



*Kirghiz family on the move
south of Gulcha.*

from the road. One of them marks the grave of Tiljaka Boua, a Kirghiz hero, who fell in one of their many wars with the Kalmuks (probably at the end of the 18th or beginning of the 19th century). The other commemorates a holy man whose name our guide could not remember. At the foot of the tomb there is a healing hot spring. The road descends all the time, accompanied by a rapid little mountain stream, called »the hot river«, with fresh and clear water. About 11.30 we came to a valley with a sparsely growing grove of leaf-trees, embedded among green hills with soft outlines. Some white buildings with iron roofs showing through the trees indicated that we had come to the fortress of Gulcha, marked on the 40 verst map of the General Staff as lying north of the Chigirchiq Pass. Warned of our approach the village headman had had two kibitkas put up in my honour and he came forward with Hassan Beg to greet us. I paid a call on the »Garrison Commander«, an essaoul or captain of the Orenburg Cossacks, whose »sotnya« (company) constitutes the garrison of this so-called fortress. When I returned, the dastarkhan was already served. After a refreshing bathe in the cold mountain stream I received a return visit from the garrison commander, while my Cossacks entertained the defenders of the fortress. The officer seemed to regard my journey with some contempt, when he heard what short marches we proposed to make at times. A platoon of his »sotnya« is stationed with one officer at the frontier post of Irkeshtam, while he himself with the three other platoons, without any other officer except an ensign promoted from the ranks, is stationed at Gulcha, where he is cut off from the rest of the world for part of the year.

Loading and saddling began at 7 a.m., but we did not get off till 8.45. The next camp was to be pitched 18 miles further south. Such a late start is inconvenient, because you spend the hottest part of the day in the saddle and have little time to make any excursions before dark. The road follows the fairly swift river Gulcha faithfully in its innumerable

*August
14th.*