

Frank and the Fells in Kazakhstan

The Kazakhstan Papers
of the Fell and Vans Agnew Families
1903—1905

Frank Vans Agnew
additional material and editing
Jamie Vans



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“A baby camel should be a part of every well-regulated family”



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Introduction

My great grandfather, Edward Nelson Fell, was a mining engineer; his most successful venture was as Manager, for the Spassky Copper Mine Company, of several properties in what was then the Siberian steppe and is now part of Kazakhstan. He took with him to work, my great uncle, Frank Vans Agnew who had previously been with him in British Columbia, Canada and had trained there as an assayer. The Company they represented was an international consortium of investors, put together by Arthur Fell, Edward Nelson Fell's eldest brother, later Sir Arthur, and MP for Great Yarmouth, and an early proponent of a Channel Tunnel.

All of Fell's immediate family came to visit: his wife Anne, daughter Olivia and son Nelson for the summer and early winter of 1903-4; these three plus the elder daughter, my grandmother Marian, all came again in 1905, and stayed until the following summer.

Several members of the family wrote accounts of the time they spent, each of them giving one (or several) variations of the timetable and itinerary they followed; these include Olivia's "we went to Spassky in 1903 and stayed for six years", E Nelson Fell's infuriatingly imprecise book *'Russian and Nomad'* which I have come to regard almost as a work of historical fiction, and other variants which have always made it difficult to establish exactly which members of the family were there, and when — and if not there, where? The waters were further thoroughly muddied by a couple of articles in Florida publications which were poorly researched and deeply misleading with egregious errors such as confusing Frank and his brother Alec Vans Agnew, my grandfather, and sending Alec, the lawyer, off to the Russian Steppes for several years to help run a copper mine while, in fact, he continued his law practice in Florida and never went to Russia.

Frank, having worked for Nelson Fell at the Athabasca gold mine¹, went with Fell to Russia, where he wrote the diaries and letters which make up this account; the diaries and many of the letters survive, addressed to Nelson's wife, Anne Palmer Fell and to the two daughters, Marian and Olivia. He and Olivia also left hundreds of photos, some of them captioned; Marian's watercolours also, in some cases, are dated and captioned.

From all this material, it is at last possible to get a clearer if not definitive version, of who was where, and what they were doing. By the way, I should add that as the eventual joint heir to Alec Vans Agnew and his wife Marian Fell's son Alec and of Frank Vans Agnew and his wife Olivia Fell, I have, I think, most of the extant records, if not all of them. If any other papers of note exist anywhere, I do not know of them.

¹ The Athabasca was near Nelson, British Columbia; Nelson Fell was born in and named after Nelson, New Zealand.

Edward Nelson Fell, Frank Vans Agnew (with Arkin, Mussen², Atkinson³ and the interpreter Hedman arrived at Omsk for the first time in March 1903; for the first time, anyway, that is anywhere mentioned in my records. Some accounts suggest that



*L to R: Olivia, Nelson, Mussen, Fell, von Rieben, Frank, Noorman the servant, Anne
at Bayandy Kuduk*

Fell left for Russia (from Florida) in January 1902 though I have found nothing to confirm this. He did, though, get a passport⁴ at that time to travel to Europe and to Africa. I think this must be the time that he went to Lourenço Marques in Mozambique. Mozambique has commercially important deposits of coal, iron ore, copper, gold, and rubies among other minerals; I presume that he was exploring prospects there on behalf of Arthur Fell. I presume that he then returned to England, and on from there to Russia.

Mussen was a mining engineer who had worked with Fell at the Athabasca; Atkinson, an accountant, was also there as a member of the team investigating the prospects⁵; Arkin, *may* have been supposed to

be representing the consortium's interests but it appears likely he acted as guide and negotiator on behalf of the owners.

² Horace W. Mussen (1874-1912) was a Canadian mining engineer who worked with Fell and Frank at the Athabasca gold mine in British Columbia and then in Kazakhstan; when they left he stayed to work in Russia and he and his wife had a baby there in 1911. Mussen sadly died in an accident a year later.

³ George B Atkinson (1879 -), an Englishman, accountant at the Athabasca Mine before this trip to Kazakhstan.

⁴ This sort of detail has mainly come from Ancestry.com.

Fell and Frank established themselves in houses and yurts at the Rieben Mines at Bayandy Kuduk from where they travelled to see various prospects, notably those owned by the Riasanoff family: the smelter at Spassky; the copper mine at Uspensky, and the coal mines at Karagandy, which were the three properties eventually bought by the new Spassky Copper Mine company.

Fell's wife, Anne Palmer Fell and the three children, Marian, Olivia and Nelson, left the USA in June 1902 and she and the two younger children spent the summer in England, in Cambridge; Olivia appears in photos there on crutches. Marian does not seem to have been there; she may have been at school in London or Paris.

Anne, with Olivia, Nelson and another boy, Morris or Maurice who came, perhaps, as a companion for Nelson, (or was he related to one of the other staff?) were in Moscow by June 1903, arriving at Bayandy Kuduk apparently between June 7th and 14th, Olivia having had measles while in Paris on the way (very likely visiting Marian at school). They went camping at Lake Djessoo Bai in the beautiful Bayan Aul Mountains.

At the end of November, 1903, it was arranged that Frank would travel with 'Papa' to Ekaterinburg when he left with Mother, Olivia and Nelson 'The Boy'. It was at Ekaterinburg that the purchase of the Uspensky Mine took place in June 1904; this trip must therefore have been only a part of the negotiations. In December, Frank wrote to Marian that he is glad that Mr. Fell will soon join her in Paris. Was Fell back in Europe to report to the consortium on the prospects and state of play in Russia, before returning to seal the deal?

Anne, Marian, Olivia and Nelson were back home in Florida by the summer of 1904. By March 1905, though, they were (all) in Holland. In May they went for a walking trip in the Harz Mountains in Germany, with 'Minor', Frank's brother Alec. In June they were on the River Irtysh and later that month were again camping in the Bayan Aul mountains.

From there they travelled to Fell and Frank's current base at Spassky; to Uspensky in September; to the Altai Mountains, and back to Spassky for the winter. In May they all, except Fell, made the great trek to Lake Balkhash and back and, in July, they were on a steamer on the Irtysh, Volga and Kama rivers; they were all back in Florida by January 1907.

As a result of this process of transcribing and editing the 160,000 words that Frank wrote, I can correct a number of misconceptions with which I grew up and which I have innocently spread around as being 'history',

I have always referred to the family's time at in Kazakhstan as being spent at Spassky; in fact, Frank, at least, heartily disliked Spassky and much preferred Karagandy and especially Uspensky where he seems to have spent much of his time, sneaking off on horseback to the yurts of his Kazakh friends whenever possible!

The surviving letters are addressed to the three children— and to Anne Palmer Fell; these being of peculiar interest.

He wrote to her extensively in the period 1899-1900 when he and Fell were at the Athabasca Mine in British Columbia (to which he occasionally refers in these later letters), the children being also at the Athabasca and Anne being away! The children seem to have been largely in Frank's care; he wrote cheerfully things like, "Marian broke her arm in a fall from her pony but is recovering well" and, nearly all those letters, like these from Kazakhstan, began without any words of greeting and ended... we shall never know how! All the endings were removed, sometimes neatly with scissors, sometimes roughly torn! Why? For some reason, someone must have wanted those endings not to be read; were they removed by Marian or Olivia, when they inherited the letters? By Anne herself? And for what other reason, can anyone suggest, than that Frank wrote at the bottom of each, "My dearest, darling, I cannot wait to press my lips against yours, your ever-loving Frank" or something of that nature?

Further, he wrote to Anne, in March 1904, "A telegram came saying the capital to buy this property had been put up and we are intensely relieved to say the least. The idea of dropping this fine property and leaving it to the mercy of this gang was unbearable. And since we owe it all to you it is welcome and, to my mind, the undertaking has gained an entirely new interest and dignity." There is no explanation of why "we owe it all to you" and no explanation that springs to my mind as to why the undertaking "gained an entirely new interest and dignity" unless it was that *anything* with which Anne was connected was dear and important to Frank.

I have long suspected them of having an affair, perhaps unconsummated but lasting for many years; I shall be interested in any reader's reaction; judge for yourself, is there any other possible explanation for the tone in which he writes to Anne, his boss's wife and eleven or twelve years his senior?

His relationship with Olivia is also interesting. She wrote in her memoir that Frank had told her that when he had met her, when she was five years old, he had "made up his mind at first sight that this skinny wild yellow haired little elf, i.e. me, would one day become his wife". I never believed that! However, the tone of his letters to her does seem more intimate and lively than when he writes to her sister. Is that because of the age gap? Or is it truly to do with how well they got on?

For a long time I have held a theory that it was really Marian that he wanted to marry; partly because he left a comfortable existence in Florida and enlisted in the British army shortly after she married Alec; partly because he did not marry Olivia until 1928 when (for instance) she was very likely too old to have children. These letters have made me question the theory again and I remain undecided — and unlikely ever to know that answer!

It is worth remembering that he wrote with the attitudes to society and to racism of the upper middle-classes of his generation.

Some other notes!

Having edited Frank's First World War experiences⁶ I could not read his views of and reflections on the Russo-Japanese War without an acute consciousness of what he would later experience.

Spellings and editing; Frank's spelling which was, of course, phonetic, evolved and was simplified as time went on; I have used his various versions a little randomly and have also stuck to the versions of place names that I was brought up with, although more 'correct' versions are now in established usage.

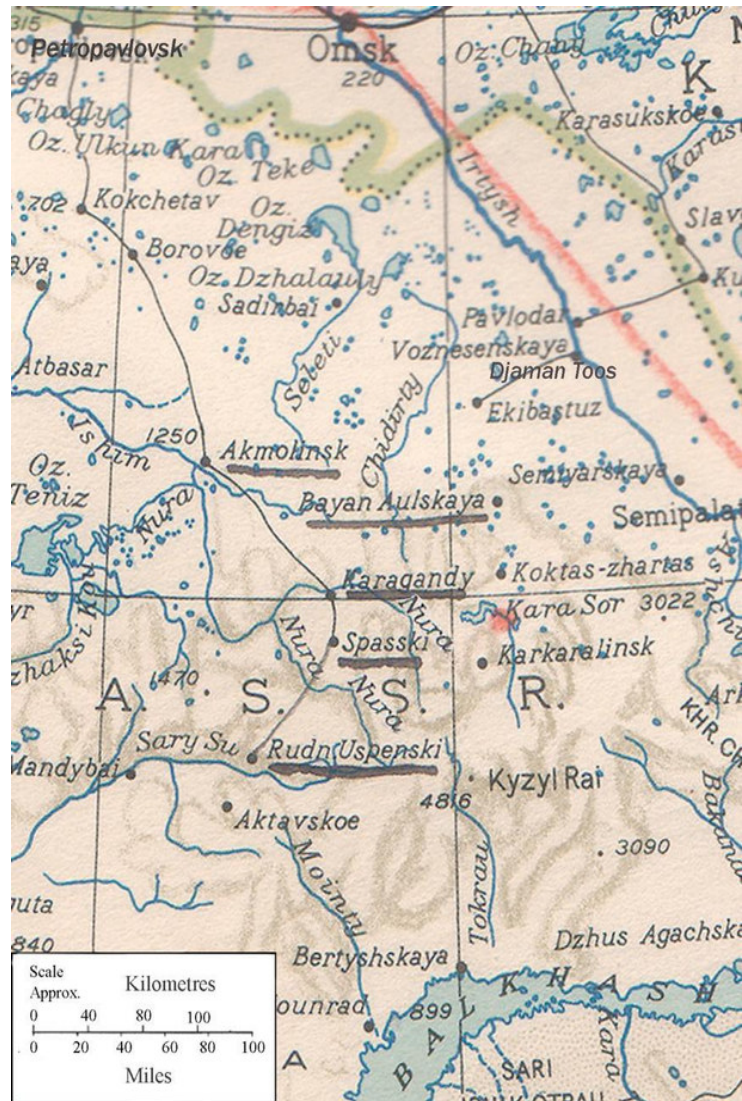
Diary entries look like this;

Letters are in italics.

A pood is Russian measurement of weight, about 36 lbs or 16 kilos.

A verst is about two-thirds of a mile, just over a kilometre.

⁶ Veteran Volunteer, Memoir of the Trenches, Tanks and Captivity 1914 – 1919 by Frank Vans Agnew (Pen and Sword, 2014).



Map of the Akmolinsk area annotated by Olivia

1. From Omsk to Bayan Aul: “Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police”

5 March, 1903

Our dignified blue and gold train, the Chinese Imperial, destined for Peking, is pursuing its leisurely way and we have passed the great stone pillar with Asia on one side and Europe on the other. This is the acme of comfort in travelling and is the fruit of Prince Khilkoff's⁷ appearance on the GWR in Canada and the Great Northern in USA. He was determined to improve on what he saw, and he succeeded admirably.

Being a military railroad, the prices are extraordinarily cheap by American and British standards, easily under half price. This train is composed of sleeping coaches and luggage vans, a dining car, a reading, writing and chess-playing car and an observation car in the rear. The pace averages about 25 miles an hour. The sleeping coaches are divided into separate state-rooms of 2 or 4 berths, with a lavatory between each pair shared by both, so that getting up and shaving is a task devoid of the usual scramble experienced in a Pullman. They are lighted by electricity and are not kept too warm.

At any time of day or night, if you press a button, you can get tea or coffee, eggs, bread or toast and simple fare of that kind, when the dining car is not in operation. In fact, we all say this is the most comfortable travelling we have ever experienced. Mussen is suffering from the complaint of enthusiastically liking everything new, no matter what it looks or tastes like, and is gaining weight rapidly all the way from Moscow. A foggy white mist has prevailed owing to the warm ground and attempt at a general thaw.

⁷ Prince Mikhail Ivanovitch Khilkov (1834 1909) was a Russian railroad executive.

From Omsk to Bayan Aul: "Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police"

Saturday 7 March, Omsk

This hotel is a large building very plainly furnished but quite comfortable and the restaurant is very fair. We had to pay extra for sheets, blankets, pillows and towels, for it seems that many travellers bring their own. The hotel walls are three feet thick with double windows everywhere and the temperature is kept very evenly and properly by steam heat. We are waiting for Mr Arkin who will arrive tomorrow. In the afternoon, Mussen, Hedman and I went to the Kazakh bazaar, about a mile walk. This is a large collection of rough sheds and houses in the streets across the Om, a branch of the Irtysh. It was very cold, 13°



*The Hotel Zaytzeff, Omsk,
which the family used for a number of years*

below zero Fahrenheit but the sheds are unheated. Every kind of thing is sold, being really a marketplace for the Kazakhs. We saw wool-work, crockery, old clothes, basketwork, piles of fish frozen like stones, bread and cakes, flour weighed on very large scales, hay, hardware, gamebirds, ptarmigan and hares, in great numbers. Also saw a dromedary, harnessed to a sleigh, covered with a quilt cut to fit his humps. Asked his price and it was 70 rubles.

The Kazakhs are dark-skinned, Mongolian-faced and have sleeves 10 inches too long, and fur-lined, leather top boots etc.

March 8, 1903, Sunday, Omsk

Dear Olivia,

I have reserved the great pleasure of writing to you today, with the beautiful muffled-sounding bells of the churches, telling you to come to Siberia at once and go to church. There is so much to tell you that I do not know where to begin, but I believe you would like to hear about the ballet at the Opera House in Saint Petersburg, and I know you would have appreciated its fine points better than I did. But I tried very hard to see them, thinking about how I could tell you.

To begin with, this was the last performance before the long seven weeks fast of Lent, during which time the Opera House is closed, so it was the last day in carnival week, a very gay and special performance, and we

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could only get the seats, a box, through the help of an influential friend of von Rieben⁸. Von Rieben escorted us and drove with Mr Fell while Mr Mussen and I followed.

The Opera House is a grand building in a great, open square, and there was a long line of soldiers before it who would not allow a carriage to stop for a moment but hurried it on most sternly. Inside were more soldiers with fixed bayonets, and many officers and officials, most gaily attired. The men, in Russia, are the peacocks, their tails always spread wide, while the women are peahens with soft voices. There was a great jingling of spurs, clanking of sabres, clicking of heels, bowing, and twirling of moustaches, mixed with soft chattering. We found a box, by the aid of a servant all covered with gold braid (who has the art of walking backwards and seeing steps behind him as he goes, without looking round), and the first sight of the immense and glorious theatre was grand. Its size and height, the absence of glare and flashy gilding, and the huge numbers of quiet people who all looked at home and pleased! From all sides came spots of bright colours from the men's uniforms. Opposite us were two huge boxes, fitted in blue and gold, with blue and gold armchairs and, in the lower one, sat the Czar's three little girls with their great uncle, an old man, white-haired with a long white beard, the brother of the Czar Alexander who was killed by a nihilist bombshell years ago.

There were ladies in charge of the three little mites, with broad ribbons across them and lots of teeny medals. Above this box was another one, just as nice, and in it were the Grand Duke Sergei, in a green military uniform with golden stars and orders, many medals, chains and tassels, and a scarlet, stiff collar, with his three boys about the ages of 8 to 13 (the two younger in sailor-suits and the oldest in soldier-style) and his daughter, a girl with long hair, about 13, I should judge. Another peacock prowled about in the gloomy background and peered in vain to try and see something.

The Royal Box proper was almost a small room, exactly in front of the centre of the stage, in blue and gold, with the Imperial arms over the middle and the double-headed, agonised-looking, nailed-to-the-barn eagle. No one used it during the actual performance but, between the acts, the court ladies, escorted by the Peacock Prowler, sunned themselves in the glare of the public eye, and the Prowler spread his tail.

⁸ Unidentified, except that he was the owner (or manager) of coalmines at Bayandy Kuduk.

From Omsk to Bayan Aul: "Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police"

The orchestra was enormous; the strings and reedy instruments predominated, and really they seemed to play like one person. The wretched conductor had his hands full, he had not only to conduct the intricate music but also to watch the Grand Duke, or "off went his head". As soon as the Grand Duke sat down, bang! went the music for the overture and soon the curtain rose. When the Grand Duke feebly clapped the overture, the conductor bowed himself in half and shut his eyes.

The ballet is really a pantomime in dumb acting with dancing almost all the time; a sort of piece is acted, and good and bad fairies appear all the time, in the short, stiff skirts that stand straight out. These appeared one after another in great numbers, each one being better than the last, evidently, and the best one of them all only appeared in the last act, and the whole house shouted and clapped in a perfect uproar as she appeared. She seemed to never leave the tips of her toes, and her feet moved more lightly, airily and gracefully than the tips of the fingers of most people. She seemed to float on wings alone, keeping absolute time to the dreamy rhythm of the music. She was called for, time and time again, and great bouquets were given to her, while she bowed her thanks, first to the Czar's little girls and then to the public. An encore was allowed if the Grand Duke clapped but, no matter how the audience wanted it, if the GD did not, the conductor had to go on without; if he made up his mind finally that he liked it, he would just tap his hands once or twice, the conductor would bow wildly and wave his arms madly at his frenzied orchestra, and the dancers would come floating in, supremely happy and bowing to the Grand Duke.

It was a gloriously long performance, from 2.00 to 5.30pm, but finally, to my sorrow, it stopped, and then, in the lower blue and gold box, all left but the eldest little girl, a child of about seven, and all the principal dancers and actors came forward in turn and bowed to her while she bowed in turn so nicely, with her hands in her lap, and sitting in the big blue and gold armchair all alone.

Outside, we had the luck to see the Czar come tearing up in a closed brougham, drawn by two very fast English-looking horses; the whole turnout might have just come from Rotten Row except that the coachman and footman wore scarlet and gold capes and great cocked hats. He drew up at the entrance, jumped out, and his three small girls hopped in. At once they were off at full speed, the road quite clear, and soldiers and police saluting stiffly all along the way. As he passed us, we dropped our hats and he bowed straight at us, so we saw him well.

Now you have had a full description as far as I can give it, but I cannot describe the wonderful performance at all!

From Omsk to Bayan Aul: "Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police"

I told Marian late last night all about our journey and the train and our arrival here, so I will not repeat if you please, but will tell you about the Kazakh bazaar we went to yesterday.

The bazaar is a collection of sheds and rough buildings with streets between them, all open and quite unheated; it was at least 10° below zero Fahrenheit and felt much colder. The Kazakhs are perfect Mongols in looks, broad-faced, narrow-eyed, dark-skinned, black-haired, big and heavy, with pleasant, cheerful expressions. Their great sheepskin coats have sleeves a foot beyond their hands for warmth, and they wear great leather, nailed, top-boots, with fur inside and huge, home-made, fur caps with long side-flaps and a back part halfway down their backs. We saw places where they sold all kinds of wool stuffs, basket work, pottery, hardware, secondhand clothes, bread and cakes, flour on enormous primitive scales, hay, berries, partridge, ptarmigan and hares, stacks of many kinds of fish, frozen like stones, and all sorts of other things, all very cheap. Good meat at 2d a pound, partridge 10 cents a pair etc. We also saw a camel, two-humped, harnessed, and drawing a rough sled. He was covered with a huge quilt, cut to fit his humps, and was very shaggy and big. We found out his price, 70 rubles, or \$35, the price of a pony in Florida. He was controlled by a rope passed through his nose, with a knot in it to prevent its pulling out, and was much subdued, lying down when told. But I am anxious to leave the railroad and drive away south 400 miles and see the real and true rough people.

Sunday 8 March

Spent all day indoors, as it was very cold and there is not much to see. About 10pm we found out it was 29°R below zero⁹ which is about 50°F below. Mr Arkin arrived at noon with the rest of the furs for us. We expect to leave by sleigh for Pavlodar on Tuesday or Wednesday, taking two covered sleighs for Fell, self, Mussen, Arkin and Hedman, and another one for the luggage and supplies. The sleighs are drawn by three horses galloping and they are changed about every 20 miles, 30 versts¹⁰. The distance to Pavlodar is about 400 versts and we will drive there in 40 hours, counting all stops, travelling day and night. This is the regular pace for well-paid, well-horsed sleighs.

⁹ The Réaumur scale, a temperature scale for which the freezing and boiling points of water are defined as 0 and 80 degrees respectively. About -50°C.

¹⁰ A verst is about two-thirds of a mile, just over a kilometre

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We shall stay a day or so in Pavlodar, which is a town of 20,000 people, then drive on to Bayan Aul, 200 versts more, to the Rieben Mines where Mussen and Hedman will stay, and Fell, Arkin and self will go on to the Riasanoff Mines, 180 miles further.

Monday 9 March

Spent the morning shopping and looking after our passports, trying to make arrangements so that they will last for a year, the limit, instead of six months as at present. Official business is slow here and we made little headway but tomorrow will see us safe no doubt. Still cold but towards dusk it snowed a little and became milder.

In the evening, we went to a concert in the Circus Theatre, a small, round, log building. A Russian singer and her accompanist were the sole performers, being on a tour to China, Japan, US etc. The upper gallery was full of cadets in uniform who made a great din in a good-humoured way. Apart from the officers in uniform, the audience was very provincial and dowdy, the



A steamer on the Irtysh

women especially. The new, large, brick theatre is being built by the town at a cost of \$100,000. Omsk contains some fine public buildings, churches and one mosque and has a population of about 50,000 people, many of whom are quite wealthy. There seems to be much business done and the River Irtysh is travelled greatly by enormous barges which we saw, also passenger steamers.

Tuesday 10 March

We spent the day in preparing to leave tomorrow for Pavlodar, packing and writing letters and so forth, while Hedman was busy engaging covered sleighs and in the final preparations. Our passports were not forthcoming after all and we are promised them tomorrow morning in time to start.

The Hotel Zaytzeff, on the whole, was quite good enough. The rooms are large and the temperature is well regulated. The washing arrangements in the rooms are primitive, being a stationary basin hollowed out in a marbled stone with a queer sort of tap above which you press upwards and at once a jet of water spurts out and splashes in all directions. So you wash most

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uncomfortably and in a most futile way. We asked for and got basins and a pail of water. There was a bathroom and large bath, but the water, hot or cold, was not clean. The meals were excellent and well-cooked and not expensive, and wines and beer where to be had. Russians keep very late hours and the restaurant dining room was crowded from 12pm to nearly dawn. Then a cup of coffee or tea with bread and butter is taken at 9.30am. Breakfast from 2pm is an elaborate five course meal; tea and cakes again at 5 to 6pm and later on, another meal of several courses at any time between 8 and 12pm.

March 11, 1903.

[To Anne Fell, greeting and signature missing, carefully torn off]

...eager to get away from the railroad and anxious to get to work. We do not start till tomorrow but the sleighs for baggage must be packed today to ensure an early start; about eight or nine o'clock. There will be two covered sleighs for five passengers, for you must not forget Arkin and Hedman, the Talking Machine; and one sleigh will carry our necessities and travel at the same speed, while the heavy stuff will come slowly in about three weeks. I am looking forward to the drive keenly because of the speed they mention casually as the regular rate for post-horses. Total expenses will be about 120 rubles (\$60). As the distance is 350 versts, there will be about twelve changes of horses and, apparently, the 50 kopecks tip ensures high speed, for each driver passes the good word on to the next, with surprising results.

The covered sleighs are supplied with hay and felt as a basis and as springs, and are long enough to allow one to lie down at night; there are no seats. It is mortally cold. It must be 10°F below at least, and has ranged up to over 20° below since our arrival, while we were reliably told that, the night before last, it went down to nearly 50°F below zero.

Our armory for warmth is so massive and complete that really no one seems to care, and we intended to photograph ourselves in all our regalia so as to prove any astounding statements we may afterwards feel called upon to make. Every one of us had forgotten to bring overalls for underground groveling, so we sallied out with the Talking Machine to get some. It seemed so easy! None could be found and we were told that all such things were made to order by a tailor; so we went to a number of shops to buy some strong coarse cloth, and it was very complicated owing to the scarcity of what we considered we wanted, and also to the spirit of intense economy our Talking Machine is imbued with.

From Omsk to Bayan Aul: "Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police"

He is a most amusing man, always talking streams of words in different languages, all with strong accents. He gives himself much trouble, shopping, by haggling furiously and always leaving the shop in genuine wrath and going to every other one to find their prices, each shop being the scene of a prolonged haggle. He generally gets lower prices than the first ask, I must admit, but he is shortening his life.

After much trouble in finding cloth of a blue canvas material much better than ordinary "overall" make, we started out to find a tailor recommended by the shop. This we finally did after much wandering about strange alleys in the evening light, where the dogs were very large and obstreperous. The abode was found and we entered by a low door into an outer room, very rough, with wood and a queer sort of boiler and an engine affair. Through this, by another low door, into the tailor's family quarters. Much talk ensued, the walls resounded with loud fuss and, finally, we were measured most carefully, agreeing to have them done in the Russian working style, little knowing!

The question of pockets consumed a long and arduous wrangle, the tailor evidently thinking his own views of the utmost importance. Meanwhile, I found out that the boiler was connected with the family stove and oven, which jutted out into the room in one corner like a cupboard and was screened by a curtain. It was arranged like a very large assay furnace, fed from the outer room. The front part was a sort of hot-plate to fry and boil and, back of this about 18 inches, was the oven, the door to it just like a muffle-door¹¹ and twice as large.

They had the usual sacred picture with a small lamp burning before it, hanging up in the corner of the room. We left for the shop, the tailor and the Talking Machine arguing furiously all the way about the amount of cloth needed and, as the tailor gained his point with about twice the quantity the Machine wrangled for, I saw that all our careful measuring was bosh.

After another heated discussion, in which several of the shop-people backed up the tailor, our Talking Machine finally gave in and bought a prodigious amount of blue cloth for four overalls. I thought it was all over, but no! The question of the pockets then sprang to the front, how many, where, how deep and how large the entrance, to be buttoned? and the cloth? All these questions were threshed, many people joining in. The tailor left

¹¹ The door of a furnace, for example.

From Omsk to Bayan Aul: "Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police"

triumphant, bearing away a bale of blue cloth, and we went home, the Talking Machine much weakened and depressed. Singly, he was a match, but numbers and fresh relays had defeated him.

The next evening, the tailor appeared at our rooms, coiled in smiles and pleasantries, with a bundle tied in a handkerchief, and produced four balloon-like affairs, tight at the waist, and drawn in at the ankles with string. Our first impressions produced uproarious laughter which immensely pleased the tailor and made him a few inches taller. There was a distinct style and cut about the balloons and Fell insisted that his were alright and refused to have them altered, but I had eight inches cut out of mine and still they are seventeen inches in width, being like the silk trousers the sultan wears. So if you come, you will see the original design on Fell as executed by the tailor, and our Talking Machine now knows why his estimates were considered childishly small. I had always considered that buying a pair of overalls was a very prosaic affair but I now see that it all depends upon where you are; and that there is poetry in everything.

I am sending you four ptarmigan wings. They were hanging on the frozen birds in the Kazakh bazaar, the whole birds being 20 kopecks a pair (10 cents) and, when I only desired the wings, the fat old Kazakh broke them off like sticks and gave them to me for 10 kopecks and seemed ready to break off many more. I hope you might use them for a hat, or put them on Marian and Olivia's hats, for they are very choice.

We went to a concert last night with Arkin. Some well-known Russian singer touring to Vladivostok, China, Japan and America was the attraction. Her singing did not attract me at all but the theatre and the audience were well worth seeing. The theatre is a little, low, round, log building (at least, little for a theatre) packed with people to the roof. The upper gallery (the gods as it were) was full of Russian cadets in uniform, who made the most noise and howled for encores the oftenest I have ever heard. All good-naturedly but with great vim. The audience, apart from the officers in uniform, is a very dowdy one indeed. No air about them in any way, and Russian women here are almost all very harsh and rough in looks. Well-behaved and not vulgar or coarse, but with some of these qualities! Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police, but the result is good...

Wednesday 11 March

We were given our passports just before leaving and had to sign them again, which allowed us the right to live in Siberia for 12 months, when they must be renewed for the same time, if needed, but for no longer.

