discussed in a quiet undertone.

'The men will laugh at you.'

'I'll think about it and give you my answer in a few days. I must first talk the matter over with my God.'

The old man lifted the corner of a carpet and spat forcibly underneath, which meant that he thought me a hopeless and benighted idiot.

A miss is as good as a mile. One reason for my refusal was that I was afraid of infection, for all the dwellers in Central Asia are riddled with venereal disease. Moreover, the Qirghiz womenfolk hardly come up to our standards either of beauty or cleanliness. I often used to watch them sitting in the sun obligingly picking the lice out of each other's hair and popping them into their mouths with manifest enjoyment. This filled me with such uncontrollable disgust that I should gladly have banished them from my yurt even by day.

For a few days I was left in peace, then the *aqsaqal* paid me another call. Again he sat down by the fire, put salt and fat into his tea, and swallowed it with noisy grunts:

'I was a guest in your yurt the other day.'

'Indeed I remember, father.'

'I then spoke to you about Maimakha!'

'Yes, father.'

'Her grandmother says that Maimakha is fifteen and the girl says she will no longer be unwed, for she feels it a disgrace.'

'She must marry another then.'

'But she wants to marry you, my brother.'

'Since when is it the custom amongst the Qirghiz that the girl should seek out for herself the man she wants to marry?'

For a long time the old man sat silent, staring into the fire.

'Take a whip then and thrash the idea out of her head. Thus you will have peace.'

'You forget, my father, that I am, after all, an *urús*. In my country no man strikes a woman.'

Another lengthy pause. I filled the *chilim* with Farghana tobacco and held it towards my guest. Then I gave tongue again to make an end of the business.

'Father, do you know what a *kafir* is?'

'Yes, an Unbeliever.'

'Well, look you, I am an Unbeliever, and moreover I am a penitent and I have taken on me a vow not for three years to touch a woman. Am I to break my vow for Maimakha's sake? That you could not ask of me.'

Shaking his head, the old man stood up, wrapped his fur mantle about him, and went out. After that evening I heard no more of marriage and a few weeks later I learned that Maimakha had consoled herself and was going to be married in a few days, not to a poor penniless devil like me, but to a fine young Qirghiz, who was able to pay a handsome bride-price for her.

Preparations for the forthcoming festivity were eagerly begun. The women brewed *buzah*, a drink with a revolting taste and smell, made from *qumiz*. It is extremely

intoxicating and is only used on festive occasions, for the Qirghiz are normally very temperate.

Two large cast-iron pots are set up and their mouths covered with fresh, still-bleeding sheepskins. As these dry they shrink, and cling tightly to the pot, sealing it almost hermetically. As a further precaution they are then sealed with wet mud. A round hole is then made in the centre of each sheepskin cover, and the two vessels are connected with each other by a tube. The larger had been filled almost to the brim with *qumiz*. A large fire was now made under this one, and the steam from it passed into the second, where it condensed into a thick milky fluid with a high alcohol content. *Buzah* possesses the doubtful advantage of intoxicating you twice over. When the Qirghiz had slept off their first orgy on the day after the wedding, they drank water. A few minutes later they were staggering about thoroughly drunk again. This curious result seems to be caused by the fact that some of the thick fluid remains in the stomach, and when more water is supplied releases a second dose of alcohol.

To initiate the feast, as it were, on the morning of the wedding day three hundred riders took part in a *baigha*. And here I had the opportunity to observe that the Qirghiz are, if possible, better riders and better stayers than the Turkomans. With the wildest cries and shouts they galloped up and down the steepest gradients and fell off in masses, so that I pictured myself having dozens of broken arms and legs to set. But, except for a few bruises, not a soul was hurt. Songs followed, accompanied by monotonous music coaxed by their owners from some primitive guitars and violins. After this the bride-price, consisting of two camels and two

yaks, was solemnly presented to Maimakha's grandmother. This was the signal for a general orgy of *buzah* drinking, and within an hour there was not a single sober person in the camp except myself. The ghastly sour taste of the stuff had prevented my doing justice to my opportunities. I was chaffed on all sides for having refused the lovely bride—who was proudly wearing her towering bridal head-dress for all to see—when I might have had her for nothing! The bridegroom did not seem to mind in the least that a stupid feringi had turned his nose up at the beautiful bride. I asked whether Maimakha had entered matrimony as a virgin. They told me that no one would expect this of a girl of fifteen. While men and women alike lay strewn about the camp completely drunk, the new-made husband took his bride by the hand and drew the tottering girl into his yurt. That completed the one and only marriage ceremony.

A penniless Qirghiz cannot hope to find a wife and set up an independent establishment of his own. He must first raise the necessary bride-price. In such a case the youth either hires himself out to a fellow tribesman as a herd-boy and saves until he has acquired the necessary animals, or thieves them from other tribes. If a husband dies, the widow has not the right to return to her own parents or to look round for another husband; she is inherited by the surviving relatives in precisely the same way as her husband's tents and herds. Whether she thus becomes the property of her husband's father or brother, she serves her new owner to the end of her days as beast of burden or as concubine, just as he happens to prefer. The Qirghiz have no incest inhibitions and near relatives are free to intermarry if they like.

Till the very last Maimakha had continued to work for me in my tent. After she was married I was left with only Belem, an ugly girl, but willing and extraordinarily hard-working. At the first streak of dawn every morning, as regular as clockwork, she turned up in my yurt, and disappeared in the evening when I indicated that I wanted to go to sleep. The mountain sickness had completely disappeared, and I felt as fit and happy as a fish in its home waters.

I had made myself candles of mutton fat with wicks of cotton. When such a storm was raging that even the hardy Qirghiz did not go out to hunt I would light some of these home-made candles for myself and with such primitive tools as were available I repaired every sort of household gear for the whole tribe; I tinkered up guns and revolvers, the locks of chests, and the buckles of straps; I soldered the holes in cooking vessels and mended *mangals*. At such times my yurt would be packed to its utmost capacity with men who had called in to watch me at my work. They looked on in amazement. One day I succeeded in making a trap for marmots; it proved successful and I made many more.

