

rode proudly on a spirited horse. His gloved right hand rested in a wooden crotch at the upper end of a short stick which stood in a little stirrup, and on his wrist perched a hunting-eagle with a leather hood over its eyes. Behind the man a four-year-old urchin, a miniature of his grandfather, planted his feet sturdily on the horse, while his hands firmly grasped the old man's shoulders. Ahead of this pair a ragged lad, mounted bare-back on a yearling steer, jogged along contentedly behind a herd of horses and colts. In spite of his rags, he looked happy, well-fed, and warm. So, too, did all the people on that day's march; and, indeed, all the pastoral nomads whom I have ever met seemed to be comfortable. When their flocks diminish and they grow poor, they are obliged to seek new homes, and to betake themselves to agriculture, leaving only the rich to continue the nomadic life.

As might be expected from their surroundings, the food of the Khirghiz is very limited in variety, and is eaten in the simplest way. A typical meal, such as one in which I shared and many at which I was a spectator, is likely to prove unpleasant to civilized nerves. One day, as I sat cross-legged with a circle of Khirghiz on the gay felts which carpeted most of the floor of a rich khibitka, our host came in, holding up the skirt of his gown full of dried dung. With this he kindled a pungently smoky fire on the stones in the middle of the khibitka floor, and on the flameless conflagration put some tea to boil. When this began to simmer, he took from the lattice-work of the khibitka a cloth heavy with grease and dirt, and spread it before me, questioning the entire circle meanwhile as to the advisability of serving cream with the tea.