From Omsk to Bayan Aul: "Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police"

We left Omsk for Pavlodar with two covered sleighs and one, uncovered, to travel with us all the time. In one sleigh were Mr Arkin and Fell and in the other, Mussen, Hedman and myself, the sleighs being supplied with hay for seats, covered with thick felt, which also lined the sides and roof and formed the covering in front. The front part could be absolutely closed in if needed. Sacking covered the felt. These sleighs were very strongly made, and had side-fenders to lessen collisions and prevent them from turning over. They allowed one to stretch out almost at full length and were warm and comfortable. Three horses abreast pulled each sleigh. The roads were good and we made fair time, using private horses, not the regular post-horses. We travelled 130 versts in five stages by 11.30pm. During the fifth stage, the baggage horses tired and delayed us nearly two hours.

Thursday 12 March

While waiting for the baggage between 9.30 and 11pm last night, we went into a Cossack's house and took several cups of tea, with cakes and bread and vodka with him, his family and friends. They are fine-looking people and their homes are clean,



Outside a post-house

well-kept, well-furnished and show evidence of a state far from poverty. Hedman asked them many questions.

This morning and all day the roads were very bad, a mild storm blowing and snow drifting badly so we made very poor time. All day we passed or met endless caravans, having to flounder in deep snow as we left the track to

pass them. Some were very long, 35 to 56 in number, all in long lines, with quite a few camels among them and Kazakhs, as a rule, in charge.

The country was a vast, flat, snow-covered plain, absolutely treeless except to the right where we followed the east bank of the River Irtysh, which was fringed with small trees and showed low hills and slopes. After supper the weather moderated

From Omsk to Bayan Aul: "Without a doubt this is the most honest nation. Fell thinks it is love of religion and I think it is fear of police"

and we travelled under a brilliant moon in a clear sky. Between 9.20pm and 2am we made only 30 versts owing to a very long caravan which was going our way and which we had to pass. As the snow off the track was deep, we stuck fast several times and had endless delays which were always most amusing. We ate at long intervals, always at private houses, where we got tea and bread and provided the rest of our food from our supply in a hamper.

Friday 13 March

The roads were still much blocked with drifts and we were hard pushed to make good time. Yesterday to 2am we had travelled 307 versts during 12 stages, having been 30 hours and 20 minutes actually moving, the balance of the time being accounted for in stopping to eat and change horses etc. The road was the regular highway with telegraph poles and wires always near, and extensive attempts to plant trees the greater part of the way.

It was very cold but we managed to keep quite warm enough, enjoying the various changes and varieties of horses at each stage, also the drivers, whose characters differed exceedingly. At 1.50pm we arrived at Pavlodar where we went to the regular government post-house, washed our very dirty selves and had a good dinner, the distance being 399 versts, done in 51 hours including all stops. We left Pavlodar at 5.50pm and made the 39 versts before 12pm when we stopped for supper, and left again soon with the best horses so far used.

Saturday 14 March

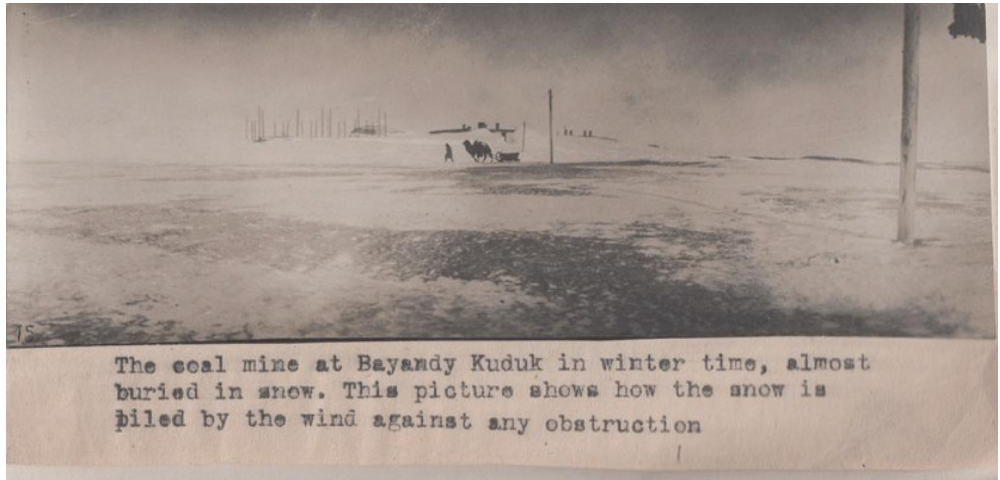
Last night we travelled with a splendid lot of horses, the night being stormy and blowing. The man who owns the horses at this post is a wealthy Russian farmer who owns 300 horses and is noted for his fine ones. He also supplied horses for the next stage, equally good and well-conditioned, and with them, on roads heavy with snow, we travelled steadily till 3.30pm when we stopped at a Post-House, the fourth from Pavlodar and only 405 versts from Rieben's. As we had to leave the highway and take to the steppes, and would have to travel at night, we waited to get a Kazakh guide who arrived at 5.30pm, when we left with four horses instead of three to each of our three sleighs. The weather was cold and clear, and blowing hard, more or less against us; there were no guiding marks except the mountains of Bayan Aul in the far south. By dint of asking at every Kazakh village on the way, (and we passed 10, showing flat-roof, low, earth houses, banked in snow, horses and camels all about) we arrived at Rieben's at 11.30pm after a furious scamper across country for the last 12 versts in the teeth of the cold wind.



2. Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

Sunday 15 March, Rieben's Mines, Bayandy Kuduk

Last night, on arrival at Rieben's Mines, called locally Bayandy Kuduk, which will be our headquarters for the summer, we were introduced to the business manager (Rodianoff), the chemist assayer (Bastrakoff) and the mining engineer (Ouzakoff), all Russians and pleasant men, and soon turned in after the inevitable and excellent glass of tea with dry "rusks" of bread. As our bedrolls had not arrived with the rest of the baggage and there were no blankets, we slept in our clothes on the cots prepared, but the rooms



were well warmed by enormous vertical round stoves reaching to the high ceilings. The dwelling house is large, with walls nearly 2 feet thick, and is rough but warm and substantial. Our part consists of a large dining-room, which acts also as sitting-

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

room, one bedroom adjoining for Mr Fell and Arkin, and another opening into this one, also large, for Hedman, Mussen and myself. The rooms each have the great big stoves, but the washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler of two quart capacity¹² in Fell's room.

Our meals are cooked in another mysterious half of the house and brought in by a strong young woman who meanders about our rooms at all times with absolute indifference to our abashed feelings. As the weather still blew and stormed, we stayed in nearly all day, making a round of the smelting works, assay office and store-rooms in the afternoon.

Monday 16 March

Today we all went in the morning to see the coal mine which underlies this place, the shaft mouths (two) being only a few hundred yards away. Considerable work has been done and the mine is furnished with electric lights when in active use; at present, owing to the stoppage of smelting, only sufficient coal is taken out to keep the boilers going, for pumping water from the mine, warming purposes and electric lights. The coal is a limonite¹³ with much ash, but answers for smelting and, for domestic use, is excellent. There appears to be an unlimited quantity. In a treeless, flat country, cold and dry, this is a great boon, especially when so much copper is at hand.

The weather is cold and windy, not much overcast and clear at intervals. Not bad weather but very keen. In the morning it was bright enough to take photographs and I took the three sleighs and the horses, including our camel passing by, drawing coal. We were quite busy also settling down and arranging personals.

March 16, 1903, Monday

Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul

[To Anne]

It was either a choice of writing at a table, surrounded thickly with people, or where one could be alone and not distressed by fragments of talk, so I thought you would not mind. As the silver lining is to the cloud, so is the smile to your frown, although sometimes it shines rather fitfully through mists of awful uncertainty, which are bringing my grey hairs in pleasant sorrow to the grave.

¹² A U.S. quart is roughly a litre.

¹³ Limonite nowadays describes one of the major iron minerals; not sure why Frank uses that term to describes the coal.

If I could only have written as I slid along on the snow behind the never-ending changes of horses, it would have been so much better, but it was impossible from the cold, the motion and the want of space. I thought of everything with your views in my mind, knowing just how you would have enjoyed it. Every day had its especial experiences which were all delightful, even if sometimes severe. I will try and tell you something of the trip, besides the figures of distances and so forth. We left Omsk at 11am, Wednesday, in gallant style, making our first stage of 30 versts in two hours and ten minutes, which we never equalled alas, again, but the roads were then most excellent and the drivers had looked upon the wine when it was deep red.

That evening, we came to a place where some birch trees near the road had caused the snow to drift in great rolling waves across the road like a great swell on some ocean and, as a caravan of horses and men were passing, our drivers wished to show off and believing, as my father did, in "rushing" any difficult place so as to get across it sooner, they dashed at it pell-mell. Fell and Arkin were ahead and we saw them bounce and fly over it. The baggage sleigh followed and the driver of its troika was an old chap, a one armed Cossack, who drove the three horses with his one hand and his teeth; he boldly dashed off too and, in the midst of the hurricane, we saw him flying in the air from his seat, carrying the reins in that one hand. The horses kept on dragging the silent figure who hung on quite unmoved. Our driver yelled with delight and sprang at the dangerous spot and we made the passage in a wild series of plunges and bangs, and just drew up even with the baggage horses in time to see the old man get up and climb back to his place with a scowl at our jeering driver. Some of his horses were on the wrong sides of their traces and one trace was broken.

That night during the next stage, the baggage sleigh was delayed, owing to a horse collapsing, and we waited till it came, Fell and Arkin going onto the next stage. There we met them at 2am and had supper. While waiting, we went into a Cossack's house and had numerous glasses of tea and some vodka and cakes with the family; Hedman, our Talking Machine, being a great success with them.

These peasants' houses are most clean and comfortable; this one had the usual great stove, a big table in the centre, and three great high-backed, long lounges, along three sides of the room, papered walls and ceiling, the paper being neat and fresh, and covering the big rafters. Their manners, both men and women, were excellent and self-possessed.

Thursday morning, we found a strong wind, raw air and snow falling which so drifted upon our roads that we could only struggle along slowly and, all the way, we saw long caravans going north and south, loaded with

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

bales, boxes and bundles, all wrapped in grass matting. Most of them were drawn by horses, but there were also quite a few stately camels pacing along noiselessly among them. For these we had to move to one side and flounder in deeper snow. Behind each sled is a bundle of hay and a round feed-box tied on and the horses eat



"A good view of a troika; the centre horse trots, the two outsiders canter, held by only one rein to the outside. This pulls their head to the outside and they are not under very good control."

from the sleigh ahead as they travel. Some caravans had thirty horses and sleds, some fifty and with these, there would be only three or four men in charge. Hardly any of the horses had bits in their mouths, halters being considered sufficient, and they look to be very intelligent animals. Although these caravans travel for hundreds of miles continuously, you see no sore backs and little

lameness, proving that these Kazakhs are as considerate and humane as their looks would indicate.

All Thursday we plodded along, the country to the left being a great, level, treeless, sheet of snow, all ruffled up by the wind into little waves like the sand under shallow waters, while to the right, one could always see in the distance the low fringe of trees which lined the banks of the Irtysh, with occasional low hills and steep slopes showing its course.

That evening we supped at 8pm and started out, warm and satisfied. It was all-but full moon, clear and starlight, the wind behind us, but piercing cold, a glorious night. We had sound horses and a Cossack to drive and nothing

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more could be desired but it came! Shortly after 9 o'clock we overtook a caravan of great length going very slowly our way and we had to pass it or plod behind. In passing many of its units we were forced to leave the packed and firm road, and plunge to one side or the other into the deep, soft snow and flounder about wildly till we could scramble to the road again. These mad manoeuvres were conducted time and time again, sometimes successfully, sometimes not, for we stuck fast three times, while strange shouts and answers floated about as the Kazakh drivers waddled on their bandy legs amidst their mountains of clothing and consoled and assisted our distracted and infuriated Cossack, whose tongue wagged in a flowing river to the steady amplification of all the missing details in the family histories of the Kazakh people and their horses and camels and aunts and uncles. At my special request, Hedman translated his earnest statements as they were acted.

Our right-outside horse was an evil one, not under much control owing to their peculiar system of harnessing and he was hungry for hay, so he would not pass a sleigh if he could help it but would keep abreast with the hay at the hind-end of the sleigh and eat hearty mouthfuls, regardless of the deep snow and the danger of being stuck fast. On one occasion during this performance, our Cossack hit him so sharply that he jumped clean into the sleigh alongside, breaking his rope traces.

A fearful commotion ensued, for he was being carried along kicking vigorously in the moving sleigh, being beaten by his driver and by two Kazakhs on the other side. Finally we stuck



Travelling the post-road

and the sleigh under him moved away and he remained with us rather abashed and surprised. This went on and on and I was hopelessly disappointed when, after two hours of supreme enjoyment, we passed the last of the caravan. I never closed an eye till 3am and my sole remaining desire during the struggle was that you could have been there to see it also.

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

Friday morning, the roads were still full of drifts; our time was not good and the whip was used too much to please me. We passed a fine band of brood-mares out on the lone prairie, fifty-three in number, all fat and healthy and pawing up the sixteen inches of snow to get at the well-preserved grass beneath. They are a fine stamp of pony or small horse. Short-legged and big-boned with good shoulders, well sloped and with very heavily muscled backs, the length of which was helped by being roached and well coupled to broad and flat hips. They would be a splendid foundation for a much better breed. Their heads are coarse, but spirited and game. We arrived in Pavlodar at 1.50pm and left again about 6pm after a good hot meal of very sheepy mutton and potatoes, tea and excellent bread of coarse rye-flour. We also had a wash which was a luxury!

Tuesday, March 17, Saint Patrick's Day!

Last night the electric light, which has followed me even here, went out at 11pm and, being left with only candles, under the economical eye of Mr Fell, I turned in to that little nest of a sleeping bag which is, for each of us, pleasure anticipated all day long.

Before going further with our trip I must say that Thursday, the second day, during an impromptu race wherein our driver was determined to pass the speeding baggage sleigh, he drew across the front of the baggage horses too quickly, knocking down the outside near horse with the fender of our sleigh and the unlucky beast was crippled so that he could not stand and had to be left behind in the snow.

We were in Pavlodar when I stopped last night.

About 6pm we left and soon crossed the frozen Irtysh, which is very broad here, 300 yards I should judge and soon seemed to cross it again so it must be very crooked in places. The night opened finely and the sunset towards which we drove was a cold, hard red. We passed many Kazakh villages that looked very Asiatic, built of great 'bricks' of turf, with camels tethered outside, and strange figures of booted and short-skirted, shapeless women standing amidst bales of clothing which, when they moved, proved to be children, and ponies and low, wide, straight-backed and short-legged cattle and wolf-faced big cur-dogs with clean, long fur that stood out straight and stiff.

The snow had drifted around these houses and settled on the flat roofs till often they were almost hidden. All this in the red sunset glow reflected by the white snow was wonderful. The stages from Pavlodar to Rieben's

were fewer and long in distance, and we stopped at 11pm at a post-house owned by a well-to-do Russian farmer of a very superior type, a splendid man of fine physique and bearded looks who was noted for the quality and number of his horses. He possessed three hundred, and took great pride in them and also owned the next post to come. During the stage to this place from Pavlodar, the roads became very bad and blocked with snow and one of the baggage horses lay down and died; and I am glad I was not there to witness the event.

The night had developed badly with much wind and flying snow and, as I wanted to see the true mettle of these famous horses, I was sorry. About 1am the old man told us to get ready and get into our sleighs because he could not harness the outside horses till we were in, for they would not stand a moment. This was encouraging! Fell's and Arkin's horses, three white ones, were put in first, a man at each head, and two more to fasten the outside traces. As soon as the horses knew they were ready, they dashed off at full speed and were out of sight in the snow mist. Our horses were bay-browns and the yoke-horse stood well, the old man at his head; and then two young horses appeared, a three and a four year-old from their looks, the younger being a beauty indeed. These two were much excited and refused to line up with the yoke-horse but, finally, they were quietly and firmly urged into place and, as the traces were being slipped over the single trees, the three-year-old stood straight up in the air and pawed at the stars.

As she came down and felt the collar, she was off, the others joining in. And we fairly flew! But, to show how sensible, well-trained and really docile these spirited horses are, I will tell you what happened. Before we had gone for a hundred yards, something went wrong with the harness and the driver, a fine young Kazakh, said 'Prrrt, prrrrt' once or twice (the sign to stop) and they stopped, and he got down, leaving the reins, and remedied the mishap, while they stood perfectly sensibly.

As soon as he began to gather up his reins again, they were off in a mad gallop. We arrived at the next post-house at daylight and, just in front, was a great salt lake which never freezes. Here again we had the same stamp of good horse and dashed away in the same manner. This was Saturday, and when we arrived in the afternoon at the last stage before Rieben's, we were quite late and the distance was 45 versts. As we had to leave the regular post-road to Bayan Aul and take to the small road across the steppes, we did not start till a Kazakh guide arrived on his horse.

He was a fat man dressed in a lovely, loose pink coat, fur lined like a dressing gown, and so stuffed-out with clothes that he could barely sit up, and his figure on a small horse was irresistible. This night was the finest of

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

all, absolutely clear, with a full moon, Sirius and Orion straight ahead of us and almost as light as day with the snow, the mountains of Bayan Aul showing up plainly. Here the country was distinctly more rolling and contoured, to our great delight. Never was there such a drive, for we had four horses to each sleigh and they galloped hard much of the way, throwing snow into our faces so that my eyes feel it yet. No road was visible to us, just the endless sweep of this rolling sea of snow with the same Kazakh villages dotted at intervals, and we seemed to drive cross-country endlessly. Finally we arrived at 11pm.

The snow here is but a few inches deep, except where drifted. The country is in waves of rounded lines and the Bayan Aul mountains are in plain view, offering a glorious broken skyline on the horizon. It is far nicer than I expected and my cup is full to the brim.

Our house is big and thick-walled, and full of enormous stoves, bigger than, and shaped like, the boiler in the Athabasca Mill¹⁴, so that the rooms are always warm. The food is sufficient and good and the tea unlimited and excellent. The smelter is a dreary place, full of holes and snow, but my assay-office-to-be is far better than we dreamed of, and can be made first rate. It is right at the furnace-mouth of the smelter!

There is a camel hauling coal to our stoves and doing the odd jobs! The local head men seem to be nice people and very polite. I will enlarge upon local matters later but I can say that our first impressions were all good ones.

Fell is well and in excellent form, being ridiculously amusing! Our working director is such a loathsome little, crawling reptile that my gorge can scarcely stand him! Goodbye, and come please as soon as you can!

Toshy.

Tuesday 17 March

Stayed in nearly all day reading and writing letters, for the mail will go to Bayan Aul tomorrow. Weather very keen and windy, snow drifting and flying in small particles. We get up about 7.30am and have glasses of tea with sugar, no milk or lemon, and dried rusks and a species of roll. Then we read, write or study Russian etc. At 1pm we have "breakfast", consisting of dried herring in small pieces and a glass of vodka, then soup, often with cabbage, a kind of mutton broth, mutton cutlets, bread,

¹⁴ The Athabasca was the gold mine in Canada where Fell and Frank worked before coming to Kazakhstan.

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butter, then some kind of pudding, and cheese, the cooking being good and clean. Our waitress and housemaid is the daughter of a Cossack and the cook is an old Cossack woman; both admirable people. Then there are several Kazakh men who do the heavy work, lighting stoves, fetching water etc. They all seem honest and industrious. At 5pm we have another samovar of tea and more rusks and, often, home-preserved wild plums which are splendid and at about 8pm there is another hot meal, much like breakfast, fish usually, local ones from the Irtysh and very good, and meat. Bed about 11pm when electric lights go out.

March 17, 1903

Von Rieben's Mines, Bayandy Kuduk, near Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

At last we have arrived at the small spot in the centre of Asia which seems so mythical and unreal on a map. Imagine, we are only 400 miles from the Chinese border and not far from the part that Sven Hedin¹⁵ wrote about, while only a few hundred miles south of us lies the most unknown part of the globe at present. Writing here in this warm and civilised room, with the electric light blazing at night, it seems impossible; but all I need to do is to look outside at almost any time and see a great stately camel drawing a sled about the works here. He is a sort of odd-job animal belonging to the mines, hauling coal for our stoves and also the snow which piles up in huge drifts around the doors and windows of our house. His driver or, to speak more correctly, the man who pulls him along by his halter, is a Kazakh, and seems to be as patient as the camel is peevish. For without a doubt this camel is the most obstinate and complaining animal I have ever seen. He howls and moans if he is asked to go forward, and howls and groans if asked to go back, and whines if he's left alone; nothing pleases him and he will bite you at any moment and probably grumble because you taste bad.

This place is better than I ever thought. I was afraid it was all dead level, but it is fine rolling country, with smooth, rounded, curving and sloping hills, quite treeless, no large stones in sight as yet, covered with grass and it seems to be packed underground with all kinds of minerals. Fancy, in a treeless country, the boon that

¹⁵ Sven Anders Hedin (1865–1952) was a Swedish geographer, topographer, explorer, photographer, travel writer and illustrator.

oceans of coal just under the ground can be! Coal is on all sides and, yesterday, we went into the coal mine which is right in our midst, and it is there, apparently, in enormous quantities.

For our stoves, it is hauled straight from the mine by the peevish camel, and there is no stinting of fires. The big, high rooms all have stoves in them, just like the boiler in the Athabasca, and we are warm all night and rise like larks in the snowy morning, carolling our prayers to the silent stove. The weather is cold, but clear and fine, although there is always wind and snow drifting. On the level, there is only about 6 inches of snow which drifts to 15 feet in places. The men whom we found in charge here are three in number, Mr Rodianoff, the paymaster and manager for all supplies, Mr Ouzakoff, the underground mine foreman; and Mr Bastrakoff, the chemist and smelter man. They are all very pleasant but speak no English.

Through Hedman, our Talking Machine, I found out from them that ducks swarm here in the summer time, with some geese and swans; also that a great bird called a steppe-hen weighing 35 pounds lives all over the country and is good eating. There are numbers of prairie-dogs, like gophers, I expect. Wolves abound, but they are very cunning as usual. No deer exist anywhere around here; there are several small lakes, joined by a stream, and a horse could gallop with nothing to stop him — and if you and Willie come, we shall have such rides as we never dreamed of!

The weather and snow are too bad to allow of much being done at present but, in a few days, Mr Fell and I, and Mr Arkin, will drive to the Riasanoff mines, which are nearly 200 miles from here in a south-westerly direction, and there we shall stay for two months probably. Then, when we return, we shall find summer here, practically, and everything ready for active work. I shall be assaying madly all summer on hundreds of samples from all the numerous claims near here as, within 35 miles on this bare and barren prairie, they have located claims which contain copper, silver-lead, coal, iron, lime, asbestos, manganese, magnesium, fireclay, plumbago¹⁶ and a little gold. The copper, coal and iron are in enormous quantities.

Mr Arkin says that the syndicate in London will probably send out the 20 horse-power motor-car, to be used in tearing madly over the steppes from claim to claim, saving valuable time during the summer months. A trained

¹⁶ Old term for graphite or galena, a form of lead-bearing ore.

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

man would accompany it to steer and nurse it and give it oil and swab it down. The charm of this place will be that, if it runs away, it will not matter because it cannot find anything to hit.

There seem to be several servants here and the meals are very good indeed. There is a great, strong woman who makes the rooms untidy and sweeps in a futile way with a bunch of twigs tied with a rope; she also waits on the table and her thumbs are very prominent in a soup plate. I don't know who cooks but I fancy it is a Kazakh lady, who is round-faced and much bundled up in clothes, wearing top boots and skirts halfway below her knees while, below, appear ordinary men's trousers to her ankles. She is not beautiful and I took her photograph this morning while really taking another, waiting for her fairy-like form to come into the range of my lens.

There are two Kazakh men who wrestle with the stoves and carry things about, and whitewash everlastingly. They have rather Chinese faces with shaven heads and small (smoking) caps nicely embroidered with bright coloured flowers on top. These they never take off as it is somehow part of their Mohammedan religion. They put their big fur sunbonnets over them, and take them off very carefully so as not to disturb the under ones, and I suppose they sleep with them on. But they are good-natured, willing to work and honest. Mr Ouzakoff had occasion to beat one of his men not long ago, and the man left in anger, returning to his village, and trouble was feared; but he returned in three days and apologised for being beaten and said he was sure it was his fault and that he was positive he richly deserved it.

I fear that this has been rather a rambling letter but there seem to be so many things that ought to be told, all at once!

Our drive to the Riasanoff Mines will be through unsettled country and far from the beaten path of even this country, and we must make long stages of 60 miles and over with the same horses.

Mr Fell is extremely well and has been so every day since he left, but he will have much of the highest importance to think about all summer. So far he is delighted with everything. Your humble servant would be quite happy in every way if you and Olivia and The Boy and Mrs Fell would only come here this summer, with Minor¹⁷ also.

¹⁷ His brother P. A. Vans Agnew, my grandfather, a lawyer in Florida.

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

Here is good luck to your hockey team and may you always win!

Always yours,

Toshy.

Wednesday 18 March

Today we drove to the Dsunos Khosie claim, near the mountains of Bayan Aul, 35 versts in a southeast direction.

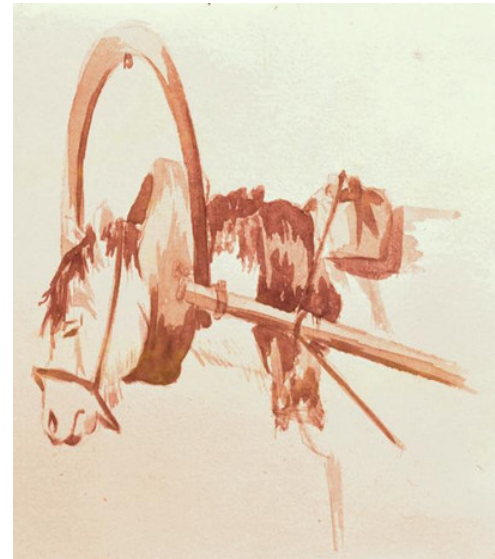
19 March, [about, letter to unknown person, probably Anne; the first page largely missing]

...The first operation is to successfully squeeze the collar (which does not open) over the heads of the ponies, which are very square-jowled and woolly. The pony, at first, kindly assists and pushes hard downwards but the time comes when his patience lags and he runs forward, the man (or woman) being forced back and back till he (or she) falls over into a snowdrift and the pony stands quiet, gaping about angrily through this window of a collar. The performance calls finally for more help and muscle and one pony took, as Fell would say, the united efforts of the "whole troupe" before his collar was jammed into place. Then a fearful uproar ensues, and words are bandied about in shrills and lisps and chokes and, after a long harangue and delay, the left-side horse is pulled out and the centre horse changes places, and probably there is another change of some sort before we actually start.

But we did start, about 11am and drove about 15 versts, when we stopped at a Kazakh village of importance. Here the chief man came and gravely shook hands, with interested and respectful looks, while the horses were being changed and herd-boys galloped off at full speed, riding magnificently with the iron stirrup pushed well home and the short stirrup leather, to bring in the new horses, which soon appeared over a low hill. The women then came, bringing koumiss in round, Chinese-looking, dark, wooden bowls, which they poured into glasses for us, and gave us cakes. On their heads they wore white linen drapery, which exactly surrounded the face, hiding the hair and ears and meeting under the chin, falling downwards in graceful folds. This was neat enough, but the disgraceful coats they wear and the shapeless skirts and the preposterous boots are beyond redemption. The younger women have the most wonderful complexions, the white is perfectly waxen, and the pink is most intense and the picture of health; the older women seem all to get so brown, and I suppose they are weather-beaten, but all have dignified and quite aristocratic faces that would not look out of place in any civilised drawing-room. The young boys and girls also have these very thin skins and fine colours. Some of the young bloods were gorgeous in bright green coats with crimson silk facings, crimson-furred caps and leather belts embossed with silver knobs, and having long, pendant pouches and sheaths for knives, silver ornamented. None of these men wear spurs or carry whips riding.

We arrived at the mine about 3pm and found that this was the place to which the timber for Rieben's was first hauled from the Mts of Bayan Aul which loom up quite close, very jagged and rough, looking glorious. As it was cold, we went into the home of the Kazakh watchman to eat lunch and have tea, which we had brought along.

No-one would ever have noticed the house because its roof is level with the ground and the chimney stack just peeped out of the snow. We entered, past the bowing man, into a sort of tunnel for about 30 feet, earth sides, and roof of saplings covered with hay, emerging into an opening about 25ft x 12ft, roughly divided into two rooms by a furnace made of turf bricks. The first room was the kitchen and eating place and had a raised



A spectacularly unenthusiastic horse in a collar, painted by Marian

portion, about 10 inches in height, strewn with clean hay, with cooking pots here and there. The other room was the sleeping and lounging place, and was a treat to see. The floor was heavily carpeted with very thick, coarse, grey felt, the walls covered to about 7 feet high with carpets and felt embroidered in beautiful scarlet patterns while, at the junction of the walls and floors, were piles of felt or rugs in big rolls, for seats. Not a table, chair or trunk in sight, praise be to them. Even the ropes on which they hung their clothes were made of plaited leather or horse hair. The woman had a coarse and wide, Mongol-type face but was clean and wore the white headgear and the same awful other things. She had a 2 year-old boy in her arms, a big, brown, fat, solemn, quiet rascal! They ushered us into their best room and retired to the outer one, where their friends collected and whispered and peered at us politely. This sort of habitation would be impossible in any but a very dry climate for the primitive skylight would not keep out rain and the walls would be very damp.

The mine was most thrilling! A great, wide vein, dipping very steeply, fairly green with malachite amongst a heavy iron ore which contains both magnetite and haematite, and much lime. There was only an open cut about



A prospect to be assessed

20 feet deep and a half-finished shaft not in use, to show for work done. If all the mines are like this, things should go well.