When the storm eased off a bit, I was tempted out to hunt ibex or to fish—unsuccessfully—in the lake. The Qara Kul appears to be completely innocent of fish; the only living thing in it is a minute type of crab, of which there are immense numbers. The Qirghiz told me that in summer large numbers of birds, whose names they did not know, come and nest by the lake, but they disappear again in autumn. The lake was usually covered with a thin sheet of ice; when I broke this and tasted the water I noticed a faint trace of salt and saltpetre.

The months sped by. My standard of living had sunk

to the same level as that of the Qirghiz. Eating, hunting, and sleeping were our watchwords, and I grew fat in the process. I ought to have been in Tabriz months ago. Qannadi had probably long since presumed that I had fallen a victim to my love of adventure, and I loved to picture the surprise that would greet my return. But that day was still far off. On Christmas Eve I had made eighteen tiny candles and fastened them on a small bush of camelthorn inside my yurt. Then I expended my last stores of rice and sugar in cooking a festive dish and invited in my best friends. My illuminated tree evoked general amazement and delight, and hearty grief was expressed that the shares of rice were so small, for my pudding was much appreciated. To celebrate the occasion I had unearthed my razor and my guests scarcely recognized me without my magnificent full beard.

At the beginning of March, light showers of snow began to fall and the whole scene was transformed into a wonderful polar landscape. Rock walls and stone shoots and the frozen lake itself were all covered deep in snow. Exactly opposite the entrance to my tent the Ushba glacier thrust downward almost to our camp, whilst in the west the far-flung ice-fields of the Tanima massif gleamed in the sun. It grew warmer with the coming of the snow, and the wind-storms became less frequent and severe.

Before long the skin was hanging in tatters from every exposed part of my body, and even thick layers of mutton fat could only partially protect it from the ravages of the fierce sun.

Thus passed March and April. At the beginning of May the snow disappeared as quickly as it had come, and within a few days young green was sprouting be-

tween the stones, though it is true it was so scanty that I could rejoice over every individual plantling that I found.

Towards the middle of May the camp began to break up. The Qirghiz were off to the valley of the Qizil Su, and thence eastwards into Chinese territory, while I intended to follow the Qizil Su downstream to the Amu Darya. A few camel-riders went off in advance, to conduct the huge herds out of the Alai valley to the rendezvous at Sari Tash.

By the 24th of May all was ready for the start. Every one was in the highest spirits. Even the half-starved animals seemed to understand that they were bound at last for luscious meadows, and contentedly let themselves be loaded up, however heavily. Two days later we halted in the valley of the Qizil Su, by the ruins of the Sari Tash *rabat*. Much more snow was lying here than we had left behind us nearly 5,000 feet higher up, and it had to be shovelled away before the yurts could be set up. Before I said farewell to my Qirghiz friends I hastily exchanged my two donkeys for a good camel, and when the actual moment of parting came the whole tribe accompanied me for several hours on my way.

At Ursham I met the herds coming up the valley. For hours a broad river of sheep, cows, and horses flowed past me, carefully shepherded by men and dogs. Then these were gone and I was saying a last good-bye to the son of the *aqsaqal*, who was acting as rear-guard to the procession. Hot tears suddenly filled my eyes, though I little suspected at the time that I had been the witness of the last march of the free Qirghiz.

About eighteen or nineteen miles farther west a large body of mounted men suddenly appeared in front of me;

They were instantly recognizable as military, and were accompanied by camels and mules carrying supplies. (Plates 52 and 53.) I and my baggage were subjected to a minute examination. They listened with incredulity to my hastily improvized lie that I had spent the whole winter alone in Sari Tash. I gradually discovered the purpose of their march. They had come from Dushamba, the capital of Tajikistan, and were to effect a junction at Sari Tash with a military column coming from Farghana via Osh. The combined force was then going to push on to Pamirski Post to give the *coup de grâce* to the robbers and rebels of the neighbourhood. This detachment was equipped as if it were starting out to besiege a mighty fortress rather than a miserable little fort held by a handful of undisciplined highwaymen.

If once the Soviets succeeded in making a pukka base on the Pamirs, good-bye forever to the freedom of the Qirghiz nomads. Tempting taxes could be levied on the living wealth of the Qirghiz flocks and herds, and assuredly the enlightened government of the new Russia would not let so rich a source of revenue slip through its fingers. It would also endeavour to curb, if not entirely to suppress, the economic and political freedom of the last of all genuinely free peoples on earth, by incorporating them within the Union of the Soviets.

The Russian government of the tsars had twice attempted—but only twice—to impose its will on the nomad races of Turkistan, and had attempted it very gingerly, hoping by gradual stages to prepare the ground for a complete conquest. As a first step small castles and palaces were built at State expense for the more important tribal chiefs, in the hopes that the Qirghiz might thus be tempted to adopt a more settled form of

life. The Khans, however, erected their yurts as usual round these handsome new buildings and lived as of old in their tents whenever they came into the neighbourhood. The new and princely buildings served conveniently as cattle stalls!

A second step, an attempt to get hold of the Qirghiz on the religious side, was no less abortive. The Russian government sent hundreds of Muhammadan mullas to the Qirghiz tribes—who were originally the purest pagans—under the illusion that all Asiatics were Muslims. The Qirghiz are devoted to story-tellers: they let the mullas talk away, and had not the least objection to adopting Islam—nominally—when the mullas proposed it. Almost all the tribes in future proclaimed themselves Muslims, but they allowed the mullas and the teachings of Islam not the slightest influence over them—which influence was of course what St. Petersburg had hoped to see established. After these futile efforts, the tsarist government left the Qirghiz in peace.

No such tolerance was of course to be expected from the Soviets. The Qirghiz had noted with dismay the fate that had overtaken the settled communities, and up till now they had contrived to guard their freedom in the almost inaccessible spaces of the Pamirs, for which reason they were assisted as far as possible by the rebels who had taken possession of the abandoned military posts of the tsarist government and dug themselves comfortably in. If these posts were to fall into Soviet hands the fate of the Qirghiz was sealed.

A curious chance had made me the witness of the last act of this drama—the passing of Qirghiz freedom in Turkistan. A few weeks later I heard in Dushamba that the advancing forces of the Soviets had found all

the barracks and frontier posts, Pamirski Post amongst them, entirely deserted. The rebel garrisons must have cleared out into Chinese territory as soon as they realized that they could not hope to offer effective resistance to the consolidated power of Russia. Possibly they had also run out of supplies and ammunition.

