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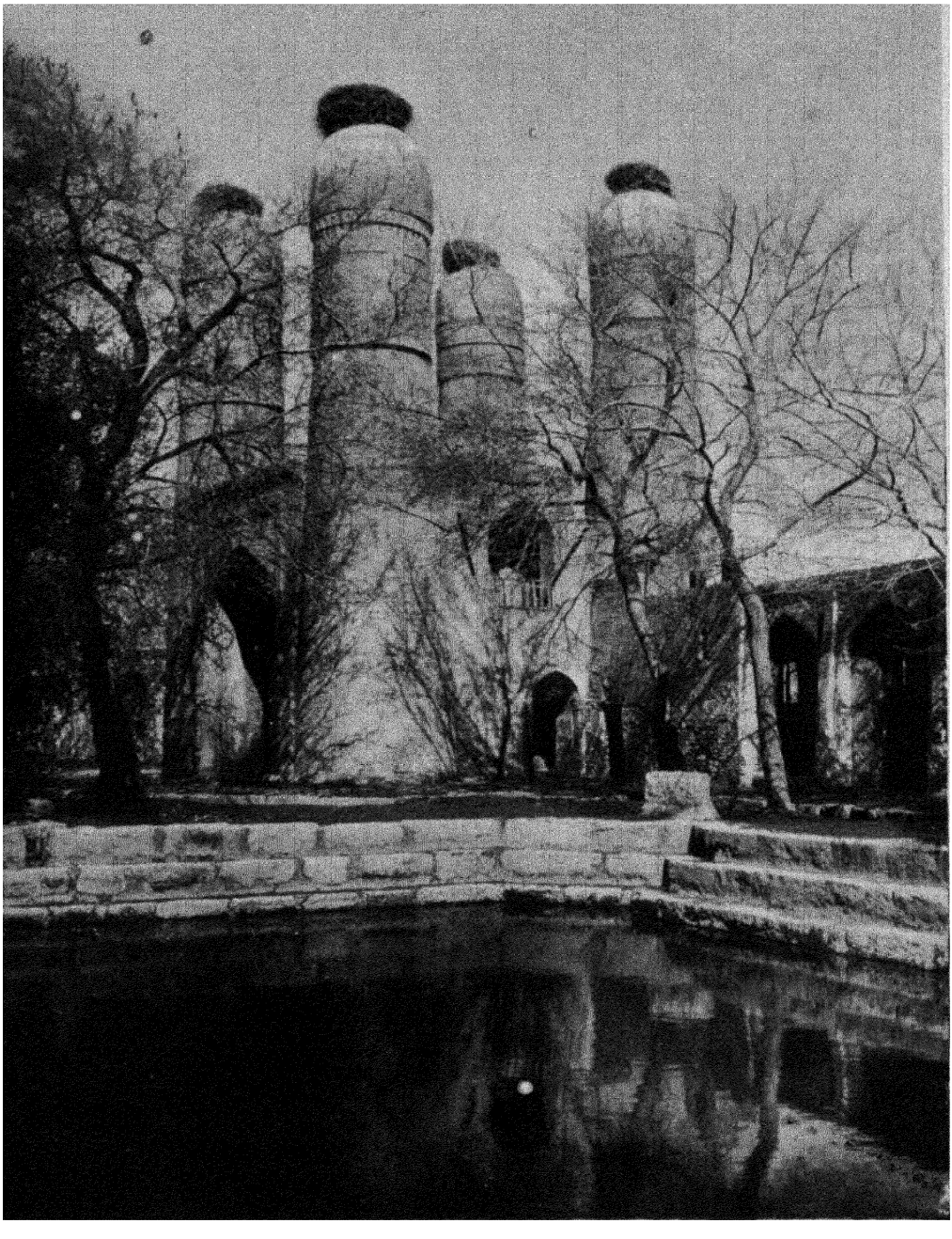
FROM MOSCOW TO SAMARKAND



BOKHARA
Mosque of Chor-Minar

FROM MOSCOW TO SAMARKAND

By Y. Z.

SECOND IMPRESSION

LONDON 1934
PUBLISHED BY LEONARD AND VIRGINIA WOOLF
AT THE HOGARTH PRESS, 52 TAVISTOCK SQUARE, W.C.1

First Published February 1934
Second Impression March 1934

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY THE
GARDEN CITY PRESS LTD., LETCHWORTH HERTS.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

This book is the record of a journey in Soviet Russia, from Moscow through Ferghana, Kirghizia, Samarkand and Bokhara. The author is a Russian, and, for reasons which will be obvious to the reader, it is necessary that he should remain anonymous.

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Sea of Aral
To Moscow
KAZAKISTAN
KARA-KALPAKS
Tashkent
Namargan
Andijan
Old Margelan
FERGHANA
Wadil
SHAH-I-MARDAN
KIRGHIZIA
Kokand
BOKHARA
SAMARKAND
CHINA
TURKMENISTAN
TADJIKSTAN
AFGHANISTAN

Chapter I

THE MAIL TRAIN FROM MOSCOW TO FERGHANA

I

The first day's run from Moscow to Riazan was a rest for tired nerves, ears and eyes. In August it was a bath of green that washed away all the dust and weariness of the town. It is the most truly Russian part of the journey, beginning from the capital of what was called Great Russia—Moscow—and passing through its central districts.

At a very early stage of the journey, however, I discovered that the popular conception of the purely Russian character of the central districts was entirely unfounded. I had not gone very far from Moscow before I discovered this. My neighbour in the upper berth was a Karelian, a young peasant differing very slightly in appearance from a Russian. Who would have thought that, in the Moscow district alone, there are no fewer than 160,000 Karelians, who speak a language akin to Finnish ?

The berth opposite was occupied by a young Communist, a factory-girl. The thumb of her right hand had been crushed, and she was now being sent to Central Asia on organisational work in the coal-mines. She admitted, rather shyly, that she was not

a Russian, but a Mordvinian from the Kazan district. She could speak Russian, Mordvinian, Chuvash, and Tatar fluently, and knew a little Uzbek. We concluded an *entente*, as is usual between neighbours in the third class—" travelling hard " as it is called. This, it should be explained, means going in a " general " car without doors to the compartments, and with nothing more luxurious than a hard wooden bench to sleep on, unless one brings blankets along. As a precaution against thieves, we tied our luggage together and fastened it to the table-leg. We took turns at running out for boiling water and food at the stations. A three-year-old girl from the next compartment became our mutual friend. She was a budding Manon, with a golden fringe, large blue eyes, shaded by long, dark lashes. To all our advances and presents of sugar-lumps, however, she only vouchsafed a smile and said nothing. After a while we learned that her name was Irkem, and that she did not know a word of Russian. She was a Tatar, and was going, together with her mother and a whole bunch of other Tatars, to Kokand. The curious thing was that none of them came from the Tatar districts of Russia, but, as a matter of fact, from the " purely Russian " district of Riazan. In the town of Kassimov, where they lived, the Russian and Tatar communities still dwelt separate from each other. The Tatars had kept their mosques and spoke in their own tongue.

The finishing touch was given to the picture by

the assistant-conductor of the train, an Uzbek, who rejoiced in the name of Akbar Saidarov. He was a peasant from a collective farm, who had been given the opportunity of a two-months' training course in a railway school. After making a few trial runs he had been sent to Moscow as assistant-conductor. And now the life of his family and himself was no longer dependent on the melting of the Pamir snows or the African locust's flight. He had become a government official, with a full right to pensions, holidays, awards, insurance, holiday homes, and so on. Further, he enjoyed a privilege that all passengers, even those of the first class, envied; as conductor he had the right of precedence in getting boiling water for tea from the station taps. He was modest, cheerful and obliging, but not to be compared for picturesqueness with the Russian conductor. That was a vivid personality. His name was Kislov, and he had been a soldier in a frontier regiment. He instituted a reign of benevolent despotism in our train, and his main purpose, which he probably did not realise, was to turn his car into a cheerful, but tidy and well-disciplined barracks. He administered a stern reproof whenever any of us changed our places without notice, praised us when we threw our papers or rubbish out of the window, and chastised the passengers' children with his own hands. Often he would sit down for a chat with us, and was able, since he had made this trip dozens of times, to give us the most valuable geographical information about the rivers, peoples and stations just ahead and, what

was more important, about the provisions to be found in the station bazaars.

2

What struck me as a new feature of the train was that practically all the men and most of the women passengers were workers. My neighbour on the top shelf opposite was a welding engineer, and was going as an instructor to the provinces. Another young fellow in the end compartment was a fireman-fitter from a turf-moor north of Leningrad. He left, he said, because it caught on fire so often. The Tatar women belonged to a tailors' " artel," or association. It was a very different car-load from those of pre-Revolutionary days, or even from those of five or six years ago.

On the second day out we passed Samara and Orenburg, and crossed the Volga at Sysran. Newspaper information, that seems tedious in Moscow, here took on flesh and blood, so to speak. Goods trains passed us day and night, carrying oil, iron and salt ; timber was borne to Central Asia, where it is worth its weight in gold. Great fields stretched on either side of us. " There's a Soviet farm," said my neighbour, who was standing by the window. " How do you know ? " I asked. " Can't you see," he replied, "that they have tractors? There are only tractors and motor-lorries on the Soviet farms. Horses are only used by the field-clerks or the water-carriers." When night fell we could still see groups of people round camp-fires, and here and there the

unwieldy black shape of a tractor. These were the shock-brigade workers of the fields. They were doing night work now for the sake of the whole village, including those virtuous and serious-minded peasants, whose reactionary individualism hindered them from conceiving any other than private farming. " We shall plough for you ! " was the slogan of the shock-brigade ploughmen. And they ploughed the fields of even those peasants who had refused to enter the collective farms and had left their fields unploughed. Here, in the train, letters of complaint sent to " Pravda " came to life. Someone announced that he was leaving the collective farm, because, although he had worked all the year, only forty days had been noted down to his credit in the book.

At one station where we stopped there was a long queue waiting outside the co-operative. It appeared that winter gloves were being sold, but only on the condition that four lamp-chimneys were taken with every pair. Some of our fellow-travellers who lived in the country around Moscow, where kerosene lamps were the only means of lighting, and who knew, therefore, how difficult it was to get these glass-chimneys, were most indignant. At a small station further on, heavy winter galoshes were being sold in the co-operative booth—that warm July night ! As I looked out of the window the manager was just shutting up shop. It was midnight. He turned in my direction. He had a crumpled face, and wore a cap with a hard, shiny peak. His knees were bent, his gestures were fussy and futile. He looked like a

caricature from a newspaper. I seemed to see something written across his cap—was it " Right Bureaucratism ? " I asked myself. No, he was the night-watchman, and the words on his cap were only the initials of the railway.

3

Beyond Orenburg stretched Kazakstan. This country was an astounding discovery for me. Limitless wastes of perfumed steppe melting away into a mountainous blue horizon—it was a landscape that could never weary. The steppe-folk were even more extraordinary than the steppe. It was the first time I had seen the Kirghiz-Kazaks. For those who love the East, the fleeting impressions to be obtained in the steppe will yield much more than the real Asia—Uzbekistan, China or India—for the steppe has a greater elemental force than the fragmentary, broken up human settlements. The Kazak steppes have been left practically untouched by European-ising influences. Whoever sees, for the first time, Kazaks swaying on hairy, brown, stately camels, and the *yurts* scattered over the steppe—say, one to every square kilometre—or a big mullah with a grey beard riding a diminutive donkey by the railway track, whoever has seen this strong, picturesque people, will not doubt the truth of what I say.

They used to come up to the stations with huge, dark pouches made from the stomachs of sheep, filled with clarified camel-fat ; they also sold goat's down, *koumiss*, and milk warm from the steppe cows.

Their women, their mullahs, dervishes, musicians (I found one of the latter in a kerosene queue after the concert) were all vivid and colourful. A legless beggar, half Russian, half Kazak, crawled into the train. He wore a wide felt hat. His eyes were sharp and gleaming in the worn, weather-beaten face. I was so taken with the Kazaks' appearance in general that I could hardly keep myself from saying to this one: "Stay with me, stranger; I'll give you food and drink; sit down and tell me your story." And he would have sat down and told me tales of the steppe.

The poetry of the East appealed perhaps least of all to our Russian conductor. He would greet everyone who had bought anything in the station bazaars with caustic comments like—"Oh, so you bought milk, did you? You know, of course, it's asses' milk!" or—"Those aren't hens' eggs. They sold you tortoise eggs, you know!" According to him, the Kirghiz were in the habit of passing off tortoise eggs as hens' eggs, since it was difficult to distinguish between them. By way of cheering the women up he would call out: "Sorry, but your husband has been left behind!"

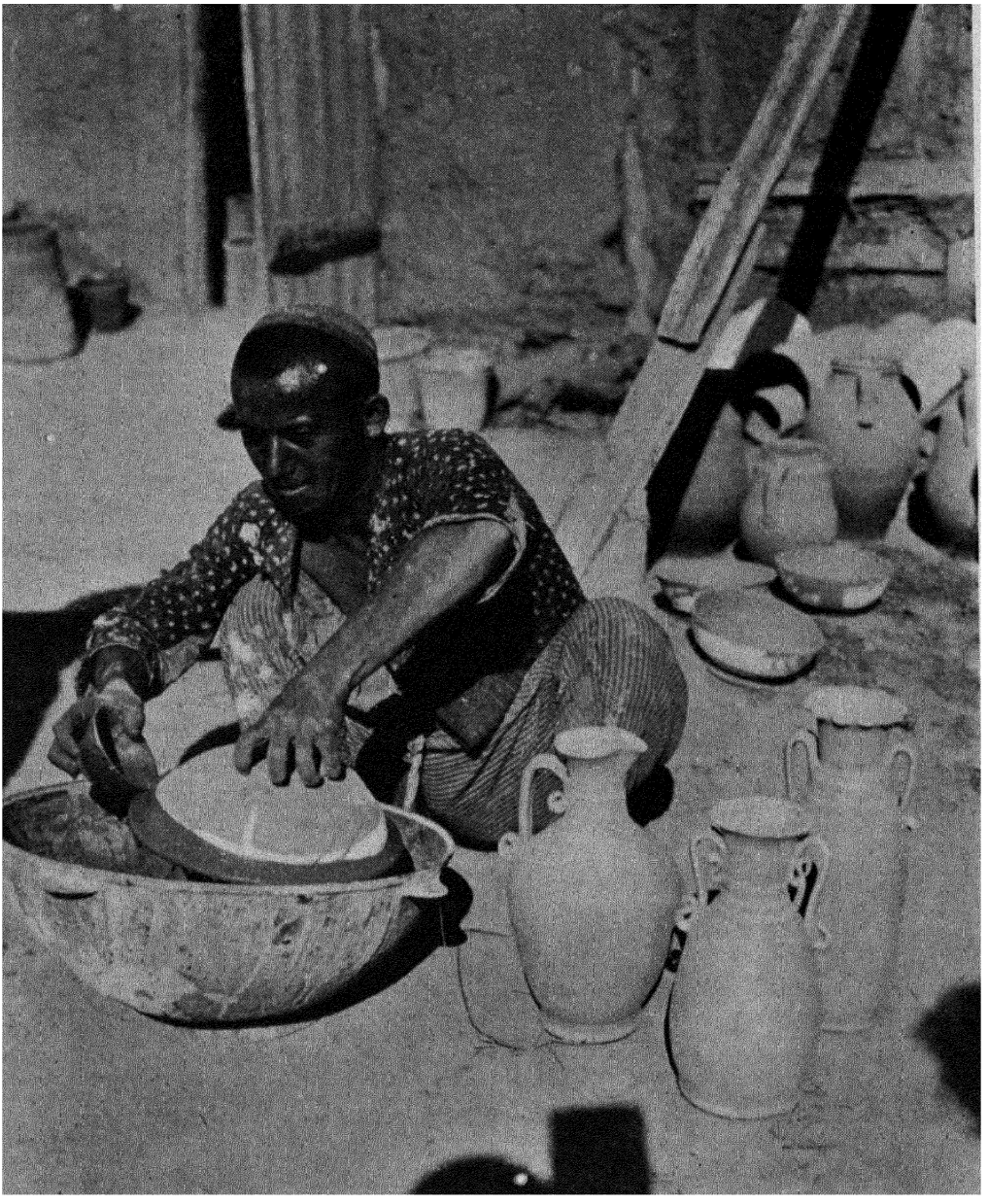
Traces of chauvinism could be observed in my fellow-passengers. The Uzbeks—I was warned—were extremely lazy and treacherous. Kazaks were terribly dirty in their habits and were regarded as idiots, since they wore padded coats in summer, and went about in winter with their chests open to the bitter winds.

One man told me that when he lived at Iletzk, a

little watering-place not far from Orenburg, he had seen the Kirghiz who came for cures ride straight into the salubrious lake, horse, arms, clothes and all. This reminded me of a story by a Russian writer. The hero is a landowner who, wild with boredom and drink during an attack of fever, puts on his old Hussar's uniform, rides full tilt into the pond and is drowned. There is, however, a slight difference between the landowner's intention and that of the Kazaks ; the latter ride in with the hope of drowning, not their sorrows, but the lice that pester them.

The fourth and fifth days of our journey we passed through Central Asia. After Kazakstan, it was difficult to get over my disappointment. A blanket of dust covered all green things. The oases looked withered and grey. Compared to the Kazak nomads, with their natural swing and freedom, the Uzbeks seemed obese and clumsy. A great deal depends, evidently, on the work to which people are accustomed. These domesticated gardeners, fed on melons and wheaten bread, digging away in their cotton plantations and riding asses, were not to be compared with the Kazaks, who ride hundreds of miles daily on horses or camels, and eat only meat and milk.

Uzbekistan and the Uzbeks produced the desired impression only after a journey into the interior of the country.



FERGHANA
A Potter

Chapter II

FERGHANA

I

I look back with pleasure on Ferghana. It is a small town built by the Russians after the conquest, that is, about sixty years ago. Until 1917 it was called Skobelev, after the first military governor of the district. The Uzbeks still call it thus. Skobelev was the Russian equivalent of General Gordon, a colonial conqueror with Victorian whiskers and luxuriant moustaches. At present the town bears the same ancient name as the famous valley, in which a number of other important towns—Andijan, Kokand and Namangan—are situated, and which produces huge quantities of excellent cotton. We went into the fields and picked a few of the open bolls of soft, fluffy Egyptian and American cotton.

The mode of life in Ferghana to-day still bears the stamp of the days of the conquest. The whole campaign savoured of light opera. It lasted twenty years and cost the Russians a thousand men, that is, considerably less than the number knocked down and killed in street accidents in any large European town in a year. The tone of the conquest is reflected in the planning of the town with its mean little fortress, the pretentious governor's house, the broad, spacious,

park-like streets. The only precaution the Russians seem to have thought it necessary to take was to build their town a long way—nine kilometres—from the native town of Old Margelan. Any advantage accruing from this, however, was completely lost, from the caprice of some idiotic official, who caused the railway to be built at yet another seven kilometres from both the towns.

For all that, Ferghana is one of the most intimate and poetic of towns that I have ever seen. It is surrounded by the high, snow-capped Alai Range, and intersected by a whole system of babbling " ariks " or irrigation canals. The streets are avenues of huge poplars. No other Central Asian town possesses such lofty, shady corridors of trees as Ferghana. Under the poplars sit Uzbek vendors of newspapers, grapes, apples, melons ; people pass by, unhurried ; great brown-and-yellow-striped, long-bodied bees boom among the sticky, heavy-scented fruit. Ferghana is so small that it is impossible to lose oneself there. All the institutions peculiar to a prosperous Russian town are in the chief street—the parks, the gardens, the dark-skinned boot-cleaners, and all the shops and restaurants the place can boast. The native bazaar is at the end of this street.

