

ledge of the local languages, unusual at the time among Russian officers of the Turkistan Province, made converse far easier than it could have been for me otherwise with my exceedingly scanty Russian. Nor could I fail to appreciate the homely ways of Madame Tumanovich's household, which would not turn night into daytime by long sittings over tea and cigarettes such as seemed to be obligatory at other Russian outposts. A two days' halt gave me the welcome chance of taking down specimens of Ishkashmi, one of the Eastern Iranian languages preserved among the isolated communities of hillmen on the uppermost Oxus, and one previously unrecorded. The specimens have since been published by my old friend, Sir George Grierson, O.M., the great linguistic authority.

From Nut, where the Oxus makes its great bend to the north, I moved down the river through that very confined portion of the valley which is known as Gharan. Until the recent construction of a bridle-path under Russian orders it had been ground most difficult of access both from the north and the south. The very scanty population of Gharan was then dependent upon Badakhshan, the fertile tracts of which could be reached through side valleys leading down from the plateaux to the west. This explains why Marco Polo refers to "those fine and valuable Balas Rubies", in reality a product of Gharan, in his account of Badakhshan. Above the little hamlet of Sist I passed the pits in which they used to be dug by forced labour as a monopoly of the Mirs of Badakhshan.

The marches through Gharan, with constant ups-and-downs on a very narrow rocky track along precipices, had been rather fatiguing. So I was glad enough when by