

Chinese; I also saw there men from nearly every part of Asia. It is a curious meeting-ground of many nationalities from north and south, and from east and west of Asia; from Russian territory and from India, from China, and from Afghanistan and Bokhara, even men from Constantinople. With all of these I had from time to time opportunities of speaking. Ethnologically they differed greatly, but they were all Asiatics, and nearly all traders, and their general characteristics, in consequence, varied but little. The effect of Central Asian listlessness had made itself felt on all. The wild fanatical Pathan from the Indian frontier allowed his ardour to cool down here till he became almost as mild as the comfortable merchant from Bokhara. All were intelligent men who, in their wanderings, had picked up much useful knowledge; and as a rule the constant rubbing up against their neighbours had produced good manners in them. They were seldom anything else but courteous, if they knew that courtesy would be shown to them, and a visit from any of them was always a pleasure. They discussed politics constantly, as their trade depended so much upon the political situation; and the man in all Asia whom they watched with the keenest interest was Abdul Rahman, the Amir of Kabul. On him and on his life so much of their little fortunes depended. He was credited with boundless ambitions. At one time he was to attack the Chinese in Kashgar, and turn them out; at another he was to invade Bokhara; and four times during our stay in Kashgar he was dead altogether. These Central Asian traders speculate freely on what is to happen when he dies. If a son of his is to rule in his stead, then Afghanistan will remain as much closed for them as it is now, and the trade of Central Asia will be strangled as before by the prohibitive tariffs, and other obstacles to it which are imposed by the ruler of Kabul. But if Afghanistan is swept away as an independent state, and the Russian and Indian frontiers coincide either on the Hindu