I had arrived back in Daraut Qurghan. In olden days it had been the busiest and most important frontier and customs post between the province of Bukhara and Russian Turkistan, but nowadays, since the establishment of a customs union between the various Soviet republics, it had lost its former glory. When I arrived I found a large military encampment; the troops were under canvas, acting as a reserve for the forces which had advanced up into the Pamirs.

My European clothes had long since fallen off me in tatters, and been exchanged for Qirghiz kit. Daraut Qurghan lies about 6,500 feet below the Qizil Art Pass, and this difference in altitude was forcibly emphasized by the heat of the sun. The slightest exertion set the sweat rolling down my body in streams beneath my Qirghiz furs. There was nothing for it but to barter my ibex skins for a Tajik robe and my heavy fur cap for a skull-cap and turban. I couldn't find a suitable pair of leather stockings such as the Sarts affect, so I was reduced to buying a pair of camel-hair ones. These are knotted like the carpets, and are extraordinarily hard-wearing.

The Alai valley narrows after you leave Daraut Qurghan. Woods and every kind of flowering bush rejoice the eye. Habitations grow more frequent and you soon meet green-clad, cultivated fields which indicate that you are reaching more populous regions. Pass-

ing through Kurg Su, Sau Ur, Sari Kul, Aji Khalma, and Aq Sai, I reached Damburchi at the junction of the Qizil Su and the Muk Su, which flows down from the glaciers of the Tanima. The augmented Qizil Su changes its name from henceforward to the Surkh Ab. (Plate 54.)

I saw but few nomad yurts in this neighbourhood, for all the Qirghiz families who could, had taken flight before the advance of the Red Army. Only Tajiks and Sarts had stood their ground. Rest-houses and *chai-khanas* became more frequent, and after nine months' deprivation I once more ate my fill of *shishlik* and was able to lay in a store of sugar and brick tea. I joyfully welcomed the sight of cigarettes, for all this while I had been driven to console myself with the *chilim*.

After the Muk Su, the mountain country of the Qara Tegin (the Black Mountains) begins—one of the most dread regions of eastern Bukhara. Junipers became rarer, and everywhere there are clumps of silver poplar and black elm. There was no longer any point in living like a savage. I washed and shaved regularly—to the recurrent amusement of the villagers. They were tickled to death to see me soap myself and scratch the stubble off my cheeks with a small machine. The peoples of Turkistan never soap before shaving; they simply wet their beard with water and scrape it off. Any form of washing, except the prescribed religious ablutions—which they reduce to rinsing finger-tips and mouth—is absolutely unheard of.

After Damburchi the valley of the Surkh Ab widens out. The river is swollen by innumerable torrents which pour down from the snouts of the glaciers of the Peter the Great range. They roar through narrow gorges in

frequent waterfalls, and tumble into the valley. Before reaching Yarai, I fell in with a lot of mountain Tajiks who were making their way on foot over the Dengiz Bai to Farghana. Many of them recognized me and stopped a moment to chat. They were folk whom I had met last autumn in the rest-house below the pass, when they were travelling in the opposite direction towards the Qara Tegin. Some of them were carrying loads but little lighter than those put on a donkey, yet these men were making twenty-two to twenty-five miles a day steadily uphill.

Yarai itself is a large village inhabited by Uzbegs and Tajiks. Rich orchards were standing in all the glory of white and rose-pink blossom. For months and months I had looked on nothing but red rocks, snow, and the mud-brown walls of nomad yurts, and the mud village of Yarai seemed by contrast a very paradise. Millions of wild roses were in flower and the meadows were pied with blue auriculas. In contrast to the Qirghiz, the Uzbeg and Tajik men work in the fields themselves, and their women folk are rarely seen by the passing stranger. The *ariqs* or small irrigation channels were being put in order everywhere, men were mowing the fields of tall clover, and magnificent dragon-flies, which are particularly abundant in this part of Bukhara, were darting about in their thousands. Despite the proximity of the capital, Bolshevik propaganda has so far made little progress in these parts. I scarcely saw an unveiled woman anywhere.

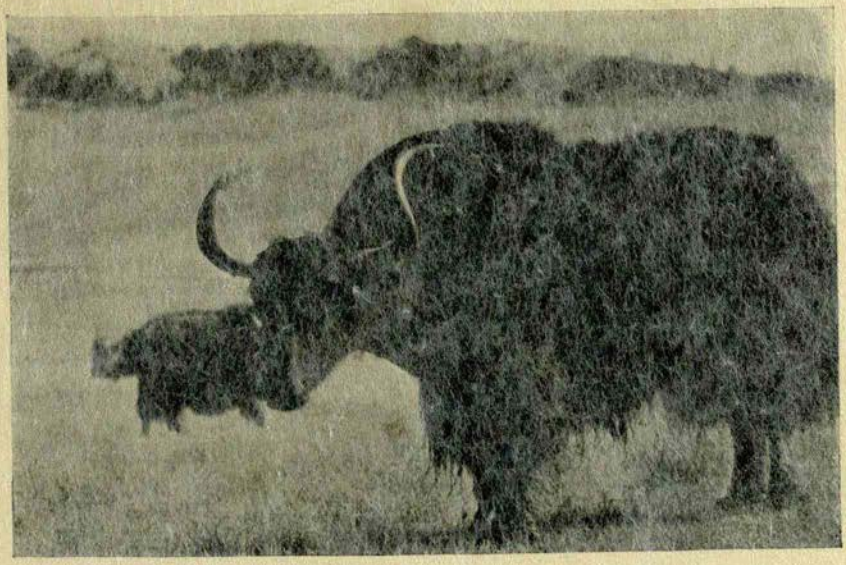
When I was spending the night in Langarash I was wakened early by the *chai-khana-chik* and ordered to leave his house. On my asking the reason, he informed me that this was Friday—the Muslim equivalent of

Sunday—and that the *aqsaqal* of the village did not allow an Unbeliever to spend Friday in the place. I asked the way to the *aqsaqal's* house and protested against being turned out. It appeared that the mulla had persuaded him that some disaster would overtake the village if I were allowed to stay. I made no attempt at resistance, loaded up my camel, and set out for Garm.

