

# AROUND THE WORLD ON A BICYCLE.<sup>1</sup>

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ACROSS THE "DESERT OF DESPAIR."

XXV.

FOR some hours we are traversing a singularly wild-looking country; it seems as though the odds and ends of all creation were tossed indiscriminately together. Rocky cliffs, sloping hills, river beds, dry save from last night's thunder storm, bits of sandy desert, strips of alkaline flat or hard gravel, have been gathered up from various parts of the earth and tossed carelessly in a heap here. It is an odd corner in which the chins, the sweepings and trimmings, gathered up after the terrestrial globe was finished, were apparently brought and dumped: There is even a little bit of pasture and at one point a little area of arable land. Here are found four half-naked representatives of this strange, wild border land, living beneath one rude goat-hair tent, watching over a few grazing goats and several acres of growing grain.

We arrive at this remarkable little community shortly after noon, and halt a couple of hours to rest and feed the horses, and to kill and cook the unhappy kid slung across the mudbake's saddle. The poor little creature doesn't require very much killing; all the way from where it was given into his tender charge its infantile bleatings have seemed to grate harshly on the mudbake's unsympathetic ear, and he has handled it anything but tenderly.

The four men found here are Persian Eliantes, a numerous tribe, that seem to form a sort of connecting link between the genuine nomads and the tillers of the soil. They are frequently found combining the occupations of both and might aptly be classed as semi-nomads. Pitching their tents beside some outlying, isolated piece of cultivable ground in the spring, they sow it with wheat or barley, and three months later they reap a supply of grain to carry away with them when they remove their flocks to winter pasturage.

An iron kettle is borrowed to stew the kid in, and when cooked a position is stowed away to carry with us. The

Eliante quartette contribute bowls of *mast* and *doke*, and off this and the remainder of the stewed kid we all make a hearty meal.

More than once of late have I been impressed by the striking, even startling resemblance of some person among the people of Southern Khorassan, to the familiar face of some acquaintance at home. And, strange it is, but true, that one of these four Eliantes blossoms forth upon my astonished vision as the veritable double of one of America's most prominent knights of the pen and wheel. The gentleman himself, an enthusiastic tourist, and to use his own expression, fond of "walking large," has taken considerable interest in my tour of the world. Can it be—I think, upon first confronting this extraordinary reproduction—can it be, that Karl Kron's enthusiasm has caused him to start from the Pacific coast of China on his wheel to try and beat my time in circumcycling the globe? And after getting as far around as this strange terrestrial chip-pile, has he been so unfortunately susceptible as to fall in love with some slender-limbed daughter of the desert?—has he been captivated by a pair of big, ophthalmia-proof, black eyes, a coy sidewise glance, or a graceful, jaunty style of shouldering a half-tanned goat-skin of *doke*?

The very first question the nomad asks of the Khan, however, removes all suspicions of his being the author and publisher of X M M—he asks if I am a Ferenghi and whither I am going; Kron would have asked me for tabulated statistics of my tour through Persia.

A couple of hours' rest in the Eliante camp, and we bid adieu to this queer little oasis of human life within the barbarous boundary line of the Dasht-i-naomid, and proceed on our way. One of the Eliantes accompanies us some little distance to guide us through a belt of badly broken country immediately surrounding their camp. The country continues to be a regular jumble of odds and

<sup>1</sup>The first article of this series appeared in *OUTING* for April, 1885.

ends of physical geography all the afternoon, and several times the horses of the sowars, without preliminary warning, break through the thin upper crust of some treacherous boggy spot and sink suddenly to their bellies. During the afternoon the mirza is pitched headlong over his horse's head once, and the Khan and the mudbake twice. In one tumble the Khan's loosely sheathed sword slips from its scabbard, and he well nigh falls a victim to the accident *a la* King Saul.

While traversing this treacherous belt of territory I make the sowars lead the way and perform the office of pathfinder for myself and wheel. Whenever one of them gets stuck in boggy ground, and his horse flounders wildly about, to the imminent risk of unseating its rider, his two hopeful comrades bubble over with merriment at his expense; his own sincere exclamations of "Allah!" being answered by unsympathetic jeers and sarcastic remarks.

A few minutes later, perchance one of the hilarious twain finds himself unexpectedly in the same predicament; it then becomes his turn to look scared and importune Allah for protection, and also his turn to be the target for the wild hilarity of the others.

And so this lively and eventful afternoon passes away, and about five o'clock we round the base of a conglomerate hill that has been shutting out the prospect ahead, cross a small spring freshet, and emerge upon an extensive gravelly plain stretching away eastward to the horizon. It is the central plain of the Dasht-i-na-oomid, the heart of the desert, of which the wild, heterogeneous territory traversed since morning forms the setting. So far as the utility of the bicycle and the horses is concerned, the change is decidedly for the better, even more so for the former than for the latter. The gravelly plain presents very good wheeling surface, and I forge ahead of my escort, following a trail so faint that it is barely distinguishable from the general surface.

