

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*

presented themselves.

"Are you going for a run round the town, Monsieur Claudius?" asked the actor, with a comprehensive gesture to show the vast surroundings of Samarkand.

"Such is our intention."

"Will Major Noltitz and you allow me to join you?"

"How so?"

"With Madame Caterna, for I do nothing without her."

"Our explorations will be so much the more agreeable," said the major, with a bow to the charming actress.

"And," I added, with a view to save fatigue and gain time, "my dear friends, allow me to offer you an arba."

"An arba!" exclaimed Caterna, with a swing of his hips. "What may that be, an arba?"

"One of the local vehicles."

"Let us have an arba."

We entered one of the boxes on wheels which were on the rank in front of the railway station. Under promise of a good "silao," that is to say, something to drink, the yemtchik or coachman undertook to give wings to his two doves, otherwise his two little horses, and we went off at a good pace.

On the left we leave the Russian town, arranged like a fan, the governor's house, surrounded by beautiful gardens, the public park and its shady walks, then the house of the chief of the district which is just on the boundary of the old town.

As we passed, the major showed us the fortress, round which our arba turned. There are the graves of the Russian soldiers who died in the attack in 1868, near the ancient palace of the Emir of Bokhara.

From this point, by a straight narrow road, our arba reached the Righistan square, which, as my pamphlet says, "must not be confounded with the square of the same name at Bokhara."

It is a fine quadrilateral, perhaps a little spoiled by the fact that the Russians have paved it and ornamented it with lamps--which would certainly, please Ephrinell, if he decides upon visiting Samarkand. On three sides of the square are the well-preserved ruins of three medresses, where the mollahs give children a good education. These medresses--there are seventeen of these colleges at Samarkand, besides eighty-five mosques--are called Tilla-Kari, Chir Dar and Oulong Beg.

In a general way they resemble each other; a portico in the middle leading to interior courts, built of enameled brick, tinted pale blue or pale yellow, arabesques designed in gold lines on a ground of turquoise blue, the dominant color; leaning minarets threatening to fall and never falling, luckily for their coating of enamel, which the intrepid traveller Madame De Ujfalvy-Bourdon, declares to be much superior to the finest of our crackle enamels--and these are not vases to put on a mantelpiece or on a stand, but minarets of good height.

These marvels are still in the state described by Marco Polo, the Venetian traveler of the thirteenth century.

"Well, Monsieur Bombarnac," asked the major, "do you not admire the square?"

"It is superb," I say.

"Yes," says the actor, "what a splendid scene it would make for a ballet, Caroline! That mosque, with a garden alongside, and that other one with a court--"

"You are right, Adolphe," said his wife; "but we would have to put those towers up straight and have a few luminous fountains."

"Excellent notion, Caroline! Write us a drama, Monsieur Claudius, a spectacle piece, with a third act in this square. As for the title--"

"Tamerlane is at once suggested!" I reply. The actor made a significant grimace. The conqueror of Asia seemed to him to be wanting in actuality. And leaning toward his wife, Caterna hastened to say:

"As a scene, I have seen a better at the Porte-Saint Martin, in the Fils de la Nuit--"

"And I have at the Châtelet in Michael Strogoff."

We cannot do better than leave our comedians alone. They look at everything from the theatrical point of view. They prefer the air gauze and the sky-blue foliage, the branches of the stage trees, the agitated canvas of the ocean waves, the prospectives of the drop scene, to the sites the curtain represents, a set scene by Cambon or Rubé or Jambon to no matter what landscape; in short, they would rather have art than nature. And I am not the man to try and change their opinions on the subject.

As I have mentioned the name of Tamerlane, I asked Major Noltitz if we were going to visit the tomb of the famous Tartar. The major replied that we would see it as we returned; and our itinerary brought us in front of the Samarkand bazaar.

The arba stopped at one of the entrances to this vast rotunda, after taking us in and out through the old town, the houses of which consist of only one story, and seem very comfortless.

Here is the bazaar in which are accumulated enormous quantities of woollen stuffs, velvet-pile carpets in the brightest of colors, shawls of graceful patterns, all thrown anyhow on the counters of the shops. Before these samples the sellers and buyers stand, noisily arriving at the lowest price. Among the fabrics is a silk tissue known as Kanaous, which is held in high esteem by the Samarkand ladies, although they are very far from appreciating the similar product of Lyons manufacture, which it excels neither in quality nor appearance.

Madame Caterna appeared extraordinarily tempted, as if she were among the counters of the Bon Marché or the Louvre.

"That stuff would do well for my costume in the Grande Duchesse!" she said.

"And those slippers would suit me down to the ground as Ali Bajou in the Caid!" said Caterna.

And while the actress was investing in a remnant of Kanaous, the actor paid for a pair of those green slippers which the Turkomans wear when they enter a mosque. But this was not without recourse to the kindness of the major, who acted as interpreter between the Caternas and the merchant, whose "Yoks! Yoks!" sounded like a lot of crackers in his large mouth.

The arba started again and went off toward the square of Ribi-Khanym, where stands the mosque of that name which was that of one of

Tamerlane's wives. If the square is not as regular as that of Righistan, it is in my opinion rather more picturesque. There are strangely grouped ruins, the remains of arcades, half-unroofed cupolas, columns without capitals, the shafts of which have retained all the brightness of their enamelling; then a long row of elliptical porticoes closing in one side of the vast quadrilateral. The effect is really grand, for these old monuments of the splendor of Samarkand stand out from a background of sky and verdure that you would seek in vain, even at the Grand Opera, if our actor does not object. But I must confess we experienced a deeper impression when, toward the northeast of the town, our arba deposited us in front of the finest of the mosques of Central Asia, which dates from the year 795 of the Hegira (1392 of our era).

