



*An inmate of the almshouse at Yarkand with a goitre characteristic of the local inhabitants.*

more comfortable as we could light a fire and reduce the dampness in the room, and some coloured carpets, spread on the floor by our host, made the room look more oriental. The yard was large and all round it there were many similar cubicles. The centre was occupied by a large brick terrace, underneath which was a large cellar for goods with a window in the roof, screened by flower-pots. These flowers and two tree-like plants with red flowers in pots made the yard appear well kept. Most of the merchants here deal in Russian goods. They spend the day in their stores, but for the night they repair to their quarters in the town. A pleasant old Afghan of sixty kept his valuable stock of corals (up to 300 roubles a piece), brocades, silks and velvets from India opposite my room. He was very talkative and not disinclined to boast, especially of the independence and warlike deeds of his country.

It is the »rosa» just now, the Mohammedans' month of fasting. They eat only when it is so dark that you cannot distinguish whether a thread hanging from the ceiling is black or white and until it grows light again, so that you can see the difference in colour. It is a picturesque sight in the dusk, when the bearded old men with their venerable appearance and wearing spotless white turbans say their prayers and make their obeisances in long rows on rugs spread among the flowers on the terrace. As soon as darkness sets in they eat greedily, babbling their prayers again from time to time in a singsong voice in various corners of the yard. Do they think of the meaning of their beautiful Mohammedan prayers or is it merely an outward form in which the main thing is to make their obeisances with wonderful theatrical precision? Their first prayer is as follows: »In the name of God the merciful, the charitable! Praise be to God, the Master of the world! We adore Thee, we cry to Thee for help. Lead us on the right way, the way of those to whom Thou hast been merciful, on whom Thy wrath resteth not, and who do not go astray. Amen!»