Shortly after leaving the mountainous country the three sowars whip their horses into a smart canter to overtake the bicycle. As they come clattering up, the Khan shouts loudly for me to stop, and the mirza and mudbake supplement his vocal exertions by gesticulating to the same purpose. Dismounting and allowing them to approach, in reply to

my query of, "*Chi mi khoi?*" the Khan's knavish countenance becomes overspread with a ridiculously thin and transparent assumption of seriousness and importance, and pointing to an imaginary boundary line at his horse's feet he says:

"Bur-*raa-ther* (brother), Afghanistan."

"*Khylic koob*, Afghanistan *inja—koob, koob, sowari.*" (Very good, I understand, we are entering Afghanistan; all right, ride on.)

"*Sowari neis,*" replies the Khan; and he tries hard to impress upon me that our crossing the Afghan frontier is a momentous occasion, and not to be lightly regarded. Several times during the day has my delectable escort endeavored to fathom the extent of my courage by impressing upon me the danger to be apprehended in Afghanistan by a Ferenghi. Not less than half a dozen times have they indulged in the grim pantomime of cutting their own throats, and telling me that this is the tragic fate that would await me in Afghanistan without their valuable protection. And now as we stand on the boundary line their bronzed and bared throats are again subjected to this highly expressive treatment; and transfixing me with a penetrating stare, as though eager to read in my face some responsive sign of fear or apprehension, the Khan repeats, with emphasis:

"*Burr-ather*, Afghanistan."

Seeing me still inclined to make light of the matter he turns to his comrades for confirmation.

"Oh, *burr-ather*, Afghanistan," assents the mirza; and the mudbake chimes in with the same words.

"Well, yes, I understand; Afghanistan—what of it?" I inquire, amused at this theatrical display of their childish knavery.

For answer they start to loading up their guns and pistols, which up to now they have neglected to do; and they examine, with a ludicrous show of importance, the edges of their swords and the points of their daggers, staring the while at me to see what kind of an impression all this is making. Their scrutiny of my countenance brings them small satisfaction, methinks, for so ludicrous seems the scene, and so transparent the motives of this warlike movement, that no room is there for aught but a genuine expression of amusement.

Having loaded up their imposing array

of firearms, the Khan gives the word to advance, with as much show of solemnity as though leading a forlorn hope on some desperate undertaking, and he impresses upon me the importance of keeping as close to them as possible, instead of riding ahead. All around us is the uninhabited plain; not a living thing or sign of human being anywhere; but when I point this out, and picking up a stone, ask the Khan if it is these that are dangerous, he replies, as before:

"Burr-ather, Afghanistan," and significantly taps his weapons.

As we advance the level plain becomes covered with a growth of wild thyme and camelthorn, the former permeating the desert air with its agreeable perfume. The evening air is soft and balmy, as we halt in the dusk of the evening to camp alongside the trail; each sowar has a large leathern water-bottle swinging from his stirrup-strap, filled at the little freshet above mentioned, and for food we have bread and the remains of the cold kid. The horses are fastened to stout shrubs and a fire is kindled with dried camelthorn collected by the mudbake. Not a sound breaks the stillness of the evening as we squat around the fire and eat our frugal supper; all about us is the oppressive silence and solitude of the desert. Away off in the dim distance to the north-east can be seen a single speck of light—the camp-fire of some wandering Afghan tribe.

"What is the fire yonder?" I ask of the Khan.

The Khan looks at it, says something to his comrades, and then looks at me and draws his finger yet again across his throat; the mirza and the mudbake follow suit.

The ridiculous frequency of this tragic demonstration causes me to laugh outright, in spite of an effort to control my risibilities. The Khan replies to this by explaining; "Afghani Noorzais—*dashtheadam*," and then goes on to explain that the Noorzais are very bad Afghans, who would like nothing better than to murder a Ferenghi.

From the beginning of our acquaintance I have allowed my escort to think my understanding of the conversation going on among themselves was extremely limited. By this means have they been thrown somewhat off their guard, and frequently committed themselves within my hearing. It is their laudable purpose,

I have discovered, to steal money from me if an opportunity presents, without the chance of being detected. Besides being inquisitive about the probable amount in my possession, there has evolved from their collective brains, during the day, a deep laid scheme to find out something about the amount of backsheesh they may expect me to bestow upon them at the end of our journey. This deep laid scheme is for the Khan to pretend that he is sending the mirza and the mudbake back to Beerjand from this point, and for these two hopeful accomplices to present themselves before me as about ready to depart, and so demand backsheesh. This little farce is duly played shortly after our arrival; it is a genuine piece of light comedy, acted on the strangely realistic stage of the lonely desert. to which the full round moon just rising above the eastern horizon lends its ghastly radiance.

