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THE STEPPES OF THE IRTISH.



DECIDED, after careful consideration, to proceed from Tiumen to Tomsk through the steppes of the Irtish by way of Omsk, Pavlodar, Semipalatinsk, Ust-Kamenogorsk, and Barnaul. This route would take us through the best agricultural part of the provinces of Tobolsk and Tomsk, as well as the districts most thickly settled by exiles; it would enable us to see something of the Mohammedan city of Semipalatinsk and of the great nomadic and pastoral tribe of natives known as the Kirghis; and finally it would afford us an opportunity to explore a part of the Russian Altai—a high, picturesque, mountainous region on the Mongolian frontier, which had been described to me by Russian army officers, in terms of enthusiastic admiration, as “the Siberian Switzerland.” I had, moreover, another reason for wishing to keep as far away as possible from the regular through routes of travel. I supposed when we left St. Petersburg that we should be obliged to go from Tiumen to Tomsk either by steamer or over the great Siberian road. The Minister of the Interior understood that such would be our course, and he caused letters to be written to all the local officials along these routes, apprising them of our coming and furnishing them with such instructions concerning us as the circumstances seemed to require. What these instructions were I could never ascertain; but they anticipated us at every important point on the great Siberian road from Tiumen to the capital of the Trans-Baikal. In eastern Siberia the local authorities knew all about us months before we arrived. I first became aware of these letters and this system of official surveillance at Tiumen; and as they seemed likely to interfere seriously with my plans,—particularly in the field of political exile,—I determined to escape or elude them as far as possible, by leaving the regular through route and going into a region where the authorities had not presumably been forewarned of our coming. I had reason afterward to congratulate myself upon the exercise of sound judgment in making this decision. The *détour* to the southward brought us not only into the part of Siberia where the political exiles enjoy most freedom, and where it is easiest to make their acquaintance, but into a province which was then governed by a liberal and humane man.

On the morning of Tuesday, June 30, having made our farewell calls, purchased a *tarantas*, and provided ourselves with a “*padorozhnaya*,” or order for horses, we left Tiumen for Semipalatinsk by the regular Government post. The Imperial Russian Post is now perhaps the most extensive and perfectly organized horse-express service in the world. From the southern end of the peninsula of Kamtchatka to the most remote village in Finland, from the frozen, wind-swept shores of the Arctic Ocean to the hot, sandy deserts of central Asia, the whole empire is one vast net-work of post routes. You may pack your portmanteau in Nizhni Novgorod, get a *padorozhnaya* from the postal department, and start for Petropavlovsk, Kamtchatka, seven thousand miles away, with the full assurance that throughout the whole of that enormous distance there will be horses, reindeer, or dogs ready and waiting to carry you on, night and day, to your destination. It must, however, be borne in mind that the Russian post route is a very different thing from the old English post route, and that the Russian horse express differs widely, not only from our own western “pony express,” but from the horse expresses of most other countries. The characteristic feature of the west European and American systems is the stage-coach or diligence, which leaves certain places at certain stated hours, or, in other words, runs upon a prearranged time schedule. It is precisely this feature which the Russian system does not have. There are, generally speaking, no stage-coach lines in Russia; the vehicles which carry the mails do not carry passengers, and, away from the railroads, there is no such thing as traveling upon a fixed time schedule. You are never obliged, therefore, to wait for a public conveyance which leaves at a certain stated hour, and then go through to your destination in that conveyance, stopping when it stops and starting when it starts, without regard to your own health, comfort, or convenience. On the contrary, you may ride in your own sleigh or carriage, and have it drawn by post horses. You may travel at the rate of 175 miles in 24 hours, or 24 miles in 175 hours, just as you feel inclined. You may stop when you like, where you like, and for as long a time as you like, and when you are ready to move on, you have only to order out your horses and get into your vehicle. It makes no difference in what part of the empire you may happen to be, nor



SKETCH MAP OF SIBERIA, SHADED PORTION SHOWING ROUTE DESCRIBED IN THIS ARTICLE.

to what part you may wish to go. Send your padorozhnaya to the nearest post station, and in twenty minutes you will be riding away at the rate of ten miles an hour, with your postal order in your pocket and a hundred relays of fresh horses distributed at intervals along your route.

The established rate of payment for transportation over the post routes of western Siberia seems to an American absurdly low. It amounts, including the compensation of the driver, to $1\frac{1}{8}$ cents per mile for every horse, or $3\frac{3}{8}$ cents per mile for the usual "troika," or team of three. In other words, two persons can travel in their own carriage with a team of 3 horses a distance of 20 miles for 68 cents, or 34 cents each. I used to feel almost ashamed sometimes to wake up a driver at a post station, in the middle of a stormy night, compel him to harness three horses and drive us 20 miles over a dark, miry, and perhaps dangerous road, and then offer him for this service the pitiful sum of 68 cents. Trifling and inadequate, however, as such compensation may seem, it is large enough to tempt into this field of enterprise hundreds of peasant farmers who compete with the Government post by furnishing what are known as "volni" or "free" horses, for the transportation of travelers from one village to another. As these free horses are generally better fed and in better condition than the over-driven animals at the post stations, it is often advantageous to employ them; and your driver, as you approach a village, will almost always turn around and inquire whether he shall take you to the Government post station or to the house of a "friend." Traveling with "drushki," or "friends," costs no more than traveling by post, and it enables one to see much more of the domestic life of the Siberian peasants than one could see by stopping and changing horses only at regular post stations.

The first part of our journey from Tiumen to Omsk was comparatively uneventful and uninteresting. The road ran across a great marshy plain, full of swampy lakes, and cov-

ered with a scattered growth of willow and alder bushes, small birch-trees, and scrubby firs and pines, which in every direction limited the vision and hid the horizon line. All this part of the province of Tobolsk seems to have been, within a comparatively recent geological period, the bottom of a great inland sea which united the Caspian and the sea of Aral with the Arctic Ocean, along the line of the shallow depression through which now flow the rivers Irtysh and Ob. Everywhere between

Tiumen and Omsk we saw evidences, in the shape of sand-banks, salt-marshes, beds of clay, and swampy lakes, to show that we were traveling over a partly dried up sea bottom.

About a hundred versts from Tiumen, just beyond the village of Zavodo-ukofskaya, we stopped for two hours early in the evening at the residence and estate of a wealthy Siberian manufacturer named Kolmakoff, to whom I had a letter of introduction from a Russian friend. I was surprised to find in this remote part of the world so many evidences of comfort, taste, and luxury as were to be seen in and about Mr. Kolmakoff's house. The house itself was only a two-story building of logs, but it was large and comfortably furnished, and its windows looked out over an artificial lake, and a beautiful garden, with winding

walks, rustic arbors, long lines of currant and raspberry bushes, and beds of flowering plants. At one end of this garden was a spacious conservatory, filled with geraniums, verbenas, hydrangeas, cacti, orange and lemon trees, pine-apples, and all sorts of tropical and semi-tropical shrubs, and near at hand was a large hothouse, full of cucumbers and ripening cantaloupes. In the middle of the garden



ENLARGED MAP OF ROUTE COVERED BY THIS ARTICLE.

stood a square building, sixty feet long by forty or fifty feet wide, which was composed almost entirely of glass, which had no floor except the earth, and which served, Mr. Kolmakoff said, as a sort of winter garden and a place of recreation during cold or stormy weather. In this miniature Crystal Palace stood a perfect grove of bananas and young palms, through which ran winding walks bordered by beds of flowers, with here and there amidst the greenery a comfortable lounging-place or rustic seat. The trees, flowers, and shrubs were not planted in tubs or pots, but grew directly out of the earthen floor of the greenhouse, so that the effect was almost precisely that of a semi-tropical garden inclosed in glass.

"Who would have thought," said Mr. Frost, as he threw himself into one of the rustic seats beside a bed of blossoming verbenas, "that we should come to Siberia to sit under palm-trees and in the shade of bananas!"

After a walk through the spacious wooded park which adjoined the garden, we returned to the house, and were served with a lunch or cold supper consisting of caviar, pickled mushrooms, salmon, cold boiled fowl, white bread, sweet cakes, and wild strawberries, with vodka, two or three kinds of wine, and tea.

It had grown quite dark when, about 11 o'clock, the horses which we had ordered in the neighboring village arrived, and bidding our courteous host good-bye, we climbed into the tarantas and set out for a long, dark, and dreary night's ride. The road, which had never been good, was in worse condition than usual, owing to recent and heavy rains. Our driver urged four powerful horses over it at break-neck speed, and we were so jounced, jolted, and shaken that it was utterly impossible to get any sleep, and difficult enough merely to keep our seats in the vehicle. Early in the morning, sleepy, jaded, and exhausted, we reached the village of Novo Zaimskaya, entered the little log-house of our driver's "friend," threw ourselves on the bare floor, where half a dozen members of the friend's family were already lying, and for two or three hours lost consciousness of our aching spinal columns in the heavy dreamless slumber of physical exhaustion.

Throughout the next day and the following night we traveled, without rest, and of course without sleep, over a terribly bad steppe road, and at 6 o'clock Thursday morning arrived in a pelting rain-storm at the circuit town of Ishim. No one who has not experienced it can fully realize the actual physical suffering which is involved in posting night and day at high speed over bad Siberian roads. We made the 200 miles between Tiumen and

Ishim in about 35 hours of actual travel, with only 4 hours of sleep, and were so jolted and shaken that every bone in our bodies ached, and it was with difficulty that we could climb into and out of our mud-bespattered tarantas at the post stations.