2

On market-days this is a particularly lively spot. Then the peasants from the surrounding kishlaks ride in to town, the townspeople themselves get together, and the bazaar becomes what is called a

" tamasha," or a social function. In Central Asia, bazaars are still bazaars, and the chief social event of the week for the Uzbeks and Kirghiz. As we were going to Ferghana with our cart, an Uzbek we met told us : " On Monday I must go to the bazaar at Wadil, on Tuesday to the one in Altarik, on Wednesday in Ferghana, and on Friday in Shah-i-Mardan." This circle of bazaars is the thing that unites all Ferghana in one whole. For to miss a bazaar means something more than foregoing possible profits—it means cutting oneself off from society, from life, colour, enjoyment, music, good food. It is not surprising, then, that the Uzbeks refuse to sell their goods, at any price, on the way ; that would rob them of a legitimate excuse for going to market. I knew an arbakesh who refused to drive me to a village ten miles away for less than fifty roubles, and went off next day with an empty native cart called an *arba* to the bazaar there for a quarter of a pound of tobacco, which must have cost him—if we count his food, fodder for his horse, his night's lodging in the caravanserai, and the loss of the money he might have made on me—about a hundred roubles.

Still, he had enjoyed his " tamasha " ; he had sat among other folk in the tea-houses, chatted to all his old acquaintances and relatives from neighbouring kishlaks, heard the latest news, bought himself a new knife, had made presents and received them, eaten *shashlik* in the daytime and a huge *pilav* at night ; he had listened to the music of the dutar, watched a bird-fight, found out the prices of everything, and

even bought a quarter of a pound of tobacco. Tamasha! Tamasha! As you go through the Ferghana bazaar you feel the fire and challenge of this word. Here stand the swarthy cooks roasting bits of lamb, horse or camel-flesh on spits over long, narrow pans of glowing charcoal. They lay the spits across the pans and fan the meat vigorously with a piece of sheet-iron. A peasant can buy twenty or thirty spits for the price of a good melon. I saw a peasant slicing a melon. A Russian woman went up to him and asked the price of it, as it was evidently an excellent one. He told her it was not for sale but for himself, and thereupon offered her a slice. A little crowd collected in the meanwhile. He invited all of them near to share it with him. He refused payment, touched his chest solemnly and said: "I am a *dekhan* (farmer). I grew this melon myself, and I want to treat you all to it!"

Tamasha! Here is the yard where onions and peppers are sold. Such mountains of shiny red peppers, and such deserts of white onion-skins as we never see in our dull, mean, greengrocery shops. Further on are great baskets of grapes, kept carefully covered with wadded blankets, and in the shade of the high arbas lie yellow, green and mottled melons. And while all this goes on, people sit about on carpets in the market tea-houses, listen to familiar rhythms beaten out on the drums, to heartrending songs of heroic, bygone days, and swallow at intervals the tasty Uigur meat dumplings, called *pelmeny*, prepared by chefs from Chinese Turkestan, and hear the

latest news and stroke their beards and make new acquaintances.

Tamasha ! There is a string of camels standing outside one of the entries. The Kirghiz are returning already from the summer pastures and descending into the valley for the winter. What have they brought with them from those far pastures—clotted cream (*kaimak*) the thick sour milk called *kotek*, or maybe rolls of felt decorated with wild but harmonious designs ? Alas, when we got nearer, we found that the haughty camels were merely standing in a queue for kerosene. Still, they also contributed to the tamasha !

3

No Russian market would be complete unless Russians took part in it, and not only as buyers (there are plenty of those), but as sellers. There are always the few unfailing Russian women, with hard, worn faces under white calico kerchiefs, selling sunflower seeds and pickled cucumbers. No matter where you may go—to the Crimea, the frontiers of China, Finland or Afghanistan, you will always see at least two women sitting, one with an old basket, and the other with an old bucket before her, calling out in the accents of Riazan or the Volga—" Sour cucumbers, if you please ! Sunflower seeds ! "

Here, in Turkestan, the difference between the Russian and the real Asiatic is very sharply felt. Take for instance one of these typical Russian country women, with her voluminous gathered skirts, loose

flannelette blouse worn outside the skirt, and white handkerchief tied demurely over her head. Against the background of gaily coloured Uzbek coats, turbans and embroidered caps, she looks like a symbol of something stern and ascetic, something out of a half monastic, workaday, dreary world, far from exotic Turkestan. Fragments of unverified historical reminiscences come into one's mind involuntarily—of men and women in the Russian Middle Ages, who lived in the depths of the forests, and under the influence of the Church and the monastery cleared the ground and ploughed the hard soil, mortified their flesh and worked out a spiritual and bodily resistance to the Tatar " Kingdom of Satan."

4

In the town of Ferghana the Russians fall into two sharply divided classes—the official and the unofficial. Under the first heading I shall place all the workers and employees, including those who served as officers or government officials during the Tsarist régime. The hotel where we stayed was full of young people, Russians who had been sent here on geological prospecting work and aerial survey. It was a sort of Russian America; a new type of youth was being developed—hard, businesslike, unscrupulous perhaps, but at any rate not the soft, brooding type of twenty years ago. It was in this hotel that I made the acquaintance of a Russian who had taken an active part in the Civil War. He was still in the army. A lean, strong fellow, with clear grey eyes. He was in-

clined to be lop-eared and, like all dignified people, never stared at anyone. One night as we were sitting listening to the Uzbek band in the park, he told me an exciting episode from his past. I reproduce in the next chapter the simple two-dimensional story as he told it to me.

The second category embraces the casual element—the disfranchised, formerly well-to-do peasants, who have been ejected from their own villages, and are now free to wander over the face of the U.S.S.R., and various groups of hooligans, drunkards and waifs. All of them do casual work and live in the bazaar. If a " colour problem " ever existed, these people would be the " poor whites," who constitute such a difficult problem in the southern part of the United States and in South Africa. It does not, however, exist here ; Uzbeks, Russians, Tadjiks and Kirghiz—all have exactly the same rights. There are certainly not two standards of living—one for the Russian, and the other for the native population. The eastern nationalities enjoy, in fact, as the indigenous population, certain privileges denied the Russians, especially with regard to government appointments and the use of the native tongue. The disfranchised element, the ragamuffins and hooligans, resemble most of all the poorer of the White Russian emigrants abroad—in Harbin or Stamboul. There is plenty of work here; the factories, fields and roads are crying out for workers, schools and colleges have been opened, and this casual element is being absorbed by degrees in spite of the rate at which it flows in from Russia.

5

Both in the towns and the kishlaks the majority of Uzbek women usually go veiled. We were rather amused once when we were going from Ferghana to Margelan on a droshky. The level-crossing was closed. We stopped. The train was still a good way off, but we were astonished to see an Uzbek woman in a long cloak (*parandja*), crouching on the rails with her back to us, evidently contemplating suicide. The Uzbek driver shouted to her, calling her " sister," and describing vividly the discomfort of being run over by trains, but she took no more notice of him than if she had been deaf. The train approached with a shriek. The woman rose, and suddenly we saw a green flag waving out of the parandja. She stood boldly with one foot on the switch, and did her signalling like a man. After that she turned towards us. Her stern, dark face showed traces of perfectly justifiable indignation that such mean civilians should have shouted at her—a signal woman, an employee of the railway !—during the execution of her duties. She had the right to administer a reproof or a warning. The laugh was on us this time.

Many Uzbek women go to work in the silk-filatures and other factories. Then the parandja flies away like an autumn leaf. Some, however, get tired of schools and factories, and return in the end to their farms in the kishlaks. There they marry and assume the parandja once more. But for all that the parandja is doomed.

Chapter III

THE STORY OF THE ACID TEST

I

" Towards the end of 1919 we decided that the time was ripe for secret revolutionary action. None of us had any political training; we were guided by an elemental dissatisfaction. We were out against the White Terror, against the outrages perpetuated by the Whites, the shooting of workers and intelligentsia, the closing down of newspaper offices, the raiding of all social organisations, and the treachery and madness of 1917.

" There were about fifteen of us, mostly schoolmates from the same town. Two were girls. We held our first secret meeting, and it was discovered that we had neither discipline nor a programme. We knew nothing about the forms a revolutionary struggle should take; we were not connected with any party. Someone suggested throwing a bomb at the governor of the province, or simply shooting him. In what way this murder was to benefit the revolutionary cause no one stopped to think. A few of us, including Gorbov and myself, offered to commit this terrorist act, three or four others began to bring forward timid objections to it, and the nature of each member became more or less clear.

"We parted without having come to a decision. At the second meeting there was still more shouting, and still less sense was talked. From the behaviour of one or two it seemed safe to suppose that they would go straight to the police afterwards.

"Exhausted and irritated by this endless talking, we held a vote on the question of the terrorist act. Only a few hands were raised. Someone protested against putting it to a vote. Everyone began to find fault with everyone else. The confusion continued until one of the members, the cleverest and most resourceful, resolved to put an end to this undignified comedy. 'Sh-sh!' he hissed. 'Police! Get out as quietly as you can!' Nobody believed him, but all felt relieved. We all took advantage of this opportunity and went away, irritated and disappointed.

2

"Gorbov was a newcomer to the town. He had come from Samara. He had a long, pale face, blue eyes and impulsive movements. His ringing laugh was pleasant to hear, and he could improvise excellently at the piano. I noticed that he often disappeared for long intervals.

"The day after the meeting Gorbov came in to see me. He suggested that we should go for a stroll in the park. When we got into a quiet green alley, he took a quick glance round and began to talk about the meeting. Didn't I think the whole affair looked rotten? he asked. I agreed. The majority of the conspirators, I said, were idiotic babblers and cowards.

" ' You know what,' he said suddenly. 'The reason for all this mess is that they don't belong to any party. This is all rubbish ! '

" ' And do you belong to one ? '

" ' Well, and what if I do ? '

" ' To which ? '

" ' It's all the same to you.'

" We were on the point of quarrelling, but we both felt that it would be silly and pulled ourselves up in time.

" ' I've known for a long time they were that sort,' Gorbov went on.

" ' Then why didn't you say so before ? ' I flared up.

" ' Well, I had to make certain first.'

" This annoyed me still more. I felt we were on the verge of something very important, and Gorbov's evasiveness was driving me crazy.

" ' Will you speak out for once ? ' I demanded. ' Else I shan't bother to meet you any more.' Gorbov reddened to the roots of his fair hair, then looked me in the eye and said : ' I can trust you, Igor, I think. I'll tell you——'

" And he told me how he had become acquainted with a runaway revolutionary—the real thing, he said. They had pasted up appeals and led study circles in the principal workshops, and now they had collected a good militant organisation. He told it all with a kind of exaltation that in 1918 and 1919 did not seem in the least ridiculous. ' The Red Army is fighting its way through. It is still on the other side

of Orenburg, but some day soon, the decisive moment will arrive—and we will need people. Would you join us if you were needed ? '

" I glanced at him eagerly ; so that was where it lay —revolutionary work. I had not found it, so it had come to find me.

" ' I'll go ! ' I exclaimed, holding out my hand to him. ' What shall I do now, though—just now ? Kill the governor ? '

" ' Oh, leave the governor alone ! What do we want with him ? ' Azan laughed at the idea. ' It was he who sent me to the meeting to find out if there were any chaps likely to be useful. It isn't the governor we need, it's the power. When the time comes we'll have to take the town. Let's go and see him now. He'll be at home, he never goes out before twelve.'

3

" When we got to the house Gorbov gave one long and two short rings at the bell. An elderly woman, with a tired, dark face, opened the door. She gave us a quick glance and then, with a movement of her head, indicated the open door of the dining-room. A man rose from the divan and came towards us. He was of middle height, with dark hair going grey, and a determined chin. His eyes were peculiar—they were blue, but the dark arches of his heavy brows and the long eyelashes made them look black. He was apparently a Caucasian. His movements were quick and graceful and gave evidence of great strength.

" ' This is Igor,' said Gorbov. ' He wants to work

with us.' Azan shook hands with me. There was another ring at the door, and Azan pointed quickly to another room. I went in and heard it lock behind me. I could hear low voices on the other side. After a few minutes Gorbov entered, handed me a thick bundle of papers, and explained what I was to do with them. I had become a member of a revolutionary organisation, and so, without another word, I went out to execute the duties laid upon me.

4

" I pinned up the appeals at dawn, when the last star was fading, so that they would be the first things the workers would see as they went by to the factories. If I did it earlier, at night, say, the proclamations might be noticed by the patrol, who would tear them off. Later in the morning it would be too dangerous. It was easy work for a quick young fellow with sharp eyes. All that had to be done was to draw out one of the sheets ready folded into four, get two drawing pins out of one's mouth and pin the thing up quickly, then run behind the post and look round. If there was any danger in sight you had to leave the handbills and run, depending on the dim light to prevent your being recognised. I sometimes went to the workshops with messages for the workers, sometimes to their homes. Often I would get a boat out and go down the river with some of the other comrades, and we would talk by the hour. Once, together with Gorbov and two workers, we uncoupled a car that we needed from the train, painted out the num-

ber and shunted it off into a blind alley. In this car we found a small printing machine that had been sent us from Samara, a set of type and ten bundles of pamphlets. We needed the car itself for sending away several men from our organisation.

"I never saw Azan again. I learned from hints dropped by comrades that he was one of the most famous revolutionaries of that difficult period from 1905 to 1917. He was renowned for his revolutionary exploits, his flight from the Schlüsselburg fortress, where he had been imprisoned for three years, and the seizure of a military training vessel, from which he, with eight other revolutionaries, had succeeded in carrying off a hundred and twenty revolvers and five thousand rounds of ammunition. He had been an anarchist, but as soon as the revolution broke out he had taken up the most dangerous and difficult work, and the Bolsheviks trusted him implicitly. In 1917 and 1918 he had been one of the leaders of the Transcaucasian republic, but after the treachery of the Mensheviks and the overthrow of the government he had run away. When he came out of hiding at last, it was to take up work in our town.

"We were proud of having such a leader and thirsted for action, for danger and glory, no matter what price we might have to pay for it. In June, 1920, exactly four months after I started my revolutionary work, we received word that we were to prepare ourselves, and that our own military organisation was to be set up.

5

" On the morning of June 25th, Gorbov called round at my flat, locked the door cautiously behind him, and then presented me with a revolver. He said that I must come to the shooting practice that was to be held at twelve in the woods behind the Long Ravine. I examined the Browning. It was not loaded. I had some idea of how to use it since my father had a couple of revolvers at home. Gorbov said that cartridges would be given out in the wood, told me the password and left.

" At the appointed time I went to the spot and found eleven persons there. I knew two of them, the young workers from the railway workshop who had helped me to shift the railway carriage, and a tall, plain-looking girl, Lisa, whom I had sometimes seen with Gorbov. The latter had not yet arrived. I looked curiously at the others. One of them—who was nicknamed Wolf—had an open face with regular features, a fine forehead and blue transparent eyes. He looked as though he would have made a good philosopher, but I did not think much of him as a fighter ; he was too slow, he gazed about so much, and was inclined to be fat.

" Alongside him stood a small, middle-aged man, with a wizened face and gnarled hands. I learned afterwards that he was an Austrian prisoner of war, a former shoemaker from Vienna. The man who drew our attention most was the eldest of the company, a stocky fellow of about thirty-seven, with a weather-

beaten face and an impressive head. His eyes looked sunken into his head, his nose was deeply pitted with smallpox, there were bitter lines about his mouth. At the same time, one could guess at powerful muscles inside the sleeves of his worn jacket, the muscles of a man used to heavy manual labour. To me and the other young students he looked an excellent type of hardy proletarian. We crowded round him. He did not mind in the least telling us that he was a member of the Communist Party since 1904, and that he was glad we would have the chance of doing some real work now. He spoke in a low, hollow voice, and had a frank, comradely way with him. Three of the others were young people, obviously students or clerks. They ran off the first and I do not remember them well.

6

" Soon after we had collected, Gorbov's cap appeared at the top of the ravine, and in a minute or two his whole figure. He had a flat, cardboard box bound with tape in his hand. ' Cartridges,' I said to myself. He waved to us. As he approached I could see signs of nervousness in his movements. He chose the tree at which we were to shoot, cut out a target on it, and measured off the range. We stood there in a group opposite the tree. Gorbov was untying his box slowly and deliberately, when suddenly the girl standing near me caught me by the arm and gave a half-choking cry of alarm. We all turned towards the point on which her eyes were fixed in terror, and

saw about a dozen soldiers running up the ravine towards us with their rifles trailing. To this day I can recall the horror that came over me when I caught sight of their heavy clumsy boots, the khaki tunics, the ferocious faces. We started forward, but here, in the very wood itself, as if out of the ground, four more rose up—three soldiers and an officer in cloak and epaulets. Gorbov stood there as pale as death. His eyes darted from side to side, and his hands shook, but he did not make the slightest effort to run away. He still held the box of cartridges. We had nothing to shoot with. The students dashed away like hares into the bushes. A couple of soldiers rushed after them. The soldiers had already formed a circle around us with their bayonets fixed. After a few minutes that seemed an eternity to us, two shots rang out in the wood. When the two soldiers returned and reported something or other to the officer, he replied, 'Good lads! That's the way! And if any of the others try to make a run for it, shoot them on the spot!' We heard a few heavy blows with the butt-end of the rifle on some unfortunate back, and were driven into the woods.

7

"I have no idea for how long we tramped; it seemed an endless time. My mind was a blank most of the time; but questions would shoot through now and again—'What next? Will we be questioned? No, tortured. No, no, probably shot! What shall we do? How shall I stand the tortures? Will there be

any chance of my killing myself first so as to avoid the torture ? I might snatch a rifle from someone, maybe, but who ? Make a dash for it ? When ? Then they'll begin to shoot the others. What shall I do, what shall I do ? ' These feverish calculations were interrupted by a shout—' Halt ! ' The wood had grown sparser. There was light ahead. Evidently we were coming to a clearing. ' Sit down ! ' ordered the officer. We obeyed slowly and reluctantly. The soldiers stood round holding their rifles in readiness. ' You two follow me '—the officer turned to the Austrian shoemaker and the girl. He nodded to one of the soldiers, who followed them. The officer went stumbling ahead, his face towards the prisoners and his revolver pointed at them. So our comrades were led away to torture and death. Years passed, ages. We strained our ears. A wild shriek from the girl, a blow, evidently on the face, a shot. We froze. It had begun. That was what awaited us.

" A few more long minutes of torment and sounds of loud swearing in broken Russian came to our ears. Then—' Nein ! nein ! nein ! ' The dull thud of rifle-butts, a groan of agony, and the order : ' Use your bayonet ! '

" In a few seconds the murderers stood before us once more, the officer with a grin on his florid face, and the soldier. Without saying a word, the officer waved his glove at the Esthonian and me. We rose and went to face our death. My body instantly sagged ; I had not an atom of strength left. My hands hung down, and my feet refused to walk

straight. It required a tremendous effort to drag them over the ground.

8

" In the state of horrible weakness that I was in, I found it difficult to comprehend the picture that opened before me when I came into the clearing. Right before me lay a corpse with outspread arms. The face was covered with a cloak, from under which thin red streams trickled. By the rest of the figure I gathered that it was Gorbov, my friend—whose carelessness had been our undoing. In the centre of the clearing stood a tent. The door flap was raised, but it was impossible to see if anyone was inside. About two paces away stood a little group of people, among them a Georgian, with one of the fiercest and cruellest faces I had ever seen. He was dressed in a wide, black *burka*, with epaulets. His right hand was encased in a white suede glove, over which he wore a ring with a big ruby. I was filled with hatred of this murderer, who was so obviously enjoying his ghastly work. I moved towards him, mechanically, as a helpless bird might move, fascinated, to a snake. His eyes were very bright. He took out his revolver, turned it on me, and shouted to the convoy : ' Give him the butt-end ! ' I received a terrible blow on the hip that knocked me breathless. ' Are you a Bolshevik ? Tell the truth ! ' I looked at him in silence. ' I'm at high school still,' I replied. ' I met this crowd in the wood, by accident.' ' Liar ! " he shouted. ' Search him ! ' One of the soldiers came up and in

a minute brought to light my revolver. 'Aha!' cried the Georgian. 'That's the kind of schoolboy you are, is it? A Bolshevik! I'll drill holes in you now, just watch me!' And he cocked his revolver.

"Suddenly a devilish grin spread over his face. 'If you'll repent, though, I'll maybe let you go, after all. Shoot this comrade of yours, and I'll give you your freedom.'

