CHAPTER XI.

The Khanates of Bokhara and Samarkand used to form Sogdiana, a Persian satrapy inhabited by the Tadjiks and afterwards by the Usbegs, who invaded the country at the close of the fifteenth century. But another invasion, much more modern, is to be feared, that of the sands, now that the saksaouls intended to bring the sandhills to a standstill, have almost completely disappeared.

Bokhara, the capital of the Khanate, is the Rome of Islam, the Noble City, the City of Temples, the revered centre of the Mahometan religion. It was the town with the seven gates, which an immense wall surrounded in the days of its splendor, and its trade with China has always been considerable. Today it contains eighty thousand inhabitants.

I was told this by Major Noltitz, who advised me to visit the town in which he had lived several times. He could not accompany me, having several visits to pay. We were to start again at eleven o'clock in the morning. Five hours only to wait and the town some distance from the railway station! If the one were not connected with the other by a Decauville--a French name that sounds well in Sogdiana--time would fail for having even a slight glimpse of Bokhara.

It is agreed that the major will accompany me on the Decauville; and when we reach our destination he will leave me to attend to his private

affairs. I cannot reckon on him. Is it possible that I shall have to do without the company of any of my numbers?

Let us recapitulate. My Lord Faruskiar? Surely he will not have to worry himself about the mandarin Yen Lou, shut up in this traveling catafalque! Fulk Ephrinell and Miss Horatia Bluett? Useless to think of them when we are talking about palaces, minarets, mosques and other archaeological inutilities. The actor and the actress? Impossible, for Madame Caterna is tired, and Monsieur Caterna will consider it his duty to stay with her. The two Celestials? They have already left the railway station. Ah! Sir Francis Trevellyan. Why not? I am not a Russian, and it is the Russians he cannot stand. I am not the man who conquered Central Asia. I will try and open this closely shut gentleman.

I approach him; I bow; I am about to speak. He gives me a slight inclination and turns on his heel and walks off! The animal!

But the Decauville gives its last whistle. The major and I occupy one of the open carriages. Half an hour afterwards we are through the Dervaze gate, the major leaves me, and here am I, wandering through the streets of Bokhara.

If I told the readers of the Twentieth Century that I visited the hundred schools of the town, its three hundred mosques--almost as many mosques as there are churches in Rome, they would not believe me, in spite of the confidence that reporters invariably receive. And so I will confine myself to the strict truth.

As I passed along the dusty roads of the city, I entered at a venture any of the buildings I found open. Here it was a bazaar where they sold cotton materials of alternate colors called "al adjas," handkerchiefs as fine as spider webs, leather marvelously worked, silks the rustle of which is called "tchakhtchukh," in Bokhariot, a name that Meilhac and Halevy did wisely in not adopting for their celebrated heroine. There it was a shop where you could buy sixteen sorts of tea, eleven of which are green, that being the only kind used in the interior of China and Central Asia, and among these the most sought after, the "louka," one leaf of which will perfume a whole teapot.

Farther on I emerged on the quay of the Divanbeghi, reservoirs, bordering one side of a square planted with elms. Not far off is the Arche, which is the fortified palace of the emir and has a modern clock over the door. Arminius Vambery thought the palace had a gloomy look, and so do I, although the bronze cannon which defend the entrance appear more artistic than destructive. Do not forget that the Bokhariot soldiers, who perambulate the streets in white breeches, black tunics, astrakan caps, and enormous boots, are commanded by Russian officers freely decorated with golden embroidery.

Near the palace to the right is the largest mosque of the town, the mosque of Mesjidi Kelan, which was built by Abdallah Khan Sheibani. It is a world of cupolas, clock towers, and minarets, which the storks appear to make their home, and there are thousands of these birds in the town.

Rambling on at a venture I reach the shores of the Zarafchane on the northeast of the town. Its fresh limpid waters fill its bed once or twice a fortnight. Excellent this for health! When the waters appear men, women, children, dogs, bipeds, quadrupeds, bathe together in tumultuous promiscuousness, of which I can give no idea, nor recommend as an example.

Going northwest towards the centre of the city, I came across groups of dervishes with pointed hats, a big stick in their hands, their hair straggling in the breeze, stopping occasionally to take their part in a dance which would not have disgraced the fanatics of the Elysée Montmartre during a chant, literally vociferated, and accentuated by the most characteristic steps.

Let us not forget that I went through the book market. There are no less than twenty-six shops where printed books and manuscripts are sold, not by weight like tea or by the box like vegetables, but in the ordinary way. As to the numerous "medresses," the colleges which have given Bokhara its renown as a university--I must confess that I did not visit one. Weary and worn I sat down under the elms of the Divanbeghi quay. There, enormous samovars are continually on the boil, and for a "tenghe," or six pence three farthings, I refreshed myself with "shivin," a tea of superior quality which only in the slightest degree resembles that we consume in Europe, which has already been used, so they say, to clean the carpets in the Celestial Empire.

