

soon as the tea-bowls were empty, a boy with the regulation long-necked, slender-nosed ewer and large basin with a crinkly edge poured water over our hands, the unequivocal announcement that a solid meal was at hand. The Beg and I, on a piazza of mud on one side of a shady little courtyard, shared a huge round platter of "pilaf," or rice, appetizingly cooked with mutton and greens. This the Beg ate skillfully with his fingers, rolling up a ball about an inch in diameter and snapping it into his mouth. The remainder of our repast consisted of a wooden bowl of delicious curdled milk, which the Beg scooped up with a thin sheet of bread. The rest of the party, being of lower rank, sat on another platform on the other side of the courtyard; and the ten or twelve of them shared two platters of "pilaf," the size of ours. They ate rapidly, but not noisily like the Khirghiz. There was no conversation, but once in two or three minutes every one drew back and waited. Then one, followed by another, would wave his hand politely over the dish and invite the others to begin again, and all would fall to. It is not considered polite to talk during meals. The time for conversation is when more important matters have been attended to.

Having had three meals that morning, I was not at all hungry at one o'clock. At that hour, as we were on our homeward way, a galloping horseman shot out of a lane and almost knocked the Beg over. There was a laugh, and an explanation. It appeared that the rider bore another invitation; so we all turned up the lane, "for a bowl of tea." This time there had been less prearrangement. We sat around an empty adobe tank under the shade of the