It had been our intention to make a short stop at Ishim, but the bad weather discouraged us, and after drinking tea at a peasant's house on the bank of the Ishim river, we resumed our journey. As we rode out of the town through a thin forest of birch-trees, we began to notice large numbers of men, women, and children plodding along on foot through the mud in the same direction that we were going. Most of them were common "muzhiks," with trousers inside their boots and shirt-flaps outside their trousers, or sun-burned peasant women in red and blue gowns, with white kerchiefs over their heads; but there were also a few pedestrians in the conventional dress of the civilized world, who manifestly belonged to the higher classes, and who even carried umbrellas.

About four miles from the town we saw ahead a great crowd of men and women marching towards us in a dense, tumultuous throng, carrying big three-armed crosses, white and colored banners, and huge glass lanterns mounted on long black staves. As they came nearer I could see that the throng was densest in the middle of the muddy road, under what seemed to be a large gilt-framed picture which was borne high in air at the end of a long, stout wooden pole. The lower end of this pole rested in a socket in the middle of a square framework which had handles on all four sides, and which was carried by six bare-headed peasants. The massive frame of the portrait was made either of gold or of silver gilt, since it was manifestly very heavy, and half a dozen men steadied, by means of guy ropes, the standard which supported it, as the bearers, with their faces bathed in perspiration, staggered along under their burden. In front of the picture marched a bare-headed, long-haired priest with a book in his hands, and on each side were four or five black-robed deacons and acolytes, carrying embroidered silken banners, large three-armed gilt crosses, and peculiar church lanterns, which looked like portable street gas-posts with candles burning in them. The priest, the deacons, and all the bare-headed men around the picture were singing in unison a deep, hoarse, monotonous chant as they splashed along through the mud, and the hundreds of men and women who surged around the standard that supported the portrait were constantly crossing themselves, and joining at intervals in the chanted psalm or prayer. Scores of

peasant women had taken off their shoes and stockings and slung them over their shoulders, and were wading with bare feet and legs through the black, semi-liquid mire, and neither men nor women seemed to pay the slightest attention to the rain, which beat upon their unprotected heads and trickled in little rivulets down their hard, sun-burned faces. The crowd numbered, I should think, four or five hundred persons, more than half of whom were women, and as it approached the town it was constantly receiving accessions from the groups of pedestrians that we had overtaken and passed.

Since entering Siberia I had not seen such a strange and medieval picture as that presented by the black-robed priest and acolytes, the embroidered banners, the lighted lanterns, the gilded crosses, and the great throng of bare-headed and bare-legged peasants, tramping along the black, muddy road through the forest in the driving rain, singing a solemn ecclesiastical chant. I could almost imagine that we had been carried back to the eleventh century and were witnessing the passage of a detachment of Christian villagers who had been stirred up and excited by the eloquence of Peter the Hermit, and were marching with crosses, banners, and chanting to join the great host of the crusaders.

When the last stragglers in the rear of the procession had passed, and the hoarse, monotonous chant had died away in the distance, I turned to Mr. Frost and said, "What do you suppose is the meaning of all that?"

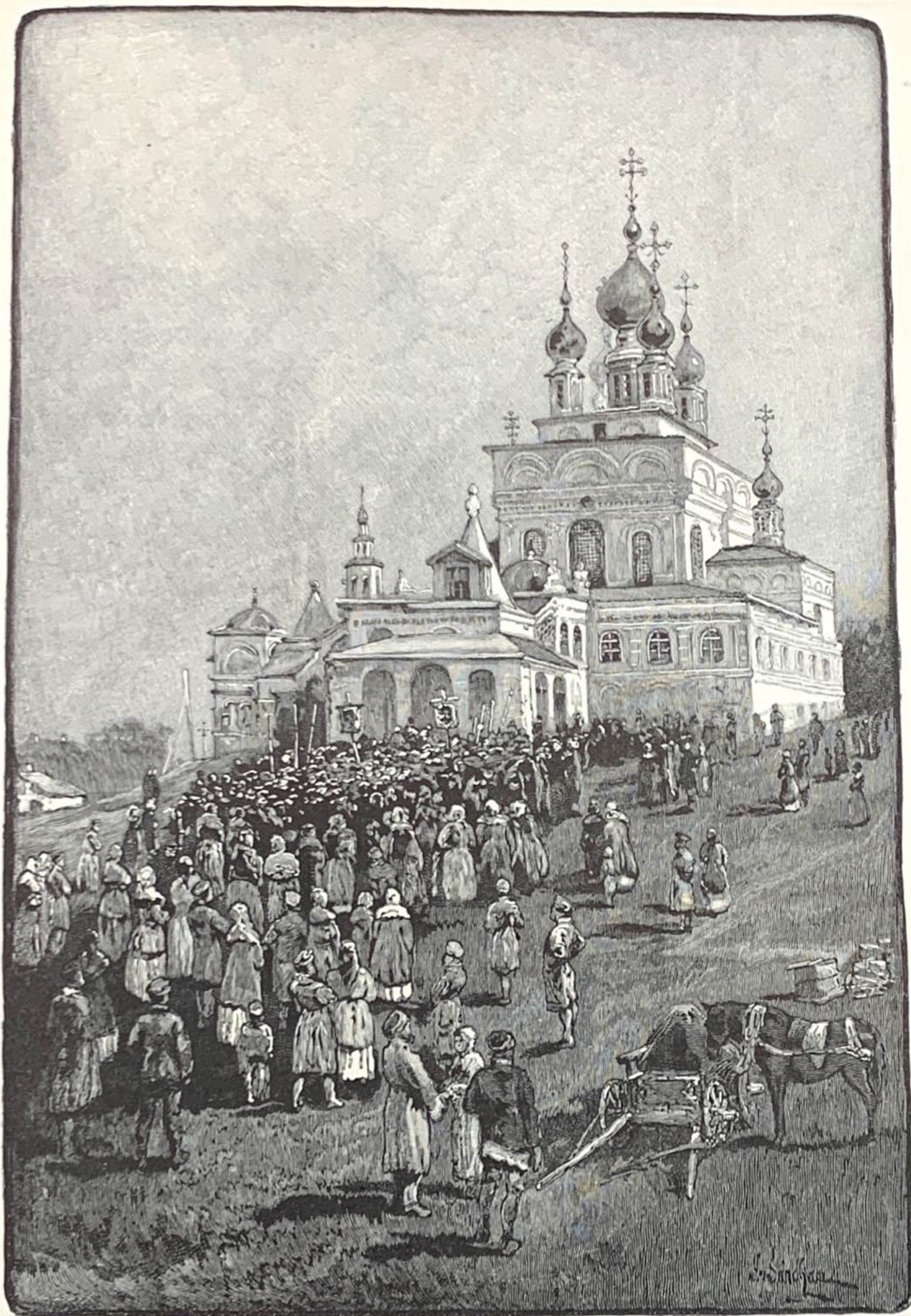
"I have n't the least idea," he replied. "It is evidently a church procession, but what it has been doing out here in the woods, I can't imagine."

By dint of persistent questioning I finally succeeded in eliciting from our driver an intelligible explanation of the phenomenon. There was, it appeared, in one of the churches of Ishim, a very old ikon, or portrait of "the Mother of God," which was reputed to have supernatural powers and to answer the prayers of faithful believers. In order that the country people who were unable to come to Ishim might have an opportunity to pray to this miracle-working image, and to share in the blessings supposed to be conferred by its mere presence, it was carried once a year, or once in two years, through all the principal villages of the Ishim okrug, or district. Special services in its honor were held in the village churches, and hundreds of peasants accompanied it as it was borne with solemn pomp and ceremony from place to place. It had been on such a tour when we saw it and was on its way back to the church in Ishim where it belonged, and our driver had stated the fact in the simplest

and most direct way when he said that "the Mother of God was coming home."

Rain fell at intervals throughout the day Thursday, but we pushed on over a muddy steppe road in the direction of Tiukalinsk, changing horses at the post stations of Borofskaya, Tushnolobova, Abatskaya, and Kamyshenka, and stopping for the night at a peasant's house in the village of Orlova. In the 60 hours which had elapsed since our departure from Tiumen we had traveled 280 miles, with only 4 hours of sleep, and we were so much exhausted that we could not go any farther without rest. The weather during the night finally cleared up, and when we resumed our journey on the following morning the sun was shining brightly in an almost unclouded sky, and the air was fresh, invigorating, and filled with fragrant odors.

Although the road continued bad, the country as we proceeded southward and eastward steadily improved in appearance, and before noon we were riding across a beautiful fertile and partly cultivated prairie, which extended in every direction as far as the eye could reach, with nothing to break the horizon line except an occasional clump of small birch-trees or a dark-green thicket of willow and alder bushes. The steppe was bright with flowers, and here and there appeared extensive tracts of black, newly plodded land, or vast fields of waving grain, which showed that the country was inhabited; but there was not a fence, nor a barn, nor a house to be seen in any direction, and I could not help wondering where the village was to which these cultivated fields belonged. My curiosity was soon to be satisfied. In a few moments our driver gathered up his muddy rope reins, braced himself securely in his seat, threw out behind and above his head the long heavy lash of his short-handled knout, and bringing it down with stinging force across the backs of his four horses shouted, in a high falsetto and a deep bass, "Heekh-ya-a-a!" The whole team instantly broke into a frantic, tearing gallop, which made me involuntarily hold my breath, until it was suddenly jounced out of me by a terrific jolt as the tarantas, going at the rate of fifteen miles an hour, dropped into a deep rut and rebounded with tremendous force, throwing me violently out of my seat, and making my head and back throb with the shock of the unexpected concussion. I needed no further evidence that we were approaching a village. A Siberian team never fully shows what it can do until it is within half a mile of its destination, and then it suddenly becomes a living tornado of energy. I shouted to the driver, "Pastoi! Teeshei!" ["Hold on! Don't go so fast!"] but it was of no use. Both driver and horses knew that this was the final



THE RETURN OF THE MIRACLE-WORKING IKON.