That is the only remembrance I retain of the Rome of Turkestan. Besides, as I was not able to stay a month there, it was as well to stay there only a few hours.

At half-past ten, accompanied by Major Noltitz, whom I found at the terminus of the Decauville, I alighted at the railway station, the warehouses of which are crowded with bales of Bokhariot cotton, and packs of Mervian wool.

I see at a glance that all my numbers are on the platform, including my German baron. In the rear of the train the Persians are keeping faithful guard round the mandarin Yen Lou. It seems that three of our traveling companions are observing them with persistent curiosity; these are the suspicious-looking Mongols we picked up at Douchak. As I pass near them I fancy that Faruskiar makes a signal to them, which I do not understand. Does he know them? Anyhow, this circumstance rather puzzles me.

The train is no sooner off than the passengers go to the dining car. The places next to mine and the major's, which had been occupied since the start, are now vacant, and the young Chinaman, followed by Dr. Tio-King, take advantage of it to come near us. Pan Chao knows I am on the staff of the Twentieth Century, and he is apparently as desirous of talking to me as I am of talking to him.

I am not mistaken. He is a true Parisian of the boulevard, in the clothes of a Celestial. He has spent three years in the world where

people amuse themselves, and also in the world where they learn. The only son of a rich merchant in Pekin, he has traveled under the wing of this Tio-King, a doctor of some sort, who is really the most stupid of baboons, and of whom his pupil makes a good deal of fun.

Dr. Tio-King, since he discovered Cornaro's little book on the quays of the Seine, has been seeking to make his existence conform to the "art of living long in perfect health." This credulous Chinaman of the Chinese had become thoroughly absorbed in the study of the precepts so magisterially laid down by the noble Venetian. And Pan Chao is always chaffing him thereupon, though the good man takes no notice.

We were not long before we had a few specimens of his monomania, for the doctor, like his pupil, spoke very good French.

"Before we begin," said Pan Chao, "tell me, doctor, how many fundamental rules there are for finding the correct amounts of food and drink?"

"Seven, my young friend," replied Tio-King with the greatest seriousness. "The first is to take only just so much nourishment as to enable you to perform the purely spiritual functions."

"And the second?"

"The second is to take only such an amount of nourishment as will not cause you to feel any dullness, or heaviness, or bodily lassitude. The

third--"

"Ah! We will wait there, to-day, if you don't mind, doctor," replied Pan Chao. "Here is a certain maintuy, which seems rather good, and--"

"Take care, my dear pupil! That is a sort of pudding made of hashed meat mixed with fat and spices. I fear it may be heavy--"

"Then, doctor, I would advise you not to eat it. For my part, I will follow these gentlemen."

And Pan Chao did--and rightly so, for the maintuy was delicious--while Doctor Tio-King contented himself with the lightest dish on the bill of fare. It appeared from what Major Noltitz said that these maintuys fried in fat are even more savory. And why should they not be, considering that they take the name of "zenbusis," which signifies "women's kisses?"

When Caterna heard this flattering phrase, he expressed his regret that zenbusis did not figure on the breakfast table. To which his wife replied by so tender a look that I ventured to say to him:

"You can find zenbusis elsewhere than in Central Asia, it seems to me."

"Yes," he replied, "they are to be met with wherever there are lovable women to make them."

And Pan Chao added, with a laugh:

"And it is again at Paris that they make them the best."

He spoke like a man of experience, did my young Celestial.

I looked at Pan Chao; I admired him.

How he eats! What an appetite! Not of much use to him are the observations of the doctor on the immoderate consumption of his radical humidity.

The breakfast continued pleasantly. Conversation turned on the work of the Russians in Asia. Pan Chao seemed to me well posted up in their progress. Not only have they made the Transcaspian, but the Transsiberian, surveyed in 1888, is being made, and is already considerably advanced. For the first route through Iscim, Omsk, Tomsk, Krasnojarsk, Nijni-Ufimsk, and Irkutsk, a second route has been substituted more to the south, passing by Orenburg, Akmolinsk, Minoussinsk, Abatoni and Vladivostock. When these six thousand kilometres of rails are laid, Petersburg will be within six days of the Japan Sea. And this Transsiberian, which will exceed in length the Transcontinental of the United States, will cost no more than seven hundred and fifty millions.

It will be easily imagined that this conversation on the Russian enterprise is not very pleasing to Sir Francis Trevellyan. Although he

says not a word and does not lift his eyes from the plate, his long face flushes a little.

"Well, gentlemen," said I, "what we see is nothing to what our nephews will see. We are traveling to-day on the Grand Transasiatic. But what will it be when the Grand Transasiatic is in connection with the Grand Transafrican."

"And how is Asia to be united by railway with Africa?" asked Major Noltitz.