"With these words he handed me his revolver and pointed to the Esthonian standing a little way off. I cannot describe the horror and loathing that this suggestion aroused in me. I took the weapon, first aimed it at the Esthonian, then swung round and shot at the officer. The revolver emitted a faint sound, but there was no shot. It was not loaded.

"I was again struck with the butt-end of a rifle, and fell to the ground. For some reason or other they were in no hurry to kill me. I resolved not to rise again, but to rest and collect my strength. I was thinking hard, and looking about to find some means of escape. At that moment a voice rang out above my head. They were questioning the Esthonian.

"'Who are you?' asked the Georgian. 'We'll cut straps from your back in a minute!' 'No, you won't, I'm your own man!' replied the Esthonian quietly.

"I started.

"'What do you mean by that?' roared the Georgian.

"I heard the tearing of a seam in the Esthonian's

clothes, and then there was silence. The Georgian was reading out aloud.

" ' Tashkent Town Police Office. This is to certify that Ian Ozol is a member of this police force. All government offices and loyal citizens of the Russian government must give him every possible assistance.' ' The traitor,' I thought. ' That's the man we believed was an old Party member. He sold us all. He's their man. Curse him ! '

" But something quite unexpected occurred. ' Give him hell ! ' came a furious voice. It seemed somehow familiar to me.

" ' Give who hell ? ' I wondered. ' Me ? ' Then I thought I would prefer to die standing up, and I raised myself to a sitting position.

9

" Out of the tent, with a revolver in his hand, strode a strangely familiar figure with black hair and blue eyes. The Esthonian stood now as white as a sheet. On his face was a sort of rascally cringing smile, mingled with deathly terror.

" The man from the tent and the Georgian both shot at once. The Esthonian fell without a sound. ' But why did they kill him, their own man ? ' I was dumbfounded. Then I noticed something that astonished me still more. Gorbov's body moved. The covering was flung off his head. He stood up and came towards me. He was alive and well, and not bleeding anywhere. The streaks of red on his face had evidently come from a little bottle lying on

the place where he had lain. ' Cheer up, Igor ! This was all a test,' he said. ' What did I tell you, Azan ? ' The man who had shot the Esthonian was Azan, then. He and the Georgian—who had taken off his *burka*—stood by me and shook hands. ' You stood the test very well,' said Azan. ' Now we are comrades for life and death.'

" He bent over and whispered in my ear : ' Congratulations. In three days' time we're going to take the town.' "

Chapter IV

WADIL

I

The Ferghana Valley is the main cotton-growing region of Turkestan. It is the Nile valley of Central Asia—with this difference only, that here the irrigation system is served, not by one great river, but by a multitude of small streams flowing from the high snow mountains that shelter the valley from every side. And whereas in Africa or Arabia an interplay of cool oases and hot desert is the dominating feature, in Ferghana one finds an interplay of hot oases and icy mountains.

In order to give an idea of the importance of cotton for the country, I shall cite just one fact. In Ferghana the husks of the cotton-seed are used as fuel, just as in Bangkok, the rice husks are used for the production of power. These husks are obtained after the oil has been squeezed out of the seeds. "I'll ask you a riddle!" said a Ferghana Uzbek to me. "What is it —on one side snow, on the other hailstones?" and thereupon answered it himself. "It is a cotton-gin; on one side the fibre falls out like snow, and on the other the seeds pelt down like hailstones." The principal textile industry of Ferghana, however, is not cotton, but silk. Many of the Uzbeks that I met

later on the road to Shah-i-Mardan were workers from the silk mills in Old Margelan.

Ferghana is beautiful in the spring, when all the green is still young, and the town blooms in the shade of its great acacias and poplars and the freshness from its numerous little canals. But in August Ferghana is tired, stifled with heat, faded. That is the time to go away to the mountain villages where there is no dust and where the air, the water, and the fruit trees are still young.

2

I left Ferghana one evening on a motor-lorry belonging to the "Soyustrans," which was making a run to Wadil in order to collect dried apricots. I had decided to spend the night in Wadil, and to be up early next morning so as to make my way further into the mountains either on asses or an arba. The lorry did the twenty-five kilometres from Ferghana to Wadil in about an hour. I left my luggage in a wayside tea-house that overlooked a swift and noisy river. It was growing dark already. I went out for a a walk. Along the whole length of the main street of Wadil stretched an endless row of tea-houses. These were simply rough wooden platforms, raised well off the ground, and covered with a roof supported by wooden posts or trees that happened to be growing conveniently near. Often there were no walls at all. In one corner there would be a stove of clay bricks, whitewashed, a huge brass samovar and a collection of teapots and cups on the stove. The tea-house

keepers were untiringly and unintermittently engaged in some mysterious business behind stoves, just as clerks are at the desk in large hotels all over the world.

A traveller's luggage always lay by the wall if there was one, or if not, on the dais that looked over the road. No one seemed to have a moment's doubt about its safety. And I remembered how, on the station of a civilised town like Tashkent, people were robbed in a couple of minutes of all they possessed, how one sometimes had to wait an hour and a half in order to give in one's things at the luggage-office.

The river roared and clattered, the lamps in the tea-houses swung in the wind, the Uzbeks sat around in groups on carpets and straw mats and drank their tea. Here life had its own peculiar tempo, which was easy enough to keep up with. I wanted something to eat, and decided to look for a pilav.

Pilav, however, is a big affair. It is cooked in an iron cauldron, and only when it is specially ordered by not less than five persons. And I had no companions with whom to join. The representative of the State Wool Trust was away, the doors of the rest of the offices were locked either temporarily or permanently. I began negotiations in the various tea-houses where I saw the hearth burning, and where pilav was evidently being prepared. At one place they were making a pilav for ten people, but the cauldron was so small that the cook refused to accept me. In two other places I was, relatively speaking, successful. I was accepted as a shareholder, but I was warned that

the pilav would be made with horse-meat. Not long before starting on my journey I had read the memoirs of the famous Clavijo, who visited Central Asia in 1404. Tamerlane, who was then an old, old man, treated his guest to the finest selected horseflesh, which was served in great steaming piles. I decided, however, that since I was not threatened with Tamerlane's wrath, I would go farther in my search for a mutton pilav and, if this was not to be had, return to my horseflesh.

Lower down, beyond the turn of the street, several voices—Russian and Uzbek—called to me from a tea-house. My friend, the representative of the State Wool Company and some Uzbeks were having tea together. I sat down with them. They had recently finished their pilav, and greatly regretted that I had not been there. It had been a fine, fat pilav, they said, and there was a good bit of rice over. I lingered talking to them. They brought out a beautiful white melon. One of the Uzbeks cut it into large, succulent chunks, and I ate two. After melon and a couple of peaches, I felt my hunger had abated. I pitied the Russians in the train who had never stopped eating melons after Orenburg and had suffered agonies of sickness and indigestion in consequence. They had devoured them in quantities on top of salt herrings, cutlets, hard-boiled eggs, and tomatoes, whereas the Uzbeks do not eat melons as a relish, but generally make their dinner off them, along with bread. So, although I missed my pilav that night, I was not sorry.

We all rose and went on to another tea-house over the foaming river, and listened to a man playing the *dutar*. " Dost thou like our music, foreign man ? " asked my Uzbek neighbour, who was stout and swarthy and obviously full of the joy of living. " Two years ago there was another Moscow man here to visit us." " What are you doing here ? " I asked him. " All of us here are collecting the dried fruit. I belong to this place, that man is from Uchkurgan, and the other is from the head office in Ferghana. And thou, Moscow man ? " he inquired politely. " Thou art also collecting dried fruit ? " " Oh, yes," I replied, " I am, but unfortunately I eat all I collect."

From time to time they would take a pinch of dark-green tobacco dust, called *nos*, and put it under their tongues. A fine Persian water-pipe, called *kalian*, was brought round. It seemed over-refined, and out of harmony with the simplicity of Uzbek life. Everybody drew from it in turn. We drank in turn also from one *piala*—a small tea-bowl. It was green large-leaf tea, the *kok-chai* of Turkestan. To these three disinfectants—the *kalian* or *chilim*, tobacco and tea—the Uzbeks attribute their long life. They often live to be a hundred or a hundred and ten. But, although they live long, they age quickly, especially the women.

It was eleven o'clock before we finished our tea, and according to the custom, threw the price of it in the tea-cups.

3

The arbakesh who was to drive me to Shah-i-Mardan roused me long before there was a sign of dawn. Big stars were shining. By the light of a match that the innkeeper struck, I managed to collect my belongings, and get out a three-rouble note, which I offered him in payment for the night's lodging. He waved it away and called the arbakesh. They both explained that the money was not necessary. Then I climbed into the high arba, and settled myself on all the soft things I had with me, including a large bundle of camel-wool bought at Jusali.

An arba, it should be explained, consists of two enormous wheels higher than a man, with a wooden platform between them, on which the unfortunate passenger must sit. After all, they used but *one* wheel for torture in the Middle Ages! Only my pillows, blankets and camel-wool preserved me from slow and painful death on a far-off mountain road. From time to time the arbakesh, who was seated in a high saddle on the horse, with his feet resting on the shafts, would turn round to me and ask: "*Arba yakshi*?"—which, being interpreted, means, "Wonderful conveyance, isn't it?"

The great stars were still shining in the dark sky. From out of the gloom donkeys trotted silently to meet us, carrying goods to the Monday market in Wadil. Young goats and sheep, destined to be sold and devoured in the village bazaar, took themselves there. Whenever the horse stopped and the creak of

the arba ceased, I could hear the noise of the mountain stream. We entered a gorge. A sharp wind blew, and it grew colder. I buttoned up my coat. The horse stood still and flatly refused to go any further. To my great surprise my arbakesh refused to beat the horse, and took the whip away from me when I started to beat it myself. He begged, prayed, coaxed the animal, and pushed the arba along himself. The horse would go a few paces and then refuse again. I lost patience at last and went on ahead, hoping to get out of the cold, dark gorge sooner. In a few minutes I noticed that the arba had started after me. I came to a halt, so as to get into it again, but at that moment the horse stopped too. The driver put his hands together in an attitude of prayer, and begged me to go on walking in front of the arba. It appeared that the horse liked my white shoes, or maybe it was my elegant gait ; at any rate, it had chosen me, as psychologists would put it, as a stimulus-sign for the organisation of its behaviour. There was nothing else for me to do but to tramp ahead of the arba. It was growing light already. The road between Wadil and Shah-i-Mardan rises from a dusty crater to a mountain eyrie at a height of about 5,000 feet, surrounded by snow-covered peaks. Anything more beautiful than this road it would be difficult to imagine. I did not grudge either my feet or my time. Occasionally, the gorge narrowed down to a hundred or a hundred and fifty yards. The road wound between the clay walls, enclosing fields of maize, lucerne and wheat. At last the sun came up. The

fields and trees were the brightest and freshest of greens, and looked as if there had just been a shower, although no rain had fallen for two months. They had drunk of the waters of the mountain streams. The mountain river, a clear greenish-blue, clattered over its rocky bed. We met a great many people still. The women, hearing the creak of the arba, hastily dropped their black horsehair veils over their faces. I was anxious, however, to get a glimpse of them, and had recourse to the following simple ruse. I was walking behind the tall wheel of the arba, where they could not see me. As soon as they had passed the driver, they threw back their veils. Then I would stop, let the arba pass on and meet the woman full face, just at the moment she was lifting her veil. The old women's faces usually became distorted with horror at sight of me.

I had companions on the road sometimes—Uzbeks in groups of three and four, some on asses, but the majority on foot. They were, for the most part, workers from the Ferghana factories, who were going to spend their fortnight's holiday in the mountains. Their families invariably remained behind in stuffy Ferghana.

It was two o'clock, the hottest part of the day, when we arrived in the market place of Shah-i-Mardan.

Chapter V

SHAH-I-MARDAN—Part I

I

The bazaar of Shah-i-Mardan is not large. It is situated at the confluence of two rivers. Astride the meeting of the waters stand rattling mills, flanked by open tea-houses. The real centre of the village is the mosque, which is at the top of a steep hill overlooking the bazaar. The mosque stands in a garden, a pond, shaded by huge karaigach trees, lies before it, a flight of steps leads to the open prayer-hall. Adjoining it is a building supposed to contain the relics of a saint—the prophet Ali. No one believes this, but neither does anyone think anything of it, as the whole of Central Asia is bestrewn with legendary relics. In Osh the guides show you Suleiman's throne, in Jalalabad the healing springs where Job found relief at last, at Cherkal the place where Elijah was carried away to heaven, and in at least ten places in Central Asia the hoofmarks of Duldul, the prophet's horse.

The village of Shah-i-Mardan itself is engaged in the production of grain and fruit. Cotton does not grow at this altitude, but wheat, maize and lucerne yield good crops. Some of the villagers cultivate the mulberry as well, but all of them without exception take part in producing the principal crop—children.

There seem to be thousands of them in that little village. From babyhood they are dressed like miniature men and women—padded coats to the heels, belted with coloured handkerchiefs, high boots and embroidered skull-caps. Their healthy, well-covered bodies, short skulls and strong chins, seem to harmonise with their style of dress.

The old schools, where the mullahs taught, no longer exist. Once upon a time a father would bring his son to school, so that he might memorise the Koran in Arabic, and would say to the teacher: "Here is my son, beat him as much as you like, but do not cripple him. The flesh is yours, the bones are ours!" Nowadays, the best buildings in the kishlak are given over to schools, and the lessons are all given in the Uzbek tongue, recently latinised.

2

The kishlak did not always live as peacefully as now. The Revolution swept over it, and the steep street ran with blood. From 1919 till 1920 it was a nest of brigands, the Central Asian brigands, known as *bassmachi*. They massacred the revolutionary authorities of Shah-i-Mardan. The Red Guards entrenched themselves in the only stone building, the mosque. Then it was that the cupola of cerulean blue tiles was destroyed. It has now been replaced by an iron one. The population was sharply divided into partisans and enemies of the Soviet Government. On March 18th, 1919, Khakim Zade, an Uzbek school teacher, was torn to pieces by a mob.

He had been at war with the mullahs, and had forced open the shrine containing the relics of the prophet Ali, and shown the people that they were nothing but the skeleton of a sheep and an old boot. How shall we account for the bitterness of this struggle? The quiet agricultural life of the old kishlak had its own hidden social mechanism. Long before the Russian conquest, in the days of the Kokand Khanate, Shah-i-Mardan was a "vakuf" or spiritual domain administered by the chief mullah of the mosque, and entirely independent of the Khan. As a matter of fact, the whole kishlak was in the hands of the clergy. The latter were, of course, responsible for the legend that Ali's remains were buried in Shah-i-Mardan, and for the building of a large and beautiful mosque. Thousands of pilgrims from the Ferghana Valley visited the mosque every year, and the clergy waxed fat. It was the custom for the pilgrims to sacrifice sheep, distribute alms, and make presents to the clergy. A multitude of innkeepers, mullahs, parasites of every sort, hashish vendors, musicians, holy men and women, hundreds of beggars, grew up like weeds around the mosque. Trade followed in religion's footsteps. Shah-i-Mardan became an important market town. The clergy enriched themselves, bought up the land round about, and loaned money to the peasants at high rates of interest. The well-to-do peasants grew richer, the poor were ruined and fell into the hands of the usurers. The rich lived up on the hill, in the houses around the mosque, where the air was dry and healthy; the poor

lived huddled in the damp valley. The poor identified their enemy with a small group of people who were at one and the same time mullahs, landowners, *mirabs*—that is, distributors of the water supply—usurers and magistrates. There were also the numerous relatives and beggars depending on this group. It was hardly surprising, then, that the dull resentment against the rich blazed up at last when the Soviets came into powér. When the teacher came to Shah-i-Mardan he found out that it would be as impossible for him to teach or to heal as to deal out justice or to rule in this kishlak, until the upper strata of the clergy, who had enriched themselves by exploiting the peasants, had been exposed. Things got worse and worse and came to such a pass that it seemed to the teacher sometimes as if all the evils issued from a great spider settled in the *masar* and calling itself the relics of the prophet Ali. He thought that if he could show up the deceitfulness and greed of the mullahs, their power would come to an end as well. One hot summer's day an incident occurred that forced the issue. A young woman had been beaten by her husband and died of it. The mullah authorised a hasty funeral before a post-mortem could be held by the village Soviet. Khakim Zade and a few of his young sympathisers—Communists, poor peasants and atheists—left the school and turned their steps in the direction of the mosque. Some peasants, alarmed, suspicious and curious, followed them. Soon strange rumours spread, and the villagers hurried to the mosque. Khakim Zade broke open the shrine,

dragged the famous relics to light—they turned out to be a few sheep's bones and an old native boot—and showed them to the people. He then made a fiery speech, in which he informed the people that they were now free of the evil spider that had entangled them, that the mullahs were crooks, and that they—the people—should go to the village Soviet for protection. The crowd of peasants made way for him and he went down to the village. But the mullahs were naturally not going to take this blow lying down. Immediately afterwards there was a loud outcry that the grave of the saint had been desecrated, that Allah would punish the whole kishlak for this, and destroy all the children.

When Khakim Zade left the village Soviet two hours later, he was met by an angry mob of beggars, tea-house keepers, old women and fanatics of all kinds. A stone was thrown. He stooped and clapped his hand to his knee. Another stone hit him on the head ; he fell, and the crowd tore him to pieces.

The case was brought up in the Ferghana court. It was not the beggars and tea-house musicians, however, who were punished for the murder, but his real enemies, the mullahs, money-lenders and landowners, against whom he had fought, and who had been the instigators of the murder. Khakim Zade's grave stands high over the kishlak. A stone slab, ornamented with a medallion, informs the stranger that this is the grave of the teacher, poet and revolutionary, who lost his life in the struggle against mediævalism.

3

Shah-i-Mardan has now entered on a new phase of development. It is true that there are neither mills nor workshops in it, and that neither cinemas nor aeroplanes can be seen there. But a good motor-road leading from Ferghana is being made, and the place is becoming the chief health resort of Uzbekistan. A sanatorium is being built big enough to accommodate a thousand tubercular cases. Two rest-homes on the same scale are under consideration. The people in charge of the building of the new sanatorium are all local people born in Turkestan. Business takes them frequently to Ferghana; when it is difficult to get horses or the motor-bus does not come in time, they walk the fifty kilometres in a day. They insist that a first-class motor-road should be built, right up to the sanatorium, that a small turbine should be set up on the wild mountain river—the Blue Saj—to supply electricity to the sanatorium, that land should be reserved for the raising of vegetables and fruit and pasturage for the cattle required by the sanatorium. Their plans concern not only the sanatorium, but will influence the life of the whole kishlak and the surrounding district. Farming here must now be reconstructed on the Alpine pattern; in other words maize must give way to cows, poultry and nursery-gardening.

In the cool mountain evenings they would sit around the samovar that breathed out a sharp scent of pencil-wood, and look at photographs of places

round about Shah-i-Mardan, of summer pastures in the mountains where the Kirghiz nomads go, of glaciers and swift rivers—and talk about the glorious future of the Alai Switzerland.

Chapter VI

SHAH-I-MARDAN—Part II

I

The whole arrangement of the village is rhythmical. Below is the bazaar, from which terrace after terrace of flat roofs climbs over the rocks. On the crest stands the old mosque, the heart of the kishlak. The architectural melody of Shah-i-Mardan has its own peculiar accompaniment, the surge and roar of two mountain rivers—the White and the Blue Saj—that meet at the foot of the village. The noise is like the rattle of an endless train. " How we miss the noise when we go back to Ferghana," say the old Shah-i-Mardan visitors, " the town seems dead and still."