These advances are met on my part by broad intimations that if they continue to act as ridiculously during the remainder of the journey as they have to-day, they will surely get well bastinadoed, instead of backsheeshed, when we reach Khalakua. The actors retire from the stage with visible discomfiture and squat themselves around the fire. Long after I have stretched my somewhat weary frame upon a narrow strip of saddle-blanket for the night, my three protectors squat around the smouldering embers of the camelthorn fire, discussing the all-absorbing topic of my money. Little do they suspect, that concealed in a leathern money-belt beneath my clothes are too Russian old Imperials, the money obtained in Teheran for the journey through Turkestan and Siberia to the Pacific. Though sleeping with the traditional one eye open and my Smith & Wesson where it can be readily used, there is little apprehension of being robbed, owing to their obligation to take back the receipt for my safe delivery to Heshmet-i-Molk.

It is the weather-changeful period of the full moon, and about midnight a clap of thunder rolls over the desert, and, a smart shower descends from a small dark cloud, that sails slowly across the sky, obscuring for a brief period the moisty looking countenance of the moon, and then disappears. A couple of hours later a rush of wind is heard careering across the desert toward us, accompanied by a wildy scudding cloud. The cloud pep-

pers us with hailstones in the most lively manner, and the wind strikes us almost with the force of a tornado, knocking over the bicycle, which I have leaned against a clump of shrubs at my head, and favoring us with a blinding fusillade of sand and gravel.

It rains and hails enough to make us wet and uncomfortable, and the mud-bake gets up and kindles another fire. In a short time the squally midnight weather has given place to a dead calm; the clouds have dispersed; the moon shines all the brighter from having had its face washed; the stars twinkle themselves out one by one as the gray dawn gradually makes itself manifest. It is a most lovely morning; the bruising hailstones and the moistening rain have proved themselves stimulants in the laboratory of the wild thyme shrubs, setting free and disseminating a new supply of aroma; and while until now the voice of animal nature has been conspicuous by its absence, the morning vespers of song birds seem almost to be issuing, like flowers, from the ground.

There is an indescribable charm about this morning's experience on the desert; dawn appears, the moon hangs low-suspended in the heavens, the birds caw merrily, and every inspiration one takes is a tonic to stimulate the system. Half an hour later the sun has risen, the song birds have, one and all, lapsed into silence, the desert is itself again, stern, silent, uncompromising, and apparently destitute of life.

Total depravity, it appears, has not yet claimed my worthy escort for its own entirety, for while saddling up their horses during this brief display of nature's kinder mood, they call my attention to the singing of the birds and the grateful perfumery in the air. The germ of goodness still lingers within their semi-civilized conception of things about them; they are the children of nature, and are profoundly impressed by their mother's varying moods. Their prostrations toward Mecca and their matutinal prayers to Allah seem to gain something of sincerity from the accompanying worship of the birds and the sympathetic essence of the awakening day. Eastward from our camping ground the trail is oftentimes indistinguishable; but a few loose stones have been tossed together at intervals of several hundred yards, to guide wayfarers across the desert. A surface of

mingled sand and gravel characterizes the way; sometimes it is unrideably heavy, and sometimes the wheeling is excellent for a mile or two at a stretch, enabling me to leave the ambling *yaboo*s of the sowars far behind. Beautiful mirages sometimes appear in the distance, lakes of water, waving groves of palms, and lovely castles; and often, when far enough ahead, I can look back, and see the grotesque figures of the Khan, the mirza and the mudbake apparently riding through the air.

Perhaps twenty miles are covered when we arrive at a pile of dead brush that has been erected for a landmark, and find a dilapidated well containing water. The water is forty feet below the surface, and contains a miscellaneous assortment of dead lizards, the carcasses of various small mammalia, and sundry other unfortunate representatives of animated nature that have fallen in. Beyond this well the country assumes the character of a broad sink or mud-basin, the shiny surface of its mud glistening in the sun like a sheet of muddy water. Sloughs innumerable meander through it, fringed with rank rushes and shrubs. A far heavier down-pour than we were favored with on the plain has drenched a region of stony hills adjacent, and the drainage therefrom has, for the time being, filled and overflowed the winding sloughs.

A dozen or more of these are successfully forded, though not without some difficulty; but we finally arrive at the parent slough, of which the others are but tributaries.