"Through Russia, Turkey, Italy, France and Spain. Travelers will go from Pekin to the Cape of Good Hope without change of carriage."

"And the Straits of Gibraltar?" asked Pan Chao.

At this Sir Francis Trevellyan raised his ears.

"Yes, Gibraltar?" said the major.

"Go under it!" said I. "A tunnel fifteen kilometres long is a mere nothing! There will be no English Parliament to oppose it as there is to oppose that between Dover and Calais! It will all be done some day, all--and that will justify the vein:

"Omnia jam fieri quae posse negabam."

My sample of Latin erudition was only understood by Major Noltitz, and I heard Caterna say to his wife:

"That is volapuk."

"There is no doubt," said Pan Chap, "that the Emperor of China has been well advised in giving his hand to the Russians instead of the English. Instead of building strategic railways in Manchouria, which would never have had the approbation of the czar, the Son of Heaven has preferred to continue the Transcaspian across China and Chinese Turkestan."

"And he has done wisely," said the major. "With the English it is only the trade of India that goes to Europe, with the Russians it is that of the whole Asiatic continent."

I look at Sir Francis Trevellyan. The color heightens on his cheeks, but he makes no movement. I ask if these attacks in a language he understands perfectly will not oblige him to speak out. And yet I should have been very much embarrassed if I had had to bet on or against it.

Major Noltitz then resumed the conversation by pointing out the incontestable advantages of the Transasiatic with regard to the trade between Grand Asia and Europe in the security and rapidity of its communications. The old hatreds will gradually disappear under European influence, and in that respect alone Russia deserves the approbation of every civilized nation. Is there not a justification for those fine

words of Skobeleff after the capture of Gheok Tepe, when the conquered feared reprisals from the victors: "In Central Asian politics we know no outcasts?"

"And in that policy," said the major, "lies our superiority over England."

"No one can be superior to the English."

Such was the phrase I expected from Sir Francis Trevellyan--the phrase I understand English gentlemen always use when traveling about the world. But he said nothing. But when I rose to propose a toast to the Emperor of Russia and the Russians, and the Emperor of China and the Chinese, Sir Francis Trevellyan abruptly left the table. Assuredly I was not to have the pleasure of hearing his voice to-day.

I need not say that during all this talk the Baron Weissschnitzerdörfer was fully occupied in clearing dish after dish, to the extreme amazement of Doctor Tio-King. Here was a German who had never read the precepts of Cornaro, or, if he had read them, transgressed them in the most outrageous fashion.

For the same reason, I suppose, neither Faruskiar nor Ghangir took part in it, for they only exchanged a few words in Chinese.

But I noted rather a strange circumstance which did not escape the major.

We were talking about the safety of the Grand Transasiatic across Central Asia, and Pan Chao had said that the road was not so safe as it might be beyond the Turkestan frontier, as, in fact, Major Noltitz had told me. I was then led to ask if he had ever heard of the famous Ki Tsang before his departure from Europe.

"Often," he said, "for Ki Tsang was then in the Yunnan provinces. I hope we shall not meet him on our road."

My pronunciation of the name of the famous bandit was evidently incorrect, for I hardly understood Pan Chao when he repeated it with the accent of his native tongue.

But one thing I can say, and that is that when he uttered the name of Ki Tsang, Faruskiar knitted his brows and his eyes flashed. Then, with a look at his companion, he resumed his habitual indifference to all that was being said around him.

Assuredly I shall have some difficulty in making the acquaintance of this man. These Mongols are as close as a safe, and when you have not the word it is difficult to open them.

The train is running at high speed. In the ordinary service, when it stops at the eleven stations between Bokhara and Samarkand, it takes a whole day over the distance. This time it took but three hours to cover the two hundred kilometres which separate the two towns, and at two

o'clock in the afternoon it entered the illustrious city of Tamerlane.

CHAPTER XII.

Samarkand is situated in the rich oasis watered by the Zarafchane in the valley of Sogd. A small pamphlet I bought at the railway station informs me that this great city is one of the four sites in which geographers "agree" to place the terrestrial paradise. I leave this discussion to the exegetists of the profession.

Burned by the armies of Cyrus in B.C. 329, Samarkand was in part destroyed by Genghis Khan, about 1219. When it had become the capital of Tamerlane, its position, which certainly could not be improved upon, did not prevent its being ravaged by the nomads of the eighteenth century. Such alternations of grandeur and ruin have been the fate of all the important towns of Central Asia.

We had five hours to stop at Samarkand during the day, and that promised something pleasant and several pages of copy. But there was no time to lose. As usual, the town is double; one half, built by the Russians, is quite modern, with its verdant parks, its avenues of birches, its palaces, its cottages; the other is the old town, still rich in magnificent remains of its splendor, and requiring many weeks to be conscientiously studied.

This time I shall not be alone. Major Noltitz is free; he will accompany me. We had already left the station when the Caternas