

CHAPTER XVI.

Kachgaria is Oriental Turkestan which is gradually being metamorphosed into Russian Turkestan.

The writers in the New Review have said: "Central Asia will only be a great country when the Muscovite administration have laid hands on Tibet, or when the Russians lord it at Kachgar."

Well, that is a thing half done! The piercing of the Pamir has joined the Russian railway with the Chinese line which runs from one frontier of the Celestial Empire to the other. The capital of Kachgaria is now as much Russian as Chinese. The Slav race and the Yellow race have rubbed elbows and live in peace. How long will it last? To others leave the future; I am content with the present.

We arrive at half-past four; we leave at eleven. The Grand Transasiatic shows itself generous. I shall have time to see Kachgar, on condition of allowing myself an hour less than the time stated.

For what was not done at the frontier has to be done at Kachgar. Russians and Chinese are one as bad as the other when there are vexing formalities; papers to verify, passports to sign, etc., etc. It is the same sort of meddling, minute and over-fastidious, and we must put up with it. We must not forget the terrible threat of the formula the

functionary of the Celestial Empire affixes to his acts--"Tremble and obey!" I am disposed to obey, and I am prepared to appear before the authorities of the frontier. I remember the fears of Kinko, and it is with regard to him that the trembling is to be done, if the examination of the travelers extends to their packages and luggage.

Before we reached Kachgar, Major Noltitz said to me:

"Do not imagine that Chinese Turkestan differs very much from Russian Turkestan. We are not in the land of pagodas, junks, flower boats, yamens, honges and porcelain towers. Like Bokhara, Merv and Samarkand, Kachgar is a double town. It is with the Central Asian cities as it is with certain stars, only they do not revolve round one another."

The major's remark was very true. It was not so long ago since emirs reigned over Kachgaria, since the monarchy of Mohammed Yakoub extended over the whole of Turkestan, since the Chinese who wished to live here had to adjure the religion of Buddha and Confucius and become converts to Mahometanism, that is, if they wished to be respectable. What would you have? In these days we are always too late, and those marvels of the Oriental cosmorama, those curious manners, those masterpieces of Asiatic art, are either memories or ruins. The railways will end by bringing the countries they traverse down to the same level, to a mutual resemblance which will certainly be equality and may be fraternity. In truth, Kachgar is no longer the capital of Kachgaria; it is a station on the Grand Transasiatic, the junction between the Russian and Chinese lines, and the strip of iron which stretches for

three thousand kilometres from the Caspian to this city runs on for nearly four thousand more to the capital of the Celestial Empire.

I return to the double town. The new one is Yangi-Chahr: the old one, three and a half miles off, is Kachgar. I have seen both, and I will tell you what they are like.

In the first place, both the old and the new towns are surrounded with a villainous earthen wall that does not predispose you in their favor. Secondly, it is in vain that you seek for any monument whatever, for the materials of construction are identical for houses as for palaces. Nothing but earth, and not even baked earth. It is not with mud dried in the sun that you can obtain regular lines, clean profiles and finely worked sculptures. Your architecture must be in stone or marble, and that is precisely what you do not get in Chinese Turkestan.

A small carriage quickly took the major and myself to Kachgar, which is three miles round. The Kizil-Sou, that is to say the Red River, which is really yellow, as a Chinese river ought to be, clasps it between its two arms, which are united by two bridges. If you wish to see a few ruins of some interest, you must go a short distance beyond the town, where there are the remains of fortifications dating from five hundred or two thousand years ago, according to the imagination of the archaeologist. What is certain is that Kachgar submitted to the furious assault of Tamerlane, and we will agree that without the exploits of this terrible cripple the history of Central Asia would be singularly monotonous. Since his time there have been fierce sultans, it is

true--among others that Ouali-Khan-Toulla, who, in 1857, strangled Schlagintweit, one of the most learned and most daring explorers of the Asiatic continent. Two tablets of bronze, presented by the Geographical Societies of Paris and Petersburg, ornament his commemorative monument.

Kachgar is an important centre of trade, which is almost entirely in Russian hands. Khotan silks, cotton, felt, woolen carpets, cloth, are the principal articles in the markets, and these are exported beyond the frontier between Tachkend and Koulja, to the north of Oriental Turkestan.

Here, as the major told me, Sir Francis Trevellyan should have special cause for manifesting his ill humor. In fact, an English embassy under Chapman and Gordon in 1873 and 1874 had been sent from Kashmir to Kachgar by way of Kothan and Yarkand. At this time the English had reason to hope that commercial relations could be established to their advantage. But instead of being in communication with the Indian railways, the Russian railways are in communication with the Chinese, and the result of this junction has been that English influence has had to give place to Russian.

The population of Kachgar is Turkoman, with a considerable mixture of Chinese, who willingly fulfil the duties of domestics, artisans or porters. Less fortunate than Chapman and Gordon, Major Noltitz and I were not able to see the Kachgarian capital when the armies of the tumultuous emir filled its streets. There were none of those Djiguit foot soldiers who were mounted, nor of those Sarbaz who were not.