spurt, and exerted themselves to the utmost, the horses laying back their ears and tearing ahead as if pursued by a prairie fire, while the driver lashed them fiercely with his heavy knout to an accompaniment of shrill, wild cries, whoops, whistles, and shouts of "Ya-a-a-va!" "Ay doorak!" "Noo-oo-oo!" (with a falling inflection) "Heekh-ya-a-a!" All that we could do was to shut our eyes, trust in Providence, and hold on. The tarantas was pelted with a perfect storm of mud from the flying hoofs of four galloping horses, and

if, putting out my head, I opened my mouth to expostulate with the driver, I ran great risk of having it effectually closed by a tea-cupful of tenacious black mire, thrown like a semi-liquid ball from the catapult of a horse's hoof. In a moment we saw, barring the way ahead, a long wattled fence extending for a mile or more to the right and left, with a narrow gate at the point where it intersected the road. It was the fence which inclosed the pasture ground of the village that we were approaching. As we dashed, with a



COSSACK PEASANT GIRL.

wild whoop from our driver, through the open gateway, we noticed beside it a curious half-underground hut, roofed partly with bushes and partly with sods, out of which, as we passed, came the village gate-keeper — a dirty, forlorn-looking old man with inflamed eyes and a long white beard, who reminded me of Rip Van Winkle after his twenty-years' sleep. While he was in the act of bowing and touching the weather-beaten remains of what was once a hat, we whirled past and lost sight of him, with a feeling of regret that we could not stop and take a photograph of such a wild, neglected, picturesque embodiment of poverty and wretchedness clothed in rags. Just inside the gate stood an unpainted sign-post, upon the board of which had been neatly inscribed in black letters the words

VILLAGE OF KRUTAYA.

Distance from St. Petersburg, 2992 versts.

Distance from Moscow, 2526 versts.

Houses, 42. Male souls, 97.

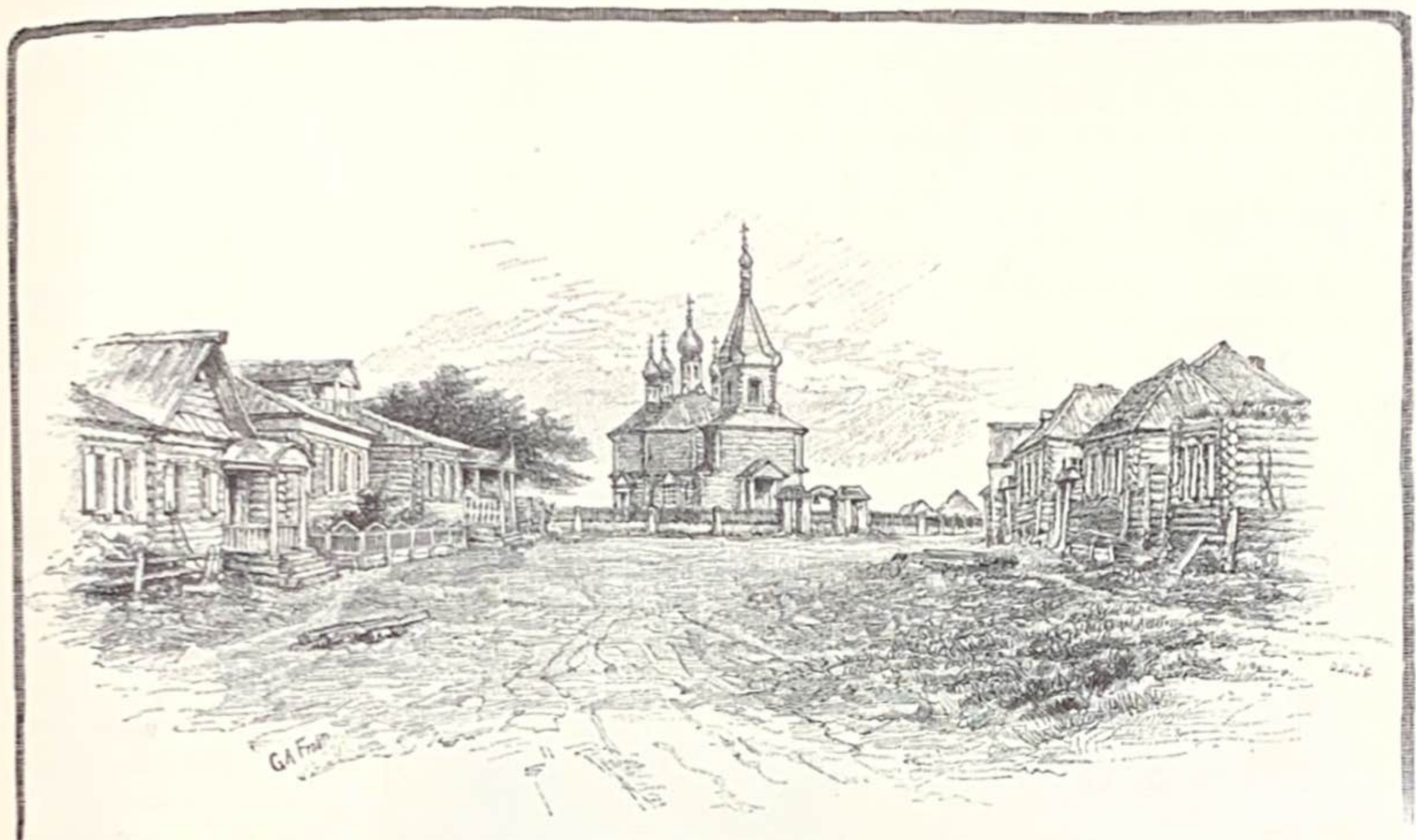
Between the gate and the village there was a grassy common about half a mile wide, upon which were grazing hundreds of cattle and

sheep. Here and there stood a huge picturesque windmill, consisting of a small gable-roofed house with four enormous wind-vanes mounted on a pivot at the apex of a pyramid of cross-piled logs. Beyond the windmills appeared the village, a small collection of gray, weather-beaten log-houses, some with roofs of boards, some with a roofing of ragged birch-bark held in place by tightly lashed poles, some thatched with straw, and some the flat roofs of which had been overlaid with black earth from the steppe and supported a thrifty steppe flora of weeds, but-tercups, and wild mustard. Through this cluster of gray log-houses ran one central street, which had neither walks nor gutters, and which, from side to side and from end to end, was a shallow lake of black, liquid mud. Into this wide street we dashed at a tearing gallop; and the splattering of the horses' hoofs in the mud, the rumble of the tarantas, and the wild cries of our driver brought the whole population to the windows to see whether it was the governor-general or a special courier of the Tsar who came at such a furious pace into the quiet settlement. Presently our driver pulled up his reeking, panting horses before the court-yard gate of one of his friends and shouted, "Davai losheday!" ["Bring

out the horses!"] Then from all parts of the village came, splashing and "thlupping" through the mud, idlers and old men to see who had arrived and to watch the changing of teams. Strange, picturesque figures the old men were, with their wrinkled faces, matted, neglected hair, and long stringy gray beards. Some were bare-headed, some bare-footed, some wore tattered sheepskin "shubas" and top-boots, and some had on long-tailed butternut coats, girt about the waist with straps or dirty colored sashes. While



A WEALTHY KIRGHIS.



A STEPPE VILLAGE.

they assembled in a group around the tarantas, our driver climbed down from his high seat and began to unharness his horses. The owner of the house in front of which we had stopped soon made his appearance, and inquired whether we wished to drink tea or to go on at once. I replied that we desired to go on at once. "Andre!" he shouted to one of his sons, "ride to the pasture and drive in the horses." Andre sprang on a bare-backed horse which another boy brought out of the court-yard and galloped away to the village common. In the mean time the assembled crowd of idlers watched our movements, commented upon our "new-fashioned" tarantas, and tried to ascertain from our driver who we were and where we were going. Failing to get from that source any precise information, one of them, a bare-headed, gray-haired old man, said to me, "Bahrin! Permit us to ask — where is God taking you to?" I replied that we were going to Omsk and Semipalatinsk. "A-a-ah!" murmured the crowd with gratified curiosity.

"Where do you condescend to come from?" inquired the old man, pursuing the investigation.

"From America," I replied.

"A-a-ah!" breathed the crowd again.

"Is that a Russian town?" persisted the old man.