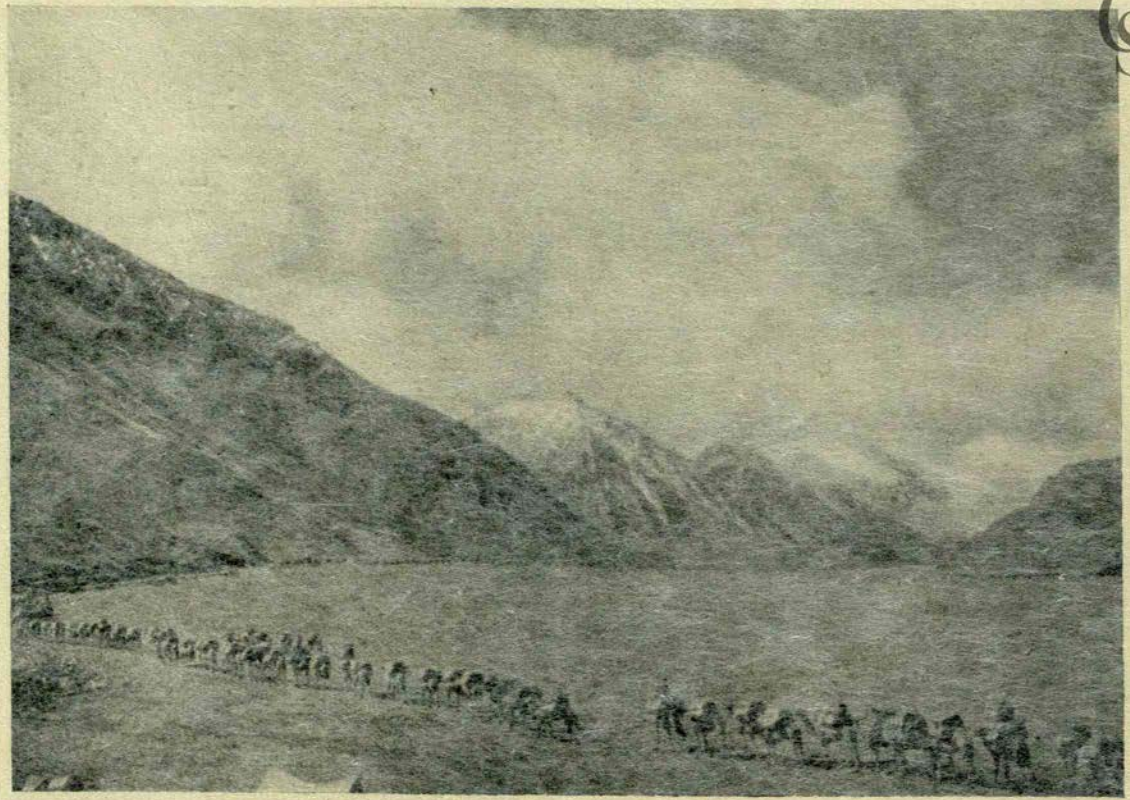
The Surkh Ab at this point flows broad and powerful, forming in its course many islands, which are the home of every kind of waterfowl. The marked piety of the inhabitants of this neighbourhood is indicated by the fact that even the tiniest village boasts its mosque. In contrast to the rest of Turkistan, the mosques are here built not of mud but of handsomely wrought timber, and the supporting pillars are skilfully carved and painted. (Plate 55.) The accompanying minarets are built clear of the mosque and are likewise of timber or of stone.

On the hills at each side of the valley I saw numerous hollow caves in almost inaccessible spots several hundred yards above the bottom of the valley. They were all inhabited, so that some thousands of troglodytes must be at home here. I confess I could see neither rhyme nor reason in this cave-dwelling business, since there was ample room below for thousands of houses. When I reached Garm, however, I discovered that the cave-dwellers form a special Bukharan sect, which in olden days was persecuted by the orthodox Muslims and took refuge in the rock caves. Though complete religious toleration nowadays prevails, they still prefer to live in their cave-homes and climb down steep and dangerous tracks for every drop of water.

45. Maimakha, the young Qara Qirghiz offered me as bride



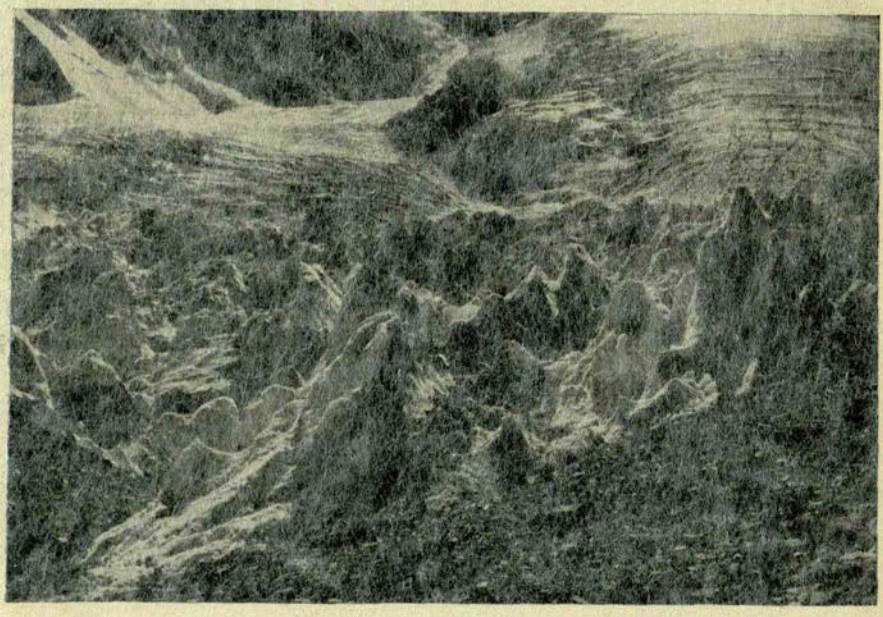
46. A yak, indispensable helpmeet of the mountain Qirghiz



