

GREAT FEATURES OF THE HISSAR VALLEY.

Hissar becomes of interest because of the extraordinary hydrography of its great valley. Opposite ancient Bactra a 15-mile wide strip of steppe sweeps up from the Oxus embayment into this valley, continuing northward up the Surkhan River as far as Karatagh, then bending due east into the wide open valley of Hissar. This portion of the valley-floor averages 2,500 feet in elevation, and is distinguished for its utter lack of a trunk-stream. It is, on the other hand, crossed by three tributaries, the Kanaka, Dushambeh, and Kafirnigan, converging to near the city of Hissar, where they break through the southern side and flow to the Oxus.



Fig. 447.—A Swimmer of Rapids, with an Inflated Goat-skin (Karategin).

The valley has a mixed population, divided between Usbeg camps and Tadjik villages. Throughout the old khanate it is famed for its wealth of pasture and the grace of its horses. The streams descending from the mountains north are diverted to irrigate a wide continuity of rice and grain-fields, while the silk woven in Karatagh and Hissar is prized throughout the cities of Central Asia.

Ten days were spent in attempting to decipher the remarkable physiography of the Hissar valley. The more open part of the valley east from Karatagh is about 40 miles long and floored by a grass plain with an average width of 5 miles, but of irregular definition. On the northern side this plain is often bounded by a loess cliff, surmounted by a narrow belt of steppe rising north. From this it inclines transversely or southwards on a grade of about 20 feet to the mile, and sweeps up again to meet the mature topography of the southern side. The loess cliff varies up to 100 feet in height, and running along the northern side of the main valley truncates tributary spurs and tributary valleys in one plain; but is interrupted by the broad flood-plains of larger tributary valleys dissecting it; in general, it runs east and west, sometimes perfectly straight for several miles; sometimes gives way to a dissected deformation of the plain, and has the appearance of a recent fault-scarp. From near Dushambeh it runs straight east for 8 miles, dissected by local streams at rare intervals.

The Hissar valley is all loess, except where crossed by the gravel flood-plains of the three larger streams. These streams cross in wide channels, beginning with a depth of about 100 feet, decreasing till near the southern side, where flood-plains