"America is n't a town," shouted a bright-faced boy on the outskirts of the crowd. "It's a country. All the world," he continued mechanically, as if reciting from a school-book, "is divided into five parts, Europe, Asia, Africa, America, and Australia. Russia occupies two-thirds of Europe and one-half of Asia." Be-

yond this even the school-boy's geographical knowledge did not extend, and it was evident that none of the old inhabitants of the village had even so much as heard of America. A young man, however, who had happened to be in Omsk when the bodies of the dead members of the *Jeannette* Arctic expedition were carried through that city, undertook to enlighten the crowd upon the subject of the Americans, who, he said, "were the wisest people that God had ever created, and the only people that had ever sailed into the great Icy Sea." One of the old inhabitants contended that Russian navigators had also penetrated the Icy Sea, and that although they might not be so "wise" as the Americans, they were quite as good sailors in icy waters. This gave rise to an animated discussion of polar exploration, in the midst of which the young fellow who had been sent after the horses came back with whistle and whoop, driving the animals before him into the court-yard, where they were



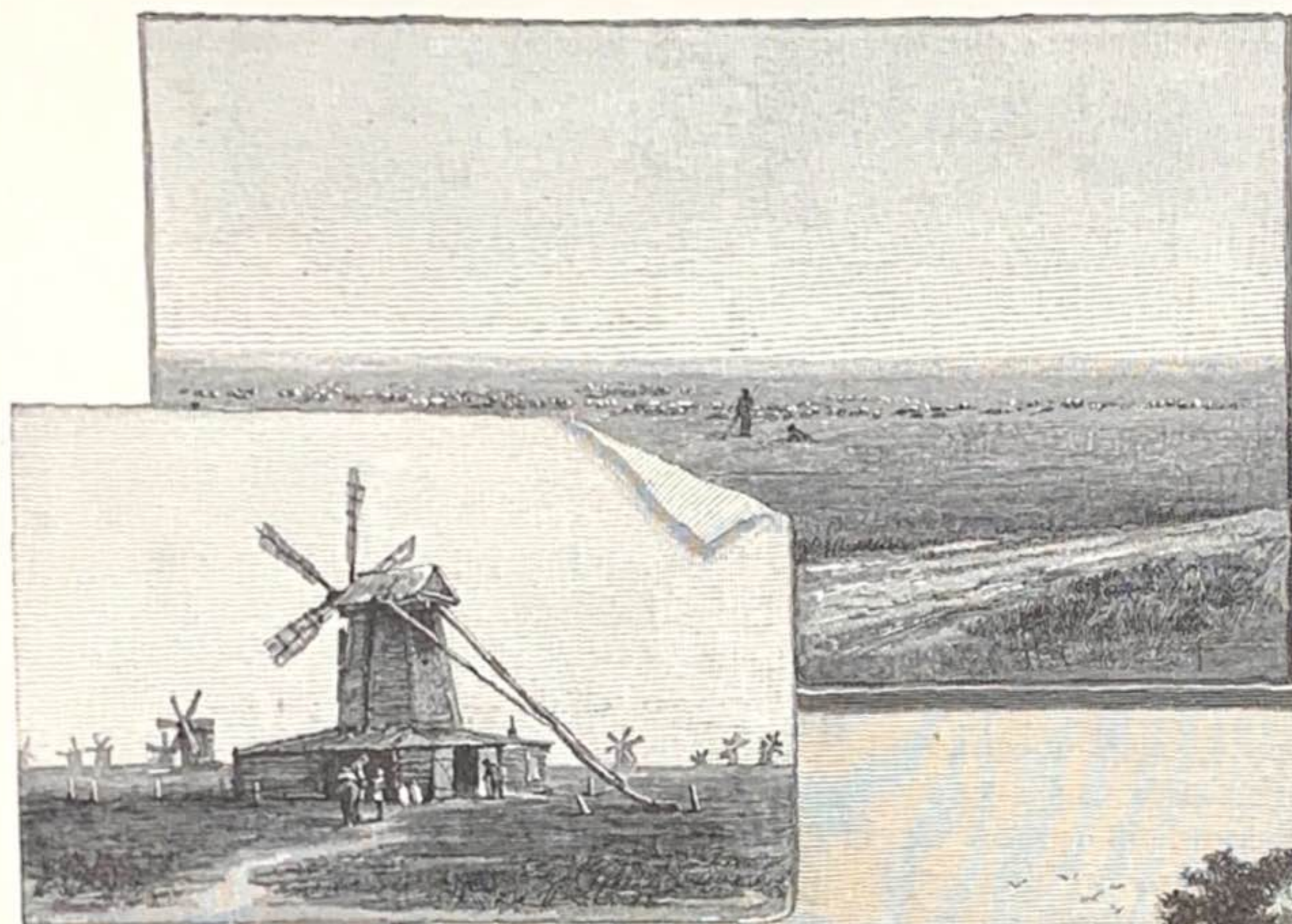
A KIRGHIS GIRL.

soon harnessed, and were then brought out and fastened with long rope traces to the tarantas. Our new driver mounted the box, inquired whether we were ready, and gathering up his rope reins shouted "Noo-oo!" to his horses; and with a measured jangle of bells from the arch over the thill-horse's back, and a "splash-splatter-splash" of hoofs in the mud, we rolled out of the settlement.

Such, with trifling variations in detail, was the regular routine of arrival and departure in

foreground with millions of wild roses, white marguerites, delicate five-angled harebells, and dark red tiger-lilies. Between the villages of Krutaya and Kalmakova, on Friday, we rode across a steppe which was literally a great ocean of flowers. One could pick twenty different species and a hundred specimens within the area of a single square yard. Here and there we deserted the miry road and drove for miles across the smooth, grassy plain, crushing flowers by the score at every revolution of our carriage-

wheels. In the middle of the steppe I had our driver stop and wait for me while I alighted and walked away into the flowery solitude to enjoy the stillness, the perfumed air, and the sea of verdure through which ran the long, sinuous black line of the muddy highway. On my left, beyond the



WINDMILL AND THE STEPPE.

all of the steppe villages where we changed horses between Tiumen and Omsk. The greater number of these villages were dreary, forlorn-looking places, containing neither yards,

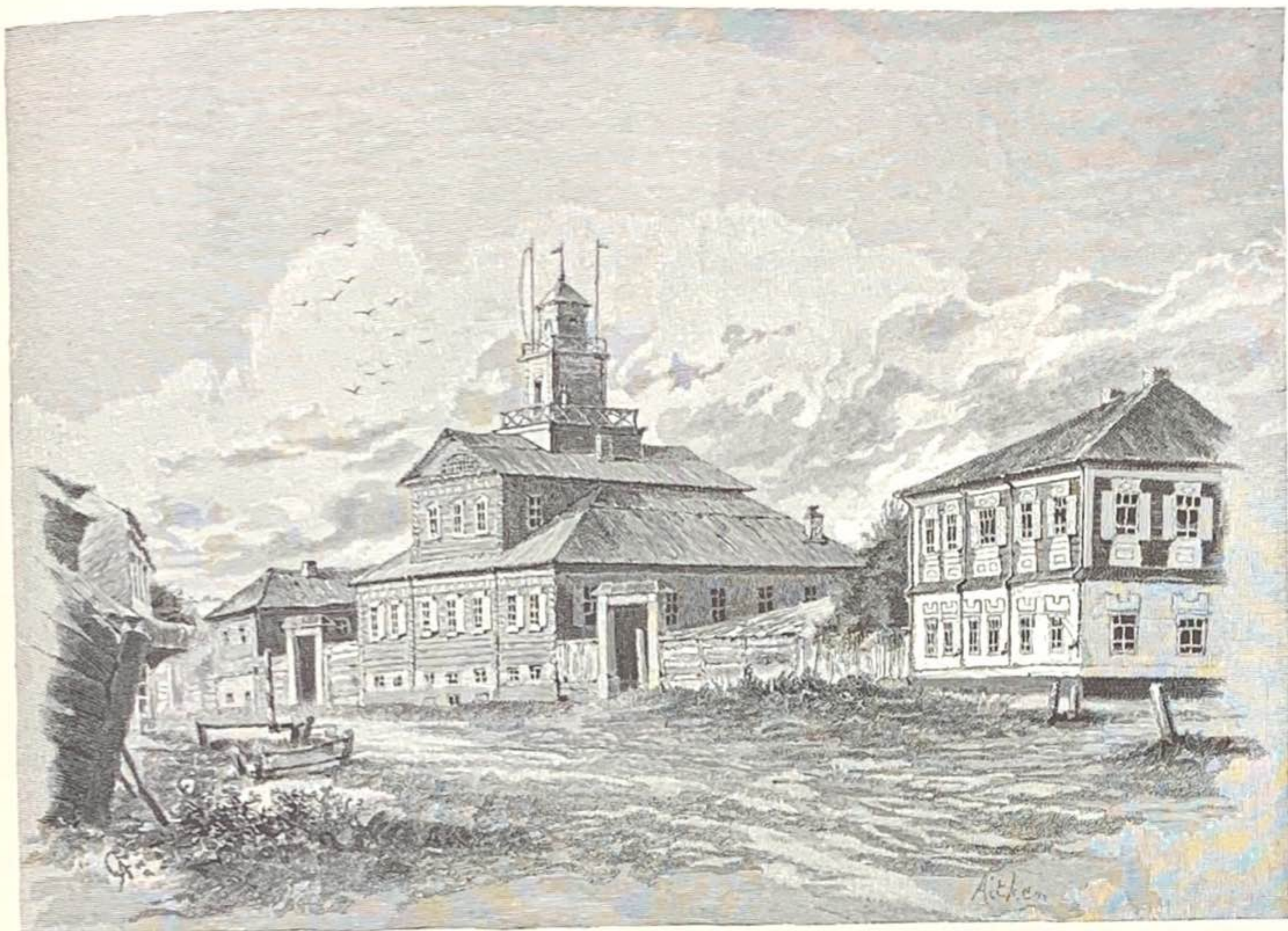
walks, trees, grass-plots, nor shrubbery, and presenting to the eye nothing but two parallel lines of gray, dilapidated log-houses and tumble-down court-yard walls rising directly out of the long pool of jet-black mud which formed the solitary street.

It is with a feeling of intense pleasure and relief that one leaves such a village and rides out upon the wide, clean, breezy steppe where the air is filled with the fragrance of clover and the singing of birds, and where the eye is constantly delighted with great sweeps of smooth, velvety turf, or vast undulating expanses of high steppe grass sprinkled in the



AN OASIS IN THE IRTISH STEPPE.

road, was a wide, shallow depression six or eight miles across, rising on the opposite side in a long, gradual sweep to a dark blue line of birch forest which formed the horizon. This depression was one smooth expanse of close, green turf dotted with grazing cattle and sheep, and broken here and there by a silvery pool or lake. Around me, upon the higher ground, the steppe was carpeted with flowers, among which I noticed splendid orange asters two inches in diameter, spotted tiger-lilies with strongly reflexed petals, white clover, daisies, harebells, spirea, astragalus, melilotus, and a peculiar flower growing in



POLICE STATION AND FIRE TOWER IN OMSK.

long, slender, curved spikes which suggested flights of miniature carmine sky-rockets sent up by the fairies of the steppe. The air was still and warm, and had a strange, sweet fragrance which I can liken only to the taste of wild honey. There were no sounds to break the stillness of the great plain except the drowsy hum of bees, the regular measured "Kate-did-Kate-did" of a few katydids in the grass near me, and the wailing cry of a steppe hawk hovering over the nest of some field-mice. It was a delight simply to lie on the grass amidst the flowers and see, hear, and breathe.