We took samples etc., then drove to another mine about 2 miles away, owned by another company and where the manager, Mr

Kondriavzeff, a Russian, is an ardent geologist, knowing more about the geology and minerals of this part than anybody else. We found him amidst a litter of specimens, assay stuff, and dusts of ages, an enthusiast who discusses geology with chuckles and laughter and much gesticulation and expression. They arranged yesterday that he should come here for a few days to have a good talk and he is here now, and will draw a geological map of this district for Fell, who talks German with him fluently. He is willing to tell all he knows and is eager for unprofitable discussions, becoming much excited and overcome with mirth in the most serious parts. He has roamed these steppes for years with his pick, blow-pipe outfit, horse and gun and he is two years unpaid, which

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

nearly convulses him with merriment! This kind of man cares not a rap for money, although he is married, for he has the steppes and its rocks and minerals and many theories to compute and establish.

We left for home about sundown; the horses were stiff and tired and it was cold and clear. Soon we arrived at a walk only, and resigned ourselves. True resignation glides truthfully into sleep and that is where my spirit led me, and, when we reached home at 2am, I was informed of many vexatious delays which had not troubled me in the least. Anyway, we drank several vodkas and much hot tea and retired at 4am. Some horses were brought here yesterday, for they decided not to use Kazakh grass-fed ponies any more and I went out to look them over. I found that the horse-seller the world over is the same, differing only in perfection, for two of the horses had their mouths doctored shamelessly to disguise their age. They were literally in their teens but were made to foist themselves off as six-year-olds. The crowd of Kazakhs saw that I recognised the crude work and chuckled and giggled at the impassive and innocent owners.

Fell is well and much interested in his work but he is in good spirits and evidently likes the life immensely. I am delighted about cousin Emma¹⁸ and hope that she interests you. I consider her quite a character and really worth cultivating apart from her extrinsic worth. Please use your honeyed accents on behalf of Minor and me and we will all live in Virginia someday and drive the finest horses in Christendom, together!

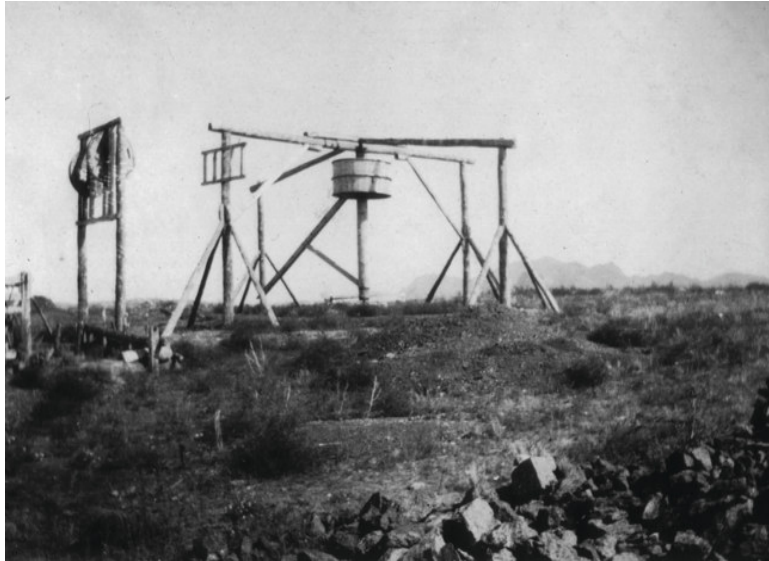
No continuation.

¹⁸ I cannot identify her.

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

Thursday 19 March

Cold and blowing still. Snow never thaws and is very late this year we are told. Unpacked three boxes of assay materials



The Dsunos Khosie claim

Pellew-Harvey¹⁹ brought out last year for copper work, and will take some of them to Riasanoff's on Monday. A long procession of animals drawing logs for mine-timbering arrived this afternoon, about 20 horses, four camels (one had a colt suckling) and several bulls in single harness, all pulling loads, with a number of Kazakhs. A queer assemblage which I photographed.

Friday 20 March

Overhauled our assay outfit to take to Riasanoff's Mine today and put together the pulp-balance²⁰, finding it in good order. Began blow-piping some iron ore from Dsunos Khosie mine of which we took samples on Wednesday. I thought it was haematite but found it was magnetite, pure and simple. Also got some

flasks, beakers, evaporating dishes, H_2SO_4 and glass-stoppered bottles from Bastrakoff, the assayer here.

¹⁹ William Pellew-Harvey, Fell's business partner. President of the Institution of Mining and Metallurgy 1931-32. Educated in Cornwall, he spent nine years in Swansea and Cornwall before going to Canada in 1889; practised as a metallurgist and mining engineer at Golden, B.C. In 1893 he moved his office to Vancouver and acted as consultant to various English and Canadian mining companies. Returned to England in 1901, and set up in practice in London, under the style of Messrs. Pellew-Harvey and Fell, the name of the firm being changed in 1909 to Messrs. Pellew-Harvey and Co. when Fell left the partnership.

²⁰ Very accurate scales of the kind used in laboratory work at the time.

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

Weather still as cold and unpromising. Yesterday some Kazakhs brought horses to sell of which Arkin bought two for 40 rubles each. They had crudely doctored the teeth of two of them, but the work was easy to detect, and they saw I recognised the attempt. Mr Kondriavzeff arrived this evening to spend a few days here in discussing the mines in this region with Fell and Arkin

Saturday 21 March

Weather bright and sunny but the wind bites as hard as ever. Blow-piping in the morning I found out that a green rock from the dump of the Dsunos Khosie was prehnite, a calcium-aluminium-silicate containing iron. Also found large haematite crystals in ore from same mine that the magnetite was found at. This ore also contains much lime. Stayed in and packed the whole assay outfit for Riasanoff's in three boxes.

Monday 23 March

All morning I packed the assay material, the acids and other liquids in one box, the glassware (beakers, flasks, burettes etc.) in another, and the balances, weights and other necessities in the third, together with some surveying and other instruments for Fell and Mussen. Everybody also packed personals for the stay and at 3.30pm, the Kazakh horses and drivers came to get the sleighs loaded etc. and a fearful commotion ensued until 4.30pm when we started.

The same order was kept, Fell and Arkin in one covered sleigh, self, Mussen and Hedman in the other, the baggage in the third. Our three horses had been bought for the company the day before and were excellent, being big, fast and strong, fed on corn, and we took the lead at once, arriving at Bayan Aul, 50 versts, at 9.30pm. The weather was calm, cold and clear and nearly perfection, but nearing Bayan Aul, the flat level becomes very rocky and broken and, as the town is on the south side of the mountain range, we had to cross it by a pass. This was very steep in places with snow belly-deep for the horses, and it winds about among steep hillsides which are fairly well covered by a kind of cedar; small timber but, with the birches, very attractive. We had no mishaps but Fell and Arkin had poor horses and a miserable driver who lost his way and got into much trouble in the pass, so they arrived at 11.30pm, disgusted. We hope to get some mail tomorrow, letters, papers or telegrams.

Von Rieben's Mines, "The washing arrangements are confined to one dribbler"

Tuesday 24 March

In the morning the mail was brought, and I got a letter from Mrs Evers²¹, forwarded from Swan Walk, Chelsea, asking me to come to stay at Netley Abbey. This I answered at once, giving the best of reasons to show its impossibility. Found out that the company rents the two rooms we occupied here at Bayan Aul permanently and they were clean and warm. In the morning, Arkin arranged horses for the trip, hiring sufficient for a complete change to all sleighs, or 20 in all, with two Russian drivers and several Kazakhs, for 300 rubles, to travel the 275 versts to Riasanoff's Mines through mostly bad and untravelled roads. We left Bayan Aul at 11am, the weather being bright and pleasant though they told us to prepare for bad weather. Soon we left the shelter of the mountains and entered the flat steppe where the wind, blowing strongly in our faces, drifted the snow so much that we had to close up the sleigh almost entirely. The drivers could barely see to mind their horses so that once, our sleigh with the three horses ran down a Kazakh on horseback just ahead, knocking him off and dragging his horse with our runners several yards. The horse had to be pulled from under our horses and sleigh by the mane and tail and was unhurt, but the owner was much excited and irritable. We neared high hills rising abruptly out of the level plain. I saw a large aul and herds of horses, cattle and sheep, all most prosperous looking; made 75 versts with two changes. We spent the night in a real Kazakh underground house (our first), full of animals and people, in a room to ourselves, felt-floored and full of insects. The men sang songs and played a crude bongo, very poorly. Dirty but interesting.

²¹ Frank's sister Nell married Cecil Calvert Evers in 1906.



Kazakh family life



3. To Spassky via Karagandy: “A birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and it was like entering into an insane asylum”

Wednesday, 25 March.

Left at 6 am with fine bright weather and keen frost, entering hilly country at once, following the winding hollows, slopes and small valleys, all smooth and snow-covered grass, crossing several small ranges which are rocky and broken. Going down from a summit is somewhat exciting, for the sleighs have no brakes and the centre horse must hold all the weight on his neck to hold back the load, the outside horse being powerless; by being able to keep the horses going a little faster than the sleigh and aiming for small rocks at times, catastrophes are averted. This country was well supplied with auls and many herds pawing up the snow for food. We made 35 versts up to noon and stopped to lunch and feed horses at a Kazakh house of some importance in a most beautiful valley. Passing as usual through the large underground space where the horses and cattle are kept, we entered a double room: one, the kitchen and eating room, containing several lambs tied up, the table and stoves etc, was very rough; the other was two thirds covered with felts and bales of felt along the walls, and the spare one third along the stone wall was occupied by about 15 kids tied up, some being most beautiful, long and curly-haired angoras. The shepherd sat by with his long hooked stick, a horse-hair rope and, with his flowing coat and beard, was the typical biblical shepherd. The house was full of people, young and old, all polite and very curious. We made 35 more versts in the same kind of country, stopping at sundown at another aul with a rich Kazakh.

Thursday 26 March

Last night we had a room to ourselves that showed signs of a more prosperous owner, felt-covered as usual and with fine rugs as well. The owner, a fine, large, black-bearded man of about 55, sat with us in his best clothes and a pink cap, bordered with white lamb's wool. This man gave orders continually, being obeyed by his several big sons, or servants, or his two wives. He did nothing himself but sit cross-legged and contented. He had a teacher for his children, who also ate with us, a great burly Kazakh who had been to school at Semipalatinsk and could read and write Arabic and do simple arithmetic. This teacher

To Spassky via Karagandy: "A birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and it was like entering into an insane asylum"

showed us his writing and seemed anxious to learn from us many things; but civilisation had also taught him to want to be photographed and how to spit.

This underground house was full of sheep, goats, cattle and horses as usual, but they were kept apart from the human beings. We got up at 3am and found a great storm or boorahn was blowing (unheard underground) making it impossible to stir. It was a real blizzard except that it was not down to zero, quite; so we stayed till noon, watching Kazakh family life, and then we left, much against our drivers' wishes, in a raging wind and blur of snow, arriving at the next aul 15 versts away in 4¼ hours of hard and cold work. Here we entered a house with a Kazakh family of quite a Hindu type of face, especially the two young girls, and the son of about 20 was a most clever-looking and thoughtful type. This was the most pleasant house so far but, as there were two calves, below the raised and felt-carpeted floor and near the stove eating hay, Arkin objected and we left for another house, where we had a dirty, dark room to ourselves and we played bridge in disgust. Storm blew all night long.

Friday 27 March

This was our most eventful and unlucky day! As the boorahn had stopped and the day was bright and fine, we left before 6am after the samovar of tea had appeared (which all Kazakh houses seem to possess) and we had eaten a bite of bread.

The first few hours we managed well, crossing several small mountain and hill ranges. At 10am we arrived at an aul where we changed our horses for our spare ones and I got a mount on a good grey horse and native saddle which is not uncomfortable (and something on the principle of a McLellan tree²²) with short stirrup-leathers and iron stirrups too far back for comfort. Here the horses were arranged with the two outside ones ahead of the yoke horse, abreast, for the road was narrowly snow-packed in the centre and deep with loose snow on either side.

An hour or so later, after much floundering and trouble in a pass over a summit, all our horses were down like sleeping dogs in a line and, when they were dragged (and beaten) out, they were arranged in Indian file for the future, the lead horse being ridden. Soon our guide lost his way in the hills until a herder of horses saw us and put us right after a great war of words, and we lost three hours by having to turn back. The roads became worse and worse and the horses were down every few hundred yards, being flogged cruelly I thought, for they are willing always to do their best. We stopped at 2pm for a hasty lunch and went on very slowly along the bed of a stream where the snow was harder, but struggling and falling often. We all walked

²² The McClellan saddle was a riding saddle designed by George B. McClellan, adopted by the US army in 1859.

To Spassky via Karagandy: "A birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and it was like entering into an insane asylum"

most of the time to ease the load and at dusk we were in the open steppe and had to camp, it being impossible to find the way. All slept without food or water.

Saturday 28 March

We passed an uneventful night, the weather quite pleasant, and at 5 am were on the move for an aul supposed to be nearby in the white mist and haze. We still followed the bed of the stream which passed near the aul and went on to a big lake on which was a Russian village, recently colonised by the government, called Samioff. The travelling was just as bad for the horses and we all walked²³, not having eaten since 2pm on the day before or touched water, and at 8am we reached the aul and were ushered into the darkest, vilest abode possible, full of animals, human and otherwise, and dirty straw and felt. Hungry as we were, it was hard to eat our food there. We left as soon as possible at 10am, all riding on the spare horses ahead of the baggage and sleighs, for the Russian village which we reached at 12.15, having ridden 13 versts. This village was started last June, and the neat clay-walled houses looked very new and fresh and extended in a curving street along the shore of the lake which was surrounded by hills and peaks. The Russians were very pleased to see us and swarmed around us, for they are much cut off, their mail connection being 250 versts away.

Arkin tried to engage horses from them, but they asked too much, so he engaged five light sleighs, all open, for us and the baggage. At 4pm the baggage arrived and was at once transferred to the sleighs. We slept in a house owned by a fine old Russian cavalryman who served in the Turkish war and bore his medals. He seemed to be a civic dignitary in the village.



A Russian village colony house

Sunday 29 March

Having drunk much good milk, we left the Russian village at 5.15am in the small open sleighs, Arkin and Fell in one, Mussen and self in the second, Hedman alone with several bags in the third, and two more behind carrying our stuff; three horses to each sleigh in Indian file, with a Kazakh riding the lead horse. The day was quite warm and thawing and the road excellent, so we travelled as well as worn-out horses could be expected to, our old Russian veteran driving us and endeavouring to converse with us all the time, while we aired our

²³ As Mr Fell said "it seems to be a big caravan organised to enable for men to go out walking in the snow" (from a letter to Olivia).

To Spassky via Karagandy: "A birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and it was like entering into an insane asylum"

Russian, with some success on the whole. We saw numbers of large, white ptarmigan and two white hares. The distance to the Riasanoffs' Karagandy Coal Mine is 50 versts and we reached the mine at 3pm in a heavy fall of melting snow which covered us thickly. The road had been very fair where packed, but a step or two off the centre and down went a horse up to his belly. One of our riders had a bad fall, the horse rolling on him in the deep snow, but he was unhurt and quite unmoved except by the jeers of his compatriots.

We were taken at once to the manager's house, a fine, large building, well warmed, walls 3 feet thick, where we were made very comfortable. He (Mr Nyemkoff) is fine-looking distinguished man and we met his wife. Here we spent the night. The country travelled through today was flat and fertile, well populated by numerous auls and stocked with great herds of horses, cattle, sheep, and many camels; the Kazakhs seeming very prosperous.

Monday 30 March

After breakfast, all went down into the coal mine except myself and I wrote a letter and brought my diary of the past week up to the present day. Our host is a great sportsman and has a fine armoury of rifles, shotguns and loading apparatus and, if I stay, he promises me much shooting; big game farther south, such as bighorn sheep, 60 versts away, long haired Siberian tiger etc, with swarms of ducks and geese, ptarmigan, hares and a big bird called steppe-hen (or big bustard), which is a kind of turkey and often weighs 35 lb. Good fishing too! He is also a great fancier of good horses.

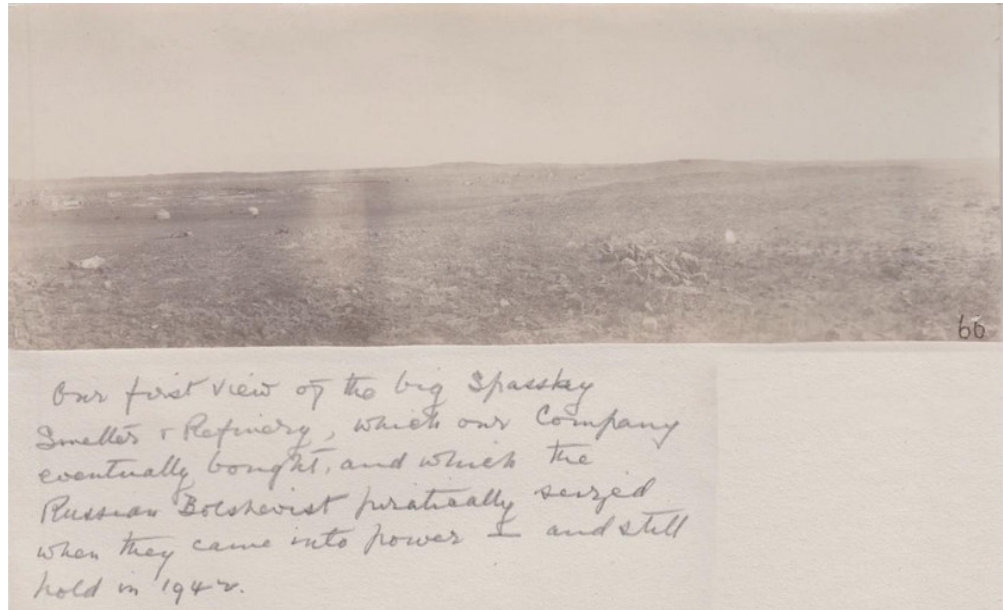
After dinner we left about 1pm for the Riasanoff works 45 versts away, with our host, in small sleighs carrying two, and with two horses driven tandem, the baggage also coming. The road was absolutely level and good, for all the coal for the works is brought in sleighs by camels along it, and we made the trip in three hours, calling on the way on the chief or Sultan (Djumabek Djebagin) of the Kazakhs of this district, who lives in a log-house, large and unpromising, and keeps up a sort of court. The Sultan is a very intelligent and interesting old man, speaking perfect Russian fluently and very friendly.

We arrived at the works at 4pm, finding a birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and a number of the guests, including the long-haired priest, drunk and disorderly and it was like entering into an insane asylum. But they fed us well and introduced us to several ladies connected with the working members of the staff. Then we were shown to another house where we have two large rooms to ourselves, but the washing arrangements as crude as ever and the house swarms with people who live in a heap. The weather all day was warm and pleasant.

To Spassky via Karagandy: "A birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and it was like entering into an insane asylum"

Tuesday 31 March, Riasanoff Works, Spassky

Found in the morning another boorahn or blizzard blowing. This was a warm one from the southwest but the air was full of flying snow and, unless it moderates, we cannot leave tomorrow for the Uspensky Mine. In the morning Mussen and I went all over the smelter, Mr Fell being busy writing indoors. They are running three blast furnaces on ore, one on the product of these converting the matte into black copper and a refining furnace which converts the impure copper into the 95% metal, which is poured into moulds, making about 30 pound bricks of red rose copper. There seemed to be swarms of Kazakhs at work and the management is very crude. No assaying is done at all. We take meals at the manager's house and, as they are very long, we seem to eat all day. The Sultan of the Kazakhs arrived in the evening and took tea with us and is a well-behaved, kindly old man.



"Our first view of the big Spassky smelter"

To Spassky via Karagandy: "A birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and it was like entering into an insane asylum"

April 1, 1903, April Fool's day

Spassky

Dear Marian,

...I must tell you of a plan I have to enable you to get our news; it will be nearly impossible to write to you frequent long letters, both because I shall be very busy and because we live rather in a heap and it is difficult to write letters at all and, as I am keeping a daily diary of our doings, I concluded I would send it whenever the mail left here, or wherever I may be, cutting the leaves out of my diary books. I will send it to Mrs Fell and I am asking that it may, please, be sent on to Olivia and to you, and you, if you please, will return it to your Mother so that it may be sent on to Minor.

By this mail I am sending all our doings since we left and I hope you both will like my plan. When I write to you, which I shall try to do as often as possible, I will not repeat the diary but try to tell you things not in the diary, of which there seems to be a great deal indeed.

This is all like a queer procession of dreams after swallowing pieces of cork late at night and then instantly going to bed. Leaving Rieben's Mine on Monday the 23rd, we took a week to travel here by sleighs, when in summertime it can be done in 36 hours, being 265 versts; but we met a 'boorahn' or blizzard on the Wednesday night, which raged all Thursday, and we stayed in a Kazakh underground house till Thursday afternoon, when we left in the storm — and how the drivers and horses faced it, I do not know, for you could see nothing but a solid sheet of snow in the air which was always trying to blow you away and, if you opened your eyes, filled them with sharp pins and needles.

One of our Kazakh drivers froze his nose which, I must say, was rather big and stuck out too far, I suppose.

Mr Fell is very well and never has been anything otherwise and enjoys the whole thing immensely. We slept in three different Kazakh houses, which are practically underground, the roof being about 2 feet above sometimes but not more, and that is deep in snow. The entrance is a tunnel, and opens into a big, half-dark place, all open, with posts upholding the roof of poles covered with brush and hay above. This place is full of horses and cattle, generally the young ones, and especial pets. Then you turn to the side along a pitch-dark passage from which rooms open out. Here sheep and goats live, with skylights overhead.

After you have bumped your head several times, you enter into the human dwelling-rooms and these are normally one big one made into two by the living turf-brick stove which forms the wall almost all the way across

To Spassky via Karagandy: "A birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and it was like entering into an insane asylum"

the room. One half is the kitchen, the other the sleeping and show-room which is carpeted by thick felt and rugs, and bales of stuff; nothing else for furniture. This room was always ours and, often, it had a string of kids and lambs tied along the stove wall and once two calves shared our space. The insects are bad but I can stand anything that bites if it does not growl! These rooms are full of most interesting people!

We leave tomorrow for Uspensky Mine, 115 versts, and I must stop and do a number of things; please excuse this hurried and imperfect letter.

Your distant friend,

Toshy.

Wednesday 1 April

Today the boorahn blew all day until the late afternoon when it moderated and there was a very quick thaw, forming streams of water and small ponds all about. Unless we leave soon for Uspensky we shall not get there for a few weeks, for there are five rivers to cross which are unfordable in the spring thaw. So we leave tomorrow at 6am and should arrive at the mine by dark. We all went over the works again, seeing the copper bricks poured from the refining furnace and we also inspected the brickmaking plant and also the stamp-crushing plant for the quartz used in the fire-bricks. There are two sets of wooden stamps within each battery, shod and weighted with cast iron shoes made on the spot, run by horsepower. The machinery is primitive but quite effective. There is a fine large brick church on the works with two domes and also a resident priest, a doctor, bakery and two general stores. Then the business of packing up and getting ones mail ready finished the day. We had hoped to get mail and newspapers here, but the mail carrier has not yet come from Akmolinsk²⁴ and it must be forwarded to us by special messenger.

²⁴ Capital city of Kazakhstan, renamed Astana and now known as Nur Sultan.

To Spassky via Karagandy: "A birthday party of one of the Riasanoffs under weigh and it was like entering into an insane asylum"

Thursday 2 April

This proved to be another exciting and trying day. We left the Riasanoff Works (Spassky) at 8 am for Uspensky with two sleighs, Mr Fell and self in a covered one, Mussen and Hedman in an open one and Mr Riasanoff in another open one, all



The church at Spassky, no longer standing

drawn by three horses in Indian file with Russian drivers and Kazakh riders; the baggage following more slowly. The weather was blustery but fine at the start, but by 10am the boorahn was blowing worse than ever, though not cold. At 1pm we stopped at the first stage, 45 versts on the way, this being a Kazakh aul. The house we entered was the dirtiest and most sordid place imaginable, for the snow, deep on the roof, was leaking everywhere and the walls were soaked through. There was an old man, a woman and two children there, all wet through and apparently contented, with practically no belongings and ragged. We lunched and left. The boorahn became worse and we struggled over the bad road until dark, when the road was almost impossible to see and the horses were

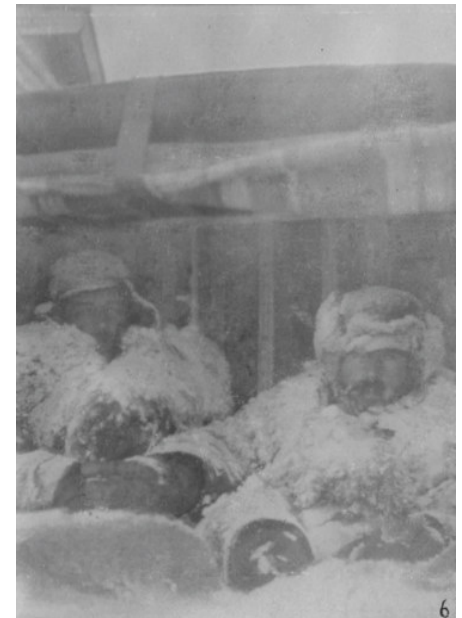
continually deep in soft snow and unable to move, lying flat. Several times we had to unharness them one by one and lead them to the road, and drag out the sleigh by hand, and once we broke a shaft. This went on till 9pm when a Kazakh rider took us in hand and led us to the next stage, another aul where we spent the night, being 80 versts on the road and 35 from the mine.

4. Uspensky: “Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them”

Friday 3 April, Uspensky

We left the aul at 8am having played bridge till 2am. This place was fairly clean and with our waterproof rolls of bedding we are always comfortable. Just at the start, all our horses found a soft place and all nine were down at one time but, after that, we had no further trouble, making the 35 versts to the Uspensky mine in 2½ hours. The weather was warm and snowing, but the wind was still strong and we arrived covered in snow, so covered that Mussen photographed Mr Fell and self in our sleigh. At last we had arrived, after driving 1015 versts from Omsk since March 11, through three boorahns, over 300 versts being away from the post-roads, at the end of an exceptional winter for very deep snow, which will cause many floods this spring. All the rivers around here will be unfordable for several weeks before long, so our mail communications will be very uncertain. The Kazakh cattle, sheep, and horses are dying by hundreds around here because of the depth of snow on their pasturage, and no hay in store.

Mr Riasanoff has placed two rooms for our use, his house is well warmed by the same colossal stoves, and we are quite comfortable. His cook is also excellent. We looked over the shaft mouth where the hoisting is done by horsepower, also the pumping engine and plant, and saw the big open cut on the vein where a great quantity of rich ore was mined as far back as 1865. The high wall, 18 inches thick, is built entirely of blocks of rich copper ore, all green and blue-stained, all around his house and about two acres of ground. A marvellous sight!



Nelson Fell and Frank on arrival at Uspensky

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

Saturday 4 April

Besides Mr Riasanoff's house, there is another large house, lately built, for offices etc, and nearby are two rows of several houses joined together, and now nearly buried in snow, for the use of the Russians here, and scattered about are several Kazakh habitations with the customary cattle, sheep and camels clustered round. Many chickens and geese also gladdened our hearts in advance. The buildings are all near and round the great open cut on the vein, with fair sized hills quite close, to the north, a great flat plane immediately to the south, bounded on the southern and eastern horizon by a range of mountains



The Manager's house again. Note what appears to be a stone wall around the house. These apparent stones were lumps of copper ore from the Great Quarry, & they were all colours of the rainbow nearly. A quite amazing sight. We were vandals, enough to haul it all to the smelter

The wall round the Manager's house; if only this could have been in colour!

of perhaps 4000 feet altitude; to the west, the prospect is flat and altogether the view is striking and unusual. I was shown my assaying and sampling quarters, which comprise three good rooms, well warmed and lighted and able to be securely locked, very satisfactory. At 2pm, we all went down into the mine by the shaft ladders, 259 feet to the lowest level and examined the showings there first. Here,

considerable ore can be got at to sample but, being mostly worked out except on the floor, it is much covered with dirt and water. The timbering is old and bad and the mine is certainly not a safe one. Saw hurriedly the showings left in all the upper levels which are nearly worked out, but here the mine is more than dangerous and cave-ins are frequent and, as these levels contain hardly any ore, we shall carefully avoid them.

Sunday 5 April

Last night from 10 to 12pm we all took a Russian steam and hot-water bath in a stone house designed for that purpose. The bathroom contains wooden benches one above the other to the roof and a great brick fireplace which is fired up so that the

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

heat is extreme, and the steam is made by throwing water onto large stones in the grate which are red hot. Clouds of steam issue and, as you climb up higher on the benches, the temperature rises to a point where you can hardly bear it. If the place had been clean, it would have been most enjoyable, for a Kazakh rubbed and massaged us with much unnecessary force. He then douses you in hot or cold water and splashes all your clothes no matter where you put them...

... In the afternoon, we all went down the shaft again to the lowest levels and further examined the ore-body. Found it to be in three distinct lens-shaped masses whose ends overlapped in places and 30 feet wide of fine ore in some parts. Discussed methods and places to sample and survey satisfactorily. Going up the ladders to the surface is quite an exertion and requires training to enjoy. Four accidents in the mine to Kazakhs from falling rock. Nothing serious but disquieting!

Monday 6 April

A fine sunny and warm day which thawed snow very fast, the tops and southern slopes of the hills around, and around the buildings, being already quite bare and brown. Already the Kazakhs are preparing to leave their winter quarters underground, getting out their tenting apparatus while the women are airing their furs and dingy belongings on any bare spot on their roofs. These women wear men's trousers and boots and can barely be distinguished at a short distance, the only distinctive feature being the headdress unless, perhaps, that they are always at work while the men watch.



