



»The Queen of Allai»
on horseback.

folded and thrown over them. A row of bridle bits and head harness richly ornamented with bronze and turquoise completed the decoration of the background. In the centre of the cupola-shaped ceiling there was a circular opening through which the star-strewn sky peeped in. On the wall hung big embroidered cloth pouches in which a couple of books, a mirror and other objects could be seen. The traditional dastarkhan was served immediately. Kind souls saw to it, thanks to gaps at the door-opening, that the tea-glasses were replenished as soon as they were emptied. Half-undressed, I crept under a warm silken quilt of unusually large size and the next moment I slept as one does after a tiring day.

August 13th. Next morning I discovered that Hassan's mother, known as the Queen of Allai, was living in the other large yurt. Led by two elderly servants, she presently came across to my yurt, wearing a rich khalat of silk brocade, trimmed with fur, the gift of one of the governors-general of Turkestan. Puffing slightly, she sank to her knees and sat down on her calves, according to Kirghiz custom, on a fur spread out for her. Our very trite conversation consisted of an exchange of compliments, translated by her grandson and received with a slight inclination of the whole upper part of her body. After taking a couple of photographs inside the yurt I requested the wrinkled old lady of 96 to allow me to perpetuate her sitting on horseback. A brown horse, handsomely saddled, was led up and with a little help from her grandson and a servant she mounted with the confidence only possessed by one who has spent her life in the saddle.

Soon after I took my departure in the company of her grandson. Locked between hills and mountains, the road leads downhill almost all the way to Gulcha, 7 miles to the east, along chasms and narrow valleys. A couple of Kirghiz tombs built of bricks in the shape common to all and decorated with horses' tails on long poles, could be seen