We traveled all day Friday over flowery steppes and through little log villages like those that I have tried to describe, stopping occasionally to make a sketch, collect flowers, or talk with the peasants about the exile system. Now and then we met a solitary traveler in a muddy tarantas on his way to Tiumen, or passed a troop of exiles in gray overcoats plodding along through the mud, surrounded by a cordon of soldiers; but as we were off

the great through line of travel, we saw few vehicles except the telegas of peasants going back and forth between the villages and the outlying fields.

The part of the province of Tobolsk through which we traveled from Tiumen to Omsk is much more productive and prosperous than a careless observer would suppose it to be from the appearance of most of its villages. The four "okroogs," or "circles,"* of Tiumen, Yalutorfsk, Ishim, and Tiukalinsk, through which our road lay, have an aggregate population of 650,000 and contain about 4,000,000 acres of cultivated land. The peasants in these circles own 1,500,000 head of live stock, and produce perhaps two-thirds of the 30,000,000 bushels of grain raised annually in the province. There are held every year in the four circles 220 town and village fairs or local markets, to which the peasants bring great quantities of products for sale. The transactions of these fairs in the circle of Yalutorfsk, for example, amount annually to \$2,000,000; in the circle of Ishim, to \$3,500,000; and in the whole

* An okroog, or circle, bears something like the same relation to a province that an American county bears to a State, except that it is proportionately much larger. The province of Tobolsk, with an area of 590,000 square miles, has only 10 okroogs, so that the average area of these subdivisions is about that of the State of Michigan. If all of the territory north of the Ohio River and the Potomac and east of the Mississippi

were one State, and each of the existing States were a county, such State and counties would bear to each other and to the United States something like the same relation which the province and okroogs of Tobolsk bear to each other and to Siberia. The highest administrative officer in a Siberian province is the governor, who is represented in every okroog by an ispravnik.



A KIRGHIS BRIDE.

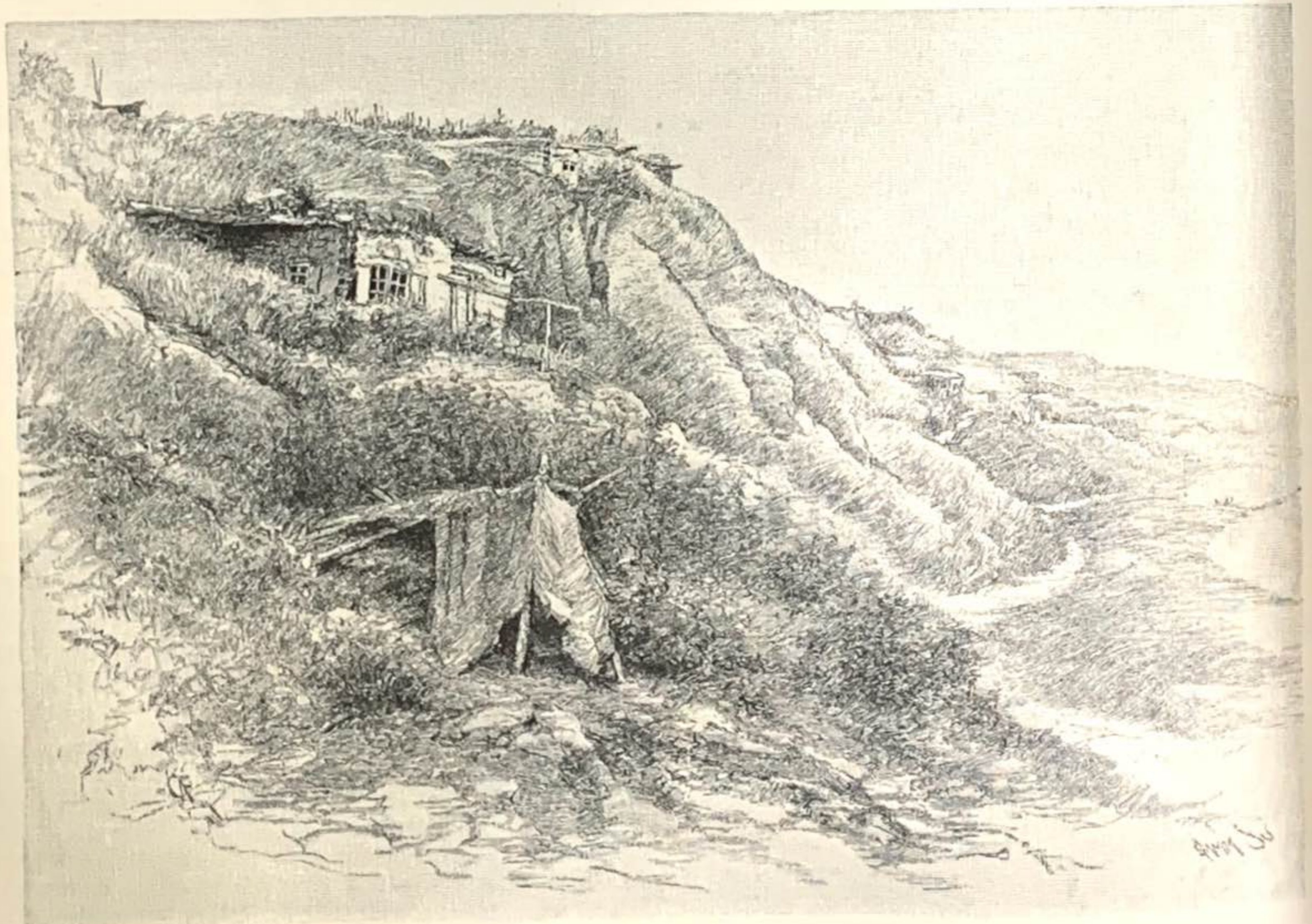
province, to about \$14,000,000. From these statistics, and from such inquiries and observations as we were able to make along the road, it seemed to me that if the province of Tobolsk were honestly and intelligently governed, and were freed from the heavy burden of criminal exile, it would in a comparatively short time become one of the most prosperous and flourishing parts of the empire.

We drank tea Friday afternoon at the circuit town of Tiukalinsk, and after a short rest resumed

our journey with four "free" horses. The road was still muddy and bad, and as we skirted the edge of the great marshy steppe of Baraba between Tiukalinsk and Bekisheva, we were so tormented by huge gray mosquitoes that we were obliged to put on thick gloves, cover our heads with calico hoods and horse-hair netting, and defend ourselves constantly

with leafy branches. Between the mosquitoes and the jolting we had another hard, sleepless night; but fortunately it was the last one, and at half-past 10 o'clock on the morning of Saturday, July 4, our tarantas rolled into the streets of Omsk. Both we and our vehicle were so spattered and plastered with black steppe mud that no one who had seen us set out from Tiumen would have recognized us. We had been four days and nights on the road, and had made in that time a journey of 420 miles, with only 11 hours of sleep.

Omsk, which is a city of about 30,000 inhabitants, is the capital of the "oblast," or territory, of Akmolinsk, and the seat of government of the steppe provinces. It is an administrative rather than a commercial or a manufacturing town, and its population is largely composed of officials and clerks employed in the various Government bureaus and departments. It has a few noticeable public buildings, among which are the enormous white "cadet school," the house of the governor-general, the police station,—a rather picturesque log building surmounted by a fire-alarm tower,—and the "krepast," or fortress. The streets of the city are wide and unpaved; the dwelling-houses are generally made of logs; there is the usual number of white-walled churches and cathedrals with green, blue, or golden domes; and every building which would attract a traveler's attention belongs to the Government. If I were asked to charac-



EXILE HILL IN OMSK.



A KIRGHIS WOMAN.

lations between the latter half and the former may be inferred from the fact that an intelligent and reputable citizen of this chinovnik-dominated city, who had been kind and useful to us, said to me when he bade me good-bye, "Mr. Kennan, if you find it necessary to speak of me by name in your book, please don't speak of me favorably."

"For Heaven's sake, why not?" I inquired.

"Because," he replied, "I don't think your book will be altogether pleasing to the Government; and if I am mentioned favorably in it, I shall be harried by the officials here more than I am now. My request may seem to you absurd, but it is the only favor I have to ask."*

We found little to interest us in Omsk except a small museum in the rooms of the Geographical Society, to which we were kindly taken by Colonel Pevtsof, and a wretched suburban colony of poor criminal exiles, living in half-underground huts on a steep hillside north of the river Om. I tried to find the ostrog, or prison, where the gifted Russian novelist Dostoyefski spent so many years of penal servitude and where he was twice flogged with the knout, but I was told that it had long before been torn down. I did not wonder that the Government should have torn down walls which had witnessed such scenes of misery and cruelty as those de-



A MIDDLE-CLASS KIRGHIS.

scribed in Dostoyefski's "Notes from a House of the Dead." There was one other building in Omsk which we greatly desired to inspect, and that was the Omsk prison; but we were treated with such contemptuous discourtesy by the governor of the province when we called upon him and asked permission to examine this prison, that we could only retire without even having taken seats in his High Excellency's office.