Shah-i-Mardan itself is not really very high—4,500 feet above sea level—but it is surrounded by several mountain ranges, and the farther ones are higher than the nearer. The last and highest is crowned with snow. The key to this Piedmontesque landscape is the splendid Central Asian poplar. In the mountains the juniper, locally known as *archa*, prevails. Poplars grow along the canals that form part of the irrigation system, and in five years reach a good height ; in ten they are splendid white pillars, and in fifteen begin to rot at the core. As fuel the poplar is unsatisfactory; it is sticky and damp and

burns badly. The archa grows on the waterless higher slopes, and takes, so I am told, from two to three hundred years to reach maturity. It is dark and dry and makes excellent fuel. It can be split up as easily as a pencil and burns like a candle. When you stand by the mosque and look down at the terraces of flat roofs and the encircling range of snow-splashed mountains ahead, you will be deceived for a moment into thinking yourself in that other mountain country —Ladak and Srinagar—that lies on the far side of the Pamirs, and looks so much like Ferghana.

Shah-i-Mardan is much nearer the Pamirs than Osh, although the latter is usually chosen as the starting-point of expeditions into the Soviet part of the Pamirs. Shah-i-Mardan stands at the entrance to the Alai Range. Beyond that lies the paradise of Kirghiz nomads, the warm Alai Valley, and then comes the Trans-Alai range that merges into the Pamirs. The distance between Shah-i-Mardan and the highest peak in the Alai Range and, for that matter, in the whole of the Soviet Union—the Lenin Peak (formerly Kauffman)—is only thirty miles. The Lenin peak is 25,000 feet—higher than either Elbruz or Mont Blanc. Shah-i-Mardan lies in that pocket of the Soviet Union which is nearest to India and China. It is only about a hundred miles from this village to the frontier of India or Afghanistan, and to China ninety.

2

We made no special preparations for our visit to the place, nor were many formalities required nor the

assistance of a steamship company. We came by almost unnoticeable stages to Central Asia and the frontiers of India and China. Mussulman influence can be seen in everything, in the religion of the people, the architecture of the mosques, the costumes and turbans, language and customs. It is said that the members of the Turki race are the most devout Moslems in the world, since their culture, literature and manners have been formed under Moslem influence alone ; while in the case of other and more cultured Moslem nations there was a previous inheritance of Aryan or Semitic culture, which tended to outweigh the Islamic tradition. The best examples of this in Central Asia are the Tadjiks, whose music, dances, manners and social philosophy are more pagan than Islamic and more Mediterranean than Eastern. The nearer one comes to the western border of China the clearer become the traces of the influence of the Chinese, more than once the masters of the Ferghana Valley. The mines now being worked by the Soviet Government in the vicinity of Shah-i-Mardan all show traces of having been worked by the Chinese ; there are tunnels, fragments of vessels, implements, most of which date from the Han dynasty, which was already reigning two centuries before the birth of Christ.

The Chinese obtained hereabouts things like cinnabar, mercury and gold. Great treasures are said to be buried in these rocks, but their actual hiding-place is known only to the Kirghiz, if to anyone. I was told that once, not far from Shah-i-Mardan, an eagle with

something glittering in its beak was seen to fly out from a cavity in the rocks. Someone shot at it, and it dropped to the ground. The glittering object turned out to be a gold chain of ancient workmanship. But the cave containing the treasure was never found. A couple of years ago an expedition was told of an old Kirghiz, who knew the secret of the treasure; but he was dying when the party got there and his secret, if indeed he possessed one, died with him.

Chinese influence can be clearly seen even now in methods of work, the crafts, and food. Almost all the mosques in the kishlaks are constructed not on the principle of Near Eastern vaulted buildings but in the form of open Chinese halls. The decoration of the beams and the ceiling, with its crude harmonies of blue, green and red, show distinct traces of Chinese craftsmanship.

3

Life in these distant parts is well adapted for travelling; the towns and villages are stages along the way rather than permanent settlements. They are tea-houses and caravanserai around which a few houses have sprung up. Here one feels the true brotherhood of the road. Wayside inns are open at all hours of the day or night. Nobody asks any questions; to stare or show curiosity about strangers is regarded as the height of incivility. You stay as long as you like, feed your animals, make your bed, cook your food and rest a day—then you move on again with no more ado than a friendly nod, though your

destination may be Peking, Kashgar, or Peshawar. If you should spend the night in a tea-house, the master of it will supply you with blankets, if you are hungry he will make you pilav, and if you invite him he will be delighted to help you to eat it. Mornings in mountain parts are cold, but after a bit of splashing in the icy-clear river you feel more vigorous and the shadows melt rapidly before the sun. Uzbeks move to and fro about their morning affairs. They are not fully dressed, their carelessly worn clothes and slippers and general good looks and elegance remind you absurdly of an army hostel, where majors and subalterns move furtively about in dressing-gowns to reconnoitre their morning baths.

4

The outskirts of Shah-i-Mardan are enchanting. Not far off lies another old kishlak—Jordan—at the foot of pink-and-grey rocks. A couple of hours' walk in the other direction takes you to two wonderful clear blue lakes. On the way one meets Kirghiz huntsmen armed with matchlocks on tripods. The huntsmen generally go in pairs, one to take aim and the other to fire. They go after wild goats, pheasants and partridges. The mountain streams contain plenty of trout—a species called *marinka*. It is a good enough fish if carefully cleansed first of the black inner membrane, which is poisonous.

But bigger and more dangerous game is to be found in these mountains. Wild boar is extremely

plentiful around the kishlaks, and causes the peasants much annoyance when the maize is ripe. Twenty kilometres or so farther away there are panthers and tigers, but nobody hunts them, since the skins are regarded as of little or no value.

The road never wearies the traveller, never ceases to astonish him with new beauties. No matter how far, how wild, stony and sterile a place one may have to pass through, the vegetation by the waterside will be fresh and strong and brilliant. There had been no rain for months when I was there, yet the green of poplars shimmered as if after a shower, fields of ripe maize—the most beautiful crop of all—glowed in the mellower sun of autumn, and relieved the deep rich green of the lucerne meadows (that yield five crops a year) behind the crumbling yellowish-white clay walls.

Chapter VII

THE KIRGHIZ PASTURES

I

The Uzbeks are surrounded both physically and mentally by Kirghizia. In the course of their history the Persians and Tadjiks of the south tended to make the Uzbeks into a settled, civilised people, peaceful Moslem tillers of the soil, while the Kirghiz in the east dragged them back to the steppe, to cattle- and horse-breeding, to plundering and paganism. Kirghizia encroaches on Uzbekistan from all sides. If you go ten miles from the river oases into the mountains or the steppe you are already in Kirghizia, and a different world. Gone is security of life ; gone are the quiet tea-houses and steaming *plovs*, the beds and blankets for stray travellers. You are now in a harsh, cold country where searching winds blow through your summer clothes, where the principal food is sour milk, where days are hot and nights freezing, where half of your body will be scorched in the sun while the other half remains icy cold in the shade, and where every man is on his guard when he catches sight of the silhouette of any other rider.

The conception of the continuity of human society vanishes in Kirghizia. Man stands face to face with

people and with Nature, and he must be constantly on his guard against both. This throws him back a thousand years, but at the same time calls out elemental feelings like fear, uncertainty and desire for adventure, which can never be satisfied in a peaceful oasis with its muddy canals and braying asses. All that a traveller needs for the preservation of life against hunger, cold, or the attacks of other people, he must take along with him.

It was full summer in Shah-i-Mardan when we saw the Kirghiz starting for the mountain pastures of the Alai, where it was still only spring.

The procession wound slowly up the stony ravine. Women rode first, sitting up very straight on their horses, their heads enveloped in swathings of soft white muslin, their coats bound round the hips with coloured handkerchiefs, and babies at their breasts. Both men and women wore the same heavy, wadded cloaks and high boots. After the file of chestnut horses came asses mincing along with gay, painted cradles strapped across their backs. Behind the last rider stalked the great haughty brown camels. Black sheep and small silky goats skipped alongside. The nomads were starting out for the Jailau.

By the end of June the mares are just putting on flesh and the fermented mares' milk, *koumiss*, is at its best.

2

It was July, the burning, fruit-laden July of Uzbekistan, when we set our faces towards the

mountains. We were a party of seven, including a guide.

We started about seven in the evening; not that we hoped to get anywhere that night, but simply to avoid those initial morning delays that occur when one of the party feels he must shave for the last time, and another thinks that one of the asses has a dirty look in his eye and maybe it would be better to change him. But once you get the people going and make them sleep on the hard floor of a village tea-house it is possible to get well away before the sun comes up. So that evening we made for Jordan, a kishlak about five miles away. The tea-house which served as an inn was a simple affair of a long wooden dais with a roof and two-and-a-half wooden walls. One corner was decorated with Mendeleyev's periodical tables and a diagram of human intestines. A dramatic poster showing the horrors of alcohol had probably a purely æsthetic value, since Moslems, in the villages at any rate, do not drink.

A couple of Uzbeks prepared our supper, a tasty plov dripping with mutton fat. We sat on the floor and ate with our fingers. There were a good many guests. Sometimes they would politely help each other to plov. They would take a handful of hot rice, press it into a lump, and ram it quickly down the neighbour's open throat. At the end of the meal, they wiped their fingers on their faces, beards, hair or boots so as not to waste fat.

After supper the Uzbeks danced their monotonous rhythms with much snapping of the fingers. The

rest of us lolled about on carpets and clapped to beat time.

No sooner had we got well into the hills next morning than the sun came up full strength on our backs. The road was dreary in spite of the sunshine. We were passing through a stretch of country where every blade of grass was burnt up. The luggage, which had been carelessly fastened on the asses by the sleepy guide, kept falling off and getting under their feet. Our only consolation was that we met with many cold, swift streams on our way.

At last we came to wide fields of clover. Wooded slopes mounted steeply to a grey, sharp-toothed skyline. Shining chestnut horses stood about grazing in groups. The round felt *yurts* of the Kirghiz were dotted here and there like brown mushrooms. This was Myshalan. We put up in the only building the place boasted—a rough wooden shed that resembled a stable but was called a mosque. The Kirghiz are only nominally Moslems, and do not live in the Jailau except in the summer months.

A few friendly Kirghiz brought us thick sour milk, for which they refused to take payment. Then a couple of us went off to look for koumiss. Moving about the "camp" was difficult, as it swarmed with snarling sheep-dogs. The old doctor who was a member of our party employed a device that I had never seen before. We were approaching a yurt, and when we were about two hundred paces away a huge dog burst out from behind it and came straight at us. Suddenly our friend squatted down, rolled his eyes,

and waddled in this position towards the dog. It had a soul-destroying effect ; the dog came to a standstill, then its nerves gave way, and it trotted off with its tail between its legs, looking back at intervals. The doctor stood up and announced solemnly that he had demoralised more than one dog in that way.

The yurt was dim and smoky. The wicker framework of the tent could be seen inside. Wooden ladles and a knife or two were stuck into it. Carpet saddlebags served the same purpose as shelves or cupboards, and reed mats were the only decoration. We bought a skinful of excellent koumiss that fizzed like champagne, and then left.

At about ten in the morning the sun was a blinding glare, but it was only necessary to get on the shady side of a yurt to shiver again. The shadows on the faces were as sharp and dense as by lamplight.

3

Next morning we bathed in the icy river that flowed from the distant glaciers, and after a hasty breakfast started out for a bigger Jailau at Shivali.

At first the road ran downhill and was extremely pleasant at that early hour. Patches of unirrigated wheat were being cut.

After that we had to pass through a species of desert. Bare, inaccessible mountains, a gloomy, waterless country. It lasted a couple of hours. Then a few stray yurts came in sight, separated from the road by a wide ditch. Here, after long haggling, we managed to buy a skinful of koumiss. It was fatal. The scorch-

ing sun of high noon and the milk acted on us like a drug. We could hardly drag our legs after us; all we wanted was to lie down in the sun anywhere and sleep it off. And there were hills in front of us to be crossed.

When the last of the steep hills was surmounted we descended into a green valley through which a narrow river ran. The long, sweeping lines of the downs where the herds were grazing carried the eye up to the jagged lilac-grey of the rocky Alai. Several small settlements of dark-brown yurts stood at wide intervals.

A family yurt was entirely given up to us. It looked badly moth-eaten, and let in the icy wind of the mountains at night, but in the daytime we were grateful for its cool shelter from the glaring sunlight.

Here we made friends with a good many of the men and women. The women's faces had a certain rugged charm, especially when they were softened by swathings of India muslin round the head and throat. Most of them had a good hard red colour on their high cheekbones, and were sturdy and well set up. Their teeth were blackened. Their long plaits of oily hair were lengthened with heavy black cord, weighted with silver ornaments, coins and the keys of the family trunk. They wore trousers tucked into high, soft rusty boots with turned-up toes.

The men wore very effective hats of white felt lined with black. They were made in four or five sections so that they could be folded flat, and were

worn over the skull-caps as a protection against rain and sun.

The mountains shut out the evening light very soon. By the time we roused ourselves from the torpor brought on by the koumiss and the long tramp, it was about six o'clock. The ranges looked warmer in the golden evening light, the chestnut horses glowed. But before we got the rice boiling in the big iron cauldron, the warm light faded and a searching wind arose. We had the usual crowd of bidden and unbidden guests for supper.

About nine o'clock the chairman of the village Soviet called round. We put on the gramophone. He wept to hear songs coming from a mere box. But the Kirghiz are sharp folk, and in half an hour he had learnt to put it on himself.

4

That evening a half comic, half tragic incident took place, which cast a shadow over the remainder of the trip.

We were warming ourselves round the fire, and the warmth and koumiss must have loosened our tongues. We began to pay more attention to our hosts. We were particularly taken by the son of the host, a fine lad with a beautifully cut mouth, perfect teeth, and a very bold look. The only woman in our party, Vera, gazed at him so persistently that we began to laugh at her. The Kirghiz noticed this, and summoned up enough courage to go and sit down by her. The doctor announced that he thought they

might make a match of it. The Kirghiz' white teeth flashed. "What *kalim* would they want?" he asked. "Oh, about a hundred sheep," was the reply. The talk assumed a more businesslike tone. Someone suggested that a couple of camels and a pound of silver should be added. It was only afterwards that we realised the difference between our conception of a joke and the Kirghiz conception.

For the next two days the Kirghiz boy never left Vera's side; he brought her the best koumiss and *airann*, and once offered her the greatest delicacy known to them, dried froth of milk. We soon noticed that the Kirghiz elders looked disapprovingly at us. Another social evening followed; the Kirghiz danced slowly and heavily to the sound of the dumbra, and we sat about weary after a long day's tramp. About ten o'clock we heard a shot outside, and immediately afterwards several men dropped in. They were evidently strangers and were armed with rifles. Our Kirghiz friends exchanged glances and seemed a little uneasy, but the playing and dancing went on. The bridegroom's brother got up to dance. It was evidently a slow and painful process with him. After he had made a few turns he grabbed Vera's hand by way of invitation to dance the next. He was a hefty lad, and with a quick movement he swung her over to where the strangers were sitting by the door-flap. Some confusion ensued, and then I found myself and two more members of our party and the old guide blocking the exit. It appeared the guide had expected something like this. The moment's

disorder passed, Vera returned to her place, and everything went on as before, except that two of our men went out to reconnoitre. They found several saddled horses and a couple of men waiting outside. Before they could speak to the men, however, our Kirghiz host had caught up with them. He volunteered the explanation that the strangers were relatives of his, and that everything was all right. Nothing could be learned from his face.

Meanwhile in our yurt the strangers were fingering their rifles, and casting suspicious glances in our direction, although they had nothing to fear from us —we were all unarmed. Some of the local Kirghiz muttered and nudged them, and after a while they laid aside their rifles. The bridegroom sat with his bridal wreath round his skull-cap, staring at Vera, and swaying a little to the music.

There was an atmosphere of tension, and it did not relax, even when the guests left and we were free to sleep. It was decided that someone should stay awake all night and keep watch.

It was clear to us now that our would-be joke had been taken more seriously by the nomads than we could have wished. The visit of the armed men seemed to point to one conclusion, that the bridegroom's friends were preparing to carry off the girl that night. There was no time to lose. Vera put on a pair of trousers and my old jacket, and went out with two of our party. A few Kirghiz were still hanging about outside, and looked sharply after the three as they left. It was too dark to make out much

and, convinced that only men had left the tent, they took no further notice. Vera slipped behind the horses, took off her men's clothes and rode away with one of the party. The other went back to the tent.

Several hours later the flap of the tent was lifted, and the bridgroom came in with a dim lantern. Excited voices could be heard behind the yurt. Just before light came we could hear through the ground the beat of horses' hoofs dying away; we turned over and slept.

It was late when we awoke. The guide came in very upset and announced that one of our asses had had its tail and mane clipped. This act had something the same significance as the tarring and feathering of a girl in other countries.

The old men and women were obviously rejoicing in their victory. The young bridegroom was nowhere to be seen. We left without honours or an escort, but we were conscious that we had not deserved them.

Chapter VIII

SAMARKAND. BAZAARS AND MAZARS

I

Samarkand is, of all cities, most like Rome. It is scattered about on hills like the Holy City; long, dusty roads run through it and cool, green groves are dotted here and there. Ruins of vast buildings rear themselves out of a sea of hovels. The great arches seem to raise their still powerful arms to heaven, as if complaining of the squalor that lies about their feet. Some of the ruins, such as, for example, the mosque of Bibi-Khanum, wife of Tamerlane, are difficult to dissociate in one's mind from Piranesi's etchings. But here the architectural resemblance ends. Rome was built of stone and concrete and mortared with lasting materials. Perhaps that is why the Pantheon, for instance, looks so disconcertingly like an American college hall.

In Turkestan, where everything is built of clay, everything looks old before it is finished. All the finest monuments in Samarkand were constructed of loess bricks, faced with clay. The buildings soon crumbled. The pious worshippers would hurry from their prayers in the mosques, fearful lest the roof should fall in on their heads. The most ancient of the buildings is no more than five hundred years old, the

majority of those in the Registan—the central square —hardly three hundred. And now they stand in ruins. The minarets topple over, the cupolas fall, the glazed facings peel off like torn wallpaper, great cracks and fissures appear in the walls. Of some of the most magnificent monuments only a few crumbling clay fragments remain.

The actual building of all the mosques, schools and mausoleums of Samarkand went on in peculiar enough circumstances. On his way home from the conquest of India, Syria and Turkey, Tamerlane collected not only spoils of material value—gold, ivory, carpets and slaves—but brought with him architects, jewellers and other craftsmen whom he found in Damascus, Alexandria or Delhi.

He desired to capture the trade of Central Asia, and to make all the principal stages on the trade routes between the East and the West—China and Europe—as glorious and attractive as bazaar-towns can possibly be made. He wanted them to glitter like jewels in the desert, and their fame to spread far and wide over Asia and Europe and the whole of the then known world.

The most convincing proof of artificial growth is that a Golden Age of architecture was unaccompanied by a Golden Age of letters and manners. The description of the Court handed down to us by Clavijo, the Spanish Ambassador to Tamerlane, convinces us that there was no real civilisation there. The arts were not at home in Central Asia; they were simply rare visitors to Tamerlane. Buildings were put up in a

hurry, between campaigns, and often in the absence of the Emir. The process was superintended by his ministers, who were afterwards accused by Tamerlane of squandering the funds or wrecking the work, and beheaded. Whenever the Emir wanted to hurry on the building of some mosque or other, he would go and see after things himself. The illiterate old man would settle himself beside the pit dug for the foundations, and throw meat and money down to the workers there. Art brings it own Nemesis in its train, however, and a heavy price had to be paid for the fact that every creation of Tamerlane's was only a means and not an end in itself. Samarkand—and in this lies the main difference between Tamerlane's creation and Rome—lacks the appearance of eternity. Built as it was by the slave-labour of captive craftsmen, at the bidding of a semi-savage chieftain, this city will vanish in time, leaving no more trace of itself than a mirage in the desert. The buildings were put up hastily, rotten clay structures; the style was confused, the decoration ephemeral. Almost all the mosques were faced with coloured tiles in gigantic patterns, reminiscent of the canvas embroidery common to many primitive peoples. The general impression is of a pale yellow towel embroidered in bright blue and green petit-point thrown over all the mosques and minarets. Sometimes an arch alongside would be decorated by the Frenchmen of the East—the Persians. Intricate designs in tiles of deepest cobalt are interspersed with texts from the Koran. The scale of the arch may be grandiose, while

the architectural plan of the whole building may be mean and unresourceful. The plans approved by Tamerlane were not chosen for the evidence they displayed of a search for harmony and perfection of proportions, but for the impression the façades would produce on merchants and nomads who, it was expected, would be subdued and overawed by Tamerlane's magnificence. The cupolas were decorated in glazed titles of glorious colours, but they usually consist of two domes—a large false one outside and a small true one inside. They never give the impression of power and harmony that is produced, even by their miniature rivals, such as, for example, La Martorana in Palermo. Comparisons, it is said, betray sluggishness of mind, so perhaps I should not compare. Tamerlane's mausoleum (built during his lifetime) is like a powerful head without shoulders. There is no break in it, nothing to stop the eye from the top to the ground. St. Peter's is sturdy and logical with its head, its shoulders, and colonnaded arms. The eye can move gradually and by pleasant stages over the whole. But Tamerlane forbade the study of logic and philosophy, and perhaps it is this mistake that is reflected dimly in the architecture.