The open cut of the former mine; the Manager's house in the background

All went into the mine at 2pm to lowest levels and into Number Two chute of ore, the floorspace of which

Mr Fell and Mussen roughly surveyed so as to make a map on which to plot places where samples came from and also assay values. I had a strip cleaned up across the vein on the floor with picks and brooms and then six Kazakhs drilled holes 6 inches deep, 2½ feet apart, which were fired with light charges of dynamite. And before we left, I was able to take an impartial sample of shattered ore from the trench formed, in two boxes which weighed about 100 lb. Our first sample!

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

Tuesday 7 April

Wind in the northwest and much colder, this familiar wind being the coldest here as in so many other places. Very little thawing today and the Kazakhs here announced that it is 'cold week' and it is *always* cold *every* year. We had an early 11am breakfast and all went down the mine, staying there till late evening. Mr Fell and Mussen continue their survey while Hedman and I continued the sampling. We had a force of Kazakhs cleaning off eight more strips across the 30 foot vein about 10 feet apart, sweeping with karagan brooms (the rough scrubby brush stuff growing all about the steppes which is the camels' special delight) to the clean ore surface. We had 22 holes drilled 6 inches apart deep, 2½ feet apart and had 28 holes fired, for six of them missed fire and gave us palpitations of the heart. This work gave us three new samples after a most laborious and long spell of work, with the steady climb up the ladders of the shaft as a pleasant background.



Fell's plan of the Uspensky Mine; the weight on the top right corner, is a small ingot of copper, stamped '1905 F' (for Fell)

This evening, Mr Riasanoff's caravan of food stuffs came from Akmolinsk and, out of 100 poods of flour, 43 had been stolen on route, so Mr Riasanoff captured as hostages the three camels which hauled them and the Kazakh drivers are bemoaning their luck over the whole camp tonight. Getting supplies is a difficulty here, naturally and the problem is often much complicated, in this way.

Wednesday 8 April

Cold with north-west wind and scarcely any thaw; snow is still

in abundance except on exposed hilltops and southerly slopes. Around all houses, the drifts are to the eaves still. At noon all went down the shaft to lowest levels. Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them, which thunderstruck the Kazakh miners who are much excited when a charge is

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

being prepared, however small, and shout 'Carsh²⁵! Carsh!' till it goes off. After the BC²⁶ charges of 60 pounds at once, these few small 4 inch sticks are quite child's play. We were busy taking samples till 7pm, with about 10 Kazakhs picking, drilling and firing charges steadily and the work is most interesting where the ore is so rich. All day Kazakhs arrived, on the news of the coming of the transport, and bargaining was brisk till well into night. The three camels confiscated are still here, also their owner, still protesting. We have had no mail of any sort since we left Bayan Aul on March 23 and, as the rivers will soon be in flood, we do not know when we shall get more.

Thursday, April 9

Weather still cold and unforgiving and the local prognostication of 'cold week' seems to be coming true. The floods this year will be very bad, for this very unusual snow fall will thaw all at once. In normal season the snow should be gone now. No-one went down the mine today, Mr Fell and Mussen mapping out their survey labours all day most successfully and intelligently, so that even I can see more or less with their eyes. Today the assay office opened, a Kazakh woman in a man's clothes having washed the floor very badly, and therefore I unpacked all the assay material, set up the pump-balance, prepared standardisation solution, filtered much water and blow-piped; in the meantime bossing a Kazakh who squatted on his feet and spent all day breaking up 100 pounds of ore from pieces as large as a musk-melon to pieces as small as a walnut: work which, in a small hand-crusher, could be done in an hour. As he wanted to throw away all pieces which he considered to be not good ore, and considered me a fool for objecting in a foreign grunt, our relations were strained, though in a strictly diplomatic sense. Assaying, once begun, will go fast now!

Friday 10 April

Cold and raw but, towards evening, the wind shifted to the east and prospects seem better for warmer weather and the explosion of another local theory. Quartered and bucked ore all day, without a bucking board, using a small iron mortar, much battered and indented, finally finishing two samples representing about 200 pounds of ore, which, with proper tools, could have been done in three hours. Monotony was broken by the advent of the principal Kazakh dignitary of this locality²⁷, a fine big-bearded, red-faced man, with a most dignified manner. He came (through Hedman's ever-moving tongue) to offer

²⁵ 'Beware!'

²⁶ British Columbia, where the Athabasca Mine was.

²⁷ Djakin Moustaphin, of whom more later

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me, as a hunter, some fine goose-shooting, and antelope a little further away, and I learned that he follows the Kazakh sport of hawking on horseback with trained and hooded eagles for foxes and wolves, and we will try to take a Sunday with him to see it soon because, in three weeks, he will leave his stationary winter abode and take to his tents and nomad life for the summer with his flocks and herds. We parted the best of friends with many handshakes.

This sport is followed by the well-to-do Kazakhs in the same manner as in centuries ago elsewhere, only with eagles of large-size instead of hawks, which are carried on the wrist, hooded, by men on horseback. The eagle is usually taken to the highest hill around and is kept hooded, waiting, while the marshy or grassy slopes and flats around are searched by other mounted men until a fox or wolf is found. The eagle is then unhooded and assisted to see the game and turned loose while the men gallop after. It is usual for the eagle to kill with no trouble and the time-honoured Kazakh custom follows, that when an eagle hunter has made his kill, the first man he meets is entitled to the feet and skin of the legs no matter whom he may be and the skin is always made into the outside fur rim of the inner cap for cold weather, which is worn under the great, fur, storm, sunbonnet-shaped cap they always wear.

The mail will go to Akmolinsk tomorrow by special messenger and will return in about a week with good luck.

April 10, 1903

[To Anne]

We are just beginning to realise that we are really far away, most seriously far away from all beaten tracks that lead to other people, for we have had no mail since leaving Bayan Aul and, this evening, the manager from the Spassky Smelting Works (I might say more truthfully the mis-manager) arrived with no mail for us and the news that all Fell's telegrams sent in cypher from Bayan Aul were to be returned by the government censor to Spassky.

This so depressed Fell that he seized the opportunity to retire and his room is wrapped in a murky gloom as I write. But, in the morning, a special man is to be sent to Akmolinsk with our letters before the rivers add their efforts to prevent us from sending or receiving news. The feeling of being quite cut off from all, outside the vision of our immediate horizon, is depressing after a few days, and will make us work all the harder to finish here and return to Rieben's where we have Bayan Aul in hail.

So far we have made a splendid start considering the want of everything here that is needed and considered almost essential to existence everywhere else; the wheels of progress here revolve on the hubs of fatality and

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need oiling very badly. The daily news I enclose from my diary, and that will give you some idea of our progress, as far as work is concerned. Until the snow leaves and summer really comes, the outlook out of doors amounts to nothing, because no one stays outside longer than he can help it, and the cold weather is very persistent. Apart from a general cold and much barking and coughing, we have been perfectly well, doing full justice to the table...

Saturday 11 April

Yesterday evening the manager of the Spassky smelting works arrived with his cashier and they made their appearance in the morning. The cashier is a very large, bearded, young man, most athletic in tastes and most elaborately polite in his manners. His bow, once seen, is never forgotten, and he means very, very well indeed, but his earnest desire to see everyone swallow as much vodka or cognac as he intends to, is rather embarrassing. After we had held a short caucus, we agreed that, as he was already several dozen in the lead, we would risk it and our diagnosis was quite correct (in his case and including the other three Russians, Hedman, the Spassky Manager and Mr Riasanoff) for, early in the night, we three were left, survivors of the field, while the four Russians were strewn about the adjoining room amidst a deathly silence; and the honour of our country was intact.

Mussen and Mr Fell went down through the mine and took some samples in the afternoon and I bucked and pounded in that small iron mortar all day. Weather is still cold and raw with a strong southwest wind blowing.

Sunday 12 April

Mussen and Mr Fell fled down into the mine immediately after breakfast to take samples and I fled to the assay office, all avoiding the cashier's polite and most courteous desire to pour vodka into us in a steady stream. It worked very well for, at 2pm, the visitors left for Spassky after a most lengthy and ceremonial farewell from the cashier, and we are now picking up portions of ourselves and putting them together again properly. I had heard of Russian hospitality and all that, but never contemplated exactly this before breakfast.

The weather being much warmer, Mussen and I went to see an outcrop of the big vein about 300 yards to the north-east and found a small hill of copper-stained quartz, about 40 feet in the centre being the vein, all around being strewn with float²⁸,

²⁸ Small fragments of any ore carried away from the ore bed by the action of water or just by gravity.

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most beautifully coloured and streaked and shaded with networks of malachite and azurite, green and blue. All afternoon arranged my wet-work and ran three rough samples successfully.

Monday 13 April

The real spring seems to have opened at last and the hens have begun to lay. Mr Fell and Mussen spent the day underground with their Kazakh miners and timberman taking samples, which is quite a business in the slopes high up, for stagings have to be built, and much talk is necessary and unlimited sign language. Spent the whole day, myself, in quartering down and pounding up ore samples in the mortar. It looks like a stay of three or four more weeks here of steady work.

Tuesday 14 April

Another quite pleasant day with much sunshine but, as a rule, the mornings here are cloudy and disagreeable while from noon the day seems to improve and the evening sun is in full sight to the low horizon. The Kazakh mining population is airing its clothes and furs, rags and carpets and felt and other awful belongings on the roofs of their half-underground houses where the dogs always live and incessantly bark, and many aired themselves at full length in the same place all day. One family has already put up its summer tent on the roof of its winter house and has moved in contentedly.

A large flock of large dove-coloured and black crows has arrived, apparently to stay, for they are quite tame and pick up all the thousand and one scraps around every house. They are much like the black crows, only being bigger and much handsomer and more knowing if that is possible.

Bucked ore all day again, religiously abusing my Kazakh assistant who was a new one and no good. My regular man, whom I have named jingo Flingo²⁹, left me in the lurch because he had an idea that Mr Fell was paying higher wages for sampling in the mine and I am going to learn some Russian abuse tonight for his benefit tomorrow.

²⁹ His real name was Ab Rai. This seems to have been a short-lived aberration as the name jingo Flingo shortly reappears applied to Frank's favourite horse, and never again used for Ab Rai.

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Wednesday 15 April

Today was so warm that the Kazakh ladies forestalled Easter, which means that they wore a short cotton skirt, just below the tops of their enormous and clumsy, high knee-boots. Their appearance never seems to distress them! More crows came, and they are most entertaining birds, preferring to walk than to fly, fighting scandalously and contorting their necks and bodies ridiculously when they croak. The doctor from Spassky came yesterday evening to see a Russian patient, a mason who, unfortunately, died before his arrival. Now I shall never get the brickwork done that I badly need in the assay office. The doctor is the type of a Russian boor, the kind you imagine in your dreams: big, excessively hairy and unkempt, dirty, coarse, vulgar and drunken in a sordid way. We wasted no good manners upon him and Mr Fell always alluded to him at the table in his presence as 'that old cuckoo' or 'the old codfish across the way' etc. The camel that does the local hauling was more vehement and loudly complaintive than usual today, for the snow was rotten and he kept breaking through and his roars and moans never ended. Mr Fell mapped all day, Mussen and Hedman were underground and I did wet work under difficulties!

Thursday 16 April

The day was cloudy, cold and dull, and the thaw received a check but, in the evening, it tried to rain feebly. Even yet, the general aspect is one of winter, the landscape being all white, although the far-off larger hills show more black areas, while the drifts of snow around our buildings are 6 feet high and the Kazakh and Russian dwellings are still buried to the eaves. In the morning, a mason came to alter my stove and make me a sand-bottomed 'hot-plate' where the draft up the chimney would carry away all fumes. At this work they are excellent, but, as usual, they have no tools and, for a trowel, this man used his hands only, slapping on the mortar and cement and smearing it into place, the result being most workmanlike. Our breakfast was late today, there being apparently no water anywhere on the whole place to make tea with, for the good water comes from a spring two or three versts away and we watched, steeped in that awful, cold, hungry feeling, from a nearby hilltop, the groaning and moaning camel shuffle off across the flat steppe out of sight dragging a barrel on a sled for our breakfast. This is on a par with all the management here, everything slides down the banisters anyway. Everybody attended to regular occupations all day.

Friday 17 April

This is Russian Good Friday and tomorrow at 11am the holidays begin and last a full week, the Kazakhs taking three days. It will be hard to get any work done, for there will be a prolonged orgy and the Russians, in this respect, cannot be equalled. My work can go on as I have many samples ahead of me but the sampling in the mine may languish for want of men and sharpened tools, so Mussen and Mr Fell will probably survey and take photographs and generally study the mine. The present

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excitement is the coming in a few days of the mail messenger from Akmolinsk for we have had no letters and papers since leaving Bayan Aul and even then one Sketch³⁰ was all, in which the only thing of interest was an item the censor at Saint Petersburg had covered up, officially, with a black, rough, sandy material, like that on matchboxes for striking on and, on scraping this off partly, one can see the blue pencilling and also the Czar's name mentioned; I am keeping the page as a curiosity. The Kazakhs pester me rather by wandering in and sitting cross-legged close to me while I am at work, not saying or doing anything but being, politely, in the way and, as soon as one leaves, another seems to arrive. Everything in an assay office must be magic and new to them and one can imagine the discussions in the auls on the subject for, among themselves, they are incessant talkers. Slight thaw today in the warmest time!

Saturday 18 April

Apparently, Eastertime in Russia is *the* great holiday season of the year and every single working man in any capacity, clerical or manual, expects, as his lawful right, a present in money and the Kazakhs, who do not really care a straw about the religious meaning of Easter, are the most vociferous for their present so, today, deputations of Kazakhs steadily appeared before Mr Fell asking unblushingly for money having already, no doubt, received presents from Mr Riasanoff. Mr Fell wisely paid only the men working for us, giving as an additional favour a lump sum of, I think, 50 rubles to the entire mob, who good-temperedly surrounded the front entrance.

Tonight at 12pm exactly, the Easter gun will be fired off on a hilltop close by. It is a large affair, about 10 feet long with a calibre of about 10 inches, carrying a powder charge of 1½ poods or about 60 pounds. We all intend to keep as far from it as possible, as it is in a very rickety condition. This gun-play seems to be a regular thing in Siberia for Rieben's Mines had one and at Spassky they were casting one out of brass when we were there. Today I had three Kazakhs pounding up ore in great good humour, sitting on their feet and conversing with their friends who come in continually to chat domestically, and the work went on swimmingly. Spring still hangs fire and it freezes hard every night.

Sunday 19 April

Heavy fog this morning, with a sharp frost, and all grass ends and small stuff were covered with a white coating but, in the evening, the sun shone bright and the thaw was considerable. The camp is in a very demoralised condition from the manager down, excepting the Kazakhs who, being Mohammedan, drink no alcohol; the Russians reel about saying "Christ is risen!"

³⁰ The Daily Sketch was a British national tabloid newspaper.

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and try to embrace and kiss you. This ordeal I have avoided by being rude! Easter is a distinct farce here, so far as religion is concerned, for all they think of are the holiday, the vodka, and the present in money. The Kazakhs still work and are impressively dignified and as good natured as ever. This state of affairs will last a whole week and will probably gather momentum as it lasts. We are all getting rather tired of this place so we continue work on Sunday, and today, with the help of three good Kazakhs, the assay office made good headway. Mr Fell and Mussen sampled in the mine and took some flashlight photographs of the vein and queer timbering. The mail messenger from Akmolinsk has not arrived and we are becoming quite querulous on the subject. Two weeks may see us moving!

Monday 20 April

Last night a strong east wind blew, which continued all day. This was a cool wind to face but a grand destroyer of snow and, this evening, little rivulets of water were running down the slopes under the snow on all sides, being the first real formation of our local river which runs all the summer as a considerable stream, quite close to the southward. The fact that we may be delayed after our work is done here by unfordable rivers seems to be more apparent. The holidays are still in full swing and are very tiresome, the Kazakhs showing up very well against this Russian background of bleary people. The more one sees of the Kazakhs, the better they are, and they stamp their characteristics upon all their animals except the camels, which unfortunate creatures are beyond all understanding, for their horses and cows and sheep and goats are all quite tame and sensible, also the hens and geese, almost too tame really, as they never get out of your way and enter every open door they see as a matter of understood invitation. The dogs are miserable, shaggy mongrels, barking short and rapid barks all day but they never bite or fight each other, or strange people. As for themselves, they are the essence of natural and unconscious good temper! The same work went on today at a great rate and all made good use of time!

Tuesday 21 April

This was the day of days for weather, by far the best we have yet seen in Siberia. Last night it cleared to a bright starlight night and the wind dropped, leaving the air warm and dry. The North Star is very high and Cassiopeia never dips below the horizon, while the southern horizon seems to swallow up many stars that should appear. All day the sun shone from this unlimited expanse of sky and the local camel broke through the snow just at my assay office window and, in his struggles, he nearly lurched through onto all my glassware, while his expostulations and groans of sorrow were awful to hear. The Kazakh drivers stand or walk just at the camel's head and never appear to pay the slightest attention to this truly dreadful noise and savage open mouth, and they never beat or get angry with him. The camp is still hopelessly demoralised and it is impossible to get meals at any regular hours, which is very bad for serious work; and there is no redress! Mussen sent up the last of the

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regular mine samples today which gives us a view of the end to our labours and the samples are assaying splendidly, so we are perfectly contented, pining only for the mailman who is probably celebrating Easter somewhere on the road.

April 22, 1903 Wednesday

Dear Olivia,

We are expecting a Kazakh whom Mr Fell sent 10 days ago to Akmolinsk, to arrive at any moment, although the snow is so deep and so rotten now from the recent thaws that his pony probably cannot travel at all on the roads during the daytime; but when night comes and the usual sharp freeze, a man may ride upon the hardened crust without falling off more than once or twice a mile. I do not wish to be caught so busily engaged when he is sent back again to struggle much harder and probably swim his pony over icy rivers, that I shall not find time to write to you, and I write tonight without the faintest idea when the letter will start for you in earnest. Even when it leaves here for Akmolinsk, there is no telling when it will get there, because the man is a Kazakh and must pass through many auls and, if a fat sheep is killed and boiled and put before him, he will stay there till the sheep is inside him.

And now I am going to tell you something quite true, something which goes on here all the time and has been actually witnessed by the manager of the Karagandy Coal Mine where we stopped. There are hundreds of Kazakhs who can eat a whole sheep at one sitting of several hours and the gorging person afterwards frequently does not eat for 10 days. This is no joke, but an actual fact and the man need not be a large one!

To corroborate this further, one day when we were at the Spassky smelter, the old Sultan of the Kazakhs arrived formally to take tea with us and a number of the Russians were there too, among them Mr Nyemkoff, the manager of the coal mine; I asked him to find out from the Sultan (through an interpreter) whether this was an unusual thing or not. The Sultan, who is a splendid old man much like pictures of Li Hung Chang³¹, laughed and chuckled, and said 'Yes, of course' and added that he had in his following of men who always ride in state with him, a small man of deceptive appearance and it is the custom at every aul he visits to make a great feast in his honour, and many sheep are cooked which are pressed upon the visitors most respectfully till they nearly

³¹ Li Hongzhang (romanised as Li Hung-chang) (1823 – 1901), was a Chinese politician, general and diplomat of the late Qing dynasty.

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burst, all except the small man who steadily accepts all offers of food until he has finished all the scraps. This man, the Sultan said, can easily eat a whole sheep. At these monstrous feasts, one man will also drink tea, not by the cup but, literally, by the gallon and no bread or vegetables appear.

A fat sheep will weigh from 60 to 100 pounds of eatable material and they say that, in the summertime on the ordinary grass, which must be most extraordinarily good, a sheep will get so fat that it can hardly walk.

I watched a Kazakh family eat their supper one night when we were stopping at an aul; there were about a dozen of them, men, women, young men, boys, girls and babies all in a heap sitting on the hay-strewn floor around a great cauldron of mutton soup and a great pile of mutton and bones, boiled and steaming. In the same room were two calves tied to the wall of the big earth and clay furnace, and a row of lambs next to a row of little bleating kids, pulling and tugging and climbing over each other while two fine, long-legged, fast-looking, Russian greyhounds, with short coats fringed with long hairs on the ears, tail and legs, sniffed about and watched for scraps. Everybody talked at once, all pleasantly and good temperedly and nearly everyone had a sharp knife worn at the belt, and in the soup was a great iron dipper. Each person reached out and sliced off great pieces of meat and choked and tugged at it in their fingers and the dipper was dipped and handed round. All the time such a noise of eating and champing and sucking of bones went on till it sounded almost exactly like about two very hungry pigs eating out of one trough. The pile became smaller and smaller and more bony looking, while the cauldron was tilted to one side and dipped till it was finished. They had no bread and no vegetables, just meat and soup and all looked fat and very healthy, with good colour in their faces. When their hands became too greasy even for them, a grass-made box filled with sawdust was passed round and each one took a handful and rubbed till it was rubbed away. After supper was done, I handed round cigarettes to the men; they never smoke but they tried them and choked and laughed and coughed, passing them from mouth to mouth in great glee. And long into the night I heard the two dogs steadily crunching the pile of bones. No doubt they ate and lived just in that way hundreds of years ago in the same place and unless they are bothered by people from elsewhere, they will always be happy and contented.

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

They are perfectly splendid horsemen and all look alike on horseback with their short stirrups and upright seat and you often see a man riding along with a full-grown live sheep across his lap and even the sheep seems to



Kazakh horsemen

be comfortable and pleased. Mr Nyemkoff told me about their sports and games which all include riding. The chief game is a dangerous one and only occurs on great occasions: one man holding a kid in his hands rides out onto the level plain, which is surrounded by people, and not more than four men ride after him at one time, on picked ponies, trying to grab the kid from him under the stated interval of time. If any one of them succeeds, he is then chased in turn. The danger lies in the rules which allow all rough play except blows and you may bunt your man-with-the-kid at full speed broadside and knock him flying, horse and all, and they do so, grabbing the kid from the man on the ground if necessary; horses have legs

broken, men are killed frequently and it is rare that the man with the kid can win the prize which means money and much honour. It is alright for the men and the horses for they enjoy it; but it is hard on the kid and that part I object to strongly.

Then two men on horseback are tied by the waist about 10 feet apart by a rope and each rides different ways trying to pull the other man from his horse, and they show great skill in whirling round suddenly and changing their course to try to catch the other man at a different angle and off his balance. They also race a great deal, each aul having a picked champion to contend with all-comers, but their races are short ones, usually one verst only. And they hunt wolves and foxes with trained and hooded eagles, which I am crazy to see and which I mentioned in my diary. To leave Siberia and not to see that would be an unspeakable folly, and the trouble is that one is very busy.

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In a quiet way the Kazakhs are very religious and the educated ones solemnly read over the Koran, without understanding a word because it is written in Arabic, and not one in a thousand understands Arabian characters, but they read away at it all the same. One old miner in the mine down deep, about 3 o'clock every afternoon, stops his drilling, spreads his coat on the ground, turns to the south-west, towards Mecca, and begins to mutter and bow and fall down, with his forehead touching the ground again and again, keeping it up for about 15 minutes; then he placidly resumes his drilling.

This is a grand mine, Olivia, which has been disgracefully managed and abused. It is full of ore which shows most beautiful green, blue and red streaks, networks and great patches, and I am going to make a grand collection before I leave Siberia to add to the collection at The Point³² which is my Mecca and before which I bow and touch my forehead to the ground. Now, good night, please and may I see you again as soon as possibly can be!

Yours always,

Toshy.

Wednesday 22 April

The day was bright and sunny but the wind blew with a steady pressure that made you walk on a slant; a cold disconcerting wind and the thaw was checked again. Nevertheless, below us to the southward there is a white plain bounded on the horizon by quite high hills and, in the centre of the plain, is a winding depression in the ground which is distinctly filling up with water; somehow our chances for leaving here when we want to seem further off than ever. This is doubly distressing because food is becoming very scarce: flour, sugar, tea and other commercial staples, and the sheep and cattle and horses around are dying every day for want of grass or hay. There are about 50 Kazakhs with families among us who are now feeling the want of enough to eat and, till the rivers quiet down, more supplies are impossible to get. This is good proof of the utter want of organisation which has brought about the downfall of the splendid mine. Probably the mine will stop work very soon because the men cannot work on 'skilly'³³ for long.

³² The house in Florida where the Fells lived.

³³ Thin, watery soup.

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Thursday 23 April

This eastern, or Chinese wind, continued all day as hard as ever and is still roaring by, although, in the thick-walled houses and big heaters we have the means to ignore it entirely. Living here is far more comfortable as regards warmth than B.C. or Minnesota, for these people combat the cold in a most proper manner. Our work is now safe, for the last samples of importance have come up from the mine for treatment in the assay office, and it is merely a question of finishing them and getting away. Between 40 and 50 samples were taken, separately, many across quite wide stretches of ore, 30 to 40 feet, and many drills broken and shots fired, and much handling of heavy boxes and sacks full of wet ore. Then, in the assay office, the whole material has been broken up small by Kazakhs and it has been handled and re-handled many times, and when you come to handling about two tons of hard rock over and over again, it mounts up. On this, there will be nearly 100 assays taken, under great difficulties for want of water etc, and it all means work. Tonight mail came from Spassky, not our own mailman, but a windfall from the skies!

Friday 24 April

All day the same wind continued blowing hard, straight from China, trying to counterbalance all the efforts the sun was making to thaw this beastly snow and it is disheartening, for the nights are cold and the ground freezes solid, the freeze commencing almost before the sun is out of sight. This evening, after a long bout of wet work during which I beat our present record and got a result which went over 31% copper, Mussen and I walked over to our nearest range of hills and clambered to the top of the highest peak, arriving there at sundown. The hills are about a mile away and, in the hollows between them, we floundered through drifts of deep and rotten snow, the summits being bare and very rocky, giving one the impression of being on top of very high mountains and, really, they are quite high for the aneroid shows a level at the mine of 4300 feet and this peak was 300 to 500 feet higher. The vegetation is already sprouting and shows signs of many flowers to come; clumps whose dead framework shows that they are a species of cornflower, and we noticed flag iris plants in low places. Most show hard, tough, wiry, contorted stems and twigs, meant to stand much wind and abuse. Much quality float all around.

Saturday 25 April

I see the benefit of the yurts in a windy country for, yesterday, I noticed some Kazakhs turning their big yurt round so as to avoid the discomfort of the draft entering their low door. They have nearly all moved into summer quarters and the mine-houses are vacant while, in the hollow, all about, are the squat, round, bee-hive-shaped tents, each one apart from the rest and each surrounded by a scattered collection of horses, sheep, goats, cattle, dogs and a camel or so. Yesterday, on a summit, we came across a Kazakh herder, sitting, watching a few horses clambering about a rocky slope for grass and, on turning a

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corner we nearly ran in to a lone camel feeding, all being horrified and ready to run. We also jumped a jackrabbit, a regular, lop-sided, three cornered, go-as-you-please, western jackrabbit, with the same black tips to his ears, and he took a wide circle, wheeling to the left just as they almost invariably do. Ducks are coming in very thickly and if we are detained here by bad rivers after our work is done, ducks will suffer! Two more weeks will certainly see us free!

Sunday 26 April

Although the wind holds in the same direction, every day sees it a trifle warmer. Of course, a quantity of snow is really thawing steadily under the constant sunshine, but the camels still wear their quilted blankets and I shudder to think of the state they may be underneath them, for they are never taken off, their humps and pronounced angles keeping them from slipping. Even the cows here wear blankets, good warm thick ones. Today though there came a real sign of summer, for one of our local camels (the big one with his nose pulled off) appeared harnessed to the water barrel *on wheels*, instead of the sled, as our spring which is two versts away and the only good water around, was flooded by a running muddy stream. The camel was driven protesting to a water-hole in the flat below us. Here the snow was rotten and he broke through to the length of his long legs into running water underneath and there he stuck, refusing to move for two hours, incessantly lamenting his fate like a foghorn in pain. We all worked hard all day for there is much to do and no time to spare.



A Russian foreman (right) chats with the Kazakh water-carrier

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Monday 27 April

Warmer weather, which means about 2°F of frost at 8am, climbing to 50°F above during the day, and a sharp frost again at night. But the wind still blows from China, as due east as it can. Before breakfast, I went out onto some of the old dumps of ore from the early surface mining. This ore is all oxidised, being copper carbonate, malachite and azurite and would be a place of wonder for children. The most beautiful specimens of the brightest colours in green and blue, the blues especially being most dazzling and varied. And there is much of it! Today they finished pumping out a flooded lowest level in the mine for us to sample for assay work and Mussen and Mr Fell took the sample under conditions most distressingly wet. They can, certainly, never be quite clean again. The pump and pipes were all home-made in the last few days. The pipes were logs,



A yurt under construction

sawn in two and hollowed out, then clamped together by iron bands, put on hot and cooled in place, with packing between the edges of the wood. The pump was wooden and clumsy and was worked by shifts of two Kazakhs, night and day and the whole affair did excellent work. All of us are still very busy!

Tuesday 28 April

This was our warmest day, the never failing east wind being soft and mild. The Kazakh women sat with their cotton summer things and sewed acres of enormous coats and men's apparel, and the Kazakh children took off all their garments but one, a very short one, and raced and sang in shrill quavers always ending lower than they began something like the African chants. Hedman returned last evening after a long ride of about 150 versts to and from the Kazakh magistrate who came to the assay office some

a few days ago and offered to show me sport with his eagles. This man's name is Djakin Moustaphin and he is a *power* in this country. He was living in his big tent with several others for his servants and guests and he feeds about 50 people in his tent every day, putting on a good deal of style. His wife was dressed in the same way as the rest, but in silk, and she was clean and well behaved so Hedman says. Hedman also saw the trained eagles, big, powerful birds, seemingly very sensible and he told us much about their way of living. He had much trouble fording running streams and was cold and wet nearly all the time.