On Wednesday, July 8, having fully recovered from the fatigue of our journey from Tiumen, we left Omsk with three post horses and a Cossack driver for Semipalatinsk. The road between the two cities runs everywhere along the right bank of the Irtish through a line of log villages not differing materially from those north of Omsk, but inhabited almost exclusively by Cossacks. Whenever the Russian Government desires to strengthen a weak frontier line so as to prevent the incursions of hostile or predatory natives, it forcibly colonizes along that line a few hundred or a few thousand families of armed Cossacks. During the last century it formed in this way the "armed line of the Terek," to protect south-eastern Russia from the raids of the Caucasian mountaineers, and the armed line of the Irtish, to hold in check the Kirghis. The danger which was apprehended from these half-wild tribes long ago passed away, but the descendants of the Cossack colonists still remain in the places to which their parents or their grandparents were transported. They have all the hardy virtues of pioneers and frontiersmen, are ingenious, versatile, and full of resources, and adapt themselves quickly to almost any environment. There are thirty or forty settlements of such Cossacks along the line of the Irtish between Omsk and Semipalatinsk, and as many more between Semipalatinsk and the Altai.

Almost immediately after leaving Omsk we noticed a great change in the appearance of



A JBOGA.

* This was said to me upon our return from eastern Siberia in the following winter, and was called out by an account which I had given to Mr. X— of our experience and the results of our observations. I should be glad to give some illustrations of the "harrying" to which Mr. X— referred, if I could do so without disclosing his identity.



A KIRGHIS ENCAMPMENT.

the country. The steppe, which in the province of Tobolsk had been covered either with fresh green grass or with a carpet of flowers, here became more bare and arid, and its vegetation was evidently withering and drying up under the fierce heat of the midsummer sun. Flowers were still abundant in low places along the river, and we crossed now and then wide areas of grass which was still green, but the prevailing color of the high steppe was a sort of old gold — a color like that of ripe wheat. The clumps of white-stemmed birch-trees, which had diversified and given a park-like character to the scenery north of Omsk, became less and less frequent; cultivated fields disappeared altogether, and the steppe assumed more and more the aspect of a central Asiatic desert.

A few stations beyond Omsk, we saw and visited for the first time an "aoul," or encampment of the wandering Kirghis, a pastoral tribe of natives who roam with their flocks and herds over the plains of south-western Siberia from the Caspian Sea to the mountains of the Altai, and who make up more than three-fourths of the population of the steppe provinces. The aoul consisted of only three or four small "kibitkas," or circular tents of gray felt, pitched close together at a distance from the road in the midst of the great ocean-like expanse of dry, yellowish grass which stretched away in every direction to the horizon. There

was no path leading to or from the encampment, and the little gray tents, standing alone on that boundless plain, seemed to be almost as much isolated, and as far removed from all civilized human interests, as if they were so many frail skin coracles floating in the watery solitude of the Pacific.

It was evident from the commotion caused by our approach that the encampment had not often been visited. The swarthy, half-naked children, who had been playing out on the grass, fled in affright to the shelter of the tents as they saw our tarantas coming towards them across the steppe; women rushed out to take a startled look at us and then disappeared; and even the men, who gathered in a group to meet us, appeared to be surprised and a little alarmed by our visit. A few words in Kirghis, however, from our Cossack driver reassured them, and upon the invitation of an old man in a red and yellow skull-cap, who seemed to be the patriarch of the band, we entered one of the kibitkas. It was a circular tent about fifteen feet in diameter and eight feet high, made by covering a dome-shaped framework of smoke-blackened poles with large overlapping sheets of heavy gray felt. The slightly curved rafters which formed the roof radiated like the spokes of a wheel from a large wooden ring in the center of the dome, and were supported around the circumference



INSIDE THE TENT.

of the tent by a skeleton wall of wooden lattice-work in which there was a hinged door. The ring in the center of the dome outlined the aperture left for the escape of smoke and the admission of air, and directly under this aperture a fire was smoldering on the ground inside a circle of flat stones, upon which stood a few pots, kettles, and other domestic uten-

sils. The furniture of the tent was very scanty, and consisted of a narrow, unpainted bedstead opposite the door, two or three cheap Russian trunks of wood painted blue and decorated with strips of tin, and a table about four feet in diameter and eight inches high, intended evidently to be used by persons who habitually squatted on the ground. Upon the table

were a few dirty wooden bowls and spoons and an antique metal pitcher, while here and there, hanging against the lattice wall, were buckets of birch bark, a harness or two, a flint-lock rifle, a red, white, and golden saddle of wood with silver inlaid stirrups, and a pair of carpet saddle-bags.

The first duty which hospitality requires of a Kirghis host is the presentation of koumiss to his guests, and we had no sooner taken seats on a sheet of gray felt beside the fire than one of the women went to the koumiss

another; and when I told him that a single quart was all that I permitted myself to take at one time, and suggested that he reserve the second bowlful for my comrade, Mr. Frost, he looked so pained and grieved that in order to restore his serenity I had to go to the tarantas, get my banjo, and sing "There is a Tavern in the Town." Mr. Frost, meanwhile, had shirked his duty and his koumiss by pretending that he could not drink and draw simultaneously, and that he wanted to make a likeness of the patriarch's six-year-old son.

This seemed to be a very adroit scheme on Mr. Frost's part, but it did not work as well as he had expected. No sooner had he begun to make the sketch than the boy's mother, taking alarm at the peculiar, searching way in which the artist looked at his subject, and imagining perhaps that her offspring was being mes-



KIRGHIS GRAVES.

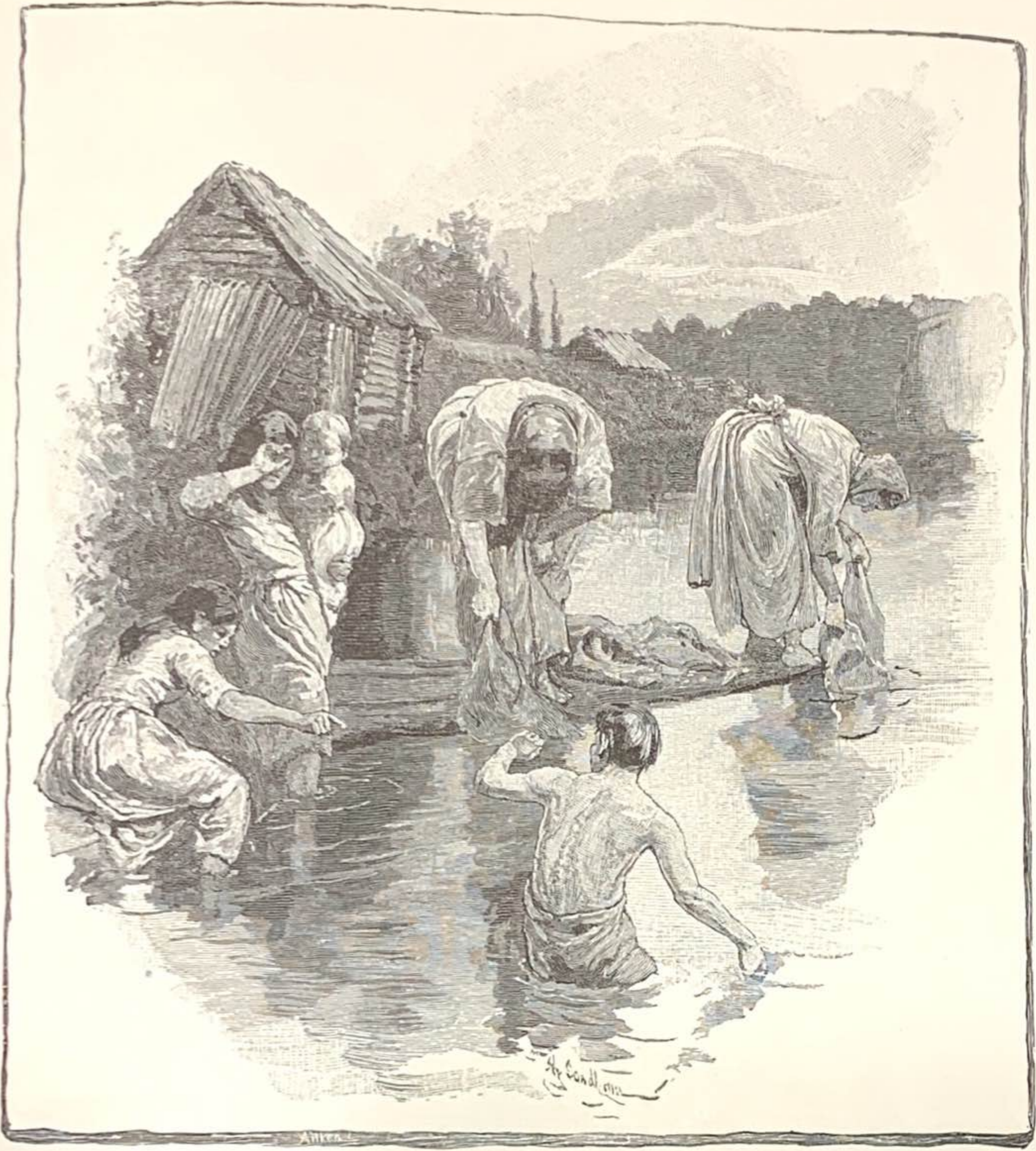
churn,—a large, black, greasy bag of horse-hide hanging against the lattice wall,—worked a wooden churn-dasher up and down in it vigorously for a moment, and then poured out of it into a greasy wooden bowl fully a quart of the great national Kirghis beverage for me. It did not taste as much like

sour milk and soda-water as I expected that it would. On the contrary, it had rather a pleasant flavor; and if it had been a little cleaner and cooler, it would have made an agreeable and refreshing drink. I tried to please the old Kirghis patriarch and to show my appreciation of Kirghis hospitality by drinking the whole bowlful; but I underestimated the quantity of koumiss that it is necessary to imbibe in order to show one's host that one does n't dislike it and that one is satisfied with one's entertainment. I had no sooner finished one quart bowlful than the old patriarch brought me



A STEPPE GRAVEYARD.

merized, paralyzed, or bewitched, swooped down upon the ragged little urchin, and kissing him passionately, as if she had almost lost him forever, carried him away and hid him. This untoward incident cast such a gloom over the subsequent proceedings that after singing four verses of "Solomon Levi," in a vain attempt to restore public confidence in Mr. Frost, I put away my banjo and we took our departure. I should like to know what traditions are now current in that part of the Kirghis steppe with regard to the two plausible but designing Giaours who went about visiting the aouls of the faithful, one of them



WASHING-DAY.

singing unholy songs to the accompaniment of a strange stringed instrument, while the other cast an "evil eye" upon the children, and tried to get possession of their souls by making likenesses of their bodies.

