

windings down a valley of rare beauty. The surrounding steep mountain slopes are tinged with very beautiful colours and assume very varied shapes. The road is suitable for wheeled traffic, but rises and falls all the time along the mountain slopes — the bridges are in good condition. Much more traffic than hitherto — considerable caravans from Kashgar and Khotan laden with wool or leather. You see more and more camels. We met several caravans of about 100. You see them from afar with their up and down motion, mysterious and dignified. Large nomadic families on the move with a dozen camels are especially decorative. Their beautifully coloured garments and dark red carpets thrown over the backs of the camels are a fine sight. Now it is a caravan of horses with their pack-saddles shaped like hives, then a few dozen small asses straining on their thin legs to climb a steep hill with loads as large as those of the horses. The men who are engaged in carrying goods by horses never unsaddle their beasts of burden, as it would be difficult to resaddle those that had been chafed by the saddles. The modest creatures often content themselves with poor pasturage and you constantly see saddled animals wandering about in search of food. In view of the difficult country it must be admitted that such transport, though slow, is extraordinarily cheap. No striking monuments or prehistoric memorials are to be seen on this part of the route. About 250 yards from the fortress of Gulcha you catch sight at the foot of the western hills of a couple of small mounds of earth, said to be the remains of a Kalmuk Gulcha destroyed by the Kirghiz. A little nearer the river one notices the ruins of earthworks that belonged to some Kirghiz fortifications built by one of Hassan Beg's ancestors during a war between the Kirghiz and the Kalmuks. The Kirghiz apparently believe that a day will dawn when a great hero will arise in powerful China and reconquer them. They are convinced that China is populated by a people that is called Chinese in the towns, but Kalmuks in the mountains, living in kubitkas. Their books seem to speak clearly of these latter »Chinese«. Indifferent as to who rules over them, whether Russia or China, and badly armed with old-fashioned rifles, they do not, at all events for the moment, present any source of anxiety to the Russian Government, though such an ally as the inaccessible country they inhabit may give them great advantages. It is more difficult to get to know the silent, reticent Kirghiz with his morose appearance than the talkative and excitable Sart. The former does not complain before strangers like the latter, but the Sart, of course, being a town dweller, comes into closer contact with the authorities. A tax of 5 roubles per yurt is levied from the Kirghiz and this sum is apportioned by a commission according to the property owned.

About 1 o'clock we came to a Kirghiz village of one farm, where we were treated to a little kumyss (mare's milk) or kemyz, as the Kirghiz pronounce it, the sharp, sour taste of which is very refreshing in the intense heat. My younger Cossack had an attack of high fever and it was only with the support of his comrade that he could sit his horse for the remaining 6 miles to our camp at Yangryk, a small plateau surrounded by high, green hills about 100 feet above the river Gulcha that makes a bend at this place. A few mounds of earth, decorated with horses' tails and coloured ribbons on long poles, indicate the spot where the Kirghiz are buried who fell in a battle against General Skobelev. The Russian losses are said to have numbered 800 men. The Kirghiz speak of Skobelev