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Wednesday 29 April

The wind veered to the south-west, the kindly warmth of Persia and the Red Sea, and our thermometer registered 52°F at noon, the consequence being that the water gained on the pumps in the mine, seeping through the great open cut, 150 feet deep, directly into the workings. If it did not freeze at night and check the steady flow, the mine would be swimming in the lower levels. Today was a banner day for the Kazakh who wanted to 'move house' and right in front of my assay office window and about 50 yards away, a Kazakh woman, dressed in most infamously fitting men's clothes, went through the whole operation of building a house for the family. The man sat by and made no remarks and gave no unnecessary advice and his behaviour was excellent, for even I was crazy to offer suggestions. She began at 2pm and in the most irritatingly leisurely fashion she finished at 5pm, and a fine large round yurt or felt-lined and roofed house was finished. The children brought the food supply in armfuls, horsemeat, smoked and half raw. A string of camels arrived loaded with two yurts and belongings. and struck camp near us and the women built two homes there also, at once!

Thursday 30 April

Last night rain clouds gathered and anywhere else the rain would have poured but it was satisfied to stay warm and cloudy with the wind from Persia again all day, and the temperature at 60° Fahrenheit at noon. A long winding flat of surface water has formed around us on three sides and I heard wild geese honking in the evening from that direction. All day Mussen, Mr Fell and I wrestled with "specific gravity" tests on the ore as a whole and with individual species of minerals, and the work is getting on very well, my assays checking most pleasantly. My ambition is to ride back to Rieben's Mines on a camel and there is no reason why it should not be done. It is getting serious, for the mail from Akmolinsk, on which we founded many hopes, brought one postal card for Mr Fell and we have seen no foreign news for two months. In the evening, Mussen and I rummaged on the old carbonate dumps for specimens and found many. No words can express the beauty and display of varied and brilliant colours in this ore. Every colour and shade is present in startling profusion.



A yurt on the move

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Friday 1 May

The day was warm and moist, the sun shining at intervals among drifting banks of clouds. All snow has gone except in deepest and most protected drifts and, owing to the fine natural drainage of the steppes, the water runs off rapidly. To my surprise, first thing in the morning, I noticed that the Kazakh lady who built the house the day before yesterday was most busily engaged in pulling it to pieces again and unpacking it on the backs of three camels who were lying down placidly chewing their cuds. The man was assisting in the light work such as arranging it on the camels' backs and there seemed to be the same perfect understanding between them. By 8 am the whole business moved off, the camels being led and just below us there



Games at Uspensky, in front of the manager's house

is, at present, quite a running stream to be forded and there was trouble. But finally the woman managed it. She led each camel across in turn herself, splashing across up to her waist and the man, who had never entered the water, climbed on the last camel and arrived quite dry on the other side. Worked all day on check assays representing whole ore chutes and the results satisfied everyone but myself!

Saturday 2 May

Last night it rained and, as the day continued, local rainstorms accompanied by big hailstones occurred. These acted disastrously on my work, for the chimney over my hot plate is wide and open, and hailstones falling from the clouds onto a very hot iron plate covered with sand, among very fragile glassware, are calculated to upset accurate work, the

result being most pitiable and the day almost wasted. The rivers between us and the rest of the world are reported to be in full stream and quite unfordable, so we may or may not leave here in a week as we hoped and it may be two or three weeks. Owing to a shortage of food of the most staple kind, the Kazakhs, who are denied their necessities, are leaving for their respective families and auls beyond the horizon in all directions and the mine will soon have to shut down. This is all gross carelessness on the part of the management! But it is only on a par with the rest of the ridiculous mishandling of this wonderful vein of ore and it has continued for 40 years without much change.

1903

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Sunday 3 May

At dawn the weather changed like lightning. Heavy rain fell during the night and the barometer was low but, in a flash, the wind whipped to the north-west, the low clouds lifted and hurried away and the day was saved. It was as though a stronger element had appeared and used force of mind and matter. The fine day brought out the Russian families in force and they paraded about in a clumpy heavy footed way, bright with startling colours. The men played rough bowls and skittles in a muscular fashion, throwing heavy wooden clubs at small pegs in the ground and it seemed to be great amusement. The women and children assembled round a great flag post affair with an iron swivel on the top, to which six hooks hold as many ropes and the ropes below were looped to make a seat low enough to allow the feet to touch the ground comfortably. By jumping and pushing themselves along, they swing round and round the post amidst bellows of laughter and the small boy, as usual, distinguished himself in such a way as to excel all others and only to please himself. They kept it up till dark! Was busy all day with most satisfactory results.

Monday 4 May

Anyone who imagines that Siberia is a country afflicted with a cold and miserable climate only, is badly mistaken, for today no country on earth was blessed with a finer day. Quite clear, bright sun and a warm, fresh wind from the south which blows life and a desire to be energetic into everything. The nights which herald and follow these days are as glorious! Last night, crisp with a mild frost, there were six signs of the zodiac in full view and a young moon, besides the enormous expanse of sky filled with constellations. All day, strings of camels came in, halted and laid down, to be loaded with household goods by the departing Kazakhs and they are the most perfect animals to pack on account of their delightful humps and the irregularities of their summit ridge. The Kazakh knows no diamond hitch but his load never moves; it's a big one and looks shipshape. A good camel can walk off with 1000 lbs on his back and that means the house and all the family belongings, the children and frequently the weakling lambs and kids. Finished practically all my copper assays with better results than anticipated!

Tuesday 5 May

Today was warm and comfortable, but local thunderstorms passed our way and the thunder here has a wooden sound and does not seem to have any depth or tone. No one could be alarmed by this thumping of empty boxes! Today, being the 'angel day' of the machinist of the mine, there was a general holiday, following the prevailing custom of this funny management, so all put on their best clothes, played skittles, hopped around the flagpole and made merry with wheezy concertinas till midnight. Luckily the vodka supply had succumbed to the Easter attack! As the machinist is the engineer and the man who runs the big mine pump, his holidaymaking stopped the pumping, just at the time of year when water is pouring into the

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

mine from all sides, the mine being a great drainage sump. Therefore, at sundown, we were not surprised to hear that all the lower workings are flooded and that water is climbing the ladder in the main shaft steadily. No-one seemed distressed and,



Loading a camel and an ancient cart

cheerfully, the manager announced that the mine would stop work until the water subsided itself. All our work is about finished and we hope to leave on Monday next, having, in fact, sent for vehicles (tarantasses) to take us to Spassky!!

Wednesday 6 May

It is quite possible that weather for reports from central Siberia do not interest people who are on the other side of this earth, but they should, and they will help to dispel some of the many thousand wild-eyed ideas about the splendid

country. This weather is better than in most places and resembles none of the worst features of other countries. Today it blew and rained, but the day was pleasant on account of the sparkling qualities in the air racing over the steppes. Today a strange 'moving' took place in my full view. A camel was loaded down with all the family belongings; lambs and kids and children were piled upon him till he whined and groaned and complained. He staggered to his feet when his nose had been nearly pulled off and then they loaded an anti-diluvian, prehistoric, two-wheeled cart with more lambs and kids and hay and tied it behind him with long ropes, no shafts being used. The man and woman walked at his lead, five mongrel black and white woolly dogs following. This procession wobbled off out of sight, the camel and the cartwheels trying to deafen each other.

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Thursday 7 May

This was a blustering and a windy day, with threatening clouds, but not cold and not unpleasant. At dusk, a perfect calm followed and tomorrow promises well. We are ready to leave now, all our work being done, and nothing is left but to pack up and leave as soon as the pesky rivers allow. Reports are varied as to the time we shall be kept waiting, one pessimistic Kazakh saying for two weeks yet, but we hope strongly to leave about the end of next week and possibly we may ride, with camels to pack our baggage, if wheels are impossible. We have been only just in time to do our work here, for everything now is upside down, the mine is half-full of water and candles will not burn in it through the water closing up the ventilation outlets; the coal supply is exhausted, there is no meat in sight and the Kazakhs will not sell stock after their grievous losses this winter. The sugar supply is finished, flour is nearly so, and tea is getting shaky. No work is being done by anyone and the mine-force, the Russian element, hops and jumps around the flagpole all day while the manager is indifferent.

Friday 8 May

A Siberian summer on the Kazakh steps I expect to liken to a winter in Florida or southern Spain for pleasure; today was perfect and nothing more need be said. In the morning I packed up almost all the assay things and everybody loafed about in a going-home-for-the-holidays mood. After dinner, Mussen and self started out for a long walk with cameras, taking a wide circle on the surrounding hills to get views of the camp and other points of interest. We called upon Ab Rai, my old Kazakh assay co-labourer and Mashai, Mussen's right-hand man in the sampling work. They were in a village of six yurts amidst a host of sheep, goats and cattle and invited us into their felt houses. Here they gave us very dirty boiled milk most politely and respectfully and we had to drink it among all the men and women and children of the community. I photoed the whole mob of them, including the yurts and flocks. These are working-class Kazakhs; they are most admirable people as to disposition and although they mean well and look fairly clean, they know nothing about cleanliness when it comes to food and cookery.

Saturday 9 May

Windy but sunny day with local hailstorms blowing about. It had been all arranged for us to go to visit Djakin Moustaphin, the chief Kazakh magistrate of this district, at his present location among his flocks and herds in his collection of yurts. For he moves about from pasture to pasture just like the poorest Kazakh nomad. At 8am we left for our 30 verst ride with a Kazakh guide, and Mr Riasanoff. The snow is almost gone except for big banks in sheltered slopes but the lowlands are very wet and the deep clay and alkali earths make dire pitfalls for horse and man, especially in crossing the many small streams. On our ride on no roads but the hills and flats, we saw real Florida whooping cranes, called storks locally, the big steppe-hen, geese and many ducks and teal, besides hawks of many sizes and variety. Wildflowers are very plentiful and fine and the indications

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

for wild berries seem most promising. At 11.30am we arrived, the magistrate riding forth to meet us with his train of followers. His hospitality was sincere and we concluded to stop the night at his earnest invitation.

Sunday 10 May

All last afternoon and evening we watched the true life of the steppes, as it was 1000 years ago. Djakin Moustaphin is a big, fine man of great intelligence, speaking good Russian and writing Arabic fluently. His herds were very large and he keeps a



Djakin Moustaphin in his yurt

number of servants and herdsmen. We saw great flocks of sheep and goats and a vast herd of horses all in poor condition owing to the late and severe winter. But his camels! The landscape was dotted for miles with them and that evening they all came strolling in like a fleet of ships. Then began a strange scene. Apparently, the camel hair is never shorn but is pulled off when loose and shedding, and this is the time of year. So boys and men, girls and women tugged at the long brown silken wool, while the camels objected a bit and pecked. Camels of all sizes and ages from one week to the lordly and ancient bulls, several being white, all two-humped apart from a very few. We ate boiled mutton, killed in front of us, using fingers and a knife, all from the same dish, drank tea in quantities, with bread, cakes and many sweets and slept on Bokhara rugs in the big yurt kept for guests.

Djakin Moustaphin said he would ride back with us and he came with his Russian secretary and his own body servant, an obsequious man. We left about 9 am, the magistrate on an ambling white horse fit and able to carry his enormous weight. We saw much white quartz outcropping, said to contain gold and also a grand supply of limestone, good for smelting. A big storm of rain and hail chased us and to make the shelter of a distant yurt in time, we galloped hard for two or three miles, over rocks, up and down slopes and through deep clay, mud and water. I just managed to head the

crowd without unduly urging my horse and the whips were popping behind. It was good but there were no hounds ahead! In three hours we were home, horses still full of go. Then Djakin Moustaphin, after much food, tea and smoking, showed us a game of cards, a wonderful game! And we played from 2pm till 9pm in one long stretch. The game is almost bridge with

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poker, picquet and seven-up all intermixed, a most complicated game at which he is very adept and at which he shows great acuteness and memory for cards.

Monday 11 May

The wind shifted to the east and blew strongly and coldly all day, the thermometer being very little above freezing point, but it was nearly cloudless and the sun was warm. Djakin Moustaphin left us about 3pm to ride back to his camp and flocks. In the morning he intimated that he desired to learn bridge and we showed him the game, which he understood at once and, in a few hands, he played like a veteran and even criticised our mistakes. He was very uncomfortable at meals with a knife and fork and very awkward, especially with the fork, but he was always essentially dignified and experimented without any external signs on his face. We are now fairly cornered because the river, the Little Nura is in full flood and it may be a week or 10 days before we can leave yet. This morning our mailman arrived from Akmolinsk, seven days doing the return journey of 400 versts and having to swim rivers. All received letters and papers; mine came from America, England, France and India and we are eagerly reading foreign news a month or more old.

Tuesday 12 May

Bright clear day with the same cold and blustery east wind. This is our worst wind, not because it is the coldest but because it is cold *and* lasts longer, blowing for days and days from the same quarter. Finished all my packing of assay stuff except the final nailing down and also packed a box full of any number of ore specimens representing every kind of copper ore known; a wonderful collection from one vein. It was arranged today that we leave on Saturday for Spassky, intending to trust to luck and some mythical boats to cross the Nura, the really formidable river in our way. We ride, all of us, from early morning (4am) the 75 versts to the riverbank, then camp the night. On the following day we try the passage. If it is impossible, our two Kazakh guides will try to get some prehistoric boat somewhere that they say they know about. If riders can swim over without the baggage wagon we shall swim and wait at Spassky for the baggage. Anyway, it will be fun!

May 13, 1903

Uspensky

Dear Marian

I have an idea that you would like to know something about the bird and plant life of the steppes as far as we have seen them. For an almost treeless country, there are a surprising number of birds, far exceeding British

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Columbia with all its great forests and berry food. The first thing that strikes you, is the great number of most noble hawks with long, pointed, powerful wings, built to wrestle with high winds. All sizes and all colours and all just a little different to any others we have seen elsewhere, even in the species which are most evidently the kinds we called in Florida the 'sparrow' and 'chicken' hawks. They are all silent, giving their prey no unnecessary alarms and they are very tame because no one shoots them, and you can ride up quite close to look at them perched upon rocks. The one who mostly resembles the Florida species is what we called the 'marsh' hawk, the dark brown one with the white spots on his back who is so very wary. Here he appears to be almost exactly the same, always flying low over flat, wet places and probably after neither birds nor rabbits but snails, water beetles, frogs etc as in Florida.

Dozens of small sparrow hawks are always wheeling about, generally 2 or 3 together. Then come the intermediate sizes up to a very large one which is lighter brown than the 'chicken hawk' and Djakin Moustaphin showed us his young one, three-quarters grown, already tame, and a very powerful bird. Riding the other day, I saw what I thought was a big white owl on the ground. I flushed him and he proved to be a big hawk, almost pure white with a tinge of pearl pink and the under-feathers of his wings were snow white with a big splash of black to the tips. He gave me a grand view as a gust of wind whirled him and nearly blew his hat off and he let everything go to catch it. The blue hawks are in great numbers and they are of course all intermixed with grays. But I have seen no swallow-tailed beauties yet and I'm keeping a close watch. Only once I heard the far-off, high-up, familiar whistle-cry and saw two enormous black-looking eagles soaring. One of them swooped down much nearer and I saw that he was a colossal creature with a far wider and more powerful stretch to his wings in proportion to his body than the bald-headed eagle of Florida. The Kazakhs say they pick up small sheep and calves easily! This number of birds of prey call for many small birds and there are many. Any quantity that run and crawl in grass and in the karagan³⁴ brush for protection. Little brown birds not particularly interesting to anything but themselves.

But the great feature among small birds are the larks, singing and soaring, great numbers of them mounting in the sky and splitting their little throttles, with big blue and brown hawks sharpening their claws all around. They sing beautifully and continually, not wisely but well.

³⁴ A shrub of the pea family similar to broom.

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

The most gorgeous woodpecker lives here, a marvellous barred and variegated creation in brown, black and white with gleams of other colours. What it pecks, I don't quite know but, as trees are such a rarity, I believe he attacks the big ants' nests which are built up a foot or so from the ground upon sticks, straw and earth, most laboriously, and are full of white grubs. The crows, if black have yellowish-white large beaks, but they are more often dove-coloured with blue-black markings, all being very large, tame, cheeky, quarrelsome and talkative. Most delightful birds!

Many swallows, of course, looking just as they always do! And I have seen two small blackbirds with yellow beaks and of a rounded squat shape, with tails upraised in an acute angle, which sing most thrillingly, sweetly and earnestly.

I find the small birds by riding in the karagan³⁵ brush instead of the open flats where the others ride, for there the flowers and warblers are to be seen. So far I have not been near enough to distinguish the geese, but a teal which was shot and brought to me proved to be a 'green wing'; but his head was different, being mottled with dark red and brown. There is also a species of enormous wild duck as large as a 'brant'³⁶, short-necked and apparently a white body with black wings, at least so he looks when flying. A clumsy flap-winged duck!

Riding to Moustaphin's, I heard a noise which sounded like The Point and I thought I was crazy, but it sounded again, unmistakable, and there were three big, blue sandhill cranes, necks outstretched, whrrooping the alarm, and they flew off with the same little run and kickoff in the same stiff, flapping fashion.

We also saw, flying in the distance, the big steppe-hen, a wary and very large bird who had the rounded appearance of the wings and strong flight of the grouse family.

There is another small game-bird here called the hazel-hen which is probably the sage-hen of the western states, for sagebrush is on all sides. I have only seen its eggs and never the bird which seems strange.

This exhausts my bird supply but, if I knew all about small birds. I would probably have only just begun, for they swarm and seem to be very varied.

³⁵ A species of juniper

³⁶ Brent goose?

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

Lizards are plentiful and tame, big brown-and-white ones and glorious green, scaly ones nearly a foot long. One of these I captured and stretched along my forearm, like you held the alligator for me, and Mussen took a photograph. People here are chary about touching them and their heads are certainly flat and snake-like but this was a quiet and dignified thing, not given to sudden impulses.

Many gorgeous beetles under stones and wood-ticks all over the stones. The latter have the same peculiar fondness for human society and swell with pride when they have achieved the object of their ambition, which means death!

I forgot! One large hummingbird flashed by me, hovering once just to display his colours, which were iridescent green and blacks, and the ever-present red head showing his gender.

Where all these birds nest is a marvel, as every small tree is well occupied on a sort of flat-system; I suppose different prices are charged for different 'suites'.

I am going to ransack the long grass and brush for nests because it must be getting time, or the larks would not be so jubilant and forgetful of hawks.

Many flowers are blooming, the white trillium-like flowers of the wild leak being most prominent at present. Yellow anemones and large buttercups, and a queer elongated white and blue flower are very plentiful. But the steppes must be the home of many well-known medicinal plants, for strong-scented herbs abound. Wild leeks grow here in the summer just like tame ones only smaller, and these are stored away for winter use. Our soups and stews all contain them. The karagan brush is the fuel of the country and distinctly resinous, burning with a fierce glare even when almost green.

At Moustaphin's they used it to cook with. A great camel is loaded on both sides with great bunches of it and on the top, sits the man. This moving stack-on-stilts moves at a stately pace to the tent door. It lies down groaning, ropes are loosened and a camel emerges talking to itself, leaving the stack on the ground. It appears very simple. Everything is easy and simple with these people. Nothing is new and untried, and all methods have been tested by practice for thousands of years so everything works smoothly and with an easy dignity.

We leave here on Saturday for Spassky and expect to have a bad time crossing the River Nura, but the ride to Rieben's Mines of nearly 500 versts, camping in yurts among the sheep, goats and camels, will be grand and I only wish you could be with us to enjoy it, as I know you would.

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

You must have spent a glorious holiday in France and have much to tell.

Goodbye Marian.

Always yours, Toshi.

Addendum. Same day.

During a long and glorious ride today, over the hills and far away, I found a most colossal nest in a stumpy small wild rose tree about 3 feet high and full of thorns. The nest was about a foot high and 10 inches across and very strongly built of stout sticks, and had a most surprising arrangement for protection from hawks above in the shape of three stacked sticks laid across the nest-opening a trifle apart. These were not fastened tightly but were so wedged that they could not blow off, and there was just room for the bird to hop in. The ingenious bird was what I called a long-tailed, black-and-white magpie and was very tame and sly looking. It flew off the nest where it was hatching, in the old and tedious fashion, three beautiful grey-blue eggs, brown-mottled and very pointed at one end. We left the eggs and departed, marveling! We also found wild onions, carrots, artichokes, mint, sorrel, sage, leeks and ate them all, and we tried a large number of other things that happily did not prove to be very poisonous! No wonder the Kazakhs grow no vegetables at all!

I also found two dead hawks around a dead camel, embraced in each other's death rattles and so have come to the pensive and sad conclusion that Siberian hawks eat carrion! Also saw a collection of birds that were evidently game-birds, for their heads were like those of the cock quail and I imagine them to be a species of plover.

Wednesday 13 May

The wind has shifted a trifle to the south and the small southern infusion just warmed the rest of the wind, which was easterly, so that the day was a perfect one for outdoor exercise. In the morning I had a box made of light iron in which to seal hermetically all the valuable pulp samples³⁷, in case the Nura proves to be a wet passage. We saw the sister boat to the one we shall be supposed to make the crossing with. It is about 12 feet long, about 4 feet beam, and was being used as a manger for the camels in the mine stables, so we shall probably not cross the Nura in a boat. In the afternoon Mussen, Hedman and self took a long ride looking for a yurt that had been in a certain place a week ago and whose owner had horses to be hired.

³⁷ Ore pulp, a mixture of finely ground ore, water, and chemicals used for mineral processing.

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

This nomad business is a nuisance, for only a dead camel marked the site of his abode and we never found him. But the dead camel was a skeleton-mine of information as to the humps and I found that the vertebrae in the humps extend to the surface, so to speak, a problem I was much worried about.

May 14, 1903

Uspensky

Dear Olivia!

You have no idea how I have missed my weekly letters to you...

I want to now take you by special invitation on a visit to Djakin Moustaphin, the chief magistrate for the Russian Empire among the Kazakh people of this district.

The chief, his train of followers and his Russian secretary come out to meet us and we exchange profound bows and shake hands most ceremoniously. All ride to his tents together and, as soon as we arrive, a Kazakh waddles to each of our horses, assists us down as if we were old and rheumatic, and leads them away. Before they feed them, they allow them to cool thoroughly. There are no hitching posts on the steppes and no fences. They hobble one horse securely by plaited camels' hair ropes, flat and broad, fastened to each foreleg below the knee and then they tie every other horse, no matter how many, to the captive. Other horses might kick and bite each other but these do not.

At night they allow strange horses like ours to graze, by tying one horse's foreleg to another horse's foreleg with camels' hair rope about 30 feet long so that they can walk about fairly well but, if they try to run away, they can never agree at the same time, to go in the same direction. The result is easy to imagine!

We are ushered into a fine tent, walled with thick grey felt and roofed likewise, carpeted with glorious great rugs made of camels' hair or camels' hair and wool, all beautifully coloured and with the exotic patterns of Persia and Turkestan.

In deference to us, our host has arranged seats with bales of rugs and a round table with legs about 8 inches high, on which the great brass samovar soon appears for the tea. Plates of sweetmeats appear, and the bread comes in little rounded pellets like walnuts, baked hard from coarse brown flour. Another strange dish came which we all ate from and pronounced the mixture to be made of nuts, butter and sugar: coarsely ground, gritty

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

material and very good. But we learned it was merely milk! The milk is boiled till it dries up into a hard cake which is broken and pounded up, butter and sugar are added and that is all.

Soon the chief's wife, a dignified lady in a white silk head-dress, and actually wearing skirts, appeared, but the chief made no introductions and she soon strolled out and proceeded (for we followed and watched) to choose a fat one amongst a flock of choice sheep for our benefit. She took a long time and felt the tails of nearly all of them; then she decided and a man seized the sheep and hauled it unrelentingly to the front door of our tent (which is a flap of felt). Here he tied its legs together in a bunch. Then he bared his knife and proceeded to perform the operation which transported the happy animal into the green and luscious pastures of Valhalla.

The next thing I saw was Mr Fell dashing out of the tent and in a short while, his form was to be seen on a distant ridge, taking very long steps, with both his hands in his pockets.

The man with the sheep having sufficiently honoured us all at our doorway, assisted the animal to the cook tent and I followed inside. Here was a sight! A great round dome of a tent with an opening to the sky, 6 feet across at the top and centre, from which the smoke from the red and glowing fire of karagan brush rose. Immediately over the fire, supported by an iron tripod, hung a great cauldron, full of bubbling soup and bones and meat; and above, in the clean smoke, hung joints and quarters of beef, mutton and horsemeat, row upon row. A pile of brush fuel was near the doorway upon which the head cook sat in a most important manner. Boxes for stores were piled all along one half of the wall and, along the other half, were rugs upon which squatted many men of all ages who sat and licked their lips.

I was given a seat and lit my pipe to give them something to look at and to hear them click in their throats loudly, which they always do if amazed at anything. This was not all, for there arose a fluffy gray thing, like a bird in a nest, of about the age of two days, that tottered and sprawled about aimlessly, always gravitating towards the fire and the boiling cauldron. This was a baby camel about the size of a big calf, with very long legs and huge joints. At intervals, the head cook would seize it from the fire, push it to one side, then he would bend its knees and force its head down until it was in a hunched up sitting posture. Thus it would stay a moment saying repeatedly "boat, bohote"!

Immediately it was up again floundering and staggering all over the floor among the men. No-one beat it, no one cuffed it but all attended to it most carefully if it got into trouble and it said "boat" all the time! One woman was in the tent making a quilted padding of camels' wool for a great Kazakh winter sun-bonnet; and a small girl

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

about two years of age who had been crawling about, suddenly arose and tottered towards the door flap. At the same time the baby camel said "boat" and staggered across her path. The girl tried in vain to pass, dodging here and there, and finally tried to crawl between the legs of the obstacle. The baby camel, gave a circular kick with its soft padded foot and bunted the girl between its four legs. I was horrified, but no one moved, so I restrained myself and the baby camel proceeded to pensively chew the other baby's hair, saying "boat" loudly in its ears. The woman looked up and murmured something in a placid way and the head cook walked across and, putting both hands under the baby camel, he lifted it bodily from the whining infant, depositing the long-necked object near some salt horsemeat which the creature proceeded to lick rapturously.

Quiet ensuing after a while, I left, much desiring that little camel!

Soon the strange feast began and we were invited to wash our hands, for no forks are used and all eat out of the same dish. Great slabs and masses of mutton, horsemeat and bowls of the soup it was boiled in. Each of us had a knife and all attacked the food, finding strange discoveries in the shape of sheep's feet and tongues and pieces of head and all kinds of things down to the animal's lungs, and our host was determined to give us all of what he considered to be titbits, carefully cutting them off and handing them to us in his fingers. I ate several pieces of lung in this way which I believe belonged to a horse. Then bowls of koumiss appeared; koumiss is sour when fresh and is particularly pleasant. After we stopped, long after, the Kazakhs still hacked at the meats and sucked up the soup till everything was but a pile of bones, like a skeleton in a cyclone. Then tea came, and sweets, candies, and woolly cakes. Altogether it was a very long ordeal!

In the evening, for we spent the night there, all the sheep and goats were driven up, all the milk-cows and milk-mares and the camels came of their own accord. Such a circus!

First, every lamb, kid and calf had to be separately run down by boys, girls, men and women to be penned up for the night, and the whole place was a moving, bleating, laughing, tumbling mass of life until the youngsters were all accounted for.

The milking then occupied the attention of a number while others pulled the hair and wool from the camels, who shed almost all their hair in the spring until the skin is quite bald and are never sheered. The camels objected strongly on principle, some biting, all moaning, others imitating the disgraceful habits of the llama (or Minor upon the station platform at Decatur) by spitting.

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

Darkness came and we had to go inside and wolf more meat with our host, in the same way. But at midnight, I went outside and saw a marvellous sight. Imagine, 100 camels all lying down all around the tent in groups, packed closely together! And in the near distance are hundreds of horses, jealously guarded by mounted herders. And sheep and goats that packed and covered the ground. All still and quiet under a clear sky full of stars!

In the morning we rode home, our host coming with us to return our visit. He is enormous and he rode a mighty, white pacer that kept with us during a hard gallop of several miles to avoid a big hailstorm. Djakin is a man of great intelligence and wished to show us what he called "chess". It turned out to be "draughts" with additional rules and moves. Please try it. You must move your men forwards in the usual way, but any of your men may take another man forwards or backwards at any time and the crowned king can take any piece on the same diagonal or parallel that he is on, no matter how far he may be away, provided that no other piece intervenes, like the queen in chess. In all other respects, the game is the same. Moustaphin played an unbeatable game and just humoured us, winning always quite easily. He showed us the most interesting and complicated game of cards too and showed great skill in this way.

Now I must thank you very much for your delightful company during this glorious ride and visit, and I hope and trust that you will not suffer any evil effects.

We are packed, and ready to leave the day after tomorrow, and I expect there will be news to tell you about our crossing the River Nura.

Our stay here has been very pleasant and most amusing in many ways but I am crazy to get to Rieben's mines where I hope to see you soon and we will ride and ride, till we will waddle when we walk like a Kazakh herder.

Bring some music with you when you come because a piano can most probably be procured from Pavlodar³⁸ and I know that Mr Fell is pining to play.

Good night, and please start at once. Always yours,

Tosh.

³⁸ I was much disappointed to discover that the story that Fell took the same piano to the Athabasca, to Florida and thence to Kazakhstan was a myth!

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

Thursday 14 May

Fine sunny continuous weather, fit for any country on Earth. The hills are quite green but there are still large patches of snow visible on nearby mountains which may last a week. Pottered about the process of packing a good deal today, everybody finding things left and partially forgotten. Today another Kazakh potentate sent an invitation to dine with him tomorrow at his yurt five versts away. But I am going to back out and write letters. Horsemeat, grease, koumiss, grubby bread and camel's wool in the tea are not magnetic inducements.

May 15, 1903

[To Anne]

...When we get to Spassky, we must run the gauntlet of the polite wishes in regard to vodka that the cashier will extend to us in such a friendly spirit of national hospitality and really, it is no joke, for as Mr Fell truly says "they don't mind if they do lie under the table".