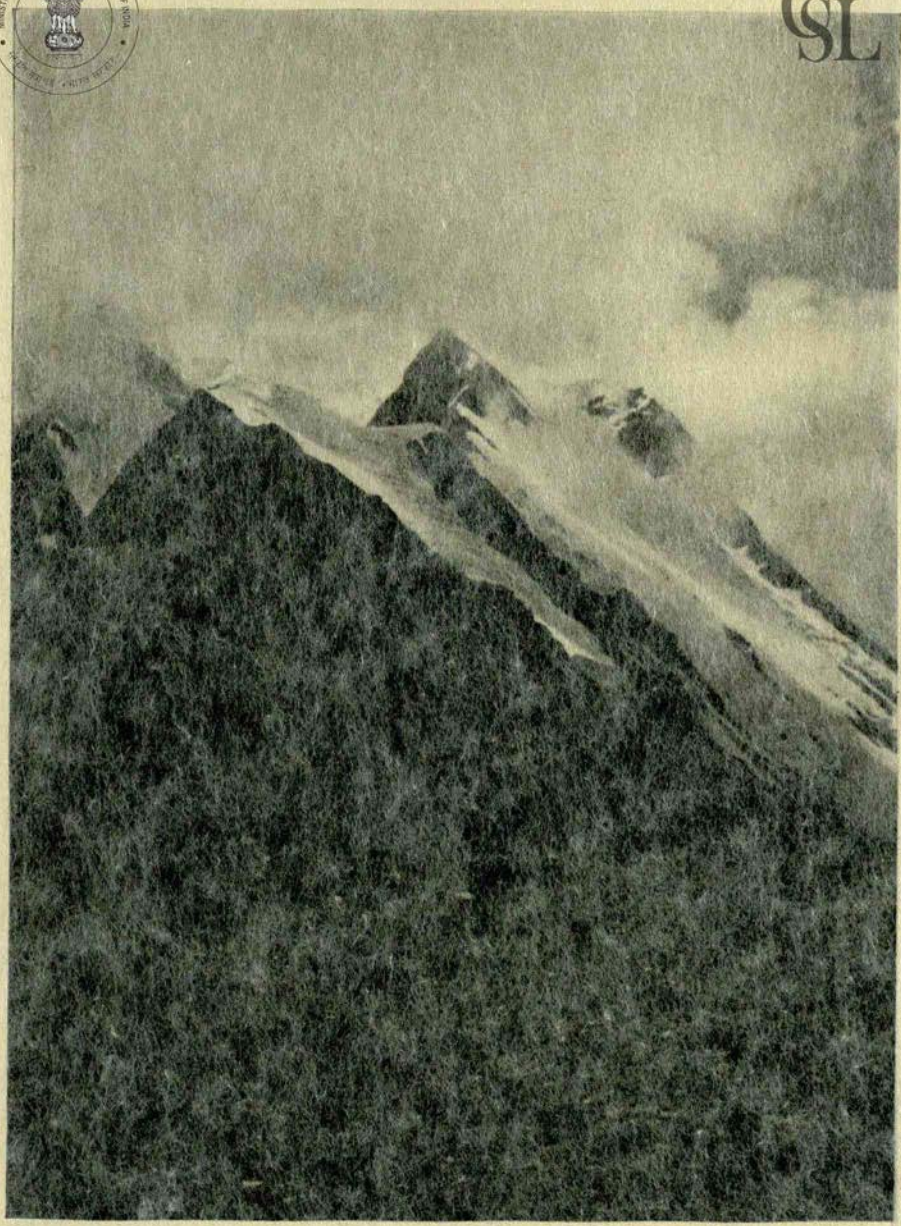
47. The Qirghiz in flight to the Pamirs

48. Near the source of the Amu Darya, at about 10,500 feet. In the background the mountains of the Hindu Kush

49. Mount Garmo in the Pamirs, 24,580 feet. In the foreground the Garmo Glacier. This mountain is now known as Mount Stalin



50. Peculiar ice formations of the Qizil Aghin Glacier; the tongues of ice are several yards high

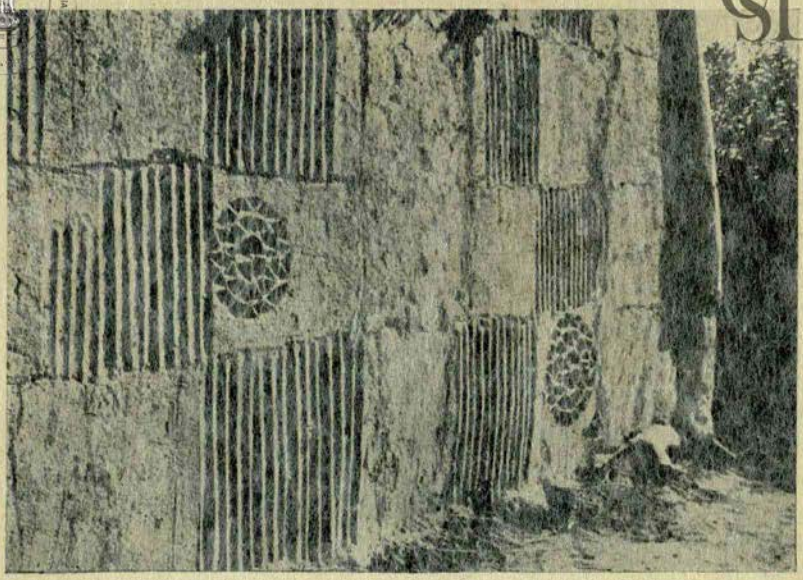


51. The top of Mount Kaufmann (nowadays Mount Lenin), 23,376 feet

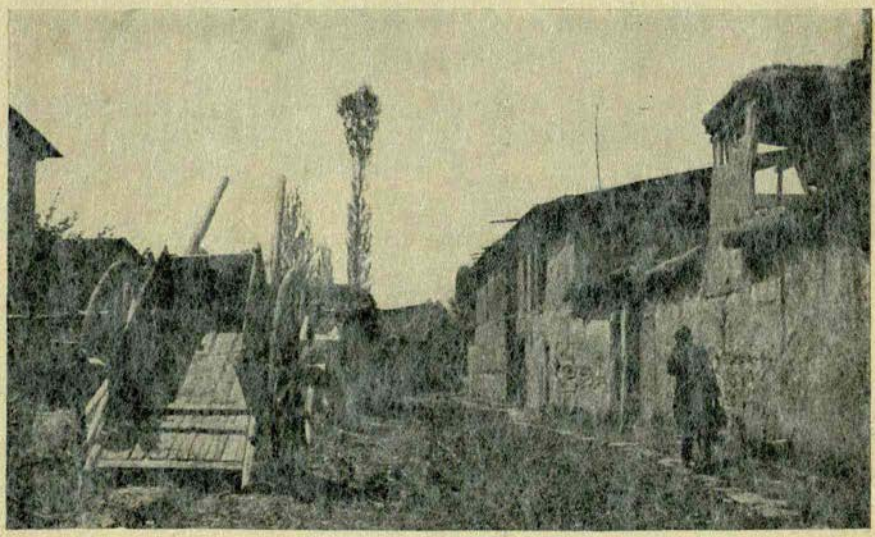
52. Soviet troops marching into the Pamirs