This proves too deep for the sowars' horses to ford, and after surveying the yellow flood some minutes and searching up and down, the Khan declares ruefully that we shall have to return to Beerjand Remonstrating with him upon his lack of enterprise in turning from so trifling a difficulty, the Khan finally orders the mudbake to strip off his purple and fine linen and try the depth. The mudbake proceeds to obey his superior, with many apprehensive glances at the muddy feshet, and wades gingerly in, muttering prayers to Allah the while. Deeper and deeper the yellow waters creep up his shivering form, and when nearly up to his neck, a sudden deepening causes him to bob unexpectedly down almost over his head. Hurriedly retreating, spluttering and whining, he scrambles hastily ashore, where his two companions,

lolling lazily on their horses, watching his attempt, are convulsed with merriment over his little misadventure and his fright.

The shivering mudbake, clad chiefly in goose-pimples, now eagerly supplements the Khan's proposition for us all to return to Beerjand, and the mirza with equal eagerness murmurs his approval of the same course of action. Making light of their craven determination, I prepare to cross the freshet without their assistance, and announce my intention of proceeding alone. The stream, though deep, is not over thirty yards wide, and a very few minutes suffices for me to swim across with my clothes, my packages and the saddle of the bicycle; the small, strong rope I have carried from Constantinople is then attached to the bicycle, and, swimming across with the end, the wheel is pulled safely through the water. Neither of the sowars can swim, and they regard the prospect of being left behind with no little consternation. Their guileful souls seem to turn naturally to Allah in their perplexity; and they all prostrate themselves toward Mecca, and pray with the apparent earnestness of deep sincerity. Having duly strengthened and fortified themselves with these devotional exercises, they bravely prepare to resign themselves to Kismet and follow my instructions about crossing the stream.

The Khan's iron-gray being the best horse of the three, and the Khan himself of a more sanguine and hopeful disposition, I make him tie all his clothes and damageable things into a bundle, and fasten them on his saddle; the rope is then tied to the bridle and the horse pulled across, his gallant rider clinging to his tail, according to my orders, and praying aloud to Allah on his own account. The gray swims the unfordable middle portion nobly, and the Khan comes through with no worse damage than a mouthful or two of muddy water. As the dripping charger scrambles up the bank, the Khan allows himself to be hauled up high and dry by its tail; he then looks back at his comrades and favors them with a brief but highly exaggerated account of his sensations.

The mirza and the mudbake deliver themselves of particularly deep-chested acclamations of "Allah, Allah!" at the prospect of undergoing similar sensations to those described by the Khan, whereupon that unsympathetic individual vents

his hilarity in a gleeful, heartless peal of laughter, and tells them, with a diabolical chuckle of delight, that they will most likely fare ten times worse than himself on account of the inferiority of their horses compared with the gray. Much threatening, bantering and persuasion is necessary to induce them to follow the leadership of the Khan; but, trusting to Kismet, they finally venture, and both come through without noteworthy misadventure. The Khan's wild hilarity and ribaldish jeers at the expense of his two subordinates, as he stands on the solid foundation of a feat happily already accomplished, and surveys their trepidation, and hears their prayers as they are pulled like human dingies through the water, is in such ludicrous contrast to his own prayerful utterances under the same circumstances a minute before, that my own risibilities are not to be wholly controlled.

This little episode makes a profound impression upon the minds of my escort; they now regard me as a very dare-devil and determined individual, a person entirely without fear, and their deference during the remainder of the afternoon is in marked contrast to their previous attempts to work upon my presumed apprehensions of the dangers of Afghanistan.

Following the guidance of a few rude landmarks of piled brush, we discover, a few miles off to the left, and on the eastern environ of the slough-veined basin, a considerable body of tents, and a herd of grazing camels. The sowars pronounce them to be a certain camp of Eimucks that they have been expecting to find somewhere in this vicinity, and with whose chief the Khan says he is acquainted. Wending our way thither we find a large camp of about fifty tents occupying a level stretch of clean gravelly ground, slightly elevated above the mud flats. The tents are of brownish black goat-hair, similar in material to the tents of Koords and Eliantes; in size and structure they are larger and finer than those of the Eliantes, but inferior to the splendid tent palaces of Koordistan. A couple of hundred yards from the tents is a small spring of water, enclosed within a rude wall of loosely piled stone; the water is allowed to trickle through this wall and accumulate in a basin outside. Here, as we ride up, are several women filling goat-skin vessels to carry to the tents.



AN EVENING MEAL IN THE DESERT.