Vanished had those magnificent bodies of Taifourchis, armed and disciplined in the Chinese manner, those superb lancers, those Kalmuck archers, bending bows five feet high, those "tigers" with their daubed shields and their matchlocks. All have disappeared, the picturesque warriors of Kachgaria and the emir with them.

At nine o'clock we are on our return to Yangi-Chahr. There, at the end of the streets near the citadel, what do we see? The Caternas in ecstatic admiration before a troop of musical dervishes.

Who says dervish says beggar, and who says beggar evokes the completest type of filth and laziness. But with what an extraordinary combination of gestures, with what attitudes in the management of the long-stringed guitar, with what acrobatic swingings of the body do they accompany their singing of their legends and poetry which could not be more profane. The instinct of the old actor was awakened in Caterna. He could not keep still; it was too much for him.

And so these gestures, these attitudes, these swingings he imitated there with the vigor of an old topman joined to that of a leading premier, and I saw him as he was figuring in this quadrille of dancing dervishes.

"Eh! Monsieur Claudius!" he said, "it is not difficult to copy the exercises of these gallant fellows! Make me a Turkestan operetta, let me act a dervish, and you will see if I don't do it to the very life."

"I do not doubt it, my dear Caterna," I replied; "but before you do that, come into the restaurant at the railway station and bid farewell to Turkestan cookery, for we shall soon be reduced to Chinese."

The offer is accepted all the more willingly, for the reputation of the Kachgarian cooks is well justified, as the major made us remark.

In fact, the Caternas, the major, young Pan Chao and I were astonished and enchanted at the quantity of dishes that were served us, as well as at their quality. Sweets alternated capriciously with roasts and grills. And as the Caternas could never forget--any more than they could forget the famous peaches of Khodjend--there are a few of these dishes which the English embassy wished to retain in remembrance, for they have given the composition in the story of their journey: pigs' feet dusted with sugar and browned in fat with a dash of pickles; kidneys fried with sweet sauce and served with fritters.

Caterna asked for the first twice, and for the other three times.

"I take my precautions," said he. "Who knows what the dining-car kitchen will give us on the Chinese railways? Let us beware of shark fins, which may perhaps be rather horny, and of swallows' nests which may not be quite fresh!"

It is ten o'clock when a stroke of the gong announces that the police formalities are about to begin. We leave the table after a parting glass of Choa-Hing wine, and a few minutes afterward are in the waiting

room.

All my numbers are present, with the exception, of course, of Kinko, who would have done honor to our breakfast if it had been possible for him to take part in it. There was Doctor Tio-King, his Cornaro under his arm; Fulk Ephrinell and Miss Horatia Bluett, mingling their teeth and hair, figuratively, be it understood; Sir Francis Trevellyan, motionless and silent, intractable and stiff, smoking his cigar on the threshold; Faruskiar, accompanied by Ghangir; Russian, Turkoman, Chinese travelers--in all from sixty to eighty persons. Every one had in his turn to present himself at the table, which was occupied by two Celestials in uniform; a functionary speaking Russian fluently, an interpreter for German, French and English.

The Chinese was a man about fifty, with a bald head, a thick moustache, a long pigtail, and spectacles on his nose. Wrapped in a flowery robe, fat as if he belonged to the most distinguished people in the country, he had not a prepossessing face. After all, it was only a verification of our papers, and as ours were in order it did not much matter how repulsive he looked.

"What an air he has!" murmured Madame Caterna.

"The air of a Chinaman!" said her husband, "and frankly I do not want to have one like it."

I am one of the first to present my passport, which bears the visas of

the consul at Tiflis and the Russian authorities at Uzun-Ada. The functionary looks at it attentively. When you are dealing with a mandarin, you should always be on the lookout. Nevertheless, the examination raises no difficulty, and the seal of the green dragon declares me all in order.

The same result with regard to the actor and actress. Nevertheless it was worth while looking at Caterna while his papers were being examined. He assumed the attitude of a criminal endeavoring to mollify a magistrate, he made the sheepiest of eyes, and smiled the most deprecating of smiles, and seemed to implore a grace or rather a favor, and yet the most obdurate of the Chinamen had not a word to say to him.

"Correct," said the interpreter.

"Thank you, my prince!" replied Caterna, with the accent of a Paris street boy.

As to Ephrinell and Miss Bluett, they went through like a posted letter. If an American commercial and an English ditto were not in order, who would be? Uncle Sam and John Bull are one as far as that goes.

The other travelers, Russian and Turkoman, underwent examination without any difficulty arising. Whether they were first-class or second-class, they had fulfilled the conditions required by the Chinese administration, which levies a rather heavy fee for each visa, payable

in roubles, taels or sapeks.

Among the travelers I noticed an American clergyman bound to Peking. This was the Reverend Nathaniel Morse, of Boston, one of those honest Bible distributors, a Yankee missionary, in the garb of a merchant, and very keen in business matters. At a venture I make him No. 13 in my notebook.

