

only sees a few travelling carts used for long journeys.

On August 7 we arrived at Aksu, the largest town we had yet seen. It had a garrison of two thousand soldiers, and a native population of about twenty thousand, beside the inhabitants of the surrounding district. There were large bazaars and several inns—some for travellers, others for merchants wishing to make a prolonged stay to sell goods. A trader will bring goods from a distant town, engage a room in one of these inns or *serais*, and remain there for some months, or even a year or two, till he has sold his goods. He will then buy up a new stock, and start off to another town. It is in these *serais* that one meets the typical travelling merchant of Central Asia; and often have I envied these men their free, independent, wandering life, interspersed with enough of hardships, of travel, and risks in strange countries to give it a relish. They are always interesting to talk to: intelligent, shrewd, full of information. Naturally they are well-disposed to Englishmen, on account of the encouragement we give to trade; but they are cosmopolitan, and do not really belong to any