

humored, smooth-faced interpreter, also in a dark blue skull-cap, but wearing a very light blue robe, which half covered his purple trousers, and was itself partly concealed by a black silk waistcoat. The interpreter led my horse to a pleasant group of trees, and carefully turned him so that I might dismount upon some felts spread on the ground. Beside the felts a low platform was covered with rugs, on which stood a little table a foot high and a red cushion on which I was expected to lean. I sat alone on the platform, as etiquette required; while the Beg and the interpreter sat on the felts with Ibrahim, who, being often needed to help me out when my Turki vocabulary failed, was fast acquiring the habit of posing as a man of consequence. The rest of the party, in robes of rusty brown, deep blue, and cinnamon purple, formed a soberer group on the bare earth. Of course we all sat cross-legged, or, more modestly and respectfully, on our knees with our feet concealed as far as possible.

A "dastarkhan," or tablecloth, was produced at once from behind a tree. It is hardly right to call it a "tablecloth," for except in cases of great formality, where foreigners or Chinese are concerned, it is always spread upon the floor. Moreover, the term includes the food as well as the cloth. The "dastarkhan" is the alpha and omega of hospitality in Central Asia, for it always appears as a guest arrives and as he leaves. This first "dastarkhan" consisted of a red tablecloth, showing more signs of use than of washing, on which a servant placed a teapot, and dishes of cold boiled mutton, curdled milk, walnuts, raisins, sugar (which is esteemed a great delicacy), and the dry eleagnus fruit, dusty and tasteless. In addition there were round sheets of bread like