For four days and nights we traveled swiftly southward over a good road through the illimitable steppes of the Irtish, stopping now and then to pick snowy pond-lilies in some reed-fringed pool, to make a hasty sketch of a lonely, fort-shaped Kirghis grave, or to visit an aoul and drink koumiss with the hospitable nomads in their gray felt tents. Sometimes the road ran down into the shallow valley of the Irtish, through undulating seas of golden-rod and long wild grass whose wind-swept waves seemed to break here and there in foaming crests of snowy spirea; sometimes it made a long *détour* into the high, arid steppe back from the river, where the vegetation had been parched to a dull uniform yellow by weeks of hot sunshine; and sometimes it ran suddenly into a low, moist oasis around a blue steppe lake, where we found ourselves in a beautiful natural flower-garden crowded with rose-bushes, hollyhocks, asters, daisies, fringed

pinks, rosemary, flowering pea, and splendid dark blue spikes of aconite standing shoulder high.

After we passed the little Cossack town of Pavlodar on Friday, the weather, which had been warm ever since our departure from Omsk, became intensely hot, the thermometer indicating ninety-one degrees Fahrenheit at 1 p. m. As we sat, without coats or waistcoats, under the sizzling leather roof of our tarantas, fanning ourselves with our hats, panting for breath, fighting huge green-eyed horseflies, and looking out over an illimitable waste of dead grass which wavered and trembled in the fierce glare of the tropical sunshine, we found it almost impossible to believe that we were in Siberia.

Many of the Cossack villages along this part of our route were situated down under the high, steep bank of the Irtish at the very water's edge, where the soil was moist enough to support a luxuriant vegetation. As the result of such favorable situation, these villages were generally shaded by trees and surrounded by well-kept vegetable and flower gardens. After a ride of twenty miles over an arid steppe in



A STREET IN SEMIPALATINSK.

the hot, blinding sunshine of a July afternoon, it was indescribably pleasant and refreshing to come down into one of these little oases of greenery, where a narrow arm of the Irtish flowed tranquilly under the checkered shade of leafy trees; where the gardens of the Cossack housewives were full of potato, cucumber, and melon vines, the cool, fresh green of which made an effective setting for glowing beds of scarlet poppies; and where women and girls with tucked-up skirts were washing clothes on a little platform projecting into the river, while half-naked children waded and splashed in the clear, cool water around them.

We made the last stretches of our journey to Semipalatinsk in the night. The steppe over

which we approached the city was more naked and sterile than any that we had crossed, and seemed in the faint twilight to be merely a desert of sun-baked earth and short dead grass, with here and there a ragged bush or a long, ripple-marked dune of loose, drifting sand. I fell asleep soon after midnight, and when I awoke at half-past 2 o'clock Sunday morning day was just breaking, and we were passing a large white building with lighted lanterns hung against its walls, which I recognized as a city prison. It was the "tiuremni zamok," or "prison castle" of Semipalatinsk. In a few moments we entered a long, wide, lonely street, bordered by unpainted log-houses, the board window-shutters of which were all closed, and

the steep, pyramidal roofs of which loomed high and black in the first gray light of dawn. The street was full of soft, drifted sand, in which the hoofs of our horses fell noiselessly, and through which our tarantas moved with as little jar as if it were a gondola floating along a watery street in Venice. There was something strangely weird and impressive in this noiseless night ride through the heart of a ghostly and apparently deserted city, in the streets of which were the drifted sands of the desert, and where there was not a sound to indicate the presence of life save the faint, distant throbbing of a watchman's rattle, like the rapid, far-away beating of a wooden drum. We stopped at last in front of a two-story building of brick, covered with white stucco, which our driver said was the hotel "Sibir." After pounding vigorously for five minutes on the front door, we were admitted by a sleepy waiter, who showed us to a hot, musty room in the second story, where we finished our broken night's sleep on the floor.

The city of Semipalatinsk, which has a population of about 15,000 Russians, Kirghis, and Tartars, is situated on the right bank of the river Irtish, 480 miles south-east of Omsk and about 900 miles from Tiumen. It is the seat of government of the province of Semipalatinsk, and is commercially a place of some importance, owing to the fact that it stands on one of the caravan routes to Tashkend and central Asia, and commands a large part of the trade of the Kirghis steppe. The country tributary to it is a pastoral rather than an agricultural region, and of its 547,000 inhabitants 497,000 are nomads who live in 111,000 kubitkas or felt tents, and own more than 3,000,000 head of live stock, including 70,000 camels. The province produces annually, among other things, 45,000 pounds of honey, 370,000 pounds of tobacco, 100,000 bushels of potatoes, and more than 12,000,000 bushels of grain. There are held every year within the limits of the province 11 commercial fairs, the transactions of which amount in the aggregate to about \$1,000,000. Forty or

fifty caravans leave the city of Semipalatinsk every year for various points in Mongolia and central Asia, carrying Russian goods to the value of from \$150,000 to \$200,000.

It is hardly necessary, I suppose, to call the attention of persons who think that all of Siberia is an arctic waste to the fact that honey and tobacco are not arctic products, and that the camel is not a beast of burden used by Eskimos on wastes of snow. If Mr. Frost and I had supposed the climate of south-western Siberia to be arctic in its character, our minds would have been dispossessed of that erroneous idea in less than twelve hours after our arrival in Semipalatinsk. When we set out for a walk through the city about 1 o'clock Sunday afternoon, the thermometer indicated eighty-nine degrees Fahrenheit in the shade with a north wind, and the inhabitants seemed to regard it as rather a cool and pleasant summer day. After wading around in the deep sand under a blazing sun for an hour and a half, we were



A KIRGHIS HORSEMAN.



A CAMEL TEAM CROSSING A FORD.

more than ready to seek the shelter of the hotel and call for refrigerating drinks. The city of Semipalatinsk fully deserves the nickname which has been given to it by the Russian officers there stationed, viz., "The Devil's Sand-box." From almost any interior point of view it presents a peculiar gray, dreary appearance, owing partly to the complete absence of trees and grass, partly to the ashy, weather-beaten aspect of its unpainted log-houses, and partly to the loose, drifting sand

with which its streets are filled. We did not see in our walk of an hour and a half a single tree, bush, or blade of grass, and we waded a large part of the time through soft, dry sand which was more than ankle-deep, and which in places had been drifted, like snow, to a depth of four or five feet against the walls of the gray log-houses. The whole city made upon me the impression of a Mohammedan town built in the middle of a north African desert. This impression was deepened by the

Tartar mosques here and there with their brown candle-extinguisher minarets; by the groups of long-bearded, white-turbaned mullas who stood around them; and by the appearance in the street now and then of a huge two-humped Bactrian camel, ridden into the city by a swarthy, sheepskin-hooded Kirghis from the steppes.

Monday morning I called upon General Tseklinski, the governor of the province, presented my letters from the Russian Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and was gratified to find that he had apparently received no private instructions with regard to us and knew nothing whatever about us. He welcomed me courteously, granted me permission to inspect the Semipalatinsk prison, said he would send the chief of the police to go with us to the mosques and show us about the city, and promised to have prepared for us an open letter of recommendation to all the subordinate officials in the Semipalatinsk province.

From the house of the governor I went, upon his recommendation, to the public library, an unpretending log-house in the middle of the town, where I found a small anthropological museum, a comfortable little reading-room supplied with all the Russian newspapers and magazines, and a well-chosen collection of about one thousand books, among which I was somewhat surprised to find the works of Spencer, Buckle, Lewes, Mill, Taine, Lubbock, Tylor, Huxley, Darwin, Lyell, Tyndall, Alfred Russel Wallace, Mackenzie Wallace, and Sir Henry Maine, as well as the novels and stories of Scott, Dickens, Marryat, George Eliot, George MacDonald, Anthony Trollope, Justin McCarthy, Erckmann-Chatrian, Edgar Allan Poe, and Bret Harte. The library was particularly strong in the departments of science and political economy, and the collection of books, as a whole, was in the highest degree creditable to the intelligence and taste of the people who made and used it. It gave me a better opinion of Semipalatinsk than anything that I had thus far seen or heard.*

From the library I strolled eastward along the bank of the Irtish to the pendulum ferry by which communication is maintained between Semipalatinsk and a Kirghis suburb on the other side of the river. The ferry-boat starts from a wooded island in mid-stream, which is reached either by crossing a foot-