I cannot, writing straight away, give you an idea of this marvel. If I were to thread the words, mosaics, pediments, spandrels, bas-reliefs, niches, enamels, corbels, all on a string in a sentence, the picture would still be incomplete. It is strokes of the brush that are wanted, not strokes of the pen. Imagination remains abashed at the remains of the most splendid architecture left us by Asiatic genius.

It is in the farthest depths of this mosque that the faithful go to worship at the tomb of Kassimben-Abbas, a venerated Mussulman saint, and we are told that if we open the tomb a living man will come forth from it in all his glory. But the experiment has not been made as yet, and we prefer to believe in the legend.

We had to make an effort to throw off our contemplative mood; and

fortunately the Caternas did not trouble our ecstasy by evoking any of their recollections of the theater. Doubtless they had shared in our impressions.

We resumed our seats in the arba, and the yemtchik took us at the gallop of his doves along shady roads which the Russian administration keeps up with care.

Along these roads we met and passed many figures worthy of notice. Their costumes were varied enough, "Khalats," in startling colors, and their heads enturbaned most coquettishly. In a population of forty thousand there was, of course, a great mingling of races. Most of them seemed to be Tadjiks of Iranian origin. They are fine strong fellows, whose white skin has disappeared beneath the tan of the open air and the unclouded sun. Here is what Madame de Ujfalvy-Bourdon says of them in her interesting book: "Their hair is generally black, as is also their beard, which is very abundant. Their eyes are never turned up at the corners, and are almost always brown. The nose is very handsome, the lips are not thick, the teeth are small. The forehead is high, broad, and the general shape of the face is oval."

And I cannot refrain from mentioning a note of approval from Caterna when he saw one of these Tadjiks superbly draped in his many-colored Khalat.

"What a splendid lead! What an admirable Melingue! You can see him in Richepins's Nana Sahib or Meurice's Schamyl."



"He would make a lot of money! replied Madame Caterna.

"He just would--I believe you, Caroline!" replied the enthusiastic actor.

And for him, as for all other theatrical folks, is not the money the most serious and the least disputable manifestation of the dramatic art?

It was already five o'clock, and in this incomparable city of Samarkand scene succeeded scene. There! I am getting into that way of looking at it now. Certainly the spectacle should finish before midnight. But as we start at eight o'clock, we shall have to lose the end of the piece. But as I considered that, for the honor of special correspondents in general, it would never do to have been at Samarkand without seeing Tamerlane's tomb, our arba returned to the southwest, and drew up near the mosque of Gour Emir, close to the Russian town. What a sordid neighborhood, what a heap of mud huts and straw huts, what an agglomeration of miserable hovels we have just been through!

The mosque has a grand appearance. It is crowned with its dome, in which the raw blue of the turquoise is the chief color, and which looks like a Persian cap; and on its only minaret, which has now lost its head, there glitter the enamelled arabesques which have retained their ancient purity.

We visited the central hall beneath the cupola. There stands the tomb

of the lame Timour the Conqueror. Surrounded by the four tombs of his sons and his patron saint, beneath a stone of black jade covered with inscriptions, whiten the bones of Tamerlane, in whose name is gathered the whole fourteenth century of Asiatic history. The walls of the hall are covered with slabs of jade, on which are engraven innumerable scrolls of foliage, and in the southwest stands a little column marking the direction of Mecca. Madame De Ujfalvy-Bourdon has justly compared this part of the mosque of Gour Emir to a sanctuary, and we had the same impression. This impression took a still more religious tone when, by a dark and narrow stairway, we descended to the crypt in which are the tombs of Tamerlane's wives and daughters.

"But who was this Tamerlane?" asked Caterna. "This Tamerlane everybody is talking about."

"Tamerlane," replied Major Noltitz, "was one of the greatest conquerors of the world, perhaps the greatest, if you measure greatness by the extent of the conquests. Asia to the east of the Caspian Sea, Persia and the provinces to the north of it, Russia to the Sea of Azof, India, Syria, Asia Minor, China, on which he threw two hundred thousand men--he had a whole continent as the theater of his wars."

"And he was lame!" said Madame Caterna.

"Yes, madame, like Genseric, like Shakespeare, like Byron, like Walter Scott, like Talleyrand, but that did not hinder his getting along in the world. But how fanatic and bloodthirsty he was! History affirms

that at Delhi he massacred a hundred thousand captives, and at Bagdad he erected an obelisk of eighty thousand heads."

"I like the one in the Place de la Concorde better," said Caterna, "and that is only in one piece."

At this observation we left the mosque of Gour Emir, and as it was time to "hurry up," as our actor said, the arba was driven briskly toward the station.

For my part, in spite of the observations of the Caternas, I was fully in tone with the local color due to the marvels of Samarkand, when I was roughly shaken back into modern reality.

In the streets--yes--in the streets near the railway station, in the very center of Tamerlane's capital, I passed two bicyclists.

"Ah!" exclaimed Caterna. "Messrs. Wheeler!"

And they were Turkomans!

After that nothing more could be done than leave a town so dishonored by the masterpiece of mechanical locomotion, and that was what we did at eight o'clock.