Mr Fell is in splendid health, he smokes a pipe, wears a belt and rolls up his sleeves, indications that please me most exceedingly. I find him changed considerably by his mixing with the world more, and much more tolerant



Steppe view in spring

1903

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

in his opinions of others which do not need words to be expressed just as plainly. Being a standard and a mirror to a family must be a fearful strain and can be good for no man. We play bridge every night and this pleases and occupies his evening splendidly, after working hard all day and worrying unnecessarily about half of the time.

Many, many thanks, if you please, for the 'Lifes'³⁹, they came safely and were much appreciated.

Miss Stimpson writes from Cherbourg on the eve of returning to New York, saying that her companion refused to cross the channel for obvious reasons⁴⁰ and that they would cruise all this summer around their own coasts and take in the boat race, no doubt. So you, probably, did not see her and she said she was very sorry to have missed meeting you in London. Paraffine⁴¹ writes a gossipy "tea and cake-soaked" little letter from India, full of giggles and lumps of dough, and the mellowing effect of Indian society is finishing her education thoroughly where Biarritz left it off.

Fell has been much perturbed over the want of accommodation for you at Rieben's Mines, and I lifted much of the troubles from his chest, where his belt travels to, by saying that I wanted to live in a yurt all summer long, and that Mussen would also have to. By moving all official work to the office-building proper, this will give you a house entirely to yourself, of five large rooms and a kitchen under the same roof, with a broad passage in the centre. The furniture and cupboard arrangements are as meagre as can be, but that can be remedied. Three rooms, all opening into each other by doors, are on one side of the passage, and two rooms are on the other side, entirely separate from each other. A yurt or two of small size can be got in Bayan Aul and they will be ideal dwellings.

³⁹ Life Magazine, I imagine.

⁴⁰ No idea what reasons! Candace C. Stimson (1869–1944 worked with her father, a surgeon and yacht-racing owner, to administer the anti-tetanus serum around Europe during World War I. The two of them raced his yacht Fleur-de-Lys in a trans-Atlantic race.

⁴¹ I do not know for certain which sister he referred to as 'Paraffine' here and in a letter to Olivia from Biarritz in 1897 in which he drew and criticised at length the 'loathesome (sic) little wretch of a dog' which his sister called 'darling sweetie yum-yum'. However, he often referred to Ida by her own name and later described her as "my fighting suffragette sister" so I presume it was his younger sister, Nell, from whom descend the American family of Vans Evers.

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

Many photographs are being taken and many more can be taken! Every step to Rieben's is a step nearer to you and every hour past brings you nearer, and life is an ever present thrill of anticipation.

Toshy.

Friday 15 May

Westerly wind with a shade of north seems to ensure fine weather for our start tomorrow and today packing is final and the baggage wagon will be loaded this evening. As we leave at 3am, I shall try to induce the others to stay up and play bridge until then, but it will be rather hopeless to attempt. All are delighted to leave! We have two guides who can swim!

Saturday 16 May

Uspensky, leaving for Spassky again. Up at 4 am, all being keen to get away with an early start. The sun rose into a cloudless sky and it was warm at dawn. We left about 6 am, saying farewell to a host of people assembled. Mussen, Hedman and self rode, Mr Fell and Mr Riasanoff driving a tarantass, and our baggage came in an ore-wagon which had been entirely remade and was very strong and heavy; three picked horses to the wagon and two horses to the tarantass. It was a matter of 70 versts to the Little Nura and, with the roads being soft and treacherous, we expected a long day. There were many delays; first the wagon, then the load, then the wheels of the tarantass kept flying off. We crossed one respectable river by a ford, which was not deep but the pull was heavy and at noon, blazing hot, we camped at a stream and rested horses for three hours. Here our mail from Spassky met us and I got one postal card from London. At 2pm went on steadily, Mussen's and my horses being both thin and weak; reached the Little Nura at 8pm, galloping the last 5 miles in their usual careless style, regardless of horseflesh!

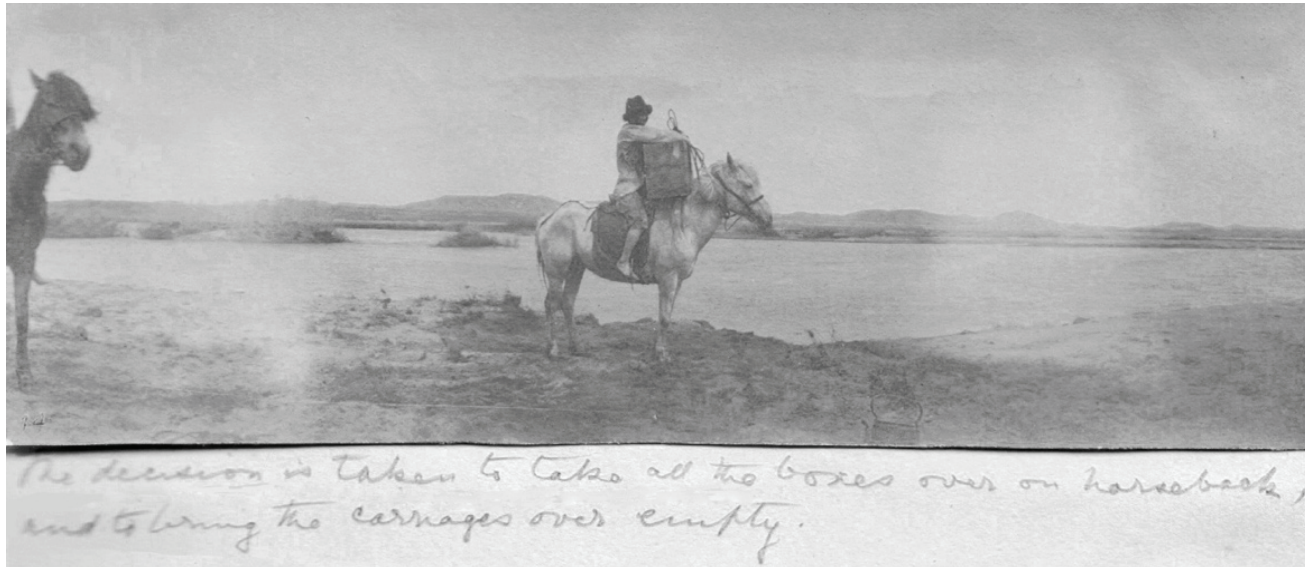
Sunday 17 May

We camped on the bank last night and enjoyed a warm and clear night. Up at dawn to see the river; she was 100 yards wide and running strongly. The remains of a bridge show, although nothing much is left. A Kazakh arrived with his horse, both wet through, having just swam across to assist us, clad largely in a broad grin and very wet! He said we could cross but doubted the wagon loaded as it was. At 6am we were packed and started off up the stream to find a ford. Here and there, wherever they fancied, our Kazakhs and the stranger swam their horses across and back repeatedly, sounding the depth and force of current. They are fine fellows and the horses most sensible, for it was dangerous work. After an hour or more, they found a

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"

crossing place, up to a horse's shoulder but good footing and at once, for the Nura was rising with the sun, they began to carry over all our boxes and baggage on horseback, stripping the wagon and crossing the river very many times. We then crossed and, finally, with five horses to the empty wagon and 4 to the tarantass, they rushed them over with loud shouts and much whip popping. The river was 150 yards wide here. By 10am we were all over and we arrived in Spassky at 4.30. I killed a badger with my whip after a long chase.

Uspensky: "Mr Fell and Mussen finishing their survey with most perfect indifference to the dynamite charges we exploded under them"



The decision is taken to take all the boxes over on horseback and to bring the carriages over empty.

5. Spassky: "The copper mine has no coal, the smelter no ore, the coal mine no pumps... Everybody is idle in all directions"

18 May

Spassky

[To Anne]

By this time, the influence of the sun was being felt and the Nura was rising so another grand sight began: The



Mashai with the box of chemicals from the assay office, and the mail messenger

three Kazakhs actually carried over on horses every single bundle, bag and box we had, stripping the baggage-wagon clean. The water was up to a horse's shoulder-blades when they started and to his withers when they stopped and they raced their horses across on the return trips, laughing and joking. The crossing was 200 yards across from landing to landing. Several boxes weighed over 50lbs and one, which contained the acids, weighed well over 100lbs but Mashai, a Kazakh miner who

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Spassky: "The copper mine has no coal, the smelter no ore, the coal mine no pumps... Everybody is idle in all directions"

worked for us a great deal and who is an especial friend, carried it over on his horse. I have his photo mounted on his big black horse; also the mail messenger on his powerful white one, both stripped, wet and pleased. After all the stuff was across, we were escorted over as precious treasures and then all the horses were taken back, five being put to the light tarantass and six to the heavy and empty wagon and, with yells and shouts and cracking of whips they rushed the vehicles across safely. This was one of the sights of my life!



The tarantass emerges safely from the Nura

... Here we are at Spassky, being made much of, and we leave for Bayan Aul in two days, rejoicing. Fell is wrestling with the smelter books, Mussen is riding to inspect outcrops around, and I am sampling the enormous slag dumps of ancient and recent years, finding enough metallic copper in these slags to stock a BC mine with sufficient material on which to float companies with \$1 million capitalization, without any hesitation on the part of the regulation directors!

There is a fine state of affairs out here. Uspensky Mine is shut down because there is no coal on hand to work the pumps and the mine is half full of water; the smelter is shut down because there is no ore, they say; the coal mine at Karagandy is shut down because the pumps are no good and it is full of water. The copper mine has no coal, the smelter no ore, the coal mine no pumps; the smelter has coal on hand and thousands of tons of refractory slag to run, but they shut down and throw out of work many dependent people because, they say plaintively, there is no ore — and shrug their shoulders. Everybody is idle in all directions.

The Kazakh and Russian workmen come to Mr Fell in deputations asking him when he is going to buy the property and run it properly and he hates to have to say that he can give them no answer for several months. The Kazakh Sultan has told us that all his people like us immensely and want us to take these properties away from the present owners as they are miserably treated now. Which is all quite true!

Spassky: "The copper mine has no coal, the smelter no ore, the coal mine no pumps... Everybody is idle in all directions"

On the way to Bayan Aul we cross the Big Nura, an elder and more ill-favoured sister and we are told that we must cross in boats, so we expect another fine experience!

I have bought a glorious Kazakh saddle with quaint iron and silver mountings, entirely homemade of wood, a fine horn in front and heavy iron stirrups, silver covered.

Good night, I have enjoyed my evening with you ever so much.

Toshy.

Monday 18 May

The weather still very fine. We are in the same house we had before and take our meals altogether at the Manager's house nearby. They are extremely hospitable and live very well indeed. Mussen and I at once began a rough survey to measure the extent of the old slag dump here, just across the river. These old dumps are enormous, about 100,000 tons perhaps and are very valuable. With the assistance of two Russians, I took a big sample, as accurately as our short stay allowed, and quartered it down to portable size to assay its value at Rieben's. This is a most interesting place, from its old work and from its wasteful nature. There was copper strewn everywhere, even the bed of the river was full of rich copper material. The Sultan Djebagin Djumabek came to see us and Mr Fell arranged with him all details of our journey back to Bayan Aul, the Sultan providing horses, carriages and wagon at reasonable rates; we leave on Friday morning.



A deputation calls on Mr Fell (who is at the front of the men standing)

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Spassky: "The copper mine has no coal, the smelter no ore, the coal mine no pumps... Everybody is idle in all directions"

18 May

... The Sultan is our best friend here and he comes in every day that the weather permits to have tea or lunch with us and sometimes he brings a great big son along. Today he told us some facts about camels. He said that the law only allows 17 poods, about 600lbs, to be put on a camel's back for transport and this load they will bring from Tashkent or thousands of versts. Often the law is broken and 20 poods carried. These loads are carried by the ordinary two-humped camel which works here and pulls 40 poods in a sleigh. He said there is also a one-humped camel, very few of which are ever seen here. We saw one at Uspensky. These are much bigger and more powerful and will pack as high as 35 poods on their back and pull as much as 90-100 pounds in a sleigh. Of this kind there are many working on the caravan routes from Tashkent to Orenburg, and they fetch 100 to 150 rubles while the camels here bring only 30 to 40.



The dilapidated smelter at Spassky

We asked the Sultan how many camels he owned and he said, "Not many – 40 head" and shortly after I asked him how many sons he had, and he replied quite seriously, "Seven head" using the same word for head that he used for his camels.

His men have left to bring our baggage with 11 sleighs, 13 camels and four horses, going to Bayandy Kuduk. He does all the transport work that he can and uses horses as a rule.

At Uspensky we had quite a pleasant time, for the manager is a most entertaining little man, quite out of place on a mine miles from anywhere. He ought to be an actor, or an artist on some newspaper in a big city, for he is as full of life and jokes and as quick-witted as a street Arab. I send you a couple of his sketches to find out

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Spassky: "The copper mine has no coal, the smelter no ore, the coal mine no pumps... Everybody is idle in all directions"

what you think of them, please. These are done in about a minute or two and without any care apparently. They are meant to represent old Russian figures to be found in churches in Moscow. He prefers caricature and cartoons to anything, having a keen and knife-like humour. Certainly the most surprising individual to find at Uspensky. Mr Fell would like him, I am sure. I admired, very much, a horse galloping in a sleigh all in the Russian style, done in black and white and in a most spirited manner, and he promised to do another for me and I believe he will. This, if as good as the original, is well worth putting anywhere and it struck me that over the horseshoes at The Point would be just the place. His horses are his strongest point to my eye and naturally so, because he understands a horse very well.

One is learning much Russian here and, although I do not speak much, I could, and I understand a great deal. All ordinary talk is now quite intelligible and one increases one's vocabulary every day. Atkinson is great with his Russian, being absolutely fluent. If I do not hear from you or about you by this next mail, I shall wear myself to a frazzle so please be kind as often as you can. This is a bad case! Thinking of you all the time and not hearing is worse than not thinking at all – perhaps!

Goodbye and may good spirits watch over you.

Tosh.

Tuesday 19 May

Rain fell in the morning but it soon cleared to a fine day! I continued sampling the slag dumps, taking two more big samples and quartering them down to small size with the help of a Russian and a Kazakh, the Kazakh being a very jovial man with an Irish cast of countenance and humour. He tried hard to 'work' me for new clothes all day long. This is the Czar's birthday and it is a holiday of course. Many flags are flying and there is much flaunting of gay-coloured dresses. At 4pm I took a number of photographic interiors of the smelter, furnaces and engine room and other places of interest, followed admiringly by all the subordinate officials. Mussen rode out with the old manager and a guide and inspected 27 copper outcrops in the neighbourhood, taking a few samples. The country is full of copper showings. Mr Fell and Hedman were wrestling with the smelter books. The Sultan sent us a fat sheep which his men slaughtered at our doorstep, doing us much honour.

Spassky: "The copper mine has no coal, the smelter no ore, the coal mine no pumps... Everybody is idle in all directions"

Wednesday 20 May

A really glorious day. Mussen and I drove out with young Riasanoff, the youngest brother, a black-browed weed of not much use to himself or anyone else. He was to show us various deposits of limestone, clay and quartz from which the smelter draws its supplies. They were all within seven versts. The deposits were splendid in every case but the system of tapping them was futile. Each man seemed to gouge out his own little hole like an animal and the hillside would be full of open burrows, from the bottom of which the material is dragged up by main strength. There is no attempt at quarrying at all. The tarantasses arrived today and the horses, also Mr Nyemkoff from Karagandy and it is arranged for us to leave tomorrow morning. Took some extended panoramic views of Spassky which were well worth it. Sultan paid us a formal call this evening and will accompany us to Karagandy.



Spassky Zavod, the workmen's houses on the left

6. Karagandy: “Below us was a wide valley full of yurts... and in the far distance the mountains of the Bayan Aul range. It was a wonderful view never to be forgotten”

Thursday 21 May

Wonderfully fine day! Up at 4am and, after the usual fuss and delay, we got off at 6am, Mr Nyemkoff coming with us, in all, three tarantasses and the big baggage wagon. 10 versts on our road, the Sultan met us for we passed near his yurts and we saw great numbers of his flocks and herds. He had brought much koumiss (Champagnski as he called it) and we drank largely, all learning to like it more and more. Here we saw also his superfine spotted horse, the apple of his eyes; a really very fine animal. The baggage wagon had already had several wheels off and was badly strained and soon it capsized completely in a small stream, all wheels pointing skywards, and we had a long and trying delay righting it and wondering whose things were wettest. The Sultan assisted personally and was much put out at the mishap. He rode a fine white Arab and stayed close to us. We arrived at Karagandy coalmine at 2pm, 45 versts, and stopped the night to allow them to tinker up the baggage wagon.

Friday 22 May, Karagandy

Here the weather changed (note the day of the week) and our troubles began. Sunshine and fierce squalls of rain, and wind blowing from the southwest. The Sultan also ate and spent the night with us, being a most entertaining, dignified and jovial old gentleman. He saw us off in the morning. Mr Nyemkoff came as far as our first change, 25 versts. He promised me a fine saddle-horse, now lame but curable, and two fine Borzoi greyhound pups from the Sultan's 'kennels', to be sent after me. The roads were bad from the heavy rainstorms and we made poor time. At 1pm we arrived at the Big Nura and found her easier than the little one. Here, we sent on to the Russian village of Samioff for help and a guide to show us a crossing. The river was very wide but we crossed in about a four foot depth and had no trouble except that many things were soaked. Arrived at 3pm at the village, 50 versts and, as it rained, we spent the night there. A fine view of the valley and the river from a mountaintop nearby.

Karagandy: "Below us was a wide valley full of yurts... and in the far distance the mountains of the Bayan Aul range. It was a wonderful view never to be forgotten"

Saturday 23 May

Left early in the morning, the weather looking threatening. The Russian colonists here have a beautiful valley to live in and their extensive fields planted in grain were sprouting well. They have only been here a year and they ought to do very well as the land is rich and fertile. A strong southwest wind with successions of driving rainstorms, cold and uncomfortable. The roads are very bad and horses and carriages sink immovably time and time again, the horses being pulled out singly and then harnessed to the back of the carriage or wagon to pull it out. Saw many ducks! Camped at noon and rested the tired horses a long time. All afternoon a cold rain fell, soaking, pelting rains and our Kazakh drivers and riders were much exposed but always cheerful. At 6pm, having made 60 versts, we came to a yurt encampment and stopped for the night in one, full of



A typical thatched house in the Russian village

people and livestock as usual. Our Kazakhs herded our horses or slept on the baggage wagon in the cold rain all night. They are fine hardy men and take everything as it comes!

Sunday 24 May

Left at 7am and glad to go. The weather is still very bad. Storms with sunshine between, and the same strong southwest wind. We travelled through glorious pasture country full of flocks and herds and had many delays crossing small streams with

abrupt banks and swift currents. Our horses were tired and not up to much! At noon, we camped again for a necessary long rest and, as one of our Kazakhs had an old muzzleloader shotgun, I tried in vain to get some ducks. In the evening we came to the end of the great plateau we travelled along and, below us, was a wide valley full of yurts and stocks and, in the far distance, the mountains of the Bayan Aul range. It was a wonderful view never to be forgotten. We crossed the valley and could see the Bayan Aul range plainly; in the evening, camped by a salt lake, having made 65 versts. This water made salt tea and was not good. The weather was cold and we slept in the rain all night — but we slept!

Karagandy: "Below us was a wide valley full of yurts... and in the far distance the mountains of the Bayan Aul range. It was a wonderful view never to be forgotten"

Monday 25 May

Woke up in a steady, cold rain which was most unpleasant with no cover. Our waterproof beds had kept us dry and warm and stood the test well. The Kazakhs were soaked but grimly cheerful. We left without breakfast, no-one desiring to stay any longer by that salt lake; hurried on to Bayan Aul, 45 versts away, hoping to be in by breakfast as we were off at 5 am. But soon the rain was a perfect downpour, more than less steady, and the roads suffered accordingly. When we entered the Bayan Aul mountains, we were only 5 versts away but they were the worst of all the trip. Long flats of black mud between rocky banks, some partly corduroyed. The baggage wagon stuck often and we had to send all the horses to pull it through, and it nearly capsized frequently. Finally, 3½ versts from Bayan Aul, the baggage horses became quite exhausted and lay down, so we went on under the guidance of a young Cossack to Razmussin's house, which the company rents, and sent back fresh horses. All arrived at 1pm, famished, wet and half frozen, also much splashed; drank vodka, slept and played bridge rest of day feeling much travel worn!



A tarantass bogged down

Tuesday 26 May

It rained and hailed all night and our Kazakhs who had herded the horses and watched the baggage all the wet and cold night, should have been dead, but they arrived to see us in the morning with cheerful smiles and teeth chattering! One man went to sleep sitting in our room in five minutes. They left us to make the trip back to Karagandy, all sorry to part, and we shook hands heartily with them for they are grand men! We left at 6am to drive to Rieben's mines, 70 versts, and it snowed as we started. Two Cossacks drove us, both under the stimulating influences of vodka. The first 30 versts, we flew, through mud and rocks, having good horses and going under the whip without any

Karagandy: "Below us was a wide valley full of yurts... and in the far distance the mountains of the Bayan Aul range. It was a wonderful view never to be forgotten"

judgement. We lunched at the aul of the head Kazakh of this district, a very superior place, clean and neat. The two wives were very striking women, the eldest especially so, and their children in some cases were beautiful to look upon.

The headman was enormous, most dignified and well-bred. By this time, our Cossacks were nearly useless and, as soon as we started, the driver of Mussen and Hedman plumped them into a stream with steep banks, and we left them, Mr Fell and I, floundering in water to their knees, trying to get the tarantass out; it being cold and windy and very wet at intervals. We drove on till our driver lost his road, when we stopped at a small yurt till, two hours later, Mussen and Hedman caught us up. Then we went to a big collection of yurts and, our horses all being played out, our Cossacks began to haggle most spiritedly over hiring horses. Here we drank much koumiss. In an hour, we were off with new horses. We hoped to be home at 5pm but, seven versts from there, the Akshah River must be crossed. The actual river is narrow and deep but there is a very long wet and clayey flat ford. Mussen and Hedman crossed ahead and safely, but Mr Fell and I with our three horses and the tarantass stuck fast in soft clay, horses down flat and wheels to the hubs. The horses were taken out singly to firm ground and we were left sitting alone. Our Kazakhs saw a herd of camels grazing near and they charged and captured two, one protesting all the time. These they harnessed roughly to our tarantass and, at the first attempt, one bogged down and one broke loose; the bogged one having a fearful struggle to get out. The next attempt they pulled us out backwards and we arrived at Rieben's at 8pm, hungry, and frozen nearly stiff.

7. Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

Wednesday 27 May

This is a funny place to call home but it seems to be correct to do so at present. Anyway it means 'stationary headquarters' and the finish to our extended journey; all trips during the summer will be local ones only. Since we left Omsk, we have travelled 1500 versts on the steppes far from the railroad, two thirds of the journey being on snow, at the end of a very bad winter when the snow was the deepest, and we passed through three boorahns. The remaining third was during the spring break-up and the season of rivers in flood: flatlands covered in water, hundreds of small streams, the steppes full of soft clay and alkaline spots of most treacherous footing. So we may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling. And no one was ill a day all the time that we camped in cold rains with no shelter. Having reached 'home', the daily account is not interesting enough to continue, being merely an account of the work of the day recorded. This can be kept in rough notes for official use, but the adventures and excitements will be too few and far between to admit of recording for distant friends.

Our trip covered country banded on the north by the railroad at Omsk, the river Irtysh on the east as far as Pavlodar, then southwest to Bayan Aul and south to the Uspensky mine, through all variations of steppe country, some flat and fertile, some rugged and mountainous. The general impression is of a very promising agricultural and pastoral country, peopled by a fine race of men and women in whom are also tremendous possibilities, for they are intelligent and have admirable dispositions.

June 5, 1903

Dear Olivia,

May I be allowed to burst into praise about the long and most interesting letter you wrote to me in Paris? Just imagine my pleasure when, on my arrival after a long drive from Uspensky Mine, I found the letter awaiting me.

Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

... What you need is a nice-gaited pony and a few rides on these glorious flats and hills; taking it quite easily and watching all that is new on every side. If I could get you as easily as I could just the right pony, I would be quite contented! If you are not tired and feel like a ride of two or three hundred miles, please come along, and I guarantee fine weather for you, though our weather was very bad! This ride is from Uspensky to Rieben's through Spassky, where the smelter is and Karagandy where the big coal mine is, across the Little Nura, the Big Nura, the Russian village and Bayan Aul.

Never before were there so many accidents and hindrance all kinds, I believe! Our baggage wagon had been overhauled completely before we left, but we had barely left when off came one wheel and strained everything. These Kazakhs are very handy and with a rope and a few poles and rawhide strips they can patch up or mend anything. So we went on, always keeping the wagon between our two tarantasses, which were monstrous great lumbering old-fashioned barouches, owned by the Sultan Djumabek Djebajin, who provided all our horses and escorted us personally to Karagandy, 45 versts on our road. He is a grand old gentleman, over 80 years of age but, if you could see him swing himself into the saddle and ride, you would marvel. He rode a very fine white horse with a flowing and arching mane and a tail that, with his neat shape and small head, betokened the Arab in a fairly pure degree. This horse always trotted, and very fast at times, but never at any time did he jolt the old gentleman, who sat as if he were at home in his yurt.

We passed near his great collection of yurts and through his great flocks of sheep, herds of fine horses, cattle and camel. Here the hospitable Sultan had caused "Champagnski" to be brought to the road for us and also a full change of most fiery horses. All of us drank great bowls of it, for they are so very polite and are insistent. Anyway, though I drank three full bowls of at least a quart and a half, Mr. Fell drank more and the way he smacked his lips delighted and charmed the Sultan.

The Sultan then showed us for a few moments his most valuable possession, his favourite horse; and then hurried him away lest per chance we had the evil eye, I thought. And I would do the same thing! This horse belongs to a special breed, not to be bought for money and this was a gem among his kind. In America he would be called an A-rab but he is not really. Any spotted horse is an Arab out there and I made one myself once with some white paint.

This horse was a wonder, a prize, and I would have given the Uspensky Mine for him cheerfully. He was spotted, oh so spotted! Every spot being quite round, an inch across and most evenly distributed all over his body; his

Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

legs, and such racehorse legs, were striped and his feet were perfectly round. His back was superb and his quarters, his shoulders and withers. He stood about 15.2. But what struck me most were the great muscles in his forearms and his thighs and the shortness from the knees and hocks to the ground.

His colour I cannot describe because he contained all shades of brown, from light brownish yellow to rich chestnut and liver, in his spots, all on a background of pure white. His nostrils were pink and his eyes very large, sensible and spirited. His head was not at all of the Arab type, being larger, with a quite straight forehead and on to his nose; but it was well bred in looks. This horse is the apple of the old gentleman's small queer-shaped eyes!

Soon after we left, we came to a small river, a petty affair, and the baggage wagon was just ahead of us. The driver was a young Kazakh, a boisterous young man who whooped at his three horses and dashed down the bank into the water and immediately and instantaneously the four wheels of the wagon were sticking in the air and the horses were jumbled up in a heap in the shallow water. I photographed it as soon as possible and took it only half righted on its side with the Sultan riding back to our assistance over the hill up ahead.



Is this the horse? I think it must be!

The rapidity of that upset was most surprising and the driver sailed through the air, landing in water (if that is possible) on his feet with a grin on his miserable face because he saw our bags and belongings steadily soak for 15 or 20 minutes. The Sultan made him squirm with agony by a few sentences spoken slowly and with much hidden meaning. The old gentleman stayed with us and the baggage wagon always after that and watched it carefully. If the horses were too slow, he said nothing, but he rode up alongside and laid his rawhide across them with good aim.

Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

At Karagandy, he had the wagon re-overhauled and, as we stayed till the next morning, he stayed too, eating with us at the manager's house and sleeping in one of our tarantasses outside, for he objected to the house.

Next morning I found a phonograph in the house and started it for the old gentleman who was amazed, pleased and horrified by rapid turns. He wanted to beat it to pieces with his whip, I feel sure and went, shaking his head. He saw us off very kindly and I left him with deep regret.

From now on our real troubles began! Dear me, in my desire to tell you about that incomparable spotted horse, I jumped from Uspensky over Spassky to Karagandy but you don't really care, I expect, so I will pretend that the Little Nura is still ahead of us. This we crossed after half a day's toil, finding a ford and crossing in water running quite fast and up to a horse's shoulders, the men carrying over all our baggage, some being big and



*Sultan Djumabek just visible on the skyline rides back
to see the wagon righted*

heavy boxes, bareback — but they can do anything on a horse.

I saw one of them catch one of our spare horses which had decided to gallop back home again. The pursuer flew after him, riding as lightly as a feather, and headed him gradually in a wide circle, then he rode up very fast behind him and leaned forward quickly and, at once, the other horse fell, being so jarred and disgusted that he was easy to catch. Their trick, I was told, is to catch the other horse's tail, ride forward very fast

and, with a strong jerk, pull his hind legs from under him and down he goes. But it takes doing!

I write in my yurt with the roof all open and the sun blazing in, and I wish you could see the lattice, the embroidered felt, the grass curtains and the camel's hair coloured, flat ropes. I enclose some feathers of the great steppe-hen.

Always yours, Toshiy.

1903

Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

June 7, 1903, Sunday

Dear Marian,

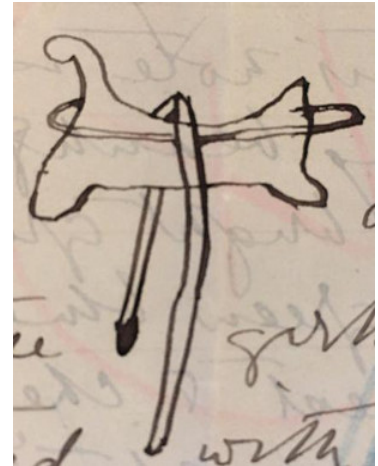
Of all the most direct of methods devised for the destruction of man, the Russian steam bath (I nearly said steamroller which would be better) as practised by the Kazakhs and Tartars of the steppes is the most malignant. Recently, much against the will of my flesh, my spirits in a moment of idle curiosity led me to take a Tartar one and since then, I have been a boiled monkey, never having cooled at all. And you know very well that a boiled monkey cannot write much of a letter.

