

Asia. He had chosen the Cossacks himself, the pick, he said, of 40 who had volunteered. I was shown the men and horses. The men looked smart, the horses were small, strong, plump and too well fed. After explaining the privations and hardships that awaited us, I asked, if the men had carefully considered that the journey would take fully two years. »If it took three or four instead of two, we should be willing to go», they answered. Both had quite made up their minds.

In the evening I visited the native town, remarkable for its wonderful historical monuments. The town is ancient (Alexander the Great selected it for his residence in Central Asia) and was razed to the ground by Jenghiz Khan, but was rebuilt with renewed splendour about 150 years later (1370) by Tamerlane who, like his immediate successors, held his brilliant court there. The most beautiful and wonderful ruined mosques are of the 14th and early 15th century. The Rigistan square, enclosed on three sides by brightly coloured old mosques, is marvellously impressive, especially at noon on a Friday, when thousands of Mohammedans come to worship. They hurry to the mosque from all sides, some stopping to rinse their feet in an ariq, spread their cloths and carpets in long rows on the pavement outside the already filled mosque and proceed to make their obeisances and prayers. The monotonous voice of the mullah breaks the silence now and then and a sea of white turbans rises and falls with surprising uniformity. Mohammedans of higher rank come to the mosque riding beautiful and richly caparisoned Bukhara horses. The mosques are visited under the guidance of willing natives and you cannot help marvelling at the lack of outward reverence they show for these centuries-old religious monuments of theirs. The mosques are built in a rectangle round a courtyard planted with trees and containing a well or pond. Half-ruined stairs with gigantic steps lead up to several floors of cells lighted by the doors facing the courtyard. The cells are inhabited by mullahs (mullah = teacher) and pupils who spend part of the year as teachers in the provinces. They are very pleased to see visitors and never refuse baksheesh. One of them, with an ingratiating smile, showed me a photograph of himself arm-in-arm with a couple of smiling women. Outside the town there is an uncommonly beautiful mosque built by Tamerlane (or Tymurlyng, as the Sarts reverently pronounce his name) with additions of a slightly later period. In a cleft in the rock you are shown the lions' den into which Daniel was thrown and his tomb on the edge of it. Tradition has it that after his death he continued to grow in his tomb which had for centuries been extended from time to time. His respectable height of 26 feet would certainly have continued to increase, had not the Russian Government with its love of order found it necessary to forbid Daniel to grow any taller. The Russian Government and its representatives are criticised sometimes with good reason, but more frequently with a childishness of which only the oriental mind is capable. The old mosques in Samarkand appear to be going to rack and ruin at a rapid pace. To judge by the condition of these ruin-like buildings, they must have begun to decay long before Samarkand was conquered by the Russians. The old building materials, consisting of unbaked bricks, give the mosques an indefinite yellowish-grey tinge that is characteristic of the deserts and sandhills of Turkestan. These earthcoloured mosques are sometimes covered with glazed tiles, blue, green, red and gold, but more often turquoise or dark blue, on a white ground. These tiles are wonderfully

