

his company, and bravely he followed me in spite of dainty slippers and waving silk garments over the narrow canal embankments and through the thickets of luxuriant Kumush edging the fields of wheat or oats. Yet his discreet allusions left no doubt that the high road seemed to him a more reasonable line of progression for people of rank and culture.

As I always used to chat with the country folk on these evening walks, the number of my Kök-yar acquaintances soon grew large in spite of the seclusion of my day's work. Comfortable farm-houses lay scattered along most of the road from my quarters to Otan-su, some two and a half miles up the valley. There were fruit-trees near all of them, though only in small walled-in spaces, and scarcely a farm was without its loggia where the women and children seemed to spend most of the summer day. A peep into the living-room for the winter showed invariably huge piles of carefully folded felt rugs, cushions, and fur coats, evidence of the comfortable provision made against the rigours of the winter season. Kök-yar is famous throughout Turkestan for its excellent felts, and a good deal of the manifest ease prevailing in these homesteads was, no doubt, derived from the profits of this flourishing industry.

Pretty was it to see the tall, waving poplar groves of Otan-su against the yellow background of the rugged cliffs which there line the valley. The maze of narrow lanes in this village, with the apricot and mulberry trees peeping across every mud wall, had its picturesque places, too. Great was the amazement of the good people of Otan-su when they first saw me paying a visit on foot. Ponies were dragged out in haste, and invitations to mount them were many and pressing. But after a time the shock wore off, and I was allowed to indulge in my queer taste for trudging along on my own feet. Otan-su was the place where Li Ta-lao-ye, the convivial little Chinese official who was supposed to guard the Raskam border, had taken up his unauthorized residence. His work was *nil* from morning till evening, but loneliness evidently oppressed him, and invitations to my Ssü-yeh for lunch and supper parties