

SPORTS EVENTS

One or two kilometers from the town lay the temporary landing-ground that had been prepared after Big Horse had destroyed the old one at the beginning of the year. A sports ground had now been established there, with a race-track 400 m long. The games of the year were held there on September 30th. We were formally invited, being received at the entrance by SHENG TUPAN himself. He conducted us to a large spectators' marquee with chairs and tables, on one of which were displayed the prizes — silver cups and the like.

All the dignitaries of the town were present; and round the track was a crowd of Russians, Chinese, Turkis, Torguts, Kirghiz and others.

I now made the acquaintance of KHOJA NIAZ HAJI, the leader of the Turkis, standard-bearer of the native Mohammedan population, and Mecca pilgrim, who also bore the honourable, semi-religious title of *khoja*. He did not make a very agreeable impression. He was coarsely built, boorish, black-bearded. Although I spoke to him in his own language, he only answered »yes» and »no»; and he did not speak to anyone else, either. Apparently he felt that if he uttered a single word that could arouse suspicion he might find himself a head shorter.

His position was difficult. In the war he had at first sided with MA CHUNG-YING, who was at least Mohammedan. But he had then gone over to the other side, and had been beaten in several fights. He had a royal reception from SHENG TUPAN, and had his own court and his own bodyguard. But the Turkis could not approve of his going over to the Chinese, whom they hate in the mass as heathens, *kaper*, or unclean. SHENG TUPAN had shrewdly and skilfully tied his hands by appointing him vice civil Governor-General, an empty title conferring no power, but binding him to the capital and placing him under direct supervision. To see him going about in an ordinary yellow-grey European overcoat and an equally European cap was an offence to all faithful Mohammedans, who consider anything but the turban to be unworthy of a *khoja* and *haji*. He was bound, therefore, to excite contempt in all quarters, on both national and religious grounds. In the circumstances it was not at all surprising that he preferred to keep silent, and to wait and see. As for ourselves, we had been so thoroughly slandered that practically everyone avoided friendly intercourse with us.

There is not much to be said about these games in the heart of Asia. There was an obstacle race, a relay race, wrestling, a long distance race and all the usual events — not badly arranged for such a barbarous country. Dinner was served in the tent, and at last we were able to go.

The games were continued the next day, and SHENG TUPAN took part in a short-distance race. When the prizes had been distributed he made an eloquent speech about the importance of physical training for the defence of the province, and did not lose the opportunity of letting off a bit of steam about Imperialism and Japan.