2

For the first few days we lived in the European section of Samarkand in a newly built pink-washed hotel. It had a huge roof-garden and every comfort. Unfortunately, it seemed to be overflowing with men

in operetta riding breeches and countless delegates to a local agricultural congress.

The authors of that excellent novel *Diamonds to Sit On*, remarked that in every house in Moscow, which may have three entries for the convenience of the tenants, the caretaker of the house invariably closes two of them. The manager of this hotel must have been disappointed, since the architect built the hotel with only one door, but he evidently consoled himself by closing all five bathrooms. Since they were all heated from a common tank they would only be opened, he declared, on those occasions when five tenants, with one accord, would agree to bath at the same hour on the same day—at, of course, an exorbitant price. One simply had to go and find four bathing partners as if it was a bridge party or a plov. To the credit of the hotel be it spoken that not one bug, beetle, or flea was to be found there. They had all been exterminated by means of some war gas that brought unwonted tears to our eyes.

But I should be grateful to this hotel, because its cashier, an exile from European Russia, told me during one of the long, hot nights the story that I shall give in my next chapter. The New Town is cleanish, comfortable, shady, and bears the stamp of an old, colonial Russian town. The dozens of soda-water fountains, of boot-cleaners and barbers seemed to indicate the holiday spirit of a former Eastern colonial town. At five o'clock the promenade in the chief street begins and lasts till eight.

3

After a few days we went over to the heart of the old native town and took up our quarters in the Mosque of Tilla-Kari on the Registan. The cells of the imams in the courtyard have been turned into a hostel for tourists.

Two more people arrived at the same time as we did. One was a well-known journalist and traveller, but she had so many cares on her mind, was so anxiously searching for subject matter and impressions, was so terribly conscious of the fact that she was really in Samarkand and must make the most of it, that she made one uncomfortable and uninterested; the other was a fat, middle-aged breathless little man who, in spite of the terrific heat, wore a heavy black coat, and had a camera slung over his shoulder. He informed us in a slow, panting, half-crying voice that he was the head accountant in a match syndicate. It occurred to me that it would be an uncommonly good get-up for a spy, and I could never quite get rid of the notion that he was really something more important and, perhaps, more powerful than he pretended to be.

Life in Samarkand flows between two shores—that of the bazaar and that of the mazar, between streets seething with noisy traders and old, deserted holy tombs. Apropos of this contrast, the Uzbeks have a saying, "Where there are children, it is a bazaar; where there are none it is a mazar."

The streets of Samarkand still retain the gaiety and

glamour for which trade in the East is famed. The streets of the Old Town are lined with tea-houses; the covered dais stand well out into the street or along the edge of the pavement. The dais are covered with fine carpets, and the crowd that sits about on them wears coloured turbans, flowered coats and high boots of excellent fit and quality. In the unglazed window of eating-houses overlooking the street, long charcoal-braziers stand. Across them lie dozens of iron spits with bits of meat on them—*shashlik*. An Uzbek cook stands fanning and turning them. More mutton is eaten in one evening in Samarkand than in a whole month in Moscow. In some windows whole sheep with enormous fat tails are being stewed. One may buy delicious chunks and eat them on the spot, washing them down with green tea. On market days there is the kish-mish market, the rice market, the melon market and silk market, and it is all interesting enough until you come to the bazaar of bazaars—a huge square whereon the bright patchwork of a close-packed crowd of Kirghiz and Uzbeks on horseback, veiled women, and children, weaves in and out in clouds of dust, selling from hand to hand shawls, scarves for turbans, endless swathes of soft India muslin, red and white Afghan mats, carpets, kerchiefs, vivid green and purple plush and other treasures from harems and family trunks.

The turban is still victorious in Samarkand, but in Ferghana, where it has been ousted by the embroidered skull-cap, it is rarely seen. The struggle of these species of headgear means a great deal. Thirty

yards of muslin go to the making of a turban. When a Moslem dies he is buried in the muslin. The skull-cap is a compromise between hygiene and religion. It is mean, businesslike and not at all beautiful. Behind the struggle of the turban and the cap lies the struggle of religion and the spirit of doubt, of extravagance and economy, of Catholicism and Protestantism.

4

And over these bazaars, over the conglomeration of people, horses, camels and hovels, rises the huge tragic, broken clay arch of Bibi-Khanum. Tamerlane's biographer, Sherif-ed-din, established that nature was only an imitation of art, long before Oscar Wilde did. In the story of Tamerlane we are told that this arch would have been the only one in the world had not the Milky Way proved a rival to it, just as the cupola would have been unique had not the vault of heaven duplicated it.

There is a legend bound up with the building of this mosque, which has, by the way, no historical foundation. According to it the mosque was built by Tamerlane's favourite wife, while he was away on one of his campaigns. The beautiful Bibi-Khanum was a Chinese princess; the architect of the mosque a Persian from Meshqed, who fell in love with her. Only the cupola of the mosque remained to be constructed, when news came that Tamerlane was approaching Samarkand. The Persian, however, refused to finish the building unless the queen con-

descended to love him. In vain she assured him that all women were alike, as much alike as eggs except for their colouring, in vain she sent him a dish of painted eggs that he might himself become convinced of this. The Persian bent over the face of the queen to kiss her. She put up her hand to shield herself, and his lips touched her palm. The kiss, however, was so hot that it burned a hole through her palm, and left a rosy mark on her cheek.

When Tamerlane saw the mark and discovered the cause of it, he sent his men to kill the Persian. But the latter, together with his assistants, had already gone to the minaret. When the Sarbazi of Tamerlane reached the top, only one man remained there. "Where is the Persian?" shrieked the Sarbazi, waving their sabres. "He has flown home to Meshqed" was the reply.

The mosque remains and the clay buildings with crumbling walls—the creations of tortured exile craftsmen, whose souls have long since flown away to their homes in Persia, in Syria and India.

Chapter IX

THE STORY OF THE MAN WITH THE PUSHED-BACK EYES

I

It was in the early spring of 1927 that Tatarov went to one of the auctions and bought himself the remarkable fawn coat that was to play such an important part in his life. The coat was a reversible Burberry, and Tatarov looked every inch a smart foreigner in it. He had a broad back and long legs. In the fawn coat you might have taken him for a Danish clerk or a quiet German-American.

The foreign-made hat and boots he had obtained long before from the German consulting engineer in the Trust. Now nothing stood between him and the fulfilment of his plan. A little practice and self-confidence were all that was needed. Tatarov tried himself out. He would go into the dining-room of Alexandrovsky Station and sit down at one of the side tables. After making sure that there was no one he knew within hearing, he would call a waiter and say in broken Russian : " What have you of ? " At first the waiter would be a little nervous, then pull himself together, reply by methods such as one might use when talking to an idiot, and—fetch the dinner. The restaurant-manager would keep watch on the " for-

eigner " out of the corner of his eye. One lift of his eyebrow would send the waiter dashing obligingly up to Tatarov's table. Once Tatarov tried the same method in the Grand Hotel restaurant. It went off quite well.

In June an announcement appeared in all the papers to the effect that the first French boat, loaded with tourists, had arrived in the port of Leningrad and that in a couple of days' time three hundred tourists of all nationalities would be let loose on Moscow, where they were expected to stay for four days. Tatarov's moment had arrived.

2

Tatarov bought a platform ticket, met the train and left it, together with the crowd of foreigners. Seventy-five cars stood outside the station at the orders of " Intourist," and the newcomers got into them as quickly as they could. They were viewed and commented upon freely by the usual crowds. Tatarov found himself in the company of a grey-haired woman of middle age, and a young girl with blue-black hair and dark eyes. They all made for a car together. Tatarov stepped forward confidently and held open the door of the car for them. Evidently they appreciated this little courtesy on the part of a stranger, and the younger thanked him with a dazzling smile. Two more women, apparently English, took up their places in the front of the car. Tatarov sat down by the chauffeur and the car moved off with a loud hoot out of the middle of Kalan-

SAMARKAND

The ruins of the Mosque of Bibi-Khanum, the wife of Tamerlane

chevskaya Place. In a few minutes Tatarov was assisting the ladies out of the car. Without uttering a word, he followed them into the vestibule of the hotel and went to the café on the left. His heart was beating so loudly that it almost deafened him.

3

Now Tatarov did not know a word of English, nor could he converse in any language except his own. Beyond a few French words of international usage, he had nothing whatever to say to the foreigners.

A silent friendship had sprung up between Tatarov and the pair—evidently mother and daughter—to whom he had become attached. They, on their side, were grateful for his little attentions. He invariably helped them in and out of cars, raised his hat and sat down by the driver. He liked them and he grew accustomed to this play ; it made no demands on his inventiveness and nerves. Once the elder woman tried to speak to him in English, but he only turned away, shaking his head sadly to signify that he did not understand. He endeavoured not to use any Russian words if possible. Once when the chauffeur nearly ran over a small girl, he strained forward, and was within a hair's-breadth of shouting " Devil take you ! " in Russian.

He visited the Kremlin with the rest of the tourists, admired the Granovitaya Room, went about to inspect all the factories, and even ate the sandwiches that were distributed to the visitors. The tourists got used to seeing him and took him for granted. So far

as he could see, the tourists were of so many different nationalities—German, French, American and English—that each group kept more or less to itself, and it was evidently not the custom to inquire each other's nationality. Every evening, on his return home, Tatarov would divest himself of his reversible Burberry and other foreign appurtenances, throw himself down on his bed, and congratulate himself on the way that everything was going so splendidly. He did not pace up and down the room, refused to worry, and almost never thought. If everything was to turn out well, it would only be by sheer luck and resourcefulness. All he had to do was to keep a tight hold on himself.

4

And so three days passed. Tatarov had unfortunately not provided himself with a programme of the tourists' activities, and this made things a little difficult for him. It meant that he had to spend practically the whole of the day in the café and stroll past the hotel bureau very often. There one might overhear the telephone conversations of the "Intourist" agents, respecting the provision of motor-cars, tickets and the like, and thus get an idea of the tourists' movements. It appeared that their return to Leningrad had been fixed for the following day. They were to take the "Red Arrow" at midnight. It would be risky to travel on the same train without a reservation. Tatarov bought a ticket for a train leaving at nine in the evening, warned his mother not

to worry about him, but to wait for a letter, and left for Leningrad.

The tourists put up at the Hotel de l'Europe. He noticed that they took him for granted, and even gave him a smile of recognition as they passed into the hotel. When they went to Peterhof, he accompanied them. The fountains had been turned on for this occasion. Tatarov had never seen them playing before. At night he returned with the tourists by a small excursion train to Leningrad. On the way out of the station he bought a copy of the evening paper, and read an article entitled " So the Mountain Came to Mohammed at Last " by a bright young journalist. From this article he learned that the steamer *Emile Loubet* would leave at 10 o'clock next morning with three hundred tourists on board, and that representatives of the town Soviet and " Intourist," would be there to see them off. The fateful moment was approaching.

5

It was a foggy morning. At about nine, however, the fog lifted, and everything looked much brighter. The tourists, laden with packages and bundles, and talking cheerily, climbed into the waiting taxis. Some fussed about their heavy luggage, which was being taken to the boat on a motor-lorry. Tatarov was waiting patiently in the long-distance telephone-booth. The receiver was at his ear, but he kept the lever down with his elbow and watched the people as they left. He had decided to wait for the girl with the

blue-black hair and her mother. Everything had gone well when he accompanied this couple from the station ; probably everything would go well if he went with them now. But they did not come. The crowd of tourists at the hotel doors was thinning ; late-comers appeared, running to their taxis. At last Tatarov could wait no longer. He threw down the receiver and hurried with the rest to the door. The commissionaire gave a push to the glass revolving-doors and muttered something ; he was evidently expecting a tip. Tatarov gave him a rouble and went out. The last lone taxi was standing by the curb. The chauffeur was sitting smoking and taking no interest in anything. When he saw Tatarov he roused himself and was about to start the machine. Tatarov could have got in and no doubt the chauffeur would have driven him off. But something held him back, in spite of the fact that his nerves were strained to snapping point. He looked back at the hotel to see the time on the clock that was visible through the glass door. It was twenty minutes to ten. And at that moment he caught sight of two familiar figures running downstairs. They both waved to him eagerly, the commissionaire pushed the door, and in another moment they were all driving at full speed down the Nevsky Prospect, past the Admiralty and along the embankment to the Sea Canal. The siren had already gone by the time they reached the bridge. At the shore end of the bridge stood the control officer, some delegates and customs' officials. One of the tourists was having a heated argument

with the customs' officials about a box of old books. " Vos passeports ! " demanded the controller, but everyone was too busy to pay any attention to him. The last warning siren sounded, and the sailors began to draw in the ropes. The representative of " Intourist " whispered something to the head customs' official. " Let them through," said the latter to his assistant. " Passeports ! " the officer continued to demand. Tatarov's companions fumbled for their documents. Tatarov collected the passports with perfect assurance and stuck them in front of the controller's nose for a moment, then passed the whole bunch of officials.

The sun disappeared behind a cloud. The waves were grey-green, a few drops of rain fell. Tatarov coolly took off his faithful Burberry, reversed it and put it on again. He felt the calmest and best-dressed foreigner of them all. No one would dream of examining or doubting the passport of a fellow who could attend to clothes with such complete disregard for his surroundings. He held open the wicket for the ladies, and conducted them up the bridge to the boat. Whether it was that the controller had no time to count the passports and examine them properly, Tatarov never knew. The gangway was drawn up immediately. To the ear-splitting shrieks of the siren the boat began to put off slowly, hardly seeming to move.

6

Tatarov's companions went straight to their cabin.

The other passengers had either gone to the bar, or to see about their luggage and their mail. A little group remained on deck watching Leningrad fade gradually. Tatarov stood with them.

And so it was all over. He had made a dash for it—and it had been a fine dash—without a single stumble, a single mistake. The old life was over; no more standing in queues, no more waiting in fear and trembling for the "purging" meetings in the offices and workshops, no more struggling to get a corner to sleep in. Now he was the equal of these people. Vistas of a new life opened before him. He could look anyone in the face. No one would bother to inquire into or condemn him for his antecedents here. Up till now he had been obliged to hide the fact that his father had been a merchant, and always stressed the fact that his mother was a peasant. And now he would tell everyone boldly that the old man had been a much-respected merchant of the Second Guild, that he himself had finished at the Moscow High School in 1917. He decided not to mention the fact that his mother had been a peasant, although a rich one. Here everything would be different from what it was formerly. One could shout the things that one had formerly to keep silence about, and what could formerly do him only harm could now do him only good.

He stood there turning over all this in his mind, and never noticed that all the passengers had gone. He stood alone. Steely-grey waves beat against the boat. It had passed the North Shipyard and was

putting out to sea. The sailors were dragging a steel rope on to the stern to the boatswain's brisk orders. Tatarov realised that he was in the way. He must clear out—but where to go? He felt hungry. His first impulse was to go down to the dining-room and have dinner with the rest, but this idea he gave up. He had no foreign money, and he might get into trouble. What should he do, then? Should he go and tell the captain? But the latter, probably, did not understand a word of Russian. And then what would the man say? What if he refused to keep Tatarov on the boat? What if he lowered a rowing-boat and sent him back? No, it would be better to wait awhile. Tatarov moved along to the other end of the deck and lay down in a deck-chair. He stretched himself out comfortably and closed his eyes. The deck was deserted.

7

Towards evening Tatarov began to realise that he had got into a very tight corner, and that there was, apparently, no way out of it. All his resourcefulness had been due to his knowledge of the conditions in his own country, the psychology of its people and their reactions. Here he seemed to be groping in a fog; he was fearful of making a false step, he felt embarrassed and helpless. He resolved to sleep on one of the long deck-chairs, but the deck steward approached him twice with inquiries that he did not understand. All that night Tatarov, now feeling rather weak and tired, spent pacing up and down the

deck. When the morning came a sailor requested him to go to the purser. Tatarov could not speak French. He sat huddled up in his coat, crumpled, sweaty, hardly raising his eyes. He had lost all his foreign spick-and-spanness, and looked a trapped, wild Russian. His deep-set eyes seemed still further pushed back into his head, and the wide nostrils gave him the look of a moujik from the backwoods. " Russe ? " asked the purser, in a tone that was no longer polite, but to Taratov's ears held something cynical. Taratov nodded. In a few minutes' time a waiter entered. He was a Polish Jew. Tatarov told him that he had run away from Moscow, and begged them to allow him to remain on the boat until it reached some European port. He told his story, choking and reddening with embarrassment. The whole scene indeed was extremely awkward and oppressive. The purser shrugged his shoulders and replied that they would have to detain him in the hold, and that his fate would be decided on their arrival in Marseilles. Tatarov felt slightly relieved. His dreams of a splendid future had receded to a tremendous distance, but this humiliating examination was over for the present, and his fate was more or less certain for a time. The Jew took him up on deck. The Baltic Sea was like shuddering molten lead. Tatarov went down the hold with the boatswain. It was a dark hole, with three or four benches hinged to the wall. Tatarov dropped down on one of these at once. He felt sick and done for.

8

Two or three days passed. Tatarov's beard grew in thick dirty bristles. He could not eat ; he vomited often. Fat, disgusting rats ran over the floor from time to time. He had been given a sailor's mattress and blanket, but it was so cold that he had to use his coat as well. There was no door to the hole where he lived, and often the sailors would come and peer in at him. Once one of them went up to him, glanced furtively round, whispered " Soviet ? " Tatarov made no reply, except for an angry glare. Then he closed his eyes, and the seaman went away puzzled. Sometimes Tatarov would get up and try to go on deck, but when he remembered his unshaven face and soiled, crumpled clothes, he would be suddenly terrified of meeting the Englishwoman with the blue-black hair and quick, brown eyes. Life became loathsome to him. The Jewish waiter told him that the boat was going straight to Marseilles without a single stop, and that it would arrive in a week's time.

One night he was awakened by a rattling of chains. There was shouting and sounds of running, and the thud of heavy things overhead. Suddenly his corner was invaded by people. Someone turned on the electric light and Tatarov found himself among little yellow people in khaki uniforms. He decided they were like monkeys, and took an instant dislike to them. It seemed as if they were sent as a punishment to him. They were ordered to put aside their arms

and get ready for bed. All the wooden benches were put down. The hold was turned into a brightly lit, sweaty, yellow, unpleasantly rocking ant-heap.

When morning came the little yellow men squatted round a bucket of rice on the floor. It seemed to Tatarov they looked at him with hostility. One of them held out a spoonful of rice to him. At this they all laughed loudly. Tatarov pushed away the spoon, got up and went on deck.

9

It was a clear, sunny morning.

