

mountains. Forcing a path over rough boulders between them, it goes from valley to valley. No animals are visible except the skeletons or half-decomposed carcasses of horses and asses, evidence of the hardships of the road. The beds of the river and streams are dry, without a drop of water. The road ascends higher and higher. You long impatiently to be able to begin the descent and reach the water. Close to a few patches of water I was able to dismount at last at 2 p.m. and let my horses, exhausted by climbing up and down slippery roads, refresh themselves with a short drink, while I shared a bit of bread and a melon bought of a caravan from Kashgar with Ljo and Yanusoff. In the hope of finding something to shoot I usually ride with them. At about 5 p.m., we reached, on a wild and inaccessible high bank, the ruins of a square fort with 4 turrets, built once upon a time by Yaqub Beg, and a small tower erected at some distance. Here you have a marvellous view of the opposite bank, the wide river bed strewn with gravel and boulders and a chaotic mass of clay mountains. The road winds between a mud wall, 8 feet high and facing the bed of the river, and the fort, past some Mohammedan graves with their coloured ends of ribbon, poles, horses' manes etc. Whose are these richly decorated graves? Do heroes who fell in one of the many wars rest here under the walls of this eagle's nest of a fort or is this respect shown to a mighty prince, a wise man? There is no inscription to give the passer-by any guidance. The road wriggles in innumerable sharp bends down the steep bank and goes on south along the bed of the river. Two miles from this place we pitched our camp near a group of kikitkas whose hospitable owners entertained us with milk that tasted nasty and very savoury lumps of boiled cream called »kaimak« swimming in it. The place is called Uksalur. We had covered about 27 miles on difficult mountain roads, not so bad for a heavily laden caravan. Of the fairly numerous caravans we met, those coming from the south carried wool, rugs and leather, those from the north matches, sugar and other groceries. The horses are not fed except on grass that is mostly miserable and are worked terribly hard in such caravans. They are never unsaddled and the state of their backs is often indescribable. The nearer they get to their goal, the worse the horses look and you begin to see why so many remain lying on the road. This lack of care for animals is due to the low value of the horses (20—30 roubles) and the comparatively high cost of transport (12—15 roubles). A few exhausting journeys and a horse has paid for itself with interest.

After an exceedingly strenuous march of 30 miles we pitched our camp at last close to some Kirghiz kikitkas in the Qizil-ui valley, an extensive slope with stones and clay soil mixed with gravel, surrounded on all sides by high mountains. Although the sky is overcast and rain threatens, one is pleased to go to bed without getting frozen, now that we have left the mountains and cold behind us. My best horse is galled, two others too, and a fourth has hurt its knee badly in coming down these curious stone stairs worn in the narrow mountain cleft by the hoofs of thousands and thousands of beasts of burden. It is not surprising that after two such trying marches my caravan is in a miserable condition. To do 30 miles with heavily laden animals on a level road is quite respectable, but on mountain paths, where you have to clamber up and down for miles, it is undoubtedly too

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