The tent of the chief stands out conspicuously from the others, and the Khan, desirous of giving his "burr-ather," as he now terms the Eimuck chieftain, a surprise, suggests that I ride ahead of the horsemen and dismount before his tent. This capital little arrangement is somewhat interfered with by the fact that a goodly proportion of the whole male population present have already become cognizant of our presence, and are standing in white-robed groups about their tents trying with hand-shaded eyes to penetrate the secret of my strange appearance. Nevertheless I ride ahead and alight at the entrance to the chief's tent. The chief is a middle-aged man of medium height and inclined to obesity. He and all the men are arrayed in garments of coarse white cotton stuff throughout, loose pantaloons, bound at the ankles, and an over-garment of a pattern very much like a night-shirt; on their heads are the regulation Afghan turbans, with long, dangling ends, and their feet are encased in rude moccasins with upturned toes. As I dismount, and the chief fully realizes that I am a Ferenghi, his face turns red with embarrassment. Instead of the smiles or the grave kindness of a Koordish sheikh, or the simple, child-like greeting of an Eliante, the Eimuck chief motions me into his tent in a brusque, offish manner, his countenance all aglow with the redness of what almost looks like a guilty conscience.

With the quick intuition and rapid pene-

tration that comes of long and changeful association with strange peoples, the changing countenance of the Afghan chief impresses me at once as the fiery signal of inbred Mussulman fanaticism, lighting up spontaneously at the unexpected and unannounced arrival of a lone Ferenghi in his presence. It savors somewhat of bearding a dangerous lion in his own den. He certainly betrays deep embarrassment at my appearance; which, however, may partly result from not yet knowing the character of my companions, or the wherefore of this strange visitation. When my escort rides up his whole demeanor instantly undergoes a change; the cloud of embarrassment lifts from his face, he and the Khan recognize and greet each other cordially as "burr-ather," and kiss each other's hands; some of his men standing by exchange similar brotherly greetings with the mirza and the mud-bake.

After duly refreshing and invigorating ourselves with sundry bowls of *doke*, the inevitable tomasha is given, and the chief asks the Khan to get me to ride up before one row of tents and down the other for the edification of the women and children, curious groups of whom are gathered at every door. The ground between the two long, even rows of tents resembles a macadam boulevard for width and smoothness, and I give the wild Eimuck tribes-people a ten minutes exhibition of circling, speeding and riding with hands

off handles. A strange and novel experience surely, this latest triumph of high Western civilization, invading the isolated nomad camp on the Dasht-i-na-oomid and disporting for the amusement of the women and children. Some of the women are attired in quite fanciful colors; Turkish pantaloons of bright blue and jackets of equally bright red renders them highly picturesque, and they wear a profusion of bead necklaces and the multifare gew-gaws of semi-civilization. The younger girls wear nose rings of silver in the left nostril, with a cluster of tiny beads or stones decorating the side of the nose. The wrists of most of the men are adorned with bracelets of plain copper wire about the size of ordinary telegraph wire; they average large and well proportioned, and seem intellectually superior to the Eliantes.

A very striking peculiarity of the people in this particular camp is a sort of lisping, hissing accent to their speech. When first addressed by the chief, I fancied it simply an individual case of lisping; but every person in the camp does likewise. Another peculiarity of expression, that, while not peculiar to this particular camp, is made striking by reason of its novelty to me at this time, is the use of the expression "O" as a term of assent, in lieu of the Persian "balli!" The sowsars, from their proximity to the frontier, have sometimes used this expression, but here, in the Eimuck camp, I come suddenly upon a people who use it to the total exclusion of the Persian word. The change from the "balli sahib" of the Tabbas Villagers to the "O, O, O" of the Afghan nomads is novel and entertaining in the extreme, and I sit and listen with no small interest to the edifying conversation of the Khan, the mirza and the mudbake on the one side, and the Eimuck chieftain and prominent members of the tribe on the other.

Standing behind the chief, who sits cross-legged on a Persian nummud, is a handsome, intelligent looking man, who seems, to be the most pleasant faced and entertaining conversationalist of the nomads. The Khan grows particularly talkative and communicative as the evening hours flow on, and while addressing his remarks and queries directly to the chief, he gazes about him to observe the effects of his words on the general assembly gathered inside and crowded about the tent entrance. The pleasant faced man does far more talking in reply than does

the chief himself. In reply to the Khan's innumerable queries he replies, in the peculiar, hissing shibboleth of the camp, "O O, O, O—O bus-s-s-orah, b-s-s-s-orah." Sometimes the Khan delivers himself of quite a lengthy disquisition, and as his remarks are followed by the assembled nomads with the eager interest of people who seldom hear anything but the music of their own voices, the interesting individual above referred to sprinkles his assenting "O, O, O" thickly along the line of the Khan's presumably edifying narrative; now and then the chief himself chimes in with a quiet "b-s-s-s-orah." Here also, in this camp of surprises and innovations, do I first hear the word "India" used in lieu of "Hindustan" among Asiatics.