Mr Fell will tell you that they are the nectar of life but surely all nectars cannot always be good!

I am about to cure myself in Minor's most approved style by starting on a fine day-ride tomorrow. As I am up with all my assay samples and Mr Mussen and Von Rieben are going, I also will go. We shall see a number of claims, good and bad, bringing back many samples and probably travelling about 300 versts. I have found by moonlight a very fine saddlehorse, a fierce-looking piebald of mild nature and I shall ride him as often as possible.

In Uspensky I bought a Kazakh saddle of which I liked the looks as regards comfort, and for which I was willing to pay much too much for that reason. The usual Kazakh saddle is a footly little thing but this has a horn in front and crupper behind just like a Mexican, and it is roomy and comfortable. An old Kazakh living here has overhauled it for me and replaced all worn straps by rawhide ones and the result is most strong and local in appearance. The girth is separate from the saddle and the plan is a good one, on the order of the separate girth of racehorses; this gives an idea of the way it is arranged:

I have now two of these girths, one being much ornamented with native silverwork on iron, and the other of plain rawhide. There is a hind girth fastened to the saddle also. The seat is studded with brass nails and the saddle is carved from one piece of wood of a very hard and knotty texture. The stirrups are iron, covered with silverwork, much worn and of this shape (some of Frank's sketches are



Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

shown), being very comfortable and heavy, and the stirrup buckles are perfectly beautiful, being silver worked and engraved, and about four inches long⁴². I cannot attempt to draw them. Yes I will (below), and the ends of the loose strap have a bit of silver work on them.



I feel scarcely competent to discuss natural history with you today but I will merely tell you that we often heard cuckoos, usually near mountains and rocks, and their note is the same as ever, echoing beautifully in this air.

Then I saw a bright green bird, very much like a green blue-jay, having the same crest and

cheeky look. It was a gorgeous sight. This was in the timber of the Bayan Aul Mountains. Then Mr Nyemkoff shot a yearling steppe-hen, weighing at least 10 lbs. while we were with him. I enclose feathers, you may wear them proudly because the great steppe-hen is a hard bird to get, being wily to a degree. His head is like that of a turkey, but with a short-pointed beak, and he has only three toes, no vestige of a fourth. He seems by his feathers to be a cross between a turkey and a huge grouse.



We also saw many hazel-hens, a game-bird like a quail only built like a killdeer⁴³ with short legs and pigeon chest.

Let me assure you that I heard of your measles with much regret and sympathise with you very much.

Yours always,

Toshy.

⁴² Some very similar stirrups are among the artefacts given by Olivia to the British Museum which can be seen online at <https://bit.ly/2Xr7m4X> or in the museum itself, of course, though this might have to be by arrangement.

⁴³ The killdeer (*Charadrius vociferus*) is a large plover found in the Americas.

Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

[At about this time, between the 5th and 14th of June, Anne, Olivia, young Nelson Fell and Morris/Maurice his friend must have arrived and been met by Frank, who took them to Bayan Aul, though apparently not for long, camping at Lake Djessoo Bai in the mountains.]

June 14, 1903, Sunday

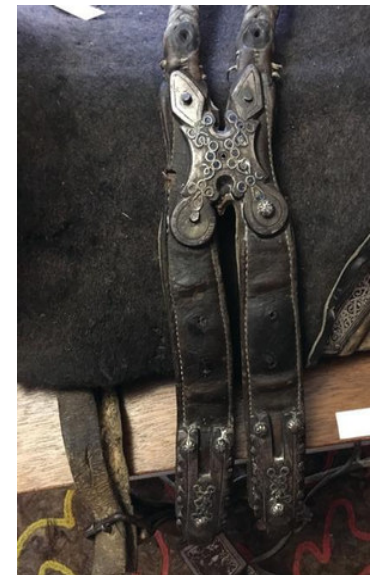
Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

At last our glorious camp is over and we are back again on the flat and treeless steppes where we cannot hear the waves beating on the shore to remind us of The Point. Our last day or so in camp will be never forgotten, especially the last night. The mountains in the steppes are storm centres and like magnets they attract all passing flurries.

Towards evening the otherwise perfect day became windy and boisterous out of a cloudless sky, a southwest and temperate blow. As the evening advanced, the wind increased steadily. By 9pm the yurts began to tremble and creak uneasily but we paid not much attention on account of the cloudless sky. Still the wind rose in great gusts that roared in the birch trees and drove the spray from the hammering waves of the lake nearby past our yurts and beyond and we began to be uneasy. The men came and pulled and tightened ropes, and muttered and shook their heads. Mother, Olive and The Boy were in one big yurt together, for we had already taken Olive's down, as it was ready to fly into tatters. And I had the other big dining-room yurt to myself.

At 10pm my yurt began to show signs of dissolution, the top felt flapping wildly and trying to pull over the whole affair, while the side felts were slipping down and sideways, allowing the fierce wind much access. I called the men and they came and worked like ants, propping it up with big fir poles in all directions, but



Kazakh metalwork from stirrups in the museum at Karkarolinsk

soon we decided to abandon it and turn all our efforts to saving the other ship in distress in which where the innocent sleeping forms of Olivia and The Boy.

They pulled and hauled and drove stakes and piled branches on the roof and made a windbreak and filled the interior with great fir props among which Olivia and The Boy slept serenely. And all the time one felt as if one were on board a ship in a great storm, for the felt flapped like sails and the ropes creaked and the woodwork groaned. Gust after gust in steady succession, each endeavouring to capsize us. I ventured to suggest that Olivia and The Boy should sleep in the big leather covered tarantass, but she sternly dissented and said she did not desire to and would rather be capsized than move. So I stayed in their yurt till dawn, behind a curtain, for Mother hated to be left alone in the turmoil and grievous uncertainty while the wind made a deafening clamour. At intervals during the night I went out and watched the wind playing havoc with my yurt. It tore off the top and roof felt and stripped two thirds of the sides until the bare skeleton framework was left in which the wind rattled among the bones. At dawn the wind fell, greatly easing us of immediate shipwreck but depositing a gentle and insistent rain upon our remains.

I then retired to my derelict yurt and endeavoured to sleep under the table where the rain dripped around me and through the cracks; for it was not a good table and had been made from green wood. By 8 am I had the men up and they patched up my yurt so that we had a roof over us for breakfast and, as it was raining steadily with every prospect of continued wet weather, we decided to leave at once and flee to refuge at home.

At 2pm we were packed and away, I riding with two Kazakhs, and the family all in the tarantass in charge of the Kazakh driver. Mother rode quite a long distance over the bad pass and through several swampy places. So we were safely at home by 7pm, wet and hungry but all well and in fine spirits.

During the camp we took nearly 80 photographs and I have been developing the negatives these last nights. Almost all of them were good and the majority are perfect for I have learned from a Russian here how to develop negatives really properly. So now my skies are white and my blacks are black.

I fear the time is coming only too fast when the ground will be carpeted with that beautiful warm, white blanket that was dinned into our half-frozen ears so often in British Columbia and I am quaking with terror. My sole hopes are centred upon an Indian summer for, dear me, we are not so far away from India.

Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

I wonder all the time how are you are getting along all alone in France and it is so strange to think of you there and I would much rather you were here; but Paris is far better than London when you know the language sufficiently. We miss you every day and all day.

Goodbye, Marian,

Yours always,

Tosh.

June 21, 1903

Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

Let me briefly say that, until a few days before the arrival of your whole family, I never knew that you were not to be among them. And the blow was a very severe one, I assure you. I had such nice plans for you and Olivia, yurts to live in and horses to ride and now they are cut in halves. The consequence being that I am slightly daft and have hurried towards the mumbling and doddering stage by about ten years for I was looking forward to seeing you very much.

Now for news that you would like to hear about; I cannot say much because it seems to be impossible to have any time at present. When one is not actually at work, one is being very entertaining and assisting in rides and drives which must be done and, when not doing that, one is trying to catch up with things half done and partially forgotten. We had a fearful time getting the house and arrangements ready for everybody, but now everything is running smoothly and pleasantly.

The house gives great satisfaction to all, being big, solid, very thick-walled, white as snow with whitewash inside and out, and the floors are clean with plain boards. Olivia has a splendid yurt to herself, very finely ornamented in scarlet patterns, walls of white felt and a floor of coloured and variegated heavy felt. She is very pleased indeed. Morris⁴⁴ is in a yurt next to her, I am in another, Mr Mussen in another and Mr von Rieben in still another, while The Boy, who appears to be still in the nursery grub stage has a play-yurt for daytimes. So we

⁴⁴ No idea who Morris is; a friend of Nelson, presumably. Later written Maurice.

Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

are a small town and the Kazakhs call it the "Angleeski Aul". It is great fun because we bandy insults from yurt to yurt.

Olivia has no doubt told you her news. I find Morris a very nice boy, rather spoiled but with much good material to be hammered out with care. He has plunged into a weekly newspaper called the 'Mining High Steppes', with



Djumabek with Zakirbek *Balkhash with Toondorshbek* *Jingo with Ahdam*

Olivia's Djumabek, Marian's Balkhash and Frank's Jingo Flingo with some of the men: Zakirbek, the hunter, Tundusbek and Ahdam, the driver at Lake Balkhash in 1905

Olivia as sub-editor, and we all contribute. Every Saturday it will appear at noon and so far one edition has been issued.

I have got for Olivia the absolutely finest horse in the steppes. This is no joke but a fact, because he wears a badge around his neck to prove it, like a blue riband, so to speak, and this can never be taken off. It is camel's hair, with a triangular piece of cardboard stitched over with cloth, and in this is fastened a fluffy feather. He won this as the finest horse at a great trial of merit and now he is known as the "First Horse", and all the Kazakhs in the country know him.

If we stop at any aul, they cluster round and admire him because they love horses and are great judges. I named him Djumabek after the Sultan who was so nice to us at Spassky. He is a rich brown with black points, no white, not a hair, long foretop, and a most intelligent head and expression. His manners are perfect, for he is keen to go and full of fun but he never loses his temper or allows himself to be at all undignified, and his gait, trotting, cantering and galloping is perfect. He was owned by the chief Kazakh magistrate of this district. I have another splendid horse for myself,

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Von Rieben's Mines, Bayan Aul: "We may safely say that we know something of the worst side of Siberian travelling"

and Morris and The Boy both have ponies and both ride almost every day, Morris learning fast and The Boy really enjoying his equine pottering about.

We have discovered a good lake about four versts away with a sandy beach and slightly salt water and Morris, The Boy and I bathe and, as soon as Lee's attire is ready, she will also.

Last Sunday, the chief magistrate, an enormous, colossal Kazakh potentate called on us in state and Mrs Fell received him ceremoniously, Mr Fell being away for a few days with Mr Mussen seeing claims afar off. He then invited us at once to call on him at his yurts which were only eight versts away. So we went in the afternoon, Lee on her Djumabek of course, and we were shown into a huge yurt, carpeted with glorious rugs and very clean. Here was a seat for Mrs Fell, a sort of throne, and everyone else sat on the carpets with either great comfort or gradually increasing torture.

They began with bowls and bowls of koumiss and I have learned to regard koumiss with keen affection; Lee loathes it, and Morris and The Boy are only just beginning to think it is passable.

The yurt was packed with people and at one time I counted over 60 inside. The bard of the aul came, a blind singer, with a ridiculous sort of banjo with two flabby strings, and this man chanted and improvised songs in Mrs Fell's honour, being most polite and high-flown. As a great compliment, he likened her to a wild goose with her three goslings who had flown among their midst from far away America; and then he said she was a snow-white swan and compliments were exchanged to and fro by interpreters in a steady stream for a long time. Then we had tea and funny Kazakh bread and then, finally, we left in a blaze of glory, escorted by the magistrate, his secretary and a host of dependents for about a verst at a wild gallop, all abreast in long lines on each side of our galloping tarantass horses, Mr Rieben and I also riding. It was a glorious experience for us all and I wished you had been there to see everything.

We have now three more invitations to visit other Kazakh notables and we shall most certainly go. Also we have arranged to hold Kazakh sports and horse races here on the 10th of August (23rd your date) with prizes for speed and other qualifications, and all the Kazakhs in the country will come. You shall hear all about it in detail and we will take many photographs. The weather is very hot in the middle of the day but the nights are cool and fresh so we are quite content it and every day is full of sunshine.

Always yours, Toshi.



8. Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

June 26, 1903

Unknown

[First pages missing]

... Mussen is away now on a long ride. He left at 8 am today for the Chandie⁴⁵ claim, distant 80 versts, with only a Kazakh guide. Both ride and lead another horse to change to and they camp out with nothing. He will see other claims and will be away three days. This Chandie claim is very promising and several other new claims are looming up brightly. Mussen rides very well now, being quite at home and having a comfortable seat. Rieben brought two English saddles, "Made in Russia", both good ones; Mussen rides one and the one I use is a secondhand steeple-chasing saddle with a history of many fine races ridden, won and lost, so Rieben says, and my cup is filled. Willing and well-conditioned horses and a good saddle; and grass to gallop over, what more is needed please!

This is Friday, and last Monday I had one of the jaunts of my life, combining business with pleasure! Mussen informed me, officially, with a gleam in his eye, that I was to go with Hedman to the great Kazakh fair and market at Kouyandy, 53 versts on the post-road north from Karkarolinsk, to buy five good horses while Hedman had poods of stores and mutton fat for the Kazakhs to buy. I was paralysed for secretly I had mourned and crooned over the thought of that fair, the great Kazakh fair of the year of this entire district! And to pick and choose and buy horses with someone else's money! I am keeping the details for Olivia, but you will not mind. I can say it was the most interesting sight I have ever seen and ten times as colossal as I dreamed.

Imagine a place open only one month each year, a town with four great parallel streets, 100 yards wide and half a mile long, lined with good wooden shops, a large church, a big bank and police and fire departments etc.,

⁴⁵ or Chaudie? Cannot identify this place.

Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

all in a great flat plain with high hills a few dozen versts away, a good river running by and a large lake in sight. Imagine yurts scattered all about by scores, some of great size and highly decorated!

Imagine, all around the fair proper, hundreds and hundreds of wagons stacked over acres of ground together, with men and women camping all among them and hundreds of yoke oxen; all of which had brought the millions of poods of stuff to the fair.

Imagine the streets and the whole plain for 500 acres covered with at least 10,000 Kazakhs, all riding their best horses and wearing their finest apparel, buying, selling, bartering, haggling and tearing wildly about on their horses. Horses tied three deep all along the streets and the shops full of men. Caravans from Bokhara, Tashkent and the Chinese frontier, buyers from Moscow and Petersburg; thousands of fat cattle and horses, countless sheep, with camels everywhere.



'Parking' at The Kouyandy Fair

One man, a Russian, from Moscow, told us he alone had bought 6500 sheep to be driven to the railroad and shipped! And no alcohol, no rowdyism, all pure fun and everybody in such a good humour! Such sights and crowded scenes of jostling life.

Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

Oh, I wanted you so badly but I have some photographs for you. I must stop and I don't want to but the mail goes early in the morning and it is very late.

[No ending].

July 5, 1903, Sunday

Bayan Aul

Dear Olivia,⁴⁶

I have been thirsting, even slavering at the mouth for today, so that I could have a long time with you and tell you all about the great and glorious Kazakh fair at Kouyandy. I will kindly ask you to please send this on to your little sister Marian⁴⁷ who is weeping and combing her hair on a rock in the dragon's den. Do you have to weep



The Fair at Kouyandy

⁴⁶ I don't know where Olivia was; perhaps at Spassky with her mother.

⁴⁷ Actually the elder by two years.

Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

*in French and sob with a Parisian accent in there and I hope you have learned to shrug your shoulders properly?
[Addressed to Marian, presumably]*

I shall begin at the very start and leave out nothing because everything was worthwhile, even our awful homecoming. On Monday last, Mr Hedman and I got up at 2am and, after a hot samovar and bread-and-butter, we started at 3am with three most rampageous horses in a light tarantass and Ahdam our best Kazakh driver. One of these horses has to be held by each ear by men when he is harnessed and he hangs his head low to the ground and rolls his white rimmed eyes. When all is ready, the men jump to one side and this buckskin horse rears up and plunges madly forward in a wild gallop and proceeds to do all the work for about ten miles before he steadies his nerves. When his nerves are steady and his brain well-balanced, he allows the other horses to do all the work which is most intelligent behaviour, I think.

Dawn was breaking even then, a perfectly clear, fresh and dew-soaked dawn and, before the lazy sun had rolled into sight, we had made 20 versts and the buckskin's nerves were much steadier. By this time we were near the foothills of the Bayan Aul Mountains, skirting their border and arriving at a low pass at about 30 versts, going south. It was very beautiful indeed, for without doubt these mountains are the finest scenery I have ever seen, rising abruptly from the green sea of the steppes. The mountains attract all the clouds near them and, being sharp-peaked, puncture the rain-bags, the consequence being that there seems to be always rain falling about them and the roads are usually very bad, soft and wet, with small streams of water running to the steppe through gulleys in the hillsides. Here the grass is most luxuriant and the wildflowers even exceed B.C. in number, variety and colours, while wild strawberries carpet the ground along the low pass and I noticed clumps of wild raspberries growing in shaded spots, for there are beautiful low birch trees here too.

By this time we had made nearly 40 versts and the sun was hot, and from the long, damp grass clouds of big, able-bodied mosquitoes appeared and fell upon this human breakfast-food, and horseflies attacked the horses in swarms. About this time we fell through a Kazakh bridge which was made of next-to-nothing, with holes in that.

About 10 versts further on, we re-entered the steppes on the other side of the mountains and found two fresh horses waiting. We changed and dashed on with much speed on better roads. After we had gone 75 versts by 9am we struck the post-road to Karkarolinsk and had 53 more versts to go.

Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

Soon, a post-house appeared and we changed horses again, and had some milk and bread, koumiss, tea and meat. Here we were given three fine white horses and the next post-house was 27 versts away. We fairly flew, galloping hard most of the way and passing great caravans and herds continually, the roads being perfect and the sun fairly blazing. At the next post-house we were given three ponies, quite small but they were good ones and in fine racing shape and they knew their own driver's voice. As we neared the fair there were long downhill slopes and many people to see us, so our driver began to excel himself and his shrill cries of "Eidah, eidah, eidah, hah-dah!" resounded and the ponies galloped as hard as they could gallop and the tarantass roared and rattled behind.

Swerving to avoid wagons and riders and never slackening pace, hammer and tongs across a big wooden bridge where the river runs by the fair, and where a jolt of about a foot in height loosened all our teeth. The post-house was inside the fair-limits and we tore up to it scattering everything in sight and stopped in about a ten-yard space, arriving at 6pm.

The post-house was full of people and babies bawled from every corner, so we hired a yurt nearby, put all our things inside and hurried away to the horse market. This fair is enormous in size, all by itself in the steppes, 50 versts from the nearest town which is Karkarolinsk, and a fearful distance from the railroad. It is astounding because it is only open for one month in each year but here were hundreds of wooden buildings and some great stone ones, a fine church, a great log building for the Imperial Bank of Russia (and as we went inside I firmly expected to see the Czar as cashier), police buildings, fire departments.

But the streets — there were four great main avenues each at least 100 yards wide and half a mile long, lined with Kazakh and Tartar shops with a few very fine Russian ones. Besides the big avenues there were any number



Yurts at Kouyandy

Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

of cross streets and alleys which were narrow and always choked up somewhere and the scene of never-ending fury and jabber and jostling, all good-natured uproar. Around the streets and actual market area were scores of yurts, big and small, dotted about like sheep in a field some being very large and of new white felt decorated with the brightest of red patterns. Outside these were the other markets, the horse market, cattle market, sheep and goat markets, camel market, wood market, flour and feed markets and the hides and felt markets.

These were all over the place, covering all in all about 500 acres of land, as I judged in my great capacity for such simple calculations. Around all of these were acres and acres of wagons arranged together in great brown clumps and patches, with people camping all among them, fires burning, dogs barking and prostrate figures asleep; thousands of wagons and innumerable draft oxen lying and standing around chewing gum for all they were worth. Wagons, wagons, wagons across the river up the first sloping hills two versts away, near and far, all about. This is not all, for outside these were the yurts and small felt shelters of innumerable travelers and



Frank with a fat-tailed sheep

these spilled over the nearest hillsides and spread on all sides as far as could be seen, and at night their campfires looked like fireflies on a warm night. Now, imagine among and amidst all these things, 10,000 Kazakhs, all on horses, riding in all directions to and from the markets and bazaars, some slowly, carrying their purchases in their arms or tied in all sorts of ways to their sensible horses; camels loaded to the clouds with great packs, furniture, wool, felt, hay, groaning and moaning along. Along the river and the fine lake nearby, great mobs of cattle, fat steers, horses in thousands, and countless sheep all going to drink that river and lake dry.

Many women and children riding horses, camels and oxen, everybody with his or her finest apparel and all in the highest of spirits; green grass all around, apart from the main avenues where the traffic was incessant and where the dust blew. Except in the crowded streets, riders rode as hard as they pleased and many impromptu horseraces took place near the horse market. There were street-preachers, exhorters, hawkers and vendors of cheap fineries and confectionary just like any other

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Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

fair; and blind beggars and maimed beggars and bundles-of-rag beggars, some with nothing much on at all. These lovely objects sat in the dust, blind as bats, in the middle of the avenues where the traffic was thickest and were almost killed a million times a day, absolutely still, cross-legged, with a wooden bowl in their caps into which the Kazakh riders dropped coins from their saddles with loud clangs, bowing respectfully.

Everybody was there to buy or sell, no one was there to sightsee; everybody had money to get by the sale of something, and then had money to buy with, and everybody paid cash for everything and took it away with him on his person, his horse, his camel or his ox. Even I was no sightseer, I was buying horses and Hedman was buying poods of mutton-fat and leather, oats and other commissions for many people. The koumiss flowed in streams, the finest of koumiss, and I drank till I whinnied in my sleep, so Hedman said.

Kazakhs had ridden hundreds of miles to attend and caravans had come from Tashkent, Bokhara and the Chinese frontier; Russian buyers of cattle and sheep for town markets and for the army and navy had come from Moscow and Petersburg, while army officers were snapping up the best horses and fat-tailed sheep.

Now come with me to the horse market which was a quarter of a mile away on the green plain, the intervening distance being full of Kazakhs riding and trying horses and others driving flat carts to the sheep market nearby, while clumps of mounted riders stood and bargained, and talked and told stories. The market had no fence, of



The horse fair at Kouyandy

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Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

course, and no defined areas at all, but the horses, and mares with foals, were picketed in long lines and, in the great centre space, was a moving mass of mounted Kazakhs, riding, standing, leading strings of horses, all buyers, sellers or both. And I plunged into it!

Horses in hundreds and riders all moving around in circles, looking and being looked at. It was very hard to keep one's head but our time was short and, with Ahdam as interpreter, I bought three fine horses before dark, all for harness purposes, big and strong pony-built horses, young and in good condition. I examined any number of others and, if you stop a moment and look at a horse closely in any marked way, the Kazakh in charge will follow you wherever you go and keep leading their horse past you, to and fro and beaming upon you and pointing out the excellence of his horse, so that, after you have looked at a large number, and they are all doing the same thing, finally you are hedged in by horses you have seen before whose owners will take no refusal; you move about in the centre of a ring of horses you do not want. They are very sly about the horses and there are many unsound, half-blind and aged creaks, all fat and sleek and smooth. Their custom is, on settling a bargain, to slap their hands into yours loudly and shake violently and many will try and grab your hand when you do not want their horse; this is like the auctioneers hammer when he says "going, going, gone and what is your name please"! After buying horses you must go to the police headquarters and get a certificate from them showing all particulars of the sale so as to protect a buyer against stolen horses of which there are many. But the best horses, they will not sell at all, and those are the ones they ride themselves, most sensibly! I saw scores of beauties.

This took us till dusk and we went to our yurt, contented, where Ahdam bought us food and waited on us carefully. After dark, I wandered among the campfires until the dogs nearly ate me up so I returned for a horse and then rode about slowly. A great hum arose from the plain with whinnies of horses, lowing and bleating, mixed with strange choruses, Kazakh fiddles, funny banjos and accordions which kept up till dawn, because I heard it. Everybody either seemed to stay up or sprawl about not asleep, and all night riders galloped heedlessly about in the dark and, among the great herd in the distance, you heard the cow-calls as the herders quieted their stock.

At dawn, the big herds, with much noise, began to move in great waves toward the lake and river to water and the lake shore was a wonderful sight. At sun-up, everyone seemed to be praying, even the watchful herders

Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

guarding against theft bowed and muttered in their saddles with their faces turned southwest towards Mecca. And again the whole place was a moving and excited ants' nest.

The best time to see and buy horses is in the late afternoon, so Hedman and I attended to the many commissions in the shops and bazaars.

I bought much camel's hair cloth, for you cannot have too much of it and a glorious camel's hair carpet which is thin and light and I use it now on my bed for a kind of counterpane. All prices here were very low; for the three fine harness-horses we paid from 36 to 40 rubles each or about \$10-\$20.

I also rode alone to see the camel, wool, flour, felt and hide markets and the camel collection was glorious: fine white riding camels, swift ones, baby camels and big pack bulls, vicious and surly. The wool market was a busy scene. Wool in great wagonloads, camels loaded to their hurricane decks, horses nearly hidden in packs with a man riding: all sorts of ways it came pouring in. The great scales weighed it and then it was piled up in great stacks like hay and covered with felt from the weather.



Camels at Kouyandy Fair

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Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

The day was sweltering with heat and dust and, I must say, I longed for a — well a soda fountain, so I had to drink koumiss from bowls of wood poured from the great horse skins; and koumiss is food and drink and an enemy to appetite; so is the Kazakh or Tashkent almond confectionery and I ate nothing else till dark.

Men and horses everywhere by thousands, all along the streets, no fighting, no quarrelling, no alcohol, bumping, jostling each other's horses and incessant chaff and talk. Many bright green coats and trousers, thousands of gaudy caps lined with the whitest of lambskins or the beautiful native fox; boots of red and green leather, high-heeled with red heels and shod with copper bands. Not a spur among them, not a blinker in sight and not a curb bit: all with whips and willing ponies.

I had kept till today the pleasure of beginning earlier and buying the two saddle-horses we needed and I had my steeple-chasing saddle to try them with so, at 4pm we sallied out to the horse market again. After much deliberation I bought two fine horses, to the great amusement of the hundreds of Kazakhs who felt and poked, pulled and patted my saddle with clicks and grunts of approval. Then, before we left, a bad thunderstorm came up and it pelted with rain till, in a moment, standing pools were everywhere and all the hundreds of horses and riders turned their tails to the storm and backed and kicked and squealed as the furious wind drove the big drops into their skins. Before we returned we were soaked but extremely happy with our bargains.

Ahdam had previously been trying our harness-horses and announced they were just the right kind, only very fresh. Hedman tried one of the saddle-horses who has a very light mouth and Hedman a very heavy hand so he was thrown and rolled upon and he retired much disgusted, hobbling. The night grew very dark and cloudy and Ahdam said he could not drive those three new and very gay horses till it grew light, and we agreed. So, at 2am, we got up and by 4am we were off; the time between was spent in starting those uproarious horses.

Finally, we left in a blaze of galloping, a man riding madly ahead leading the yoke-horse by a long rope. We clattered over the bridge and jolted our teeth home again and those playful horses tore over the ground; we made 30 versts in two hours and 20 minutes, our saddle-horses coming at a gallop behind with another Kazakh riding. This day was also hot; we kept to the post-road all the way to Bayan Aul and arrived there, 112½ versts, by 2pm, 10 hours elapsed, with two hours stoppages for breakfast at the first post-house and for the time required to change horses at the post-houses.

Just as we arrived, another great thunderstorm caught us up and till 6pm we were bound there by the heels. At 7pm we left for Bayandy Kuduk (Rieben's) across the mountains by a steep and very rough pass, the distance

Kouyandy: "One of the jaunts of my life. The great and glorious Kazakh Fair"

being 50 versts. The wind had changed to the north-west and it was still raining hard; a distinct new storm had cropped up to blow in our faces. By dusk we had made 20 versts and had crossed the mountains, having to get out and walk quite often in steep and rough parts. The twilight here is very long and then there was a small moon till 10pm but after that it was pitch dark. The roads were frightful, soft clay in places, mud and standing water everywhere and the three horses tired rapidly.

Our Cossack driver was a good man and one in whom his horses had confidence and between them they kept the road well, but nothing could be seen and we lost the road at times; as it had to be found again, we would get out in the pouring rain and paddle round till we found it, and it was bitter cold. This went on for hours till the horses could only walk and our teeth could not keep still. Nearly dead we crawled in at 1am, just human pools, blue with cold, and sat upon the big kitchen stove which was still warm.

Next day, no-one was any the worse except the three horses and, at noon, our other new horses arrived with Ahdam, having come more slowly. Wasn't that a great trip!

Now I hope I have not tired you out completely, but I think you have it all.

I have written so much that I feel sure I cannot do it again and I am wondering, Olivia, if you will send this on to Minor as if it were a diary and he will surely send it to you back if you ask him to. I hope and pray and trust that you are getting entirely over your late siege of illness and that you are strong and well as you used to be when we camped at the summits of B.C.

Yours always,

Toshy.



9. Bayan Aul: “Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians”

September 4, 1903, Sunday

Bayandy Kuduk

Dear Marian,

... My mind runs largely upon rugs out here. This is the country for rugs, gorgeously coloured in fine rich tints and the camel's hair ones are my pick. I am writing in my yurt with Olivia's and Maurice's close by and I am soon going out to pull the top flap of felt over Olivia's, for a suspicious character of a cloud is looming up in the south-west and Olivia is practically sleeping under the stars.

