



Crossing the Tekes.

At the foot of the altar stood a low bench covered by a rug, in front of a much lower table with all kinds of dishes. On either side of this there was a semicircle of smaller tables rather more modestly decked. After an exchange of compliments I had to take the seat of honour with my host on a carpet on the left, my interpreters and a couple of Kalmuks on the right. The women and a group of Kalmuks, who had assembled at the door, looked on standing. We were regaled with European tea made in my honour in the usual way, Kalmuk tea prepared with salt, butter and milk, served lukewarm in large copper pots with chased bands of silver, thin Kalmuk bread dripping with fat, Russian biscuits, a kind of gingerbread and lumps of sugar. When we had drunk our tea, a live sheep was brought in and the host announced with much ceremony that it was to be slaughtered in my honour. All compliments were paid standing and with much ceremony. He sent for my cook and asked him to prepare the mutton for my dinner in the way I liked best. For the household it was boiled in a large pot in the middle of the yurt and was eaten before the soup. While the meat was boiling, a Kalmuk made «lapsha» (a kind of vermicelli) of flour and water, throwing large quantities into the pot, when the meat had been taken out. — At night it was curious to go to bed while the household half undressed and lay down under fine, thick sheepskins on a high bed at the back of the yurt. Before this some fir branches were burnt in an iron bowl on a pointed foot stuck into the ground, while first the wife and then the husband said some prayers, falling to their knees time after time, in the process. — I was most comfortable in the yurt. It was a warm and calm night, the warmest, I fancy since the beginning of winter.

It has been raining since the early morning. Luckily, we had only 7 or 8 miles to cover to Kura, the principal lama monastery of the Kalmuks, for it rained harder and harder and the grey sky held out no hope of improvement. The clouds were so low that they seemed almost to touch the ground. To make mapping more difficult there was a thick fog which forced me to check the direction constantly. The road we followed was a good one. It goes in a SW—NE direction and probably connects the Kalmuks' former lamasery, Sumbe, with Kura. The ground is uneven, the mounds and hills being mostly in a N—S

*April 8th.
Kura.*