The fatigue of the day's journey, and the imperfect rest of the two preceding nights, causes me to be overcome with drowsiness early in the evening, and I stretch out alongside the bicycle and fall into a deep sleep. An hour or two later I am awakened for the evening meal. Flat, pancake-like sheets of unleavened bread, somewhat inferior to the bread of Persia, and partaking somewhat of the character of the *chapatties* of India, boiled goat and the broth preserved from the same, together with the regulation *mast* and *doke*, constitute the Eimuck supper. A liberal bowl of the broth, an abundance of meat, bread *mast* and *doke* are placed before me on a separate wooden tray, while my escort, the chief and several of his men gather around a communal spread of the same variety of edibles. A crowd of curious people occupy the remainder of the space inside, and stand at the door. As I rise and prepare to eat, all eyes are turned upon me as though anticipating some surprising exhibition of the strange manners of a Ferenghi at his meals.

Surveying the broth I motion the Khan to try and obtain a spoon. The chief looks inquiringly at the Khan, and the Khan, with the gladsome expression of a person conscious of having on hand a rare piece of information for his friends, explains that a Ferenghi eats soup with a spoon. The chief and his men smile incredulously, but the Khan emphasizes his position by appealing to the mirza and the mudbake for confirmation. "Eat soup with a spoon?" queries the chief in Persian; and he casts about him a look of unutterable astonishment.

Recovering somewhat from his incre-



"AS HE DRAWS HIS HAND ACROSS IS JUGULAR."

dulity, however, he orders an attendant to fetch one, which shortly results in the triumphant production of a rude wooden ladle. These uncivilized children of the desert watch me drink broth from the ladle with most intense curiosity. In their own case, an attendant tears several of the sheets of bread into pieces and puts in the broth; each person then helps himself to the broth-soaked bread with his fingers. What broth remains at the bottom of the bowl is drank by them from the vessel itself in turns.

After consuming several generous chunks of "gusht" bread and *mast* and broth, and supplementing this with a bowl of doke, I stretch myself out again and at once become wrapt in sound, refreshing slumbers that last till morning.

It is a glorious morning, as, after breakfasting off the cold remains of the meat left over from the evening meal, we bid farewell to the hospitable Eimuck camp and resume our journey. As we leave, I offer to shake hands with the chief to see if he understands our mode of greeting; he seizes my hand between his two palms and kisses it.

For the first few miles the country is gravelly and undulating, after which it changes to a sort of basin, partially covered by dense patches of tall, rank weeds. On either side are rocky hills, almost rising to the dignity of mountains, the rain and melting snow evidently con-

vert this basin into a swamp at certain periods; but it is now dry. A mile or so off to the right we catch a glimpse of some wild animal chasing a small herd of antelope. From its size and motion, I judge it to be a leopard or cheetah; the sowars regard it, bounding along after the fleet-footed antelope, with lively interest; they call it a "*baab*" (tiger) and say there are many in the reeds. It looks quite a likely spot for tigers, and it is not at all unlikely that it may have been one, for, whilst not plentiful hereabouts, *Tigris Asiaticus* occasionally makes his presence known in the patches of reed and jungle in southern Afghanistan and Seistan.

All three of the sowars are frisky as kittens this morning, the result, it is surmised, of the generous hospitality of the Eimuck chief—*gusht-i-goosefang*. galore and rich goat broth causes their animal spirits to run riot. Like overfed horses they "feel their oats" as they sniff the fresh and invigorating morning air, and they point toward the shadowy form of the racing *baab* a mile away and pretend to take aim at it with their guns. They sing and shout and swoop down on one another about the basin, flourishing their swords and aiming with their guns, and they whip their poor, long-suffering *yahoos* into wild, sweeping gallops as they swoop down on some imaginary enemy. This wild hilarity and mimic warfare of the desert is kept up until the ragged edge of

their exuberance is worn away, and their horses are well nigh fagged out; we then halt for an hour to allow the horses to recuperate by nibbling at a patch of reeds.

About ten miles from the Eimuck camp, the country develops into a wilderness of deep loose sand and bowlders. Across this sandy region stretches a range of dark volcanic hills; the bases of the hills terminate in billows of whitish yellow sand; the higher waves of the sandy sea stretch well up the sides like giant ocean breakers driven by the gale up the side of the rocky cliffs. It is a tough piece of country even for the sowars' horses, and dragging a bicycle through the mingled sand and bowlders is abominable in the extreme. The heat becomes oppressive as we penetrate deeper into the belt of sand hills, and after five miles of desperate tugging I become tired and distressed. The sowars lolling lazily in their saddles, well nigh sleeping, whilst I am struggling and perspiring, forms another chapter of experience entirely novel in the field of European travel in Asia. Usually it is the natives who have to sweat and toil and administer to the comfort of the traveler.