53. Detachment after detachment of the Red Army passed me, riding up to the Pamirs

54. Bridge over the Muk Su



55. Wall of a Turkistan village mosque, showing the mud decoration



56. The 'Main Street' of Garm

Although Garm was formerly the seat of a beg and the capital of the eastern province of the Qara Tegin, it is one of the dirtiest and most miserable holes I have ever seen even in Central Asia. (Plate 56.) Tumble-down houses, lanes several feet deep in swampy mud, a miserable bazaar in which neither cigarettes nor dried fruit can be bought, a dirty windowless Government office, and a crowd of sulky inhabitants are the essential characteristics of this provincial capital.

The road on leads across numerous narrow bridges and climbs steeply up to Ab i Garm, a place which I had already visited in 1919. Not far from the town, securely hidden in an almost inaccessible bowl-shaped depression amongst the rocks, thirty-six Austrians had forged weapons in the interests of their country during the World War, for use against the 'Russians', as the Bukharans understood the term. In 1916 the Amir of Bukhara got into touch with the prisoners of war in Katta Qurghan, Samarqand, and Tashkent and enlisted some first-class craftsmen, most of them expert munition-makers, who with the assistance of Sarts and Bukharans escaped from the prison camps and were piloted by secret tracks first to Bukhara and then to Ab i Garm. Here they succeeded in establishing a regular arsenal able to manufacture rifle ammunition and cannon balls. They got their machines and material by the most roundabout routes, mostly through China and Afghanistan. Machine-guns and trench mortars reached Ab i Garm in detached parts and were assembled by the Austrians. When the Russians surprised Bukhara, the Amir, as well as his statesmen and generals, lost their heads completely and bolted by the shortest route into Afghanistan.

On the second day of my stay in Ab i Garm I borrowed a horse from the *chai-khana-chik* and rode out to the ruins of the arsenal. The commando in charge of explosives had done its work thoroughly. Not one stone remained upon another. The waterworks were a heap of ruins, between which there still lay parts of water-leads, dynamos, and transmitters in the wildest confusion. Nearby some Tajiks had built stone hovels for themselves out of the wreckage. I had the greatest difficulty in winning their confidence and coaxing them to tell me all about the final capture of the arsenal. According to their story, fourteen Austrians were still surviving; with six hundred men of the regular Bukharan Army and the anti-Soviet free-lances who had taken refuge here, they put up a bitter and determined resistance against the advancing Russian forces. Their admirable supply of munitions and their superior weapons enabled them to hold out for four months against the badly equipped Russians. They were not even short of food supplies, for they were able to draw on the fertile valleys in their rear. When the Russians found that they were powerless to break down their defence they summoned to their assistance two aeroplanes from Tashkent, and with this reinforcement they at last succeeded in capturing the arsenal. The survivors of the garrison were cut down without quarter. By the irony of fate the chief credit for the conquest of the arsenal fell to the International Iron Brigade, a force composed mainly of Hungarian and Austrian ex-prisoners of war, so that here again Austria's sons murdered each other in the interest of foreigners.

I sat a long time on the ruins of the building where once upon a time I had myself set up the machines for

minting gold and silver coins for the Amir of Bukhara, till the fanatical mullas and muftis called a halt to my activities. Machines, they preached, were the work of the devil and money produced by them must not be allowed to desecrate the sacred soil of Bukhara. They stirred up so much fanatic hate that I was compelled to fly by night over the frontier.[1]

After quitting Ab i Garm I left the Surkh Ab, which had so long been my companion, and riding along by the side of one of its tributaries I climbed the mountain heights on which Faizabad is situated, the largest town of eastern Bukhara, with some two thousand houses. This valley is usually rich in fruits, and the first cherries and apricots of the season were already ripe. I let myself go in greedy enjoyment of them. The plateaux and high valleys between the Hisar mountains and the Darwaz range are the most fertile of all Tajikistan. Here the cultivation of the silkworm begins, and the innumerable mulberry trees give the landscape a peculiar character of its own.

[1] See my earlier book, *Pascholl, Plenny!*

XI

Through Uzbegistan

A tributary of the Kafir Nihan rises near Faizabad and for a time the road follows its course, to twist and turn later in stiff zigzags up the steep mountain sides to Kafir Nihan. This town lies in a wide and lofty mountain basin on the river of the same name. The first time I travelled to Ab i Garm I was able to see very little of the place, for while the Qush Begi, in whose company I was, was receiving the Beg and the chief men of the district, I had to remain hidden away in my tent. Kafir Nihan forms as it were an island in the Muslim sea of Bukhara, for it is—as indeed its name implies—inhabited by Unbelievers who immigrated some hundred years ago from Kafiristan in Afghan territory. Legend tells that the Kafirs are the last remnants of a once extensive Christian community in Central Asia. (Plate 57.) Thanks to their adaptability and unfanatical behaviour they were for the most part tolerated by the Muslims except for an occasional massacre. Unlike the Jews they were permitted to purchase land and to enjoy the same rights as Muslims. Kafir Nihan is a clean, well-cared-for place with extensive vineyards.

The road now runs through a broad, extremely fertile valley to Dushamba (now rechristened Stalinabad),

the capital of Tajikistan, with a population of round about 30,000. (Plates 58, 59, and 60.) Dushamba was the first place of any size I had come to since leaving Skobeleff. The town had certainly gained much since the authorities and the Council of Tajikistan have made it their official headquarters. Many buildings in European style have been erected, amongst them a very passable hotel intended only for the use of travelling commissars or Soviet delegations. With special permission from the local Soviet it may, however, be also opened to ordinary mortals. The town streets, which elsewhere throughout the whole of Turkistan are the terror of travellers, are here kept in good repair, and during my stay Russian engineers were actually busy installing a small electric plant to supply the town with light and power.