The sea seemed to stand still. The Jewish waiter was just going off night duty. He was as green as a grape in the cold light. Tatarov stopped him and learned that the boat had stopped at Havre and not Marseilles. They had stopped there, said the waiter, at the request of the War Office, in order to pick up a company of Annamite soldiers that was being drafted to Saigon. Tatarov stayed up on deck and—for the first time in a week—breathed the fresh air into his lungs. He felt the terrible, wolf-like hunger that comes between bouts of seasickness. But where to get food ? He wandered down the deck until he reached the barrier separating the crew from the first and second classes. The wicket-gate was unlocked. Tatarov passed through. He could hardly drag a leg after him. Just before him stood a chaise-longue ; he dropped into it and closed his eyes. Someone shook him roughly. He opened his eyes and saw the impudent sleek face and prominent eyes of the deck

steward, who signed to him to vacate the chair. Tatarov felt his heart bursting with rage and hatred. He got up and went on further. The door of one of the cabins stood open ; in the mirror on the inside of the door Tatarov caught sight of his reflection. He did not recognise it at first, and then realised with a shock that this terrible uncouth monster was himself. He glanced round in terror, but the cabin was empty, no one had seen him. On the little table near the door stood a breakfast-tray—with chicken, ham and fruit. Tatarov looked again and gave way. He seized the fruit, the chicken and ham, and began to stuff his pockets with them. All of a sudden a door into the next cabin opened and he found himself face to face with the old Englishwoman. She recoiled, then apparently recognised him and, it seemed to Tatarov, stared at him with disgust. At that moment some rapid French sounded in his ear, someone caught him by the back of the neck and dragged him out of the cabin. The deck steward, who was standing by the rail with his satchel over his shoulder, laughed insolently. The boatswain, a hard-faced elderly man, held Tatarov by the sleeve, twisted it round his wrist to keep his prisoner from running away, and led him back to the hold. Not to the place he had formerly occupied, however. With his left hand the boatswain got out a key, opened a heavy door with a tiny opening at the top, and pushed Tatarov into a cell of some kind. This done, he swore roundly in French, locked the door and went away.

10

Tatarov felt as if the the world was rocking under his feet. There was nothing whatever in the cell, not a stick of furniture. Tatarov was boiling with rage and hate, and felt thoroughly sick. He squatted down on the floor. The wind came up and the boat began to rock again. Hunger, nausea, and a feeling of irreparable loss came over Tatarov. Life seemed to him not worth living.

It was probably midday now. The cell grew warmer, and in a few hours unbearably hot. He felt as if he was going crazy. He continued to sit stupidly on the floor. The blood throbbed in his head. Then it grew dark, but the cell did not cool down. Then, through the little square hole, he could see the stars come out. A cool breath of air was wafted in to him. Sounds of music could be heard on deck. Tatarov was suddenly possessed by a fear that he would sit there, forgotten, until he died. And up above there was music and dancing and the English girl who had waved her hand to him in the hotel. He must go up on deck, try to see her, to explain. Maybe it was all a bad dream—the yellow soldiers, this hunger, the dark hold—yes, he must finish with all this. He felt his strength come back to him. He had always been a strong, husky fellow ; the ship's prison was only temporary, a stage in his adventures. After half an hour of pushing at the door—when Tatarov was ready to give up the struggle—it yielded a little. His jacket and shirt were torn, blood was flowing

from his brow and his right cheek. He broke down the door and stepped out. It was now or never, he thought to himself. His instincts had never let him down—he must finish with this disgusting inequality business once and for all. He went in the direction from which the music was coming. Three or four stewardesses were watching the dancing from behind the door. He pushed them aside and strode into the ballroom. No one noticed him at first. Then one of the dancers caught sight of him, whispered to the others, and all turned to stare at the tall, unshaven, tattered figure with sunken eyes and blood streaming down his face. They edged further away from him, thinking he was a madman. They had already heard something about the dangerous Russian thief who had tried to go on the boat without a ticket. The music ceased suddenly. An old man was pointing him out to the others. The horror and disgust on the old man's face startled Tatarov. But he had no time to think, for straight at him came the deck steward and several sailors. The hateful face of the steward loomed before Tatarov's sick eyes. He pulled himself together and hit out at the face with all his strength. The next minute he was lying on the floor. The sailors dragged him out. " It's Gorgulov ! " hissed the old man behind him. " They're all alike."

Tatarov lay in a state alternating between delirium and coma all the week. At Marseilles he was put on board a French ship going to Leningrad for timber. In Leningrad he was tried and sentenced

to three years' imprisonment for his illegal attempt to leave the country, and then exiled to Central Asia.

" And that's the story of how I came to be here," the cashier concluded.

Chapter X

BOKHARA-I-SHERIF—THE NOBLE BOKHARA

1

The picture that our imagination paints of towns and countries is often much more valuable and complete before we actually visit them than after. Seen capitals are sweet, but those unseen are sweeter. What a person who has never been in London thinks about it as he approaches it is architectonically and musically much more valuable than the disappointing confusion that remains in his head after he has seen Camden Town. I had heard and thought of Bokhara as the Oxford of Central Asia. I pictured to myself a sea of flat roofs, glistening domes of the covered markets, countless theological schools lining the streets, cool courtyards of the tall mosques, where scribes write Korans in gold and blue, cupolas and minarets, crowned with nests of storks, from which the wise old birds, the symbols of ancient, dying Bokhara, look down on weary pilgrims.

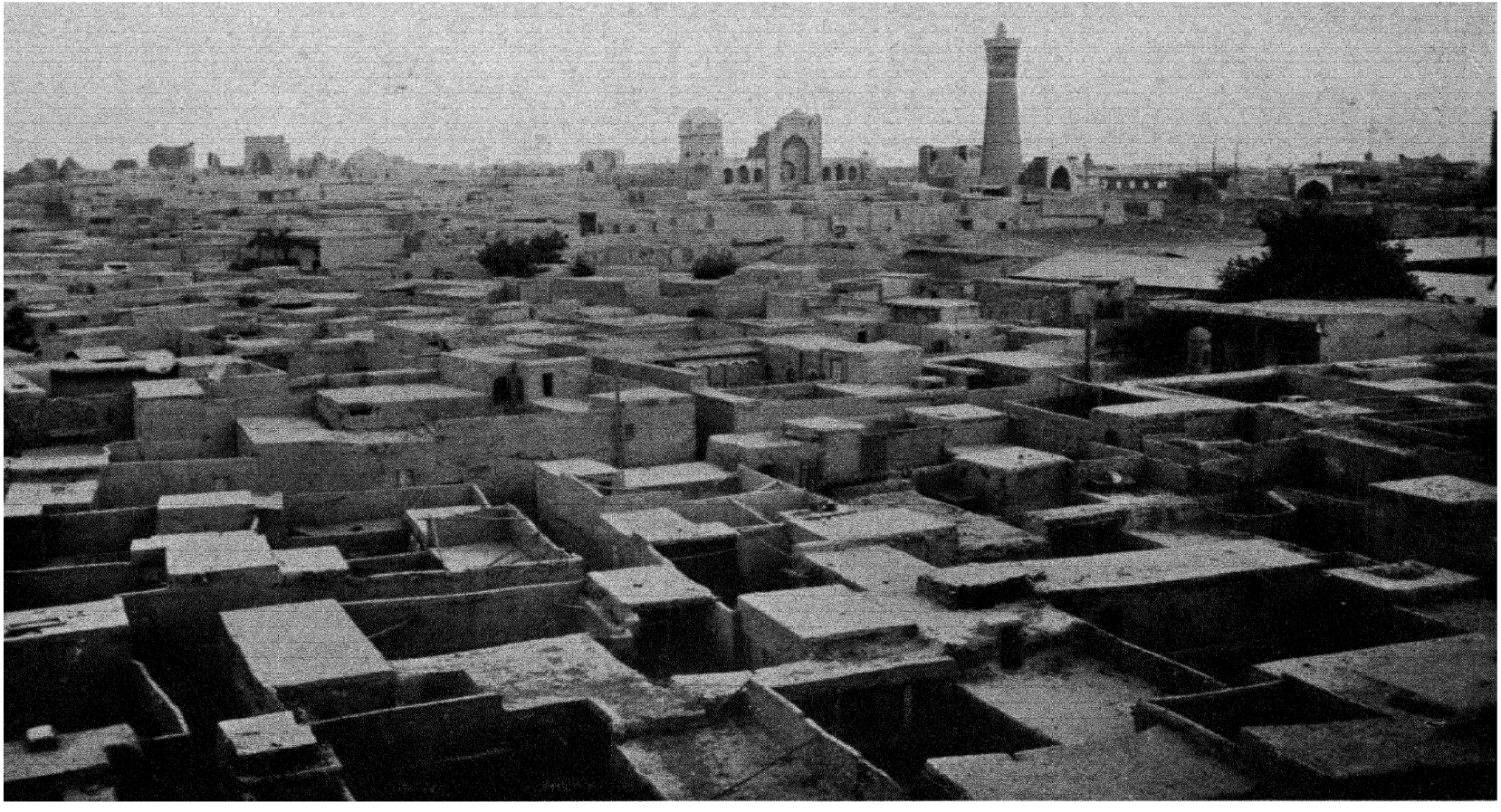
2

We stayed in the mosque called Divan-Begi by the old pond of Liabi-Haous. The mosque is surrounded by a stone embankment, and stone steps lead down to

the pond and remind one of India. It was the middle of October, blazing hot weather. We had come back into the summer, it seemed. The restaurants and fruit-stalls were black with flies.

Bokhara is much older than Samarkand. Many of the streets have stone and clay-brick houses, and with its arcades, passages, narrow crooked streets and the constant interplay of glaring white sunshine and black shadow, of dusty heat and stony coldness, it reminded one a little of Italy. We felt this touch of Italy in the Tower of Death. It is said to be the tallest and is certainly the most impressive building in Central Asia. Its trivial name was given to it merely on account of the fact that criminals used to be thrown from it in bygone days. There is no Persian grace or cloying sweetness about this tower ; it is grand, severe, classic and robust. Dating as it does from the twelfth century, it must be a cousin of the Moorish tower and the Italian campanile.

While Samarkand is difficult to think about except in connection with Timur, Bokhara bears comparatively few traces of having been a political capital with a renowned Emir. True, there is the Registan—the central square. But it is tucked away in a south-western corner of the town. It was formerly cluttered up with small shops and houses. Now these have been demolished by the town Soviet, and the result is even more desolate and unreal. The citadel stands on the right. At one time it enclosed the Emir's Palace and his prison. On the left stands the mosque, with tall, wooden columns that look like



BOKHARA
The tallest building is the Tower of Death

slim palms, and in the centre the *madrassa* or theological school. All the buildings are a dry, dusty grey; between them lies the neglected square, its silence only broken by camel-bells. When the string of camels passes through, the whole Registan with its citadel and palm-columns resembles some Egyptian or South American capital that we have seen in old yellowed engravings, or the setting for Offenbach's *Perikola*.

The Emir not only held the power of life and death in his hands, but almost all the foreign trade of Bokhara as well. Curiously enough, one is at a loss to find any traces of it in the business section.

3

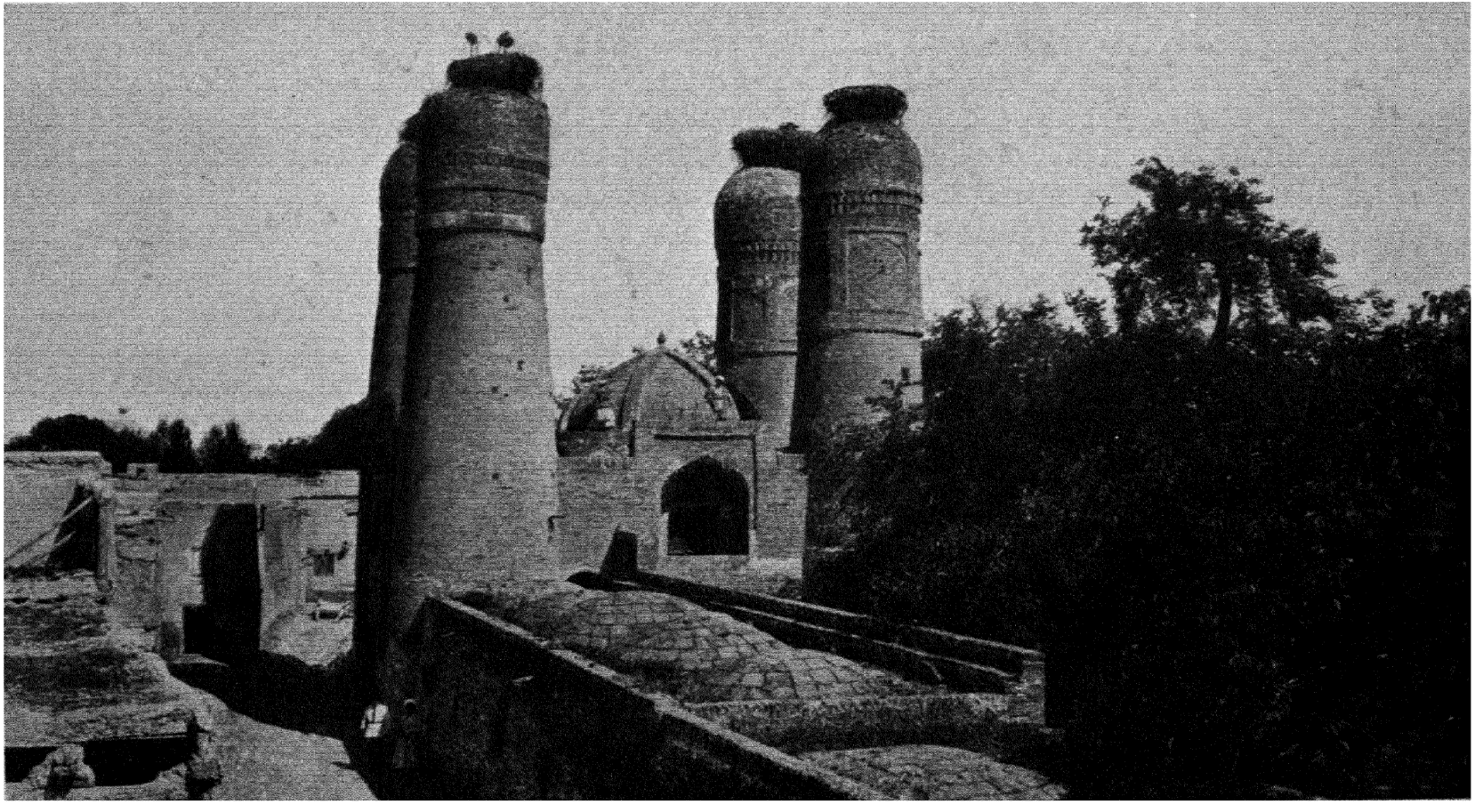
Several of the buildings are remarkable. The best is undoubtedly Chor-Minar. It was built little more than a century ago, and is by way of being despised by the archæologists on account of its youth. It consists of four minarets, of an extremely solid and severe form, boldly grouped and united by balconies. They are crowned with storks' nests, and when you sit in the courtyard below you are certainly in one of the most poetic corners of the ancient city. When you climb up the broken, twisting steps to the balcony, a sea of flat roofs stretches below, with the cupolas of the mosques in the distance, and the squat vaults of the covered bazaars sprawling like huge, pale tortoises. And over all rises, like a lighthouse, the building that has outlived all—the Tower of

Death. It seems a foreigner here, an echo of some other bygone civilisation. There is one architectural detail in it that makes it especially different from all the Moslem structures of Central Asia—a semi-open colonnade running round the upper story. The belfries of Florence and Pisa come into one's mind involuntarily, and thoughts of Bokhara's former glory—nearly a thousand years ago—when it was a centre of letters, mathematics and research. The flat roofs leave off very soon, and beyond that point lies the fringe of the oasis, and, farther still, the desert that stretches for thousands of miles on all sides. Then one grows sad for Bokhara in her isolation, in the wild, neglected corner where she was doomed to grow.

In the ancient cemetery stands a ninth-century mausoleum, known as Ismail Samani. Though dear to the hearts of archæologists, it looks very much like a second-rate Palestinian church. It is a cube of whity-grey bricks, decorated a little and topped with a dome. Here in the cemetery, however, there is another old tomb, which has an interesting conical cupola, or perhaps it would be better described as an embryo spire, of burnt brick. It resembles early Armenian or Celtic structures, and is quite a startling find among the rounded contours of Moslem architecture.

4

Beyond this, and several more old mosques and *madrassa*, dating mostly from the fifteenth or



BOKHARA

Another view of the Mosque of Chor Minar with storks

seventeenth centuries, Bokhara has few places of interest. The European section of the town is small, in fact ten minutes would be sufficient time for a general survey. The day of our arrival we made the acquaintance of all the distinguished non-Russian foreigners the town contained—a Greek who sold hot waffles, a Georgian who kept a soda-fountain, a Persian from a second-hand clothes shop and an Afghan with made-up eyes and tarnished silver slippers, who was trying to sell an ounce or so of green tea. The Greek was from the Ægean, and had come to Russia as a child. He had all the vivacity and courtesy of his race. The Georgian was from Kutaiss, and acknowledged it with pride and a certain reserve. He came every summer and made big profits, since he was the only specialist who knew the secret of this subtle chemical process. The Persian was from Meshqed, and turned out to be an extremely informative and obliging fellow. We patronised the establishments of all three, and out of sheer Bokharian boredom ate large quantities of waffles, drank pints of soda-water, and bought unnecessary bits of embroidery and the small tea-bowls of the East.

Chapter XI

UZBEKS

I

The Uzbeks honour the memory of Tamerlane, although he was not himself an Uzbek. To this day his tomb in Samarkand retains for them the character of a national monument. The natives of the place called it simply Gur-Emir—the Emir's Tomb. Inside the mausoleum lies a huge dark green slab of carved jade perpetuating his memory. At one end of the jade slab stands a tall pole from which a faded banner and a yak's tail hang. His remains lie in the vault below.

Tamerlane was half Mongol, half Turk, the link between the Mongolian conquerors of the thirteenth century and the Turki-Uzbek Khanate, established in the seventeenth. In the Khan's palace there is a grey stone (*kuk-tash*). The new Emirs were raised to this throne on a piece of white Kirghiz felt. Here, in front of the stone, the heads of less fortunate pretenders were cut off. The nomad's felt and the sedentary throne are symbolic of the nation's dual psychology. They are, after all, a nomad people who have comparatively recently taken to a settled life, and have not had time to work out a civilisation. This is the essential difference between the Uzbeks

and the Chinese or Hindus, who settled thousands of years ago. While the ruling classes of China, India or Japan were enjoying whole centuries of uninterrupted peace and security, the Uzbek ruling classes were engaged in endless struggles among themselves and with other nomad tribes. Hence the superficial character of Uzbek civilisation. Religion was borrowed hastily from the Arabs, buildings and towns constructed from clay in the course of a few years, art and crafts and learning were hired and developed in accordance with the needs of the church, war and the government. Still the main masses of the Uzbek nation have passed the stage of nomad cattle-breeders and become tillers of the soil—for the most part gardeners. Practically every Uzbek possesses at least one horse, but rides it always at a walk. Every Uzbek, rich or poor, carries a knife with him; but they are of very poor quality and workmanship, and only used for cutting up the daily melon. The Uzbek *bassmachi* are physically brave and not afraid of danger, but they never attack during a fight, and usually confine themselves to killing the defenceless part of the population. As soldiers the Kirghiz and Kazaks are far ahead of the Uzbeks in daring, endurance and cruelty.

The Uzbeks are very picturesque, but not in the least romantic. It was a great relief to me to find out that there was no mystery about them. In this respect they differ greatly from the Caucasian mountaineers. One should not allow oneself to be misled by their picturesque clothes and flowered robes.

These traditional textiles were formerly made, after all, in Moscow, and the natives who made their clothes of them were simply taking part in a masquerade perpetuated and, to a great extent, directed by Russian mill-owners.

Carpets and robes and turbans are no longer necessary and are, in fact, being gradually supplanted by sober caps, raincoats and khaki.

Then, too, Uzbeks have no psychological burden weighing on them. They eat with pleasure and rise from the meal without reluctance ; they are sensual and unsentimental, and in this way impress one as being rather modern.