Revolving these things over in my mind, and becoming really wearied, I suggest to the Khan that he change places for a brief spell and give me a chance to rest. The idea of himself trundling the *asp-i-ahen*, appeals to the Khan as decidedly novel, and he bites at the bait quite readily. Mounting his vacated saddle I join the mirza and the mudbake in watching him struggle along through the sand with it for some two hundred yards, Along that brief course he topples over with it not less than half a dozen times. The novel spectacle of the Khan trundling the *asp-i-ahen* arouses his two comrades from the warmth-inspired semi-torpority of their condition, and whenever the Khan topples over, they favor him with jeers and laughter. At the end of two hundred yards the Khan declares himself exhausted and orders the mudbake to dismount and try it; this, however, the mudbake bluntly refuses to do. After a little persuasion the mirza is induced to try the experiment of a trundle; it is but an experiment, however, for being less active than the Khan, the first time he tumbles the bicycle over finds him sprawling on top of it, and fearful lest he should snap some spokes, I take it in hand again myself.

Another couple of miles and the eastern edge of the sandy area is reached, after which a compensational proportion of smooth gravel abounds. Shortly after noon another small camp of nomads is reached, some half dozen inferior tents, pitched on the shelterless edge of an exposed gravelly slope. The afternoon is oppressively hot, and the men are comfortably snoozing in all sorts of outlandish places among the scrubby camelthorn. Only the women and children are visible as we approach the tents; but youngsters are dispatched forthwith, and, lo! several tall white-robed figures seem to rise up literally out of the ground at different spots round about; they were burrowed away under the low, bushy shrubbery like rabbits. The women and children among these nomads always seem industriously engaged, the former with domestic duties about the tents, and the latter tending the flocks; but the men put in most of their unprofitable lives loafing, sleeping and gossiping.

We are not invited into the tents, but bread and *mast* is provided, and while we eat, four men hold the corners of an ample blue turban sheet over us to shelter us from the sun. Spread out on sheets and on the roofs of the tents are bushels of curds drying in the sun; the curds are compressed into round balls the size of an apple, and when dried into hard balls are excellent things to put in the pocket and nibble along the road. Here we learn that the Harood is only one farsakh distant, and a couple of stalwart young nomads accompany us to assist us across, At Beerjand the Harood was "deep as a house;" at our last night's camp we were told that it was fordable with camels; here we learn that though very swift, it is really fordable for men and horses. First we come to a branch less than waist deep. My nether garments are handed to the Khan; in the pocket of my pantaloons is a purse containing a few kerans. Whilst engaged in fording this branch the Khan ferrets out the purse and extracts something from it, which he deftly slips into the folds of his kammerbund. All this I silently observe from the corner of my eyes, but say nothing.

Emerging from the stream, the wily Khan points across the intervening three hundred yards or thereabouts to the main stream, and motions for me to go ahead. The discovery of the purse and the purloined kerans has aroused all the latent



WHEELING FOR THE EDIFICATION OF THE NOMADS.

cupidity of his soul, and he wants me to ride ahead so that he can straggle along in the rear and investigate the contents of the purse at his leisure. Whilst winking at the amusing little act of petty larceny already detected, I do not propose to give his kleptomaniac tendencies full swing, and so I meet his proposal to "*sowar*" and go ahead by peremptorily ordering him to take the lead.

Arriving at the bank of the Harood, I retire behind a clump of reeds, and fold my money-belt full of gold up in the middle of my clothes, making a compact bundle, with my gossamer rubber wrapped around the outside. The river is about a hundred and fifty yards wide at the ford, with a sand bar about mid-stream, and is not above shoulder deep along the ridge that renders it fordable; the current, however, is frightfully strong. Like the Indians of the West, the Afghan nomads are accustomed from infancy to battling with the elements, and are comparatively fearless in regard to rivers and deserts and storms, etc.

Such, at least, is the impression created by the conduct of the two young men who have come to assist us across. The bicycle, my clothes and all the effects of the *sowars* are carried across on their heads, the rushing waters threatening to

sweep them off their feet at every step; but nothing is allowed to get wet. When they are carrying across the last bundle, the Khan, solicitous for my safety, wants me to hang on to a short rope tied around the waist of the strongest of the nomads. Disdaining any such arrangement as this, however, I declare my intention of crossing without assistance, and wade in forthwith. Ere I have progressed thirty yards, the current fairly sweeps me off my feet and I have to swim for it. Fancying that I am overcome and in a fair way of being drowned, the *sowars* set up a wild howl of apprehension, and shout excitedly to the nomads to rescue me from a watery grave. The Afghans are not so excited, however, over the outlook; they see that I am swimming all right, and they confine themselves to motioning the direction for me to take. The current carries me some little distance down stream, when I find footing on the lower extremity of the sand-bar, and on it, wade up stream again with some difficulty against swiftly rushing water four feet deep.