The bazaars of Dushamba are as well provided with every kind of Asiatic goods as they are innocent of European wares. When I made inquiries the Russian 'Political Adviser' of the Tajik Soviet assured me that in pursuance of the Five Year Plan the Turkistan bazaars would soon all be well stocked with the products of Russian industry. There was notably a lack of every kind of metal article, for the demand for metal can be only very partially supplied from local resources.

Riding through the bazaar I saw a dealer in birds of prey who trained and sold eagles, falcons, and buzzards for the chase. (Plate 61.)

The very day of my arrival in Dushamba I loaded my camel with two sackfuls of mineral specimens and made my way to the 'Tajsoff' (Soviet of Tajikistan) to deposit them there for official dispatch to Samarqand. I had hoped to acquire merit with the Soviet Govern-

ment by my collection of stones. My mistake! Various officials first of all examined my papers for an unholy length of time, and then inquired how I had managed to arrive in Tajikistan without the express permission of the Tajik Soviet. I explained that the authorities in Samarqand had given me plenary powers to make mineralogical researches in the interest of the Soviets. The reply I got was that the good folk of Samarqand should, as the Sart proverb has it, jolly well 'pour their water into their own buckets', and not meddle in the affairs of a friendly neighbouring state. I shrugged my shoulders and said that I personally had no concern with the domestic affairs of the individual Soviet states, but here I was in Tajikistan and I begged the comrades to take note of my presence.

I doubt if there was a single divisional president, high official, or commissar, or even an office boy, in Dushamba who did not think it his business to take cognisance of my unauthorized arrival. I should have been inclined to show a clean pair of heels and leave the worthy gentlemen to spend a year or so deciding under whose jurisdiction my singular case should be considered if the officials had not unfortunately impounded my papers. It would be useless to pretend that I looked on calmly at all this telegraphing to and fro. I did not. I was in a most almighty stew lest Samarqand had discovered my real identity and orders might be sent for my immediate arrest, or that some one had had the bright idea of making inquiries for Steinschneider in Qizil Arwat. Nothing of either sort in fact occurred. One fine day a militiaman turned up and requested me with the greatest politeness to come with him to the Soviet office. The chairman of the Council of the

Tajikistan People's Commissars received me with a broad grin and assured me over and over again that he had let those blokes in Samarqand understand once and for all that they had no right whatever to grant permission for stray people to travel in other people's territories. Thereupon he gave me a permit to reside and travel in the land of the Tajiks and the solemn assurance that my mineral specimens had been annexed by the Republic of Tajikistan and would certainly not be handed over to that of Uzbegistan.

I tried in vain to make it clear to the good man that by this procedure neither of the two countries would derive any benefit from my explorations, since my sketch maps and notes about the position of my discoveries were all on their way to Samarqand by post and that the notes without the specimens had no value whatever, since they were all numbered to correspond. Conversely the specimens had no value for Tajikistan without the notes explaining their exact provenance. To my amazement this information delighted the honourable gentleman so much that he burst into shouts of loud laughter, and then with inimitable gravity cried: 'Never mind; so much the better!'

Soviet red tape had held me up for a week, though a two day's ride would easily have taken me across the border into Uzbegistan. An excellent, newly made road leads from Dushamba to Hisar and on to Deh i Nau, crossing through the territory of the Masang gipsies. What odd contrasts this world provides! With us the gipsies are a restless folk who trek hither and thither through Europe with their wheeled caravans. But here, in the land of nomads, the gipsies are settled people. As with us, however, they are looked down upon and con-

sidered an inferior race. So much so that, although the Masang women are famous for their beauty, no gipsy girl was in former times ever received into a harem. They have thus retained their racial purity without blood admixture of other stocks. They are artists and craftsmen, renowned as iron-founders, metal-workers, gold- and silver-smiths. The Masang gipsies manufacture weapons, especially sabres, daggers, and battle-axes, which are famous throughout the whole country.

The valleys round Hisar have, however, yet another title to fame—they rejoice in more scorpions to the square foot than any other corner of Asia.

Nobody is likely to believe what multitudes of them there really are. When I spent the night in the *chai-khana* of Hisar hundreds of these revolting brutes were scrambling about the room so that it sounded as if a regiment of grasshoppers were dancing on a tight drum. Now was my chance to test the natives' assertion that scorpions never tread on felt. I slept on a felt blanket, and I can testify that I was not bitten nor even touched by one. As a general rule a scorpion will not attack a man unless it feels itself in danger. They love, however, to take refuge for the night in boots or in the sleeves of shirts. If you touch one when you are dressing, it naturally bites. The same thing may happen if you accidentally roll over on one in your sleep. Scientists call the scorpion of Turkistan *Androctonus asiaticus*, the 'Asiatic man-slayer', which sufficiently indicates its deadly efficiency.

Wherever scorpions thrive, tarantulas are also at home. The Turkistanis are more afraid of the tarantula than of the scorpion, believing that its bite is inevitably fatal. One day I was rigging up my primitive camp kitchen

on the banks of the Dushamb and I lifted a few stones with which to build a fireplace. There was a whole nest of tarantulas under one of the stones, and after I had got over my initial terror I was able to observe them carefully. The tarantula's body is egg-shaped and from two to two and a quarter inches long. Its long, very hairy legs measure nearly four inches, and like its body vary from light yellow to brown. Its mouth is provided with sharp fangs and four jaws, which snap like lightning and inflict four simultaneous wounds, into which the poison is injected.

Driving along one day in my wheeled cart through southern Bukhara I fell in with a caravan, which passed through a large and gloriously fertile oasis without halting. I begged the caravan-*bashi* to pitch camp in the oasis. He assured me that if he did so not a man of us would be alive next morning, for we were within the area of the qarakurt spiders. I said I should very much like to see one, as I had heard so much about them. He dismounted cautiously and impaled on a camel thorn a small black something which he handed over to me. This was one of the dreaded qarakurt, not bigger than the nail of a man's finger, and yet capable of slaying any living man or beast within the space of a few minutes. The poison of this spider is absolutely deadly, and this is why many rich and luxuriant stretches of country in the valleys of the Ili and of the Amu Darya are uninhabited.