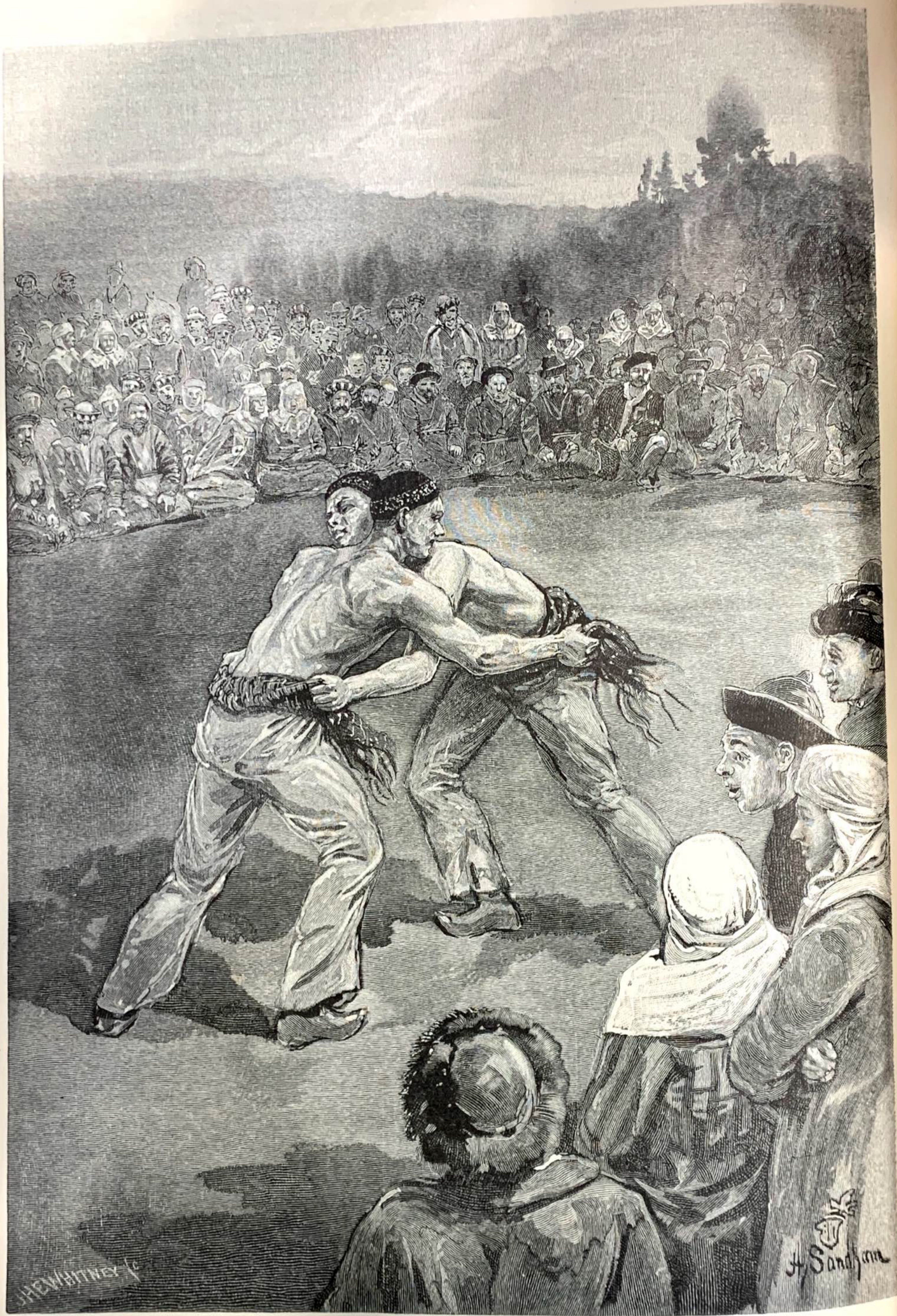
bridge, or by fording the shallow channel which separates it from the Semipalatinsk shore. Just ahead of me were several Kirghis with three or four double-humped camels, one of which was harnessed to a Russian telega. Upon reaching the ford the Kirghis released the draught camel from the telega, lashed the empty vehicle, wheels upward, upon the back of the grunting, groaning animal, and made him wade with it across the stream. A Bactrian camel, with his two loose, drooping humps, his long neck, and his preposterously conceited and disdainful expression of countenance, is always a ridiculous beast, but he never looks so absurdly comical as when crossing a stream with a four-wheeled wagon lashed bottom upward on his back. The shore of the Irtish opposite Semipalatinsk is nothing more than the edge of a great desert-like steppe which stretches away to the southward beyond the limits of vision. I reached there just in time to see the unloading of a caravan of camels which had arrived from Tashkend with silks, rugs, and other central Asiatic goods for the Semipalatinsk market.

Late in the afternoon I retraced my steps to the hotel, where I found Mr. Frost, who had been sketching all day in the Tartar or eastern end of the town. The evening was hot and sultry, and we sat until 11 o'clock without coats or waistcoats, beside windows thrown wide open to catch every breath of air, listening to the unfamiliar noises of the Tartar city. It was the last night of the great Mohammedan fast of Ramazan, and the whole population seemed to be astir until long after midnight. From every part of the town came to us on the still night air the quick staccato throbbing of watchmen's rattles, which sounded like the rapid beating of wooden drums, and suggested some pagan ceremony in central Africa or the Fiji Islands. Now and then the rattles became quiet, and then the stillness was broken by the long-drawn, wailing cries of the muezzins from the minarets of the Tartar mosques.

Tuesday morning when we awoke we found the streets full of Tartars and Kirghis in gala dress, celebrating the first of the three holidays which follow the Mohammedan Lent. About noon the chief of police came to our hotel, by direction of the governor, to make our acquaintance and to show us about the city, and under his guidance we spent two or three

* Most of the works of the scientific authors above named were expurgated Russian editions. Almost every chapter of Lecky's "History of Rationalism" had been defaced by the censor, and in a hasty examination of it I found gaps where from ten to sixty pages had been cut out bodily. Even in this mutilated form, and in the remote Siberian town of Semipalatinsk, the book was such an object of terror to a cowardly Gov-

ernment, that it had been quarantined by order of the Tsar and could not be issued to a reader without special permission from the Minister of the Interior. A similar taboo had been placed upon the works of Spencer, Mill, Lewes, Lubbock, Huxley, and Lyell, notwithstanding the fact that the censor had cut out of them everything that seemed to him to have a "dangerous" or "demoralizing" tendency.



A TARTAR WRESTLING MATCH.

hours in examining the great Tartar mosque and making ceremonious calls upon mullas and Tartar officials. He then asked us if we would not like to see a Tartar and Kirghis wrestling match. We replied, of course, in the affirmative, and were at once driven in his droshky to an open sandy common at the eastern end of the city, where we found a great crowd assembled and where the wrestling had already begun. The dense throng of spectators — mostly Kirghis and Tartars — was arranged in concentric circles around an open space twenty-five or thirty feet in diameter. The inner circle was formed by two or three lines of men, squatting on their heels; then came three or four lines of standing men, and behind the latter was a close circle of horsemen sitting in their saddles, and representing the gallery. The chief of police made a way for us through the crowd to the inner circle, where we took orchestra seats in the sand under a blazing sun and in a cloud of fine dust raised by the wrestlers. The crowd, as we soon discovered, was divided into two hostile camps, consisting respectively of Kirghis and Tartars. Ours was the Kirghis side, and opposite us were the Tartars. There were four masters of ceremonies, who were dressed in long green "khalats" and carried rattan wands. The two Tartar officials would select a champion in their corner, throw a sash over his head, pull him out into the arena, and then challenge the Kirghis officials to match him. The latter would soon find a man about equal to the Tartar champion in size and weight, and then the two contestants would prepare for the struggle. The first bout after we arrived was between a good-looking, smooth-faced young Kirghis, who wore a blue skull-cap and a red sash, and an athletic, heavily built Tartar, in a yellow skull-cap and a green sash. They eyed each other warily for a moment, and then clinched fiercely, each grasping with one hand his adversary's sash, while he endeavored with the other to get an advantageous hold of wrist, arm, or shoulder. Their heads were pressed closely together, their bodies were bent almost into right angles at their waists, and their feet were kept well back to avoid trips. Presently both secured sash and shoulder holds, and in a bent position backed each other around the arena, the Kirghis watching for an opportunity to trip and the Tartar striving to close in. The veins stood out like whip-cords on their foreheads and necks, and their swarthy

faces dripped with perspiration as they struggled and maneuvered in the scorching sunshine, but neither of them seemed to be able to find an opening in the other's guard or to get any decided advantage. At last, however, the Tartar backed away suddenly, pulling the Kirghis violently towards him; and as the latter stepped forward to recover his balance, he was dexterously tripped by a powerful side-blow of the Tartar's leg and foot. The trip did not throw him to the ground, but it did throw him off his guard; and before he could recover himself, the Tartar broke the sash and shoulder hold, rushed in fiercely, caught him around the body, and, with a hip-lock and a tremendous heave, threw him over his head. The unfortunate Kirghis fell with such violence that the blood streamed from his nose and mouth and he seemed partly stunned; but he was able to get up without assistance and walked in a dazed way to his corner, amidst a roar of shouts and triumphant cries from the Tartar side.

As the excitement increased new champions offered themselves, and in a moment two more contestants were locked in a desperate struggle, amidst a babel of exclamations, suggestions, taunts, and yells of encouragement or defiance from their respective supporters. The hot air was filled with a dusty haze of fine sand, which was extremely irritating to the eyes; our faces and hands burned as if they were being slowly blistered by the torrid sunshine; and the odors of horses, of perspiration, and of greasy old sheepskins, from the closely packed mass of animals and men about us, became so overpowering that we could scarcely breathe; but there was so much excitement and novelty in the scene, that we managed to hold out through twelve or fifteen bouts. Two police officers were present to maintain order and prevent fights, but their interference was not needed. The wrestling was invariably good-humored, and the vanquished retired without any manifestations of ill-feeling, and often with laughter at their own discomfiture. The Kirghis were generally overmatched. The Tartars, although perhaps no stronger, were quicker and more dexterous than their nomadic adversaries, and won on an average two falls out of every three. About 5 o'clock, although the wrestling still continued, we made our way out of the crowd and returned to the hotel, to bathe our burning faces and, if possible, get cool.

George Kennan.