The Khan thinks I have had the narrowest possible escape, and in tones of desperation he shouts out and begs me not to attempt to cross the other channel without assistance. "The receipt!" he shouts, "the receipt! Allah preserve

us I the receipt; Heshmet-i-Molk." The worthy, Khan is afflicted with a keen consciousness of condign punishment awaiting him at Beerjand, should I happen to come to grief while under his protection, and he, no doubt, suffers an agony of apprehension during the fifteen minutes I am battling with the rapid current of the Harood.

The second channel is found less swift and comparatively easy to ford. The sturdy nomads, having transported all of my escort's damageable effects, those three now stark naked worthies mount with fear and trembling their equally stark naked steeds—naked all, save for the turbans of the men and the bridles of their horses. Whatever of intrepidity the Khan possesses is of a quantity scarcely visible to the naked eye, and it is, therefore, scarcely surprising to find him trying to persuade, first the mudbake and then the mirza, to take the initiative. His efforts proving wholly ineffectual, however, to bring the feebly flowing tide of their courage up to the high water level of assuming the duties of leadership; and so in the absence of any alternative, he finally screws up his own courage and leads the way. The others allow their horses to follow closely behind. The horses seem to regard the rushing volume

of yellow water about them with far less apprehension than do their riders. While dressing myself on the eastern bank, the frightened mutterings of "Allah" from these gallant horsemen come floating across the water, and as they reach the sand-bar in the middle of the stream, I can hear their muttered importunities for Providential protection change, like the passing shadow-whims of nature's children that they are, into gleeful chuckles at their escape.

When the Khan emerges from the water, the ruling passion within his avaricious nature asserts itself with ridiculous promptness. With the water dripping from his dangling feet, he rides hastily to where I am dressing and whispers, "*Pool neis; Afghani dasht-adam, pool neis.*" By this he desires me to understand that the men who have been so industrious and ready in helping us across being Afghan nomads, will not expect any backsheesh for their trouble. The above-mentioned ruling passion is wonderfully strong in the rude breast of the Khan, and in view of his own secret machinations against my money, he, no doubt, entertains involuntary objections to leakages in other directions. So far as presenting these hospitable sons of the desert with money for their services is concerned, the Khan's



SWIMMING THE SWIFT HAROOD.

advice probably contains a good deal more wisdom than would appear from a superficial view of the case merely. Assisting travelers across streams and through difficult places, evidently appeals to these people as the most natural thing in the world for them to do. It is a part of the unwritten code of the hospitality of their uncivilized country, and is, in all probability, undertaken without so much as a mercenary thought. Presenting them with a money consideration for their services certainly has a tendency to awaken the latent spirit of cupidity, generally resulting in their transformation from simple and unsophisticated children, hospitable both by nature and tradition, into wretched mercenaries, who regard the chance traveler solely from a backsheesh-giving standpoint. The baneful result of this is to-day glaringly apparent along every tourist route in the East; and, among the pool-loving subjects of the Shah of Persia, travelers do not have to appear very frequent to keep alive and foster a wild yearning for backsheesh that effectually suppresses all loftier considerations.

These Afghans, however, seem to be people of an altogether different mold; the ubiquitous Western traveler has not yet become a palpable factor in their experiences. The hidden charms of backsheesh will not become apparent to the wild Afghans until their fierce Mussulman fanati-

cism has cooled sufficiently to allow the Ferenghi tourist to wander through their territory without being in danger of his life.

The danger of corruption in the present instance is exceedingly small, considering that I am the only representative of the Occident that has ever happened along this way, and the probability that none other will follow for many a year after; therefore I ignore the Khan's wholly disinterested advice and make the two worthy nomads a small present. They accept the proffered kerans with a look of bewilderment, as though quite unable to comprehend why I should tender them money, and they lay it carelessly down on the sand while they assist the sowars to resaddle their horses. To see the indifference with which the magnificent Afghan nomads toss the silver pieces on the sand, and the eager, covetous expression that the sight of the same coins laying there inspires in the three Persians, is, of itself, an instructive lesson on the difference between the two peoples. The sowars become inspired, as if touched by the magic wand of alchemy, to the discussion of their favorite theme; but the Afghans pay no more heed to their remarks about money than if they were talking in an unknown tongue. They really act as though they regarded the subject of money as something altogether beyond their comprehension.