The verification of the papers of young Pan Chao and Doctor Tio-King gave rise to no difficulty, and on leaving they exchanged "ten thousand good mornings" with the more amiable of the Chinese representatives.

When it came to the turn of Major Noltitz, a slight incident occurred. Sir Francis Trevelyan, who came to the table at the same moment, did not seem inclined to give way. However, nothing resulted but haughty and provoking looks. The gentleman did not even take the trouble to open his mouth. It is evidently written above that I am not to hear the sound of his voice! The Russian and the Englishman each received the regulation visa, and the affair went no further.

My lord Faruskiar, followed by Ghangir, then arrived before the man in spectacles, who looked at him with a certain amount of attention. Major Noltitz and I watched him. How would he submit to this examination? Perhaps we were to be undeceived regarding him.

But what was our surprise and even our stupefaction at the dramatic outburst which at once took place!

After throwing a glance at the papers presented to him by Ghangir, the Chinese functionary rose and bowed respectfully to Faruskiar, saying:

"May the General Manager of the Grand Transasiatic deign to receive my ten thousand respects!"

General Manager, that is what he is, this lord Faruskiar! All is explained. During our crossing of Russian Turkestan he had maintained his incognito like a great personage in a foreign country; but now on the Chinese railways he resumed the rank which belonged to him.

And I--in a joke, it is true--had permitted myself to identify him with the pirate Ki-Tsang. And Major Noltitz, who had spent his time suspecting him! At last I have some one of note in our train--I have him, this somebody, I will make his acquaintance, I will cultivate it like a rare plant, and if he will only speak Russian I will interview him down to his boots!

Good! I am completely upset, and I could not help shrugging my shoulders, when the major whispers to me:

"Perhaps one of the bandit chiefs with whom the Grand Transasiatic had to make terms!"

"Come, major, be serious."

The visit was nearing its end when Baron Weisschnitzerdörfer appeared.

He is preoccupied, he is troubled, he is anxious, he is confused, he is fidgety. Why is he shaking, and bending, and diving into his pockets like a man who has lost something valuable?

"Your papers!" demands the interpreter in German.

"My papers!" replies the baron, "I am looking for them. I have not got them; they were in my letter case."

And he dived again into his trousers pockets, his waistcoat pockets, his coat pockets, his great-coat pockets--there were twenty of them at the least--and he found nothing.

"Be quick--be quick!" said the interpreter. "The train cannot wait!"

"I object to its going without me!" exclaimed the baron. "These papers--how have they gone astray? I must have let them drop out of my case. They should have given them back to me--"

At this moment the gong awoke the echoes of the interior of the railway station.

"Wait! wait! Donner vetter! Can't you wait a few moments for a man who is going round the world in thirty-nine days--"

"The Grand Transasiatic does not wait," says the interpreter.

Without waiting for any more, Major Noltitz and I reach the platform, while the baron continues to struggle in the presence of the impassible Chinese functionaries.

I examine the train and see that its composition has been modified on account of there being fewer travelers between Kachgar and Peking. Instead of twelve carriages, there are now only ten, placed in the following order: engine, tender, front van, two first-class cars, dining car, two second-class cars, the van with the defunct mandarin, rear van.

The Russian locomotives, which have brought us from Uzun-Ada, have been replaced by a Chinese locomotive, burning not naphtha but coal, of which there are large deposits in Turkestan, and stores at the chief stations along the line.

My first care is to look in at the front van. The custom-house officers are about to visit it, and I tremble for poor Kinko.

It is evident that the fraud has not been discovered yet, for there would have been a great stir at the news. Suppose the case is passed? Will its position be shifted? Will it be put hind side before or upside down? Kinko will not then be able to get out, and that would be a complication.

The Chinese officers have come out of the van and shut the door, so that I cannot give a glance into it. The essential point is that Kinko has not been caught in the act. As soon as possible I will enter the van, and as bankers say, "verify the state of the safe."

Before getting into our car, Major Noltitz asks me to follow him to the rear of the train.

The scene we witness is not devoid of interest; it is the giving over of the corpse of the mandarin Yen Lou by the Persian guards to a detachment of soldiers of the Green Standard, who form the Chinese gendarmerie. The defunct passes into the care of twenty Celestials, who are to occupy the second-class car in front of the mortuary van. They are armed with guns and revolvers, and commanded by an officer.

"Well," said I to the major, "this mandarin must be some very exalted personage if the Son of Heaven sends him a guard of honor--"

"Or of defence," replies the major.

Faruskiar and Ghangir assist at these proceedings, in which there is nothing surprising. Surely the general manager of the line ought to keep an eye on the illustrious defunct, entrusted to the care of the Grand Transasiatic?

The gong was struck for the last time; we hasten into our cars.

And the baron, what has become of him?

Here he comes out on to the platform like a whirlwind. He has found his papers at the bottom of his nineteenth pocket. He has obtained the necessary visa--and it was time.

"Passengers for Peking, take your seats!" shouts Popof in a sonorous voice.

The train trembles, it starts, it has gone.