She is very well, Marian, and Siberia is good for her. Today she returned from a long drive with Mr Fell to a claim 80 versts away, camping out one night and she saw a number of the giant steppe-hens. Tomorrow we all go for a camp in the Bayan Aul Mountains on the shore of a freshwater lake and it is quite an undertaking. Mr Fell and I are taking it in turns to be away from this place for Mr Mussen and Mr Atkinson have gone to Spassky for a month. We sent on two big yurts in wagons and a tent and other supplies yesterday by ox-team, three in number, and today I rode with the idea of choosing a place for the yurts on the lake shore but, 30 versts away I found the ox team lying down and too exhausted to move, so I returned this evening and tomorrow will try again at dawn. At noon, Mrs Fell, Lee, Boy and Maurice, and two Kazakh servants, in a big tarantass and three horses, will start for the camp; and four saddle-horses will be also brought along. A boat is on the lake and fishing gear to catch fish and a potato patch is nearby. We have much food and if the weather is fine the camp may last a week and, Marian, the scenery is perfectly wonderful! All we need is you to make it perfect and I cannot grasp your absence even yet for you should be here!

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Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

I should write oftener but I am very busy and you will understand I am sure.

Good night and don't get into any accidents please. Yours always, Toshiy.

September 11, 1903, Sunday

Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

As the sun rolls along its appointed track, so does my Sunday letter roll along that beloved Trans-Siberian Railway. Nothing can deflect it from its course and only an eagle may look at it and I don't mean the Russian eagle either. He looks at my weekly papers and cuts large pieces out of my Times and pastes black splodges where he does not wish me to look and generally infuriates me twice a week. I wrote to the editor of the Times about it and, although I received an answer from the editorial office-boy or the man who officially cleans the editorial boots, saying that the matter would be rectified, I notice no change at all and I ravenously desire the blood of the Censor Dragon through whose maw all papers pass.

May I at once present to you my compliments upon your 17th birthday and wish you ever so many more of them, all of them to be 17th forever and forever!! Tomorrow is the day and this letter will be posted then.

I have already had a whip made for you and it hangs even now in my yurt, just a plain Kazakh whip such as they use in their daily life. The stick or handle is about a foot long and The Boy and I cut it ourselves in the Bayan Aul Mountains. The rest is braided, eight plait rawhide and is fastened to the shaft in a very durable way. The Boy, Olivia and I have the same. They hang by a rawhide loop to your wrist when not needed and your hands are quite free. I plan also to get you and Olive a bridle, also a small and silver-worked sheath knife each to hang to a belt.

Never has an equinox behaved quite so badly as this one for the wind has roared and whistled every day and all the time for days and days and rain has been very frequent with dull and cloudy skies. Olive and I are still in yurts and I must say that they are distinctly cool and airy in the early hours of dawn when, to add further discomfort, one puts on clothes that are damp and clammy. But we are appallingly well and I believe Olivia enjoys it. Today we saw the first signs of real winter, in the shape of a few drizzly flakes of grubby snow, a sight which made me ill but over which Olive and The Boy went into idiotic raptures.

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

The Boy's riding is the joy of my declining years. Marian, you would be delighted with him for he is quite fearless and really enjoys now the society of a horse. He actually rides Djumabek, the King Bee of the steppes and can just hold him in, showing delight all the time. And if a new horse is given him, he rides him willingly. His seat is now splendid, a natural, easy and happy little seat. You would be very proud of him indeed! In every way besides, The Boy improves daily and is a source of never-ending fun. Mother rides nearly every day and it is doing her a great deal of good...

I remain, yours always,

Toshy.



Two views of Lake Jessoo Bai in the Bayan Aul Mountains

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

September 13, 1903, Sunday

Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

We are camping in the mountains about an hour's ride from this town and today, I rode over with Mr Rieben and I'm writing to you while Mr Rieben attends to some business. In camp, it seems to be impossible to write to you, although I want to very much, because I'm almost all the time solely in charge and there is always something that must be done. We came here a week ago yesterday and leave next Thursday for the mine again.

I want you to know how things are done here when a quiet family party wants to go on a simple camp. It took the united efforts of about forty men with a great lumbering tarantass and thirteen horses, six oxen and two camels, to bring us to our campsite; we had to negotiate several mud-holes where we stuck fast, and a mountain pass which is just the limit as far as anything can be called a road. A trifle worse and it would be absolutely impassible. We now have two large yurts for our use and another for a cook-tent and sleeping place for the



Cutting hay

men. We keep three driving-horses and four saddle-horses for ourselves and we vary from three to five Kazakh servants. It is camping made perfect, for a well-to-do Cossack farmer lives nearby and every day he brings us fresh supplies of cow's milk, koumiss, eggs, mutton, fish, bread, cakes, cabbages, carrots, potatoes etc. and we have nothing to do but ride or row, and paddle up an appetite.

The camp is on the edge of a glorious fresh and clear-water lake about two miles by a mile wide, in a green and fragrant valley wherein are harvest fields of wheat, oats and barley, and

haymakers busy at work. All around are high and jagged peaks with grassy slopes covered in fir trees which branch low and are rooted and growing among bare and distorted granite rocks. Our weather has been fine and crisp and the yurts are as comfortable and commodious as houses and far nicer. Mr Fell comes as often as he can and today he is here.

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Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

Now I must tell you about Mother's riding! Just fancy, Mother rides astride with perfect freedom and seat, all over the mountain places, everywhere that we go — and the old Boy is grand, he is entirely changed and rides like a cow-puncher, rising to the trot and galloping as hard as his good horse can gallop. He never tires, and goes with Lee and me as fast and as long as we wish. All his timidity has gone and he is learning at his own request to ride a horse standing on a felt pad on the horse's back; and can go quite fast standing up erect and I also am learning humbly. A Cossack here started us. We can all kneel riding and think it nothing.

Maurice left for England a few days ago and sometimes we miss him and sometimes we don't. I speak for myself at least. Yesterday we went to see an old Kazakh hermit's cave in desperately rough mountains, high up and overlooking the vast steppes for a great and wonderful oceanic distance. In his cave was a spring, supposed to be medicinal, to which the simple Kazakhs still go to pray, slop around and imagine themselves cured.

I don't believe I shall ever forgive you for not coming. I receive the news from your letters, and you have had a delightful time, I am sure, especially at North East Harbour. Did you climb Green Mountain⁴⁸?



Olivia rides standing

There are many wild ducks (almost tame) on the lake and a large sort of loon affair that at night sounds a loud moaning weird crying that makes your flesh creep around. There are wolves in the mountains too and we cannot turn our horses out hobbled at night, for the wolves are big timber fellows and attack a hobbled horse. I have

⁴⁸ Both in British Columbia, near Vancouver.

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

seen coveys of grouse and big, blue, wild rock-pigeon. Great eagles soar and sweep and many kinds of hawks. Every day we eat the large, wild, juicy and very malodorous onions that grow on all the hillsides, in soups and stews.

All are very well and Lee is gaining weight every day.

Goodbye Marian and may we meet soon,

Yours always,

Toshy.

Undated, November 1903

Bayan Aul

Dear Marian

This is certainly a climate which fits the dreaded name of Siberia, the name that all people shudder at. It is different to all others in its fierceness and prolonged viciousness. We left our camp in the mountains of Bayan Aul over two weeks ago; and I may safely say that not a full day has since passed during which we have had quiet weather. At first, we shrugged our shoulders and said "Equinox, of course" and that ended it. But day after day it stormed wind and rain till, about four days ago at noon, there came such a violent storm with pelting rain that four yurts belonging to workmen here were blown down and completely wrecked, and three men worked at Olivia's and mine steadily to keep them upright. As it was, they were slanted and strained and moved a trifle.

This, we said, was the final outburst and now we should have good weather and "Indian summer is due" etc. The days followed much the same, with nights when it froze hard in our yurts and we smashed ice on our water-buckets — but still we had hope. It culminated in last night, never to be forgotten!

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

The evening was quite calm, with low clouds and a soft, splashing, warm snow which brought the usual preposterous squeaks and chirrup of delight from Olivia and The Boy. At midnight, it was still as warm as the



Nelson 'The Boy' and 'Mother' on horseback

presence of snow will allow and I retired at ease. I awoke in the night to hear the familiar scream and thunder of the wind buffeting the yurt and I felt a falling spray of wetness on my face. This was snow and it was literally driving through the felt sides and roof and welling up in little puffs from the many crevices all around along the bottom. I got up and looked outside and nothing but a fast-moving fog of snow spray was to be seen, with a keen cutting northwester as the motive power. Even if I had thought it necessary to call Olive and hurry her to the house, I did not feel like trying, for it was easy to lose one's way in that fury and fuss, so there was nothing to do but lie down again and trust to

the yurts holding together.

When light came and we made our move, the same roar and rush of wind, cold and snow was going on. My floor was entirely white, my table, books and papers all snow-covered and my bed also and in places the snow was a foot deep in drifts. Olivia's yurt was much the same and, soon after I called her, we scampered through the whiteness for a safe, warm harbour.

Our decision was prompt: winter had commenced and we would sleep no more in yurts; three hours later, they were pulled down and being hauled away by a camel. By 9 o'clock the wind dropped and today has been clear and clean and fine. Goodness only knows what will happen tomorrow!.

Good night, Marian,

Yours always, Tosh.

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November 8, 1903, Sunday

Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

Although I write upon my appointed day, it is very uncertain when my letter will reach you because the mails are all at sea, owing to the Irtysh being frozen over in a manner dangerous for boats, but not sufficiently for horses and carriages to cross. So you may be a week or more without letters from anyone.

Things are rather at a standstill here at present too, no work being done except to close up and shut down everything; for the syndicate does not want this property and we are awaiting rather impatiently the message

to send us to the big Uspensky Mine where we spent six weeks this spring. Once there, we shall be very contented, with a glorious mine under our feet, crammed with rich and exciting copper ores, and a much more hilly and interesting country all around.



One of Frank's crucibles; perhaps the last!

The weather is cold and windy but not so very dreadful, and Olivia and The Boy ride regularly every day, clothed in fur caps, warm things and great felt boots. Mother rides also every morning for about an hour and tries hard not to miss a day. I have just about finished all my work in sight at present and hope in a day or two to have some more time to devote to amusing the little chick-a-biddies. I do not know yet what the plans are for Mother, Olive and The Boy and I doubt if they are settled.

Today, we played ping-pong and fives in our big dining-room, giving our horses a rest and getting much uproarious exercise ourselves.

I have made and set apart for you a few most beautiful little green scarifying crucibles, for pins and such-like, on your dressing table or anywhere else; Olivia will give them to you. I have completely stocked the whole family. All the rugs and jolly things of that sort have been packed and sent away to London on their long journey to The Point, where they will be a great ornament and pleasure.

There is a lovely, large, real Bokhara rug of camel's hair; two smaller and plainer camel's hair rugs; about four more still smaller; a great, felt, embroidered curtain to hang in a doorway, of local make; and two large and

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thick felt rugs with coloured patterns. They will make all the difference to The Point and Minor will revel in them, all being very choice. As a crate, to protect them, will go a great wickerwork carriage-basket which, when on wheels, composes that vehicle called a carabok. This, on a buck-board at The Point will make an admirably comfortable, light and roomy carriage for Florida. Your letters are full of interest and you seem to be in a downy nest full of soft feathers...No continuation

November 22, 1903

Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

... I believe I shall travel with Papa to Ekaterinburg when he leaves with Mother, Olive and The Boy because we consider that, in winter time in Siberia, he must not travel alone for these long and cold drives. If I could continue to Paris I would, but I fear I will not have time, much as I want to see you.

Yesterday Olive, The Boy and I had a great ride, to settle an argument about the distance to Bookum Bai the biggest "mountain" within a few hours' ride of our camp. We took no roads but made a beeline across the steppe to the white-topped hill and in an hour and a half of steady, fast riding we arrived at the base, and rode up a winding zigzag, water-worn depression to its summit, which was a long hog-back with a crest and ridge about 10 feet across, just like the B.C. ones. From the summit, about 500 feet up above the steppe, we could see probably 60 or more versts in all directions, great expanses of rolling brown and white waves with seven lakes showing snow-covered circular patches, and the great Bayan Aul ridge of real mountains off to the southward.

The evening sun kindly shone for us and it was one of the most impressive sights we had ever seen. The summit showed many jackrabbit tracks and also what we took to be wolf — probably true.

The sun sets here now at about 4.30 and we hurried away down a shorter and steeper place, dismounting and leading the horses (and it was cold enough to have one's moustache frozen solid) because it is distinctly unpleasant, not to say dangerous, to be caught by darkness on the open steppe. The sun set when we were halfway home and we kept pounding away at a steady, hard pace with the big Bayan Aul range to guide us and the nearer landmarks one after another becoming blotted out in haze and cloudiness. We reached home about dark; we were never in any difficulty, but it was easy to realise what might happen. Probably Olive and The Boy did not think as hard as I did about the possibilities of missing that small spot called "home" in the middle of

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central Asia. Bookum Bai, we agreed to my satisfaction, to be 16 versts away, so The Boy rode 32 versts in three hours and five minutes, practically without a stop, nearly 22 miles and, you will agree, that now he has won his spurs, for he was not tired, and today is as fit as a fiddle.

The day before yesterday, Mother and Mrs Atkinson, driving in a carabok drawn by three of our best horses, with Lee, The Boy and I riding good and trusty saddlers, drove and rode to a zimoffka⁴⁹ 16 versts away, where a rich Kazakh and his family, his flocks and herds hibernate. We drove and rode the first 10 versts in 35 minutes,



A carabok, Anne Fell aboard, in front of a moghila, an ancient burial structure.

galloping nearly all the way and the whole 16 versts we did in an hour and 15 minutes.

On our arrival we went in (I had sent a man before on horseback to say we were coming) and they had all their best clothes on and all their best felts and carpets on the floor and were very gay with gorgeous colours, blue, red and green. They produced a steaming samovar and drank tea with us and we gave them cakes and sweets and then they showed Mother their choicest embroidery work and all their simple treasures of that kind, some of which were really very good indeed. We were much struck by a jacket the eldest

daughter wore and finally, after a fearful gabble of words, we bought it for Olivia. It is red with embroidered flowers on it and it has the Kazakh shape and cut, which will be used to make one for you some day, as fancy dress to represent a Kazakh girl in national costume, for Mother knows all the rest of it well. The bits and other silver ironwork of yours and Olivia's bridles will be finished any day. The bits are splendid and of most original shape and design. And as treasures they are grand. Your belt and knife are also almost finished.

⁴⁹ Permanent semi-under-ground home.

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To be sure to be on time I will wish you now, Marian, with all my heart, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year, much fun among many friends.

Good night, pleasant dreams, sweet repose, as The Boy says. Yours always, Tosh.

December 9, 1903

Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

We had planned to leave tomorrow but there is no snow for us to leave on and we cannot leave on wheels because, just beyond Pavlodar there is too much snow for wheels, and we cannot start on wheels and transfer to sleighs because, at the point of transference, there are no sleighs! So you see, we must just possess ourselves in patience and wait.

Tonight the wind is rising and clouds are gathering, while it is cold, cold, cold! It is a shame to think of you alone in Paris, but fate puts strange burdens on peoples' backs and there is no dignity in hopping up and down and tearing one's clothes when one is feeling depressed, or Paris might well be strewn with your garments.

Let me cheer you up! Even as I write, a hammer is going tap, tap upon a little anvil and two fascinating Kazakh men are at work upon your and Olive's bridles: an oldish man and his son who is just about grown up. They came yesterday with their little tools and Mother let them work in our sitting-room where we can all watch. They sit cross-legged on a piece of felt near our big stove and do all their work sitting quite still, for it is small, pretty work, hammering silver embroidery upon iron. They draw the fine silver wire themselves in our sight, beginning from a small bar or pencil of silver.

Both are very friendly and observant of our ways and they work all day and again at night until about 11pm. and the way that they do it, it does not seem like work at all but fun and quiet occupation. The bridles are glorious and most quaint. You had better never use them on a horse but keep them for curiosities, or else the iron part will rust and the leather part soil and get malodorous. They have exceeded our wildest expectations.

They have also brought your belt and Olive's too, and really they are excellent. The leather part can always be changed or renewed and the iron silver-work is indestructible.

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About your fancy dress costumes, the plan is as follows: to get you and Olive at once and in a hurry, costumes made in cotton with the correct cut and details in bright colours by a Tartar tailor who has done a lot of work for Mother, a marvellous man. These can be taken by Mother to you if they can be finished in time, or sent by post afterwards. But I have planned to have made for you, this winter or spring, by the same tailor who is going with us to Spassky, two gorgeous costumes, a Kazakh for you and a Tartar for Olive. These will be in flashing, resplendent, coruscating, changing silks, exactly as they are really worn on great state occasions; the caps and feathers and ornaments on the dresses, silver rings for fingers, boots new and gaily coloured, shawls like birds of paradise for colours, in fact the whole costume complete and entirely correct, and made on the spot. I can tell you frankly that, when you see the costumes, you will be delighted, for the colours are rich and startling, and full of life and warmth.

Good night, yours always,

Toshy.

December 13 Sunday

Bayan Aul

Dear Marian,

We are still stuck in the mud here when we want to be stuck in the snow. It is really most distressing and Siberian weather is just as contrary as weather in all the other countries one has ever been in.

Tonight it is feebly trying to get warmer and to brew a few shoddy clouds but we are all getting very sceptical. Still, the news that Mr Fell will soon be with you in Paris has cheered us all immensely. The idea of a lone Christmas for you was unbearable.

At last the bridles have been finished, yours and Olive's, also your belts and knives and I must say that all are good and the bridles are more than good. The leatherwork is quite crude, for this silversmith is not a leather man but the silver and ironwork is glorious and you can always have new leather put in the place of this. The silversmiths are still here, as I write, within a few feet of me in our sitting room, working upon other small things, and you would revel in watching. They buy nothing ready-made except the rawest of raw material. Their iron is merely in a rough bar and the silver also in small bar-like pencils. They beat out the iron in flat sheets and they actually draw the silver wire from the small, thick stub of a pencil into the yards and yards of thin

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thread-like wire. They make the rivets and mould the heads of the small silver-copper nails as we watch and we see the rough iron and solid silver develop into this beautiful work.

As further entertainment, we have arranged to have a Kazakh come tomorrow to make a great pair of high, leather jackboots, lined with solid felt, which he will make in our sitting room, sitting cross-legged like the smiths, cheerful and impassive, and he will make them in two days so that I can wear them to Omsk, for real warmth and comfort.

Any day we expect to be off, and that is all we know; and it will be a cold and stormy trip, I fear, and I shall be relieved when I get Mother to the railroad safely and soundly.

Good night, yours always, Tosh.

*December 30, 1903, Wednesday
"Bayanduckaduck"*

Dear Olive,

Back at the old place again at last after another splendid trip with good weather all the way. Fine sleighing and good horses and much galloping managed it for us, and you would have liked it immensely. We made short stops and quick changes and hammered along night and day. From Pavlodar all our same troubles began only this time they

were worse because from Djaman Toos to Chackchan there was much less snow and from Chackchan home there was almost no snow. In the stage from Kalkoman on to Djaman Toos we had a matched troika of three most splendid, black, fiery horses, the very best team I have ever seen out here. They dashed at their collars in bounds, all feet off the ground, and shook their heads and shaggy manes all the time with great fierceness, and the Kazakh driver never dared to touch them with his whip.



*"The old place" Bayandy Kuduk.
The Kazakh on the camel holds a sheep across his front*

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

On this stage one of the shaft horses on another of our sleighs so exerted himself with fury that he exhausted himself after only 10 versts and had to be taken out and left behind hobbled and panting on the steppe. At Kalkoman, Djaman Toos and Kaidool, we spent hours in long wrangles and arguments with the owners of the posts, for we had plenty of time to waste and it was good practice in Russian and we saved a little on prices but not much. At Djaman Toos, we had grand horses again, two piebalds and two snowy whites and we made the trip on sleighs. But at Kaidool, all our sleighs were put upon telegas⁵⁰ in the same way that happened on our trip, and we jogged along slowly perched up high in the air, wondering when the sleighs would tip over and capsize. At Chackchan, The Brat⁵¹ dashed up, bowing and smiling, and said he had ten of our horses and a carabok there for us, and that there was no snow at all on the road home. So we took the carabok and three horses and hurried on to Bayandy Kuduk, leaving Lopectzan and The Zoon to bring the sleighs on wheels later. We arrived here at 6pm this evening and they will arrive sometime tonight. The mail leaves early tomorrow morning and it is my last chance to write to you for some time as we leave for Spassky on Saturday next, January 2. Once there, I will write and tell you all about our journey across the genuine Kazakh land, where we shall meet no Russians at all and where we shall spend our nights and all stoppages in zimoffkas among these jolly people. Given at all decent weather, it will be simply grand and much better than post-roads and stuffy Russian horses.

We left Omsk at 11am on Sunday last and arrived here at 6pm on Wednesday, a fairly fast trip. We found Mr Mussen alive and well and all packed ready to leave.

You must come out again to Uspensky next summer and bring Marian with you and two of the very finest horses on earth will await your arrivals. So come, and tell her not to go to New Westminster⁵² again, and insist upon it. I want to hear all about your journey to Berlin and your stay there.

I really must go and sleep somewhere, I really must! So good night, Willie, Yours always, Toshiy.

⁵⁰ Telega (plural telegas) a simple four-wheeled Russian cart without springs.

⁵¹ Real name, Hussein! The Brat, may be брат which, in Russian means 'brother'; but I can find no reference that shows whose brother he might have been.

⁵² New Westminster is a city in the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia.

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December 30, 1903, 9pm

"Bayanduckaduck"

[No greeting, to Anne, I presume]

A little over two hours ago we arrived from Omsk and, as the mail goes tomorrow morning, it is necessary to write at once, especially as we all leave for Spassky on Saturday next, January 2, 1904. So, this is the last letter I shall ever write to you from this place, you being at this moment in Moscow I hope, looking at or wearing your new fur coat.

Our trip back was most successful from the weather point of view, being colder and with headwinds but fine and settled. We made the stages to Pavlodar from Omsk in 41½ hours, beating Mr Fell's and Atkinson's previous record of 46 hours, and with plenty of time for food and samovars. From Pavlodar on to Chackchan our troubles commenced and we wasted much time at every single post-station in long and heated wrangles about prices and, on the whole, the prices Atkinson got were very little lower than ours. At Kaidool our three sleighs were hoisted up again on telegas and the sum of 30 rubles was demanded for the stage and had to be paid. At Chackchan, The Brat was on the scene with a carabok and ten of our best horses, so Atkinson and I went on with three horses and the carabok, and we expect the sleighs in before midnight still up on the air on wheels, because between here and Chackchan, the steppes are brown and bare, a big boorahn of wind for 36 hours having raged, Mussen said, in our absence.

We are going to leave somehow on sleighs on Saturday as there is said to be enough snow 20 or 30 versts away on our road. Mussen is quite packed and ready to go and he is as cheerfully impassive as usual.

I found a letter from Marian with Christmas wishes which was most welcome; also both Mussen and I received from Minor, by mail, a snakeskin pouch and pocket-book made by Jack Hancock, which arrived most admirably timed this morning.

I must say that it is a pleasure to stop travelling for a few days, the trip back being no fun at all without you, but the Spassky trip will be better, being off the post-roads and entirely among the Kazakhs.

At Spassky we shall expect a very queer and mixed time, things being in rather a complicated state for us and, until the deal goes through definitely, it is possible that the people there will not be as nice to us as they possibly can be. Mussen and I will go on to Uspensky very soon and from there after a bit, back to Karagandy, leaving Atkinson to brave the Spassky hostiles.

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

Don't forget to photograph yourself in your new coat and also to photograph Marian for me as often as you please. And also, please don't forget to take my negatives if you do finally go to Florida and leave them with Teinen⁵³ to develop. The cost, let Minor defray and I will repay him without fail. It is rather hard to write tonight as one feels abnormal to a degree and not in a fit state to be saying nice things to you, much as one may think them continually.

Until I hear definitely of your immediate plans, I shall do a lot of wondering as the sleighs go ploughing along day after day, but I fear that it means Cambridge or some such lazy, loathly place where the little smiths cannot come into your sitting room and pound on anvils and chatter musically the while, or the maker of big boots also.

This house looks very forlorn at present and its glory has departed forever, and all the steppes around here seems to be wanting in something which gave its bareness warmth and feeling. It is brown and hard and sorrowful, and I am glad to leave in a few days. When your sun sets, the nights are very dark for there is no moon.

Good night,

Toshy.

Thursday, December 31

Found Mussen busy packing all our stuff for Spassky and Uspensky and making final arrangements. Our horses are in bad condition with incessant work going to Bayandy Kuduk for letters, telegrams etc. Five of them are lame! We saw in the New Year properly, roasted chestnuts and mixed toddies till 1am. Friday, January 1, 1904

Packing all finished. Cannot leave until horses are rested for several days. Began to have them all shoed and watch the job, horrorstricken⁵⁴.

⁵³ Spelling uncertain, unidentified.

⁵⁴ Frank trained as a farrier in Canada, and no doubt had high standards!

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

Saturday, January 2

Began personal packing. Horses being shod all day and not finished yet.

Sunday, January 3.

Finished shoeing horses. Snowed hard last night and enough snow is in sight for fast sleighing. In the evening was warm and rain fell, a crust being formed on the snow so that winds cannot blow it away.

january 3, 1904

Bayandy Kuduk

Dear Olive,

Although I said we would leave yesterday, we have not and we now do not expect to leave until Tuesday. I feel sure you will appreciate the reasons. When I returned, I found all the horses in dreadful condition, thin and poor and five of them lame namely The Mare, Balkhash, Malenky Savraska, Leesanka and Shaitan, the horse with the long mane and tail, whose ears require to be held whenever we start. They needed a few days more rest and all of them needed to be reshod; so this is being done and much oats being poured into them. Then, the big sleigh arrived in dreadful plight, all cracked, twisted and broken and this queer little serf of a Russian blacksmith has been working at this, binding it with iron bands as strong as the muscles on the arms of the Village Blacksmith. Arrangements are all made as follows. We leave in the three sleighs on Tuesday, day after tomorrow or "nocove zabimpa". Mr Mussen and Mons. Atkinsong in the big sleigh, I in the smallest sleigh (and we will change about) and Anoushka and the quarrelsome Cook will wrangle in the middle sleigh. Ahdam, The Brat and Lopectzan will drive.

We take our food in a hamper, a samovar, 30 poods of oats and our hand-bags only. Jingo Flingo will be a spare horse. Tomorrow the slow freight leaves with our trunks and lots of other stuff: six baggage sleighs drawn by one horse each and each pulling 20 poods of stuff. With these, there will be four men: Toolpah, who is in charge, Beezumbeck, Little Jacob, and Kassein. Toolpah is armed with a revolver which he is frightened to death of. They will take 10 days at least for they will have a round of visits to make at every zimoffka near the road.

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

The night before last, it snowed hard and yesterday morning great flakes settled and it became so warm that it actually rained but, at noon yesterday, it cleared to cold and windy weather and if the rain had not glued the snow down it would all have gone to China. As it is, the sleighing will be fine and I wish you were coming too — so much! I was so busy telling you about the horses that I forgot to ask about your glorious time in Berlin but I thought about it a great deal all the time. This surely will be the last letter from Bayandy Kuduk! Goodbye again. Always yours, Toshi.

Monday, January 4.

Loaded the six baggage sleighs each with 20 poods of stuff, all boxes being marked and weighed. Also brought up to the house the three covered sleighs. Everything packed and ready to leave tomorrow.

Tuesday, January 5

Left for Spassky at 10am with our three troikas of covered sleighs, after first seeing off the six baggage sleighs. They were too heavily loaded, 20 poods for one horse, for the state of the roads and they had much trouble at first. Toolpah is in charge of the baggage caravan with three men under him, Mussen and I in one sleigh, the big one; Atkinson in the small one; Anoushka, the Talkative Cook and her small girl in the middle one, The Brat, Ahdam and Lopectzan driving. Food for six days for men and horses. Sleighing not good. Travelled till 4pm when we stopped for the night at an aul at the foot of the Bayan Aul Mountains near the mouth of the Djama Aul Pass. A nice, clean, zimoffka with prosperous people: a fine old Kazakh with a grand manner and dignity with three enormous well-behaved sons. Enjoyed ourselves here immensely. Made 40 versts.

Wednesday, January 6

Up at 5 am and started at 7.45 am. Made 35 versts by noon, sleighing through Djaman Aul Pass being good and the scenery very beautiful. At noon, we stopped at an aul and had a samovar and fed horses, staying about two hours all the afternoon it snowed steadily, being warm and misty with no wind. At 4.30pm, dusk, we stopped for the night at another aul which was also clean and roomy with good felt to sprawl on. This is the way to live! Played chess! Made 45 versts today, 85 altogether!

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

Thursday January 7

Russian Christmas day!

Left at 8 am. Snow deep and pulling was heavy. Sleighs fast repeatedly causing frequent delays. In one struggle a collar tore to pieces and had to be patched on the spot, which Ahdam and The Brat managed most skillfully. Travelled till 2pm. Horses quite exhausted, stopped to feed and rest at an aul and decided, as next aul was a long way on, to spend the night. Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians with a gorge. Great feasting occurred for both Russians and Kazakhs. Weather clear and cold all day and scenery among rolling hills, round and dazzling white. Made 35 versts, 120 in all. Believe we went too far south and out of our way considerably.

Friday, January 8

Up at 5 am. Left at 8 am, sun up! Roads piled with snow and the horses with sore shoulders acted badly, balking and fighting! Soon the disease spread and the delays were very frequent and prolonged. The road had to be broken and a stiff crust on the snow made the sleigh stick fast many times. Very hard on the horses! At 11 am after doing 25 versts we stopped at an aul to rest and feed. This was a