

Just as we rode away I went to the postmaster, making what I thought to be a very clear arrangement as to the forwarding by next carrier of my chronometer (of the *montre-torpilleur* type), which had been notified to me as being at Andijan straight from a Petersburg dealer. The unresponsive official was asked to see the Colonel, if any sort of doubt could arise as to the immediate forwarding; we had already wasted some days, were anxious to go on, and in a moment of weakness I left the matter in that condition. Just why a man of some experience in travel should commit such folly I know not. A few months later there was full and fair punishment for my error. Indeed, my whole experience in life leaves me unconvinced concerning the necessity of a purgatory—much less a hell—as a device for “getting square” between justice and myself. Even you, gentle reader, who may be a profligate—a seven-ways sinner—could satisfy all of my mind’s requirements for justice merely by having less of heaven, not more of hell than should fall to your righteous pastor, or to myself.

The road was dusty, and it was hot, because Central Asia in July is always hot. But our mounts were fairly good; the country was green all about us through the twenty-mile strip of irrigation; the people were interested and interesting. Altogether a fair start,—only the recollection of the Colonel’s compound of courtesy and of curtness to worry us. The first night out we slept happily under the spreading trees that sheltered an old Kirghiz, having two wives. He was a rare bird, by the way—for the Kirghiz is almost universally a monogamic nomad.