

The kitchen arrangements and accommodation for servants, the stables for 50 horses, and the enclosure for our baggage animals, were all in keeping and excellent, and I fear the comparison we drew between the method and ingenuity of these so-called barbarian people and of their more civilized neighbours across the Himalayas was not in favour of India.

Whilst we were settling ourselves in our new quarters, Ihrar Khan Tora, the same person who came to India as Envoy from the Atalik in 1871-72, called to enquire after our health and to request that we would at once present ourselves before his master. Fortunately our baggage animals, which being always lightly loaded were accustomed to keep pretty well up with us, soon arrived and we were speedily ready to obey the summons. Mounting on horses, we rode across the moat and inside the large gateway, and after passing a small quadrangle found ourselves in an open space, on one side of which was a large mosque and other buildings, and in the left front the Atalik's palace. According to etiquette we dismounted at about 40 paces from the gateway and walked slowly along with Ihrar Khan, the Yasawal-bashi or head chamberlain with white wand in hand going ahead. In the outer gateway soldiers were seated on a dais, with their fire-arms laid on the ground before them, their arms folded and their eyes cast on the ground. We then crossed obliquely an empty court-yard and, passing through a second gateway filled with soldiers, crossed another court on all sides of which soldiers in gay costumes were ranged seated. From this court we passed into the penetralia, a small court, in which not a soul was visible and everywhere a deathlike stillness prevailed. At the further end of this court was a long hall with several window doors. Ihrar Khan then led us in single file, with measured tread, to some steps at the side of the hall, and, entering almost on tip-toe, looked in and returning beckoned with his hand to me to advance alone. As I approached the door he made a sign for me to enter, and immediately withdrew. I found myself standing at the threshold of a very common looking room, perfectly bare of all ornament and with not a very good carpet on the floor: looking about, I saw enter at a doorway on the opposite side, a tall stout man, plainly dressed. He beckoned with his hand and I advanced thinking that it must be a chamberlain who was to conduct me to 'the presence.' Instinctively however I made a bow as I advanced and soon found myself taken by both hands and saluted with the usual form of politeness, and I knew that I was standing before the far-famed ruler of Eastern Turkestan. After a few words of welcome the Atalik led me across the room and seated me near him by the side of a window. At this moment a salute of 15 guns was fired. His Highness asked in an eager tone after the health of Her Majesty and of the Viceroy, and soon afterwards called in a low voice to Ihrar Khan to bring in the other officers. They came in one by one, and each was shaken by the hand and made to sit down by my side. Then there was a long and somewhat trying pause, during which the Atalik eyed each one of us with intent scrutiny; I had been told that etiquette forbade the guest to speak much on the first interview, and that it was a point of good manners to sit perfectly still, with downcast eyes.

When it is remembered that the oriental posture requires the visitor to sit upon his heels, with feet well flattened under him, the excruciating agony of having to keep perfectly unmoved in this position for perhaps half an hour will be appreciated.

After this silent ordeal had been undergone for some time, at a sign from the Atalik 16 soldiers came in with the dastarkhwan, and the Atalik breaking a loaf of bread shared it with us. After the cloth was removed, we, remembering our lesson in manners, rose up and stroking our beards said 'Allah o Akbar,' soon after which the Atalik said 'Khush-amadeed' 'you are welcome.' This was the signal for us to be released from our agonising position, and we shook hands and departed. During the interview Ihrar Khan stood by the door at the further end of the room, it not being etiquette for any one to be near enough to hear any thing that passes between the ruler and his guest.

According to the etiquette of the country, after having thus paid our respects to the ruler, it was considered proper for us to remain quiet in our own quarters for a few days. Some of our followers however went to the city of Kashghar to make purchases, and found themselves the object of eager curiosity, while crowds thronged round calling them 'English.' The fact is that so very little intercourse has taken place between India and the people of Kashghar that they knew scarcely anything of us.