

most important articles of Khirghiz diet. Then when the servants had smacked their lips over the remains of the meal, each man, with a look to see that his neighbors were ready, raised his hands to his face, and all in unison stroked their beards, with a muttered prayer to Allah.

During the next hour or two, big stories of brave deeds and travel were told, or less praiseworthy talk of quarrels and women kept the party animated at first, but soon the kumiss took effect, and drowsiness began to prevail. At length, to the relief of all, the host appeared, and we knew that the real meal was at hand, for the tea-drinking is, after all, but a new-fangled Russian notion. In his hand, at the end of a spit, he bore a small piece of roasted fat from the immense kidney-shaped tail of the sheep that we were to eat. Pulling his big knife from his girdle, he cut off morsels and placed one in the mouth of each guest as an appetizer. Behind the host came his boy, bearing a basin and a copper urn of water, from which in the oriental way he poured water over the hands of one after another of the squatting circle, beginning, of course, with the foreigner as the most honorable. As the Khirghiz put out their hands to wash, they made a peculiar gesture in throwing back their long sleeves.

The washing over, dinner followed promptly — an enormous quantity of boiled mutton in a huge wooden bowl, flanked by two smaller bowls full of the broth in which the meat had been cooked. The host waved his hand over the bowl and cried, "Eat;" some one else cried, "Eat;" and then each cross-legged Khirghiz cried, "Eat," and, whipping his knife from his girdle, plunged his hand into the dish. The