Without acquiring any of the characteristics of an ancient settled civilisation, the Uzbeks lost at the same time many of the best of the nomad qualities. Long before they were conquered by the Russians every trace of the free democracy common to military and nomad organisations had disappeared, to be replaced by Asiatic despotism, creeping, noiseless and hypocritical. According to accounts left by travellers, the last Khan, Khudoyar, would dispose of his enemies by simply decoying or kidnapping and murdering them. People brought up for trial were led about the town and forced to cry out a warning to the people—" Beware of committing the offence that we have committed, lest a similar fate to ours befall you ! " But nothing is, perhaps, so characteristic of the régime as the method of execution. In Uzbekistan executions were carried out with a terrible Asiatic simplicity. The executioner would take the

doomed man by the beard and cut his throat while reciting prayers in a loud voice. Just before this took place the condemned had to cry out his thanks to the Khan and his ministers of justice for their righteous action. If the man refused to do this his legs and arms were broken and other tortures applied. It is only now in Soviet Uzbekistan that executions have become more merciful. In old Bokhara no prisoner would be dispatched without torture. The Emir used to fling his enemies into a great pond full of huge, voracious fish that would gradually consume the victim before the Emir's eyes. But ordinary tortures were not enough for this tyrant, who invented a way of extending the prisoner's torments even after the execution. A tray would be made red-hot on coals in his presence. Then the executioner would sever the head in such a way that it would fall on the tray, where it would whimper and grimace, to the great delight of the jaded ruler. All official records of the trials of the bassmachi state that no feast was regarded as complete unless Red Army prisoners were brought before the bassmachi and executed for the diners' pleasure. The literature and folklore of the Uzbeks show that they have very little imagination and no nerves.

2

The Uzbeks have worked out their own attitude to life and appear to be satisfied with it. From this point of view (and this is also to be found frequently enough in Russia), everything is regarded as tempo-

rary, and people live in the vague belief that they and their circumstances will presently undergo a change, which, in fact, they never do. The difference between the Russian and the Uzbek is that the attitude of the former is tinted with a species of philosophic extremism and that of the latter with sensual hedonism.

Apropos of the kinship between Russians and the peoples of the Orient, the following story is told. It was originally found in Prince Viazemsky's notes. A Russian aristocrat of the early nineteenth century went to Europe and married into the French nobility. He was extremely proud of this, and exclaimed once at some function or other : " Don't you know I am Talleyrand's nephew ? " " Perhaps you mean Tamerlane's ? " rejoined Viazemsky quietly.

The Uzbeks build bad houses—a few beams, the intervals between filled up with stones, clay and every kind of rubbish. Their embroideries are second-rate, so is their metal-work. They cannot make carpets at all. Their fingers are clumsy ; even antiquarians that I knew seemed incapable of picking up or fingering embroidery, porcelain or anything of that sort with any degree of accuracy or delicacy. They walk well and their movements are good. Only about one in a hundred can read or write, and none of the people in shops can count quickly. All of them without exception, however, show ability to make the time pass as pleasantly as possible for themselves. They can spend hours in the tea-houses doing nothing. They sit and lie about in graceful, picturesque atti-

tudes in the shade of great trees or by the river. Flowers mean a good deal to them, and pretty little flower-beds can often be seen in front of some poor clay hovel. While roses are in season every second Uzbek can be seen wearing one tucked into his cap. On occasions their Oriental dreaminess leaves them, and they show great alertness. Once in the Bokhara market I saw an Uzbek chasing a thief. Instead of trying to grab the fellow, which would have resulted in an undignified scuffle, the Uzbek had recourse to a little agile footwork. When he got within a couple of paces of the thief he kicked him viciously in the small of his back. The thief gave a yelp, crumpled up and lay down. Then the Uzbek gave him a couple more kicks and retired without, so to speak, dirtying his hands.

There is not a sign of the squalor, stench and poverty that leaves such a terrible impression on the traveller in China and India. Although the Uzbeks have no idea of what hygiene may be, they love green places, scented grasses to burn in the houses that they try to build beside clear running water. They adore small children, beat their wives and mothers, and never lay a finger to their horses. They breed and train fighting-quail, which they carry in their bosoms and set on to fight each other in the tea-houses. They like women, though their taste in this respect is not particularly refined, and boys almost as much. Woman still occupies a low position in the eyes of the Uzbek, even though she has been equalised with him socially and politically, and is perfectly

free to become economically independent if she wishes. Many of the faults of the Uzbeks can be traced to the fact that theirs is a purely male society. The evils of the latter undoubtedly include lack of freedom, chivalry and the absence of respect for old age. Cases of sons killing their fathers occur frequently, and there is no sentimentality about it. They show, however, very good taste and dignity in their manners and conversation. They never shout or bawl, and short dialogues usually take the form of soft, musical exclamations. In this respect they fulfil the precept of the Koran which says : " Let thy gait be ever modest and let thy voice be low, for the most unseemly of all voices is surely the voice of an ass."

Up to quite recently many of the Uzbeks made pilgrimages to Mecca. When the old Uzbeks meet they still embrace according to the old custom. It is a pleasant sight. The long, straight coats stretch over the backs, the grey beards and white turbans touch. One catches again something of the urbanity and brotherliness of ancient Islam. In Bokhara the people love coats and caps of silk or velvet, embroidered in gold and silver, and are ready to pay any price for them. Their clothes show something of their dual nature ; while on top there may be the Arabian or Persian brocade cloaks, and fine muslin turbans, their legs are shod with rough Mongolian boots to the knee. The same with the women ; when you see them in the villages wrapped in their grey silk parandjas and black horsehair veils, it seems for a moment as if you were in Egypt, but one glance at

their feet clad in men's coarse high boots brings you back to the borders of Mongolia.

Uzbeks are one of the most direct people in the world, I should imagine. The art of carrying on long roundabout negotiations in order to gain their ends, of prolonged bargaining and elaborately expressed gratitude, is not for them. They go straight to the point—be it the pecuniary, material or sensual gratification of their desires. Their conversation is chiefly concerned with these subjects.

Once we passed an Uzbek holding a baby, and as he greeted us we stopped and admired the child and asked whether it was a girl or a boy. He said " a boy," and quickly pulled up its little shirt to corroborate his answer.

3

They like eating, generally prepare food very well, and never badly. All Uzbeks know how to cook and, of course, the best cooks are men. There are very few dishes, which shows how much more primitive and backward are the Uzbeks in comparison with, say, the Chinese. The bill of fare in a Canton restaurant would comprise several hundred dishes, while even the best of Uzbek dinners would consist of not more than five.

All these dishes go back to the nomad days. The sheep of the Kirghiz steppe protrudes its head in all the gastronomic delights of the Uzbeks, whether it is *shurpa* (mutton broth), *kaurdak* (fried mutton with potatoes), *shashlik* (mutton roasted on the spit), or

pelmeny (meat dumplings). They do not know anything about fish. Many of the Russians born in Central Asia know almost nothing about fish and do not care for it. The *pièce de résistance* of Uzbek culinary art is plov or pilav, which deserves a detailed description. It was the favourite of the Emir in his palace and the peasant in the bazaar, a dish that never wearies. Dishes have their own fate, like Khans. In no other dish that I know of can the crossing of two different cultures, the nomad and the sedentary, the sheep of wild pastures and the rice of cultivated plains, be seen so clearly. If, as Brillat Savarin said, the discovery of every new dish is of more benefit to humanity than the discovery of a new star, the Uzbeks must have known it long ago, for ninety-nine men out of a hundred can make pilav, but only one can read. Brillat Savarin would have been canonised here; a mosque would have been set up in his memory. Every evening in the cool shade of the elms around the holy pond of the mosque groups of believers in bright flowered or striped coats and snowy turbans would gather and, with the appearance of the evening star, light their fires and begin the preparation of an Asiatic pilav in an iron pot. And after they had eaten it with their hands they would give praise to the Holy Brillat Ali Mahomed Savarin.

4

There are some dishes the preparation of which is even more fascinating than their mere mastication. Their cooking appeals to the imagination as much as

a good song or a game. Of these is pilav. Under the open sky, out in the garden, the Uzbek builds his stove. It consists of five or six old bricks set up in a semicircle. In a few minutes the dry juniper chips blaze up and there is a smell like cedar. Then a big black iron half-globe is set on the fire. It warms up a little and chopped mutton-fat is thrown in. It hisses, melts, and is soon boiling fast. Into the frying fat goes chopped onion. Ingredients are used in large quantities—ten or twenty onions to two or so pounds of fat. When the onions are brown, small pieces of mutton are dropped in. In the meanwhile the shareholders in the pilav who have been squatting down cutting carrots into delicate, thin strips, bring them up on a plate and let them fall into the boiling, hissing mixture. A minute or so later half a dozen tomatoes follow. To watch the intense expression on the cook's face is worth waiting for. The Uzbeks cannot tear themselves away from the plov. Darkness comes down quickly, the twilight is very short. More juniper wood has to be split up and piled under the cauldron, where it burns as if spirit had been poured over it. The flames light up the swarthy faces around. A close watch must be kept lest the pilav should dry up and burn. Into the boiling fat a few cups of cold water and a handful of salt are poured. More wood is added to the fire and the meat boils fast and long. This takes about twenty minutes, but half-way through a few whole red pepper pods are thrown in. Pity the man who, later on, mistakes one for a tomato, and puts it all in his mouth at once! The

last stage—the mass of rice, standing ready washed in a bucket near by, is thrown in with a handful of barberries. Over the rice water is poured to the depth of two fingers. The fire is raked a little and the rice left to cook of itself on the red embers. It must not be disturbed. The mingled action of the fat, steam and water will finish it. The cook holds a thin wooden stick in his hand, with which he probes the stuff from time to time. When the water has all been absorbed by the rice, the cauldron is covered with a big flat dish or a wooden lid, the flame dies down and the rice is left to stew for ten minutes or so. The entire preparation takes about two hours of conscientious, intensive work. Including the cutting up of the vegetables and meat it would be two and a half hours. The pilav is served up on a dish in the inverse order, rice at the bottom, meat, carrots and onions on top. The Asiatic way to eat it is with the fingers. This the Uzbeks do very tidily, never dropping a grain of rice. They all sit round the one big dish and put handful after handful of boiling hot, fat rice into their mouths. It should be mentioned here that the Uzbeks eat only one solid meal a day—in the cool of the evening—and that after two and a half hours of waiting and hunger this sharp, hot dish assumes for them an importance out of all proportion.

The spicing is built up on the principle of the struggle of contradictions, and bears the stamp of real creativeness. On the table stand saucers of ground red pepper, onion soaked in vinegar, garlic that has been rendered odourless by pickling, and

grated white radish, which all tend to set the palate on fire still more. As soon as this begins to be unbearable, other extras having a directly opposite action are brought in ; they heal the palate and refresh the mouth and permit one to go on eating. These are pieces of cold, white melon, sour, dryish quinces or a few mouthfuls of thick sour milk, the most delightful of all cool things. Then pomegranates are served. They are cut up into quarters, and the juice pressed out on the pilav. Grape-juice can be used instead of pomegranate. In Bokhara more expensive pilavs are made with chicken or pheasant instead of mutton, and sultanas or raisins are mixed with the rice. The vast dish of pilav gradually melts away. Hunger is appeased. Huge yellow melons are brought on or else green tea.

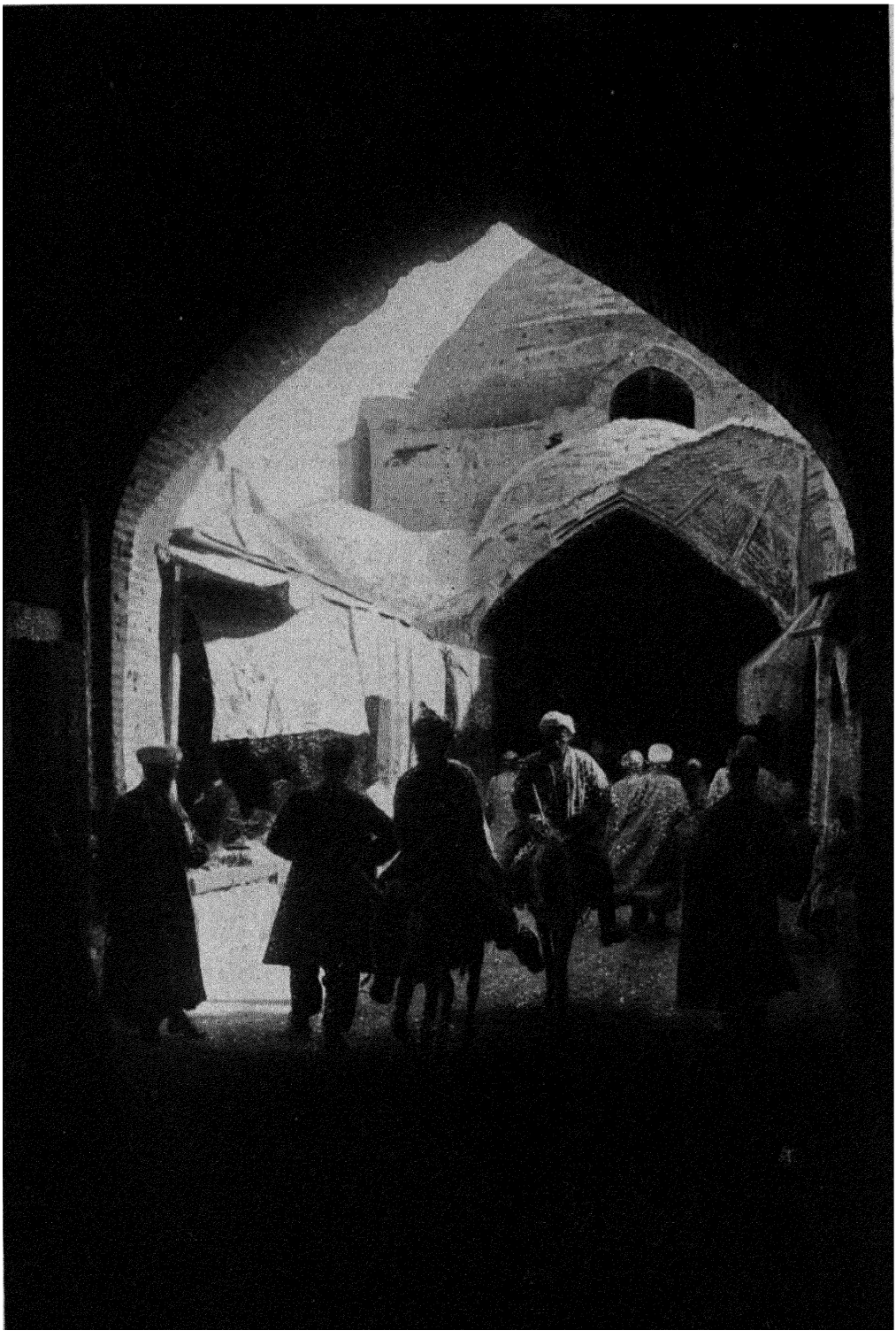
Chapter XII

THE NON-UZBEKS

I

Of which Uzbeks was I speaking? The old or the new? The rich or the poor? No, I was speaking of the tribe as a whole, and not of its extreme wings. There are learned old Moslem Uzbeks, there are Uzbek warriors, and lastly there are fifteen thousand young Uzbek students receiving higher education in the country. There are Uzbek Communist workers, Uzbek mill-girls, teachers and tram-conductors. They are different—I cannot and do not wish to speak of them at present. The Uzbeks of whom I spoke were the types that reflect the national character, as it was built up by the economic forces, history and religion of centuries. I believe that before one can describe the changed national type one must show the type that is changing.

But Uzbekistan is not peopled by Uzbeks alone. Among the more important national groups are the Tadjiks, Kirghiz and Turkomans. To these must be added the omnipresent gipsy (in white burnouse and turban), the Bokhara Jews, who played, at one time, an important part in the economic life of the country, Persians, Arabs, Afghans, Hindus, Chinese, Uigurs and scores of other smaller national groups. Central



BOKHARA

Closed Market

Asia deserves its name of " Cradle of the Nations," although it has also been given a less complimentary one—the " Rubbish Heap."

2

Samarkand is one of the most motley towns of Uzbekistan in this respect. A few years ago it was the capital of the country, but the government has now been transferred to Tashkent. There are still a few works in it, for one of which, the brewery, I have only the sincerest praise. Samarkand is rapidly becoming a university town. Four thousand five hundred students are studying in the Pedagogical Academy alone. The wits say that Samarkand is a second Heidelberg, since the whole population is divided up into professors and students, and both spend the day drinking beer. Strangely enough, the greater part of the population is Tadjik. Before the Russian conquest the Uzbeks comprised the ruling class. The majority of them live in the kishlaks around Samarkand.

All who have studied the Tadjiks and can be said to know them well have a very high opinion of them. They are the remains of an ancient civilised race that peoples all the oasis of Central Asia, including the valley of the Zarevshan, in which Samarkand lies. Anthropologically speaking, they are Aryans, and their language is Iranian. Wherever they have not been mixed with Uzbeks or Kirghiz, that is, in far-off mountain places, the ancient Aryan type has been preserved. This should throw the supporters of the

Nordic theory into an ecstasy. In spite of the fact that the Tadjiks have always had to submit to their conquerors, the Arabs, Mongols or Uzbeks, they have remained until now the most civilised of any of the Central Asia peoples. The majority of the mullahs and of the saints revered by the Uzbeks have always been Tadjiks. The settled cultivators of the soil, craftsmen, and teachers, were also Tadjiks. Even now they outstrip the Uzbeks in the schools. Unfortunately, I was unable to visit the mountainous parts of Tadjikistan. It so happened, however, that I was present at an exhibition of their dances. They were, for the most part, effeminate Eastern movements and aphrodisiac contortions, obvious enough and rather disgusting. Towards the end, however, it was announced that they would perform a harvest dance as it was performed among the mountain Tadjiks. The dancers were dressed in white muslin tunics with wide pleated skirts, wide trousers and sleeves—trimmed with coloured embroidery, a costume reminiscent of that worn in the Balkans. They thrashed the ground with wooden clubs, fenced with them and spun around in rings. There was astounding vigour in the tune and the movements, a purity and peculiar archaic freshness. I caught myself thinking of ancient Greece. The Tadjiks are for the most part thin, well-built and, unlike the Uzbeks, have well-marked waists.

3

The next national minority is nomad and falls into

two main branches—the Kirghiz and the Kazaks. The latter live in the Russian steppe around Orenburg and Semirechia, while the Kirghiz live in the foothills of the mountain ranges dividing Russia from Afghanistan and China. Both branches profess the Moslem faith and speak the same language, but the Kazaks are nearer to the Turki race, the Kirghiz to the Mongolian. Both branches are clever and quick. Fortunately, Islam was never able to put down its roots very deeply into them. The mind of a Kirghiz or a Kazak is not muddled with texts from the Koran in the incomprehensible, to them, Arabic tongue. Nor is it hemmed in by tradition, church or prejudice. Whatever they know, they know from the practical side and understand the application of it. Long before the Revolution the Kirghiz could be much more easily persuaded to go to school than the Uzbeks. Officers, officials and teachers were frequently chosen from their ranks. The Uzbeks were bound hand and foot by their mullahs and landowners—the two most conservative elements in the population of any country—and refused to attend any Russian school. The Kirghiz are, of course, handicapped in many other ways. They suffer from all kinds of diseases, and sometimes whole villages are infected with syphilis.

A woman about to give birth to a child is sometimes treated in the following way: she stands, holding on to a beam, while the husband beats her on the back with a stick until she delivers the child. The upper classes of Kirghiz live extremely well and

are called *manaps*. Many of them are extraordinarily stout and greedy. Those travellers who have been present at Kirghiz feasts say that a man can eat as much as fifteen pounds of mutton fat at a sitting. This gluttony is partly to be explained by the conditions of a nomad life in which the long periods of hunger demand proportional compensation. A *tête à tête* between a Kirghiz and a medium-sized boiled sheep usually ends up with the total disappearance of the sheep into the stomach of the Kirghiz in the course of two or three hours. Before the Revolution the Kirghiz were rapidly degenerating. Harsh social customs, the necessity for the purchase of the bride, for instance, oblige a very poor man to remain a bachelor for life. On the other hand the richer element give their children in marriage while they are still infants. This leads to the devitalising and degeneration of the stock. Old Kirghizia still lacks its Katherine Mayo to describe the evils attendant on early marriages—the exhaustion, apathy, torpor, stunting of children's growth and development, etc.