As I mentioned earlier I had got a severe dose of malaria into my system on the banks of the Amu Darya after crossing the Qara Qum. It remained in my blood and gave me a good deal of trouble from time to time on my way to the Alai. Once I reached higher altitudes

these bouts of recurrent fever had ceased of themselves, but on the morning after my arrival in Hisar I was quivering so with ague that I could not get up. I found I still had some quinine in my little medicine chest. On the fourth day, in a lucid interval, I begged the owner of the serai to fetch me a doctor. But there was neither a Russian nor a Sart doctor to be found anywhere in Hisar or the neighbourhood. So there was nothing for it but to hie me back to Dushamba, where there was a hospital of sorts with a European doctor. They kindly bundled me on to a wheeled cart, tied me on with ropes, and sent me off. For four weeks I was consumed with raging fever. My body was nothing but a quinine magazine, but at last the quantities of quinine and of vodka that I had absorbed began to take effect. When I could think clearly again and even eat a little the doctor spent all his spare time at my bedside, and we often talked for hours together.

Thanks to his care and to the soundness of my constitution, the fever gradually yielded, and one day I actually got to the point of being able to leave my bed. When I got back to Hisar the owner of the serai did not recognize me, so completely had the malaria altered my appearance. I only finally shook it off in 1932, after its persistence had been the despair of several Vienna specialists. The forethought of the Dushamba physician provided me with half a pound of quinine for my further journey, and every morning, with heartfelt curses, I swallowed a dose of the bitterest of all powders. I owed it to this precaution, however, that during the rest of my travels I suffered only short and comparatively slight attacks.

From Hisar my course now led me to Qara Tagh,

Sar i Asia, Yurtchi, and Deh i Nau, the scene of the last act of the Enver Pasha tragedy. Yurtchi was the birthplace of the last Qush Begi of Bukhara, and I hoped here to get some news of the man who had once so nobly befriended me. With great precaution I made inquiries about such well-to-do people as the village had known in earlier days, and when I had made their acquaintance I called on them in their homes. Gradually I ascertained that the Qush Begi had followed his master, the Amir of Bukhara, into exile in Afghanistan, and that he was believed to be still alive there. When the Bolsheviks broke up the Amir's harem after its master's hasty flight, the Qush Begi's daughter returned to her relatives in Deh i Nau. Unfortunately I was not able to trace her. Possibly the Bukharans were afraid lest if I claimed acquaintance it might in some way get her into trouble.

My efforts to find the sometime favourite of the Amir's harem, if it bore no other fruit, at least brought me into touch with a lot of people, and I found out that the Agabekoff of whom the Izfairan forester had told me was one of the biggest traders in the Deh i Nau bazaar. The rest was easy. I looked him up, as if by chance, and also by chance happened to speak of the fighting round Yurtchi and Deh i Nau. Swollen with pride over his own prowess and his heroic act of patriotism, Agabekoff told me everything I wanted to know about Enver Pasha's death. (Plates 62 and 63.) When I bade him farewell I happened—by chance of course—to overlook his outstretched hand without, I hoped, offending him. Some years later fate duly overtook him. For some political reason or other he had to fly the country, and he perished miserably in exile.

Two caravan roads lead out of Deh i Nau: one southwards by Sar Mak and Shirabad to Chuchka Guzar on the Amu Darya; the other westwards to Baisun, Tang i Khurram, and thence northwards via Guzar to Samarqand. I should have been glad to visit the Amir's old summer quarters in Shirabad, but I was more anxious to go to Guzar and on to Kelif. I felt I simply must see just once the town which years ago had been the longed-for goal that haunted night and day the dreams of an escaping prisoner of war. The roads ahead were in good condition, so I reluctantly decided to exchange my camel, at a well-known camel-breeder's, for a horse and wheeled cart. This transaction cost me the remainder of my ready cash. (Plates 65 and 66.)

The Turkistan arabah is a unique type of vehicle. (Plate 33.) It has two great wheels the height of a man, which never cease from squealing. Between them a massive frame is fixed, the front of which acts as the shafts for the horse. The axle, which is usually two or three yards long, is never directly fastened to the frame, but attached by strips of wood lashed with string, which act as rude springs. The horse is not only harnessed but saddled and the driver rides with his feet drawn up and resting on the shafts. The rims of the wooden wheels have no iron tyres and consequently soon wear out, but the size of the wheels is of great advantage in the sort of country over which they have to travel. Any other type of cart would certainly sink in and remain embedded to the axle in the deep mud of a Turkistan town. In fording rivers and streams—which, bridges being usually non-existent, is often the only means of crossing—the tall wheels are also invaluable.

From Deh i Nau onwards the road passes through

deep gorges with lofty walls of rock on either side. I halted for my noonday rest at the Aq Su spring, where Enver had been murdered. A little wood lies just to the left of the caravan road in the middle of a small steppe-like valley. In front of it is the spring of water where the last act of the tragedy took place. Not a stone, not a memorial tablet marks the spot where one of the most remarkable generals of the World War met his death. (Plate 64.)

Baisun used to be a great Bukharan fortress guarding the valley of the Surkhan from the north-east. The place is surrounded by strong, high walls of mud, pierced by six great gates. Even to-day Baisun is the headquarters of an Uzbeg cavalry garrison a thousand strong. The Bolsheviks have great achievements to their credit in military matters, but, alas, they have not abolished the old martial music! Unfortunately for me the *chai-khana* where I spent the three nights of my stay lay just on the road by which the troops rode to their early morning exercises, so that I got the thumping and caterwauling at first hand. In the van rode thirty men armed with kettledrums, followed by an equal number of players on the pipe, and these again by twenty lusty fellows with drums. These eighty 'musicians' beat or blew their instruments just as their individual fancy took them. The squeaking and squawking of the pipes, the sharp 'rattatatting' of the kettledrums, and the deeper thudding of the drums produced a chaos of discordant sound that almost amounted to genius. I never reckoned myself a connoisseur of the arts, and this music wrought me nearly to frenzy.

While in Baisun I accidentally heard from a Russian who had been living in the place since 1920 the