It is usual to suppose that the settled cultivation of the soil is in a very advanced stage of development as compared with the herding of cattle. The Kirghiz show once more that this is not so. Rich Kirghiz much prefer to own herds of cattle and spend a nomad life. Only the poor, who own no cattle, stay all the year round in winter settlements and dig the ground with primitive instruments. The sojourn in the summer pastures is holiday-time for the Kirghiz. There they can feed and fatten on the milk and honey of the steppe.

4

Next to Kirghiz come the Turkomans, the great, warlike nomad tribe of the Transcaspian deserts, and the only one that gave trouble to the Russians during the conquest. They have excellent horses, wear enormous fur caps at all seasons of the year, and make the best carpets in Asia. They are tall, bold and fierce. For centuries they have been slave-raiders, and have carried off, in course of their expeditions, over a million Persian slaves.

I shall not describe all the other nationalities here. A brief mention should be made of the Uigurs, who are really Uzbeks from Chinese Turkestan.

The Soviet Uzbeks are only part of this race that has spread itself over Afghanistan, where there are half a million Uzbeks, and Chinese Turkestan, where there are over a million of them, called Uigurs. The latter are, by the way, excellent cooks. In their dingy restaurants in Ferghana you can obtain much tastier and more interesting dishes than in the local restaurants. Thousands of them cross the frontier every year for seasonal work in the Soviet cotton plantations. It was in an Uigur club that I met the old Mrs. Fortunatov, widow of the famous physicist; she looked like a gouty shade of the Victorian era, and was in charge of a school for teaching the illiterate Uigurs the new Latinised alphabet. We made friends, and she told me an episode, which forms the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter XIII

THE STORY OF THE ORPHANAGE

I

" I ARRIVED in Petersburg, as it was then called, at the beginning of the 'eighties. I can still vividly recall the feeling of wrought-iron railings, wide streets, and trotting horses caparisoned in blue netting. Maybe it was because all our meetings took place in front of the Conservatoire or beside the Neva. My admirer lost his head completely about me, and became the laughing-stock of society. This tall, bearded scientist who resembled Faust, and was known all over Europe, would hang round the door of the Conservatoire by the hour, waiting for the very young girl I then was. Making men wait is said to be good for them. To tell the truth, I was a little afraid of him. As a girl in Tashkent I had never liked to think of marriage, and whenever I thought of men, it was of some smart young officer with moustaches, who would make love to me, and then carry me off some night in a troika.

" And this man who waited was not an officer and no longer young. He was middle-aged and wore a broad-brimmed hat and a long coat. He had been married to a woman that he did not like, and had obtained a divorce from her.

" I was alone in Petersburg, living with the family of an old friend of my father's, General Stavrolsky, who had retired. They soon learned of the famous Professor Fortunatov's extraordinary attachment for me, and regarded it, of course, as a joke. The only unpleasantness that resulted was that Tanya, the General's eldest daughter and my greatest friend, avoided me. She was one of Fortunatov's students in the university and showed promise of becoming a very capable physicist.

" I could not understand what the matter was at the time. Perhaps it was that she was jealous of me, because the Professor had been a frequent visitor in the days before I came to live there. Now he came very seldom. We usually met in the street and went for walks in the parks or visited museums and theatres. Perhaps Tanya was a little ashamed of her Professor ; he had become, she thought, a toy for a little provincial girl, whom she had taught only a month ago to do her hair properly and wear her hat in a more citified way. And perhaps Tanya envied me my success with my singing and the splendid future that was prophesied for me, or maybe my appearance, for I was still in the pink-and-white stage, had excellent teeth and shining eyes, and was glowing with health and youth and happiness. She herself was tall and thin. Her smooth hair was brushed straight back behind her ears in the style of the ' advanced ' women of that time. It so happened, however, that my fear of them all—Fortunatov, Tanya, her father, and last of all myself—prevented me from ever

coming to an explanation with her. In any case, Tanya always behaved strangely. She would often disappear for a long time, and spent a great deal of money without any visible result. Queer, badly dressed, ill-behaved people came to see her at times.

2

"And then one evening the key to the mystery appeared. We were all sitting round the samovar when there was a sharp ring followed by an imperative knock at the door. We started; we could not wait for the servant to make her way from the back regions to the door. I ran to open it myself. A tall officer stepped into the hall. Two soldiers followed him. The officer bowed coldly to the General, who had come out with us, and said loudly: 'Tatiana Stavrolsky?' Tanya was standing in a corner; she was pale as death, with something of a hunted animal in her eyes, but she called back scornfully: 'What do you want?' The officer then stepped forward and said: 'My orders are to arrest you on a charge of belonging to a secret society which has for its aim an attempt on the sacred person of His Imperial Majesty!' It was a terrible shock to Stavrolsky; he covered his face with his hands. Tanya stood there like stone, looking straight at the officer and soldiers with hatred. I was dumbfounded at the power to hate that she showed—where could it have sprung from? I had never hated anything violently in my life. It seemed to me that I had always loved everything and everybody—music, the theatre, people,

children, society, light, sweet things. Intense hatred remained a riddle to me. It is true I had been told that I was an egoist, and had never loved anything sufficiently to make sacrifices for it. The last memory I have of Tanya was that steady look of hatred and contempt for the people who had come to arrest her. There, in the hall, she caught up her cloak, kissed her mother good-bye, and went out with the escort. The officer saluted, and a couple of minutes later we heard the wheels of the carriage that was taking Tanya away to prison.

3

"Many years passed. The year 1905 brought Revolution and an amnesty for political prisoners. Tanya returned to Petersburg. She was over forty then. The General and his spouse were both dead, the old home was broken up, and I had no opportunity of seeing Tanya. Up to 1906 her name appeared constantly in the papers; she had been chairman at meetings and a member of the Soviet of Workers' Deputies. Once I wrote to her, but received no reply. I had too many cares and interests of my own at the time to follow the matter further, and in 1907 she was again imprisoned. I had been married for nearly twenty years to Nikolai Pavlovitch Fortunatov then. I had not been able to resist his strength of will, his passion, his constancy, and the sight of his unhappiness. And I had been wise in my decision. I had told the General's wife all about it, she had written to Nikolai Pavlovitch, and one fine day he had driven up to pay

an official visit. He wore his star and held his head high. He had never looked so well, not even when he gave his famous annual lecture at the Royal Society ten years later. The General and his wife could no longer treat him as a maniac who had lost his head over a young girl. Here was a great man and a scholar, who had come to demand what he felt he was entitled to. We were married in two weeks' time. My parents telegraphed their congratulations. After his marriage Nikolai Pavlovitch quieted down and returned to his scientific work. Our first son was called Dmitri, after that two more sons followed, and at last a daughter. Part of the time we lived in Petersburg, and the rest on the estate we bought in the district of Pskov. We made frequent trips abroad in the summer. After my children were born I gave up singing altogether, and began to study painting. Nikolai Pavlovitch was made director of a department by the Liberal Government, and we went to live in the house provided for us on the Moika Canal. He was then elected member of the Academy of Science. In 1902 we went to England, where the title of Doctor *honoris causa* was conferred upon him by Cambridge University.

"A week before war was declared in 1914, Nikolai Pavlovitch died. He was seventy-four, but he had not shrunk up as many old people do. With his impetuous walk, penetrating eyes and flying beard he looked more like Faust than when his hair had been black and his legs sturdier. All our children were grown up. I had lived a full life. I had known all the

celebrities of the world, and had dined with crowned heads. I remember a dowager royalty telling me that she would write to the Russian Court and say that she was proud to have met me. She evidently did not understand that this would produce the opposite effect to what she desired in reactionary Russia. When the European War broke out, I was already fifty years of age. The sea of banners and glory was fed by rivers of blood and tears, and I sought comfort in religion. Above all I felt that I must pay back something in return for all that life had given me. I set about organising a hospital large enough to receive two hundred wounded, and after that was in order I organised the first home in Russia for orphans of the war. The archbishop presided at the opening, and at my wish named the home 'Assuage My Grief.' I was on a number of committees at the same time with charitable or patriotic aims and names like 'The Drop of Milk,' 'The Cup of Tea,' and so on. Life was difficult. I left off thinking about fashionable clothes and began to dress like an old woman—in a bonnet and cloak—as you see me now, in fact, and as you say Queen Victoria used to dress.

"In 1916 it was feared that Petersburg would be taken by the Germans, and so my orphanage was transferred to Tashkent. I did not want to part with the children. I happened to have an uncle living in Tashkent, so I locked up my house in Petersburg and went after the orphans.

4

"The Revolution went almost unnoticed by me. People were shouting in the streets, banners were waving, there was much talk of a new life, but for all that the sick did not get back their health, the dead did not arise, nor did the orphaned children find their parents. Bread grew still scarcer during the next few months. There was a new administrative power in the town. I did not know anyone connected with it, and had, therefore, no influence. A terrible winter passed, and then the Civil War broke out. The number of orphans in 'Assuage My Grief' kept on increasing, while the food allowance grew smaller and the discipline worse. I broke off all connection with Petersburg and my own children and became more and more attached to those in the orphanage. I loved their straight fair hair and grey eyes. Sometimes I would ask my favourites to have tea and jam in my room and then make sketches of them.

"In the September of 1920 the Bolshevik advance was expected. The troops in Tashkent were then under the command of my cousin. He arranged for me to leave with the children in a goods train. We were a fortnight on the road to Ferghana, arriving there at the end of November. It was terribly cold weather. There was a stove in the car, and at every station the children would run out to steal wood. At times our car was crowded up with people. They were armed, the Bolsheviks were at our heels, and to argue was dangerous. It was probably from them

that we caught typhoid fever. Only afterwards I learned that I had been unconscious for many miles before reaching Ferghana. I was taken to the hospital unconscious and lay there two weeks.

" After the crisis, but while I was still in a state of coma, I remember hearing that the town had been taken by the Bolsheviks. I got well slowly. Fear and anxiety for the future, for my children, for my house and furniture in Petersburg and all the manuscripts belonging to my husband—all this weighed on my mind during my convalescence. I was greatly troubled, too, about my orphanage and the children, many of whom had probably died of disease and hunger. I could not rest for thinking of them. I asked the nurses in the hospital, but they knew nothing. I wanted to leave the place as soon as possible and find out something about them. The doctors let me go in spite of the fact that I was still terribly weak. An engineer, who had been my neighbour in the ward, and had already recovered, learned my name from the nurses, and left an invitation for me to stay at his house for the present. I do not know how I got to that house. It was the first time during my illness that I felt my heart so weak and my legs so heavy. There was not a vehicle of any kind to be seen. It took me four hours to walk the kilometre and a half to my destination. I lay at the engineer's house three days. Everyone was extremely kind to me. Then I got up and went to search for the orphans. After hours of waiting and questioning in the local Town Soviet I was told that I should apply to the Com-

missar of Sanitation of the Twelfth Army, which had occupied Central Asia just after our train had got in. This Commissar, however, had a meeting, but his secretary, a young man with very long legs and a very imposing leather belt, received me, and I laid my case before him. He wrote down my name and asked me to call round in two days' time at the same hour.

5

"I remember quite clearly how the long-legged secretary smiled at me, and how I thought when I saw his plain young face that he might have been one of the children in 'Assuage My Grief'—no more than five years ago. I entered the room and stood still a few moments on the threshold. It was my first encounter with the new power, which I had heard was headed by theoreticians who approved any outrage that might be committed in the name of Bolshevism. The room was full of cigarette smoke. Several people were sitting round the table. No one paid the slightest attention to me until a young Jewish girl, dressed in a short skirt and a military tunic, with a revolver at her belt, turned and gave me a quick glance out of her sharp, black eyes. She said something to the others and they stopped talking and turned to me. I told them why I had come, and that I wanted to look after the children. They moved aside a little, so that I could speak directly to an elderly woman in ordinary clothes who was sitting at the head of the table. They asked me several ques-

tions that seemed to show suspicion of me, and vouchsafed no answer to any of mine. I felt that I was on the brink of arrest, but resolved to persist in my search for the children, no matter what happened.

"At last I decided to break the silence that had fallen. 'Tell me just one thing,' I begged in a voice that sounded strange and unnatural to my ears: 'Where is my orphanage, "Assuage My Grief"? That's all I want. I must see the children.'

"The elderly woman raised her eyes to me and said that no such orphanage existed in Ferghana. My spirits fell. It seemed as if an abyss yawned at my feet suddenly. Where then were the children? What should I do without them?

"'I'll give you the name of a house,' the woman was saying, 'where you'll find the children you're looking for. You'd better go there now and maybe we'll come round when the meeting's over.'

"I took the paper with the address on that she held out to me and left. I felt weary and troubled. My weakness came over me once more, and I crept along slowly, slowly. As soon as I got to the corner of Pushkin Street some children came running towards me. They were in rags, but I knew them instantly. My heart beat fast. I had to stand still. They threw themselves into my arms. I kissed them and hugged them, and we went along the street arm in arm. I asked them where they lived, and they told me that they were being fed on white bread and porridge and apples, and were learning boot-mending. We turned a corner and they pointed excitedly to a tall, white

house. ' Look ! look ! that's our house, and the workshop is underneath ! '

" The horn of a car sounded behind us, and the children scattered like excited sparrows. Out of the car stepped a tall, elderly woman. It was the Commissar of Sanitation of the Twelfth Army, the woman I had just spoken to. I was ready to weep for joy that the children were safe. I went up to her as quickly as I could, and said half reproachfully : ' How could you say that the orphanage, " Assuage My Grief," no longer existed ? ' ' Well, it doesn't,' she replied. ' Look ! ' We were just by the entrance now. A large board over it bore the words, " The Nicholas Fortunatov Children's Home." Something snapped in my breast. I could not cry, but tears kept rolling from my eyes. I looked up at the woman commissar's and saw that her face was twitching. Her eyes shone, the wrinkles softened, she looked younger. I suddenly recognised her. It was Tanya ! I held out my arms to her. She embraced me and drew me inside the house. We sat down. For a long time I was unable to speak.

" ' Well, I must be off now,' she said, after a few minutes. ' If you need anything for the children, come round any time to see me. The Committee of Sanitation has appointed you director of this orphanage.' She rose, shook hands with me and went out. I remained alone with my children."

Chapter XIV

THE HOME-COMING

I

Everything must have an end except, as the wits say, the sausage, which has two. And so we left Bokhara on a late October day and started our journey back to Moscow. The return trip was by no means as exciting. There was winter in the air. The windows of the train were now sealed up, the stations looked cold and deserted. Days in the swaying train dragged wearily.

The Kazaks we caught sight of were huddled in their dull winter clothes, and looked pinched and blue with cold. Only at rare intervals could the steppe's vastness and the far hills be glimpsed through the driving rain. After three days we got into Russia, where there was more movement and colour. Rivers gleamed, young birches stood up thin and pale and solitary, the grasses shone in pale green and brown streaks of wet colours, tearful distances opened before us. It reminded us of early spring during the melting of the snows.

On the fifth day we were already in Riazan, the poor Russian north. Some of the old villages still looked like deserted Zulu kraals. In bygone days rural life in these places was dominated by grotesque

fears and bogies and the power of the evil eye. The people were nicknamed " squint-bellies."

I lay on my back in the stuffy carriage trying to realise that we should be in Moscow within a few hours and that I had said good-bye to Central Asia in good earnest. And even as I was thinking so, the door opened noiselessly and a thin man in a long black coat glided in. He was well-built and gave the impression of being tall. His coat was tied round his slender waist with a silk handkerchief of pleasant hues, shading into grey and orange. He had a black beard and an air of busy refinement. This vision of a Tadjik tea-house keeper was so out of place here that I reared myself up on my bench to make sure I was not dreaming. What! I thought. Will all Turkestan come back into the car ? Shall I see again from a high tower under a flat blue sky the level greyness of Bokhara ? Shall I see those wonderful yellow-striped bees hovering over grapes and melons in Ferghana ? Shall I sniff again the sharp morning air of the icy sunny mountain Jailau ? The young Uzbek student travelling in my compartment was amused at my astonishment, and explained that the Tadjik was from the next car. A whole party of them, it appeared, were travelling to Moscow.

2

As the train drew near to Moscow I asked myself whether I should attempt another such journey soon, and to where, and why I should travel at all. What had driven me to Turkestan from the antipodes ?

Was it the chant of the caravan in the Haymarket Theatre, when *Hassan* was produced, or was it perhaps that I was tired of the drab winter life of the city ? Had it been a reactionary desire to travel back a few centuries ? Did I want to give myself the satisfaction of being a traveller ?

What was the use or necessity for leaving off work and taking long holidays under difficult conditions just for the sake of jotting down a few dull observations and seemingly pointless stories. I must find an answer, for I belong to the post-war generation (the " post-lost "), which is just beginning to retrieve the rudiments of shattered social responsibilities.

Realising, as I did, that I could never answer all the questions that arose, I started a discussion in the car on why people travel. There were three of us who took part in the discussion—a young Uzbek student, who wore a hat and raincoat, and looked surprisingly stocky and commonplace in these European clothes, and an old Russian poet with broad shoulders and a high chest. He reminded me of Tolstoi's *Hadji-Murat*, where one of Shamil's murids is described as sleeping on the floor—" his chest higher than his head." The poet had a clean-shaven face and relentless green eyes. He was getting on towards fifty, was fond of travelling, and had spent half his life roaming about the Pamirs, where there was a glacier named after him and a peak after his niece. In answer to my question he provided an explanation that was at once plausible and convenient. It was only

later, while reading a book published more than fifty years ago that I learned where my interlocutor must have found it.

People advance through a thick forest. They hew and cut and blaze their way. The men work and sweat, fell trees and fight wild beasts, the women collect food, carry loads and children, and the camp groans with toil and effort and fires and noise. But in every camp there are generally people who do not apparently share the burden of their brethren. They run ahead, they pick up with strangers and talk to them, they climb trees and look at the sky and the surrounding country. They may be accused of shirking, but in reality they know more and see farther than the rest. They contribute the knowledge they have gained to the common cause, and sometimes show the short cut out of the wood to the delectable mountains. The Russian poet said he could not compare himself to these watchers of the skies, who were really the scouts of an advancing army. He was simply one of those members of the advancing horde of humanity, who like to take a sidetrack into the forest and talk to anyone they may find there, and watch things and, perhaps, even wickedly snatch a few hours of unearned rest. Then they come back and tell of what they saw. Their information is hardly ever of any use to headquarters, but it may afford entertainment to the less exacting of their friends. And therein lies the justification of what the Germans would call their " Seitensprung." So he carefully abstained from complaining about hard-

ships and discomforts such as rain, bed-bugs, bad food and so on, leaving the wailing to be done by that dreary unpleasant person—the intrepid professional traveller.

The Uzbek student had no theory. He was very young and took it for granted that he should go to Moscow and see things.

3

The train drew up at last after a six days' run from Bokhara (it was twenty-four hours late). I was glad to crouch once more on my luggage in a droshky with my legs dangling over the sides. A raw day with a cold wind—how welcome the feel of that damp autumn wind was after the stuffy car! The city looked even more crowded and noisy than when I had seen it last. New traffic signals obliged us to stop at different corners, and I was able to watch the still peculiar Moscow life. A woman passed me, also in a droshky. She looked pale and pinched; her hands were folded on her swollen stomach, her mouth hung slightly open. A man, evidently her husband or her brother, rode on the step of the cab beside her. Going to a maternity home, obviously.

At one corner where we drew up, a man and a woman were standing close together, talking while looking at each other mistrustfully. They spoke in low tones. Was it a conversation between a man and his former wife? Judging by the coldness of the woman it could not be the question of who should keep the children that they were discussing—but

probably something about the room or furniture. Two little men in short, warm coats, high boots and peaked caps stood in a gateway. They were obviously two house-caretakers, a breed as numerous in Russia—where the houses are nationalised—as scribes in ancient Egypt. They are mostly lowly and uneducated, but wily and legal-minded, and therefore extremely dangerous.

The traffic signal showed a green light. My droshky driver admonished his horse, flourished his whip and off we went. We passed through the Theatre Square to the hotel where my mail and a hot bath awaited me. The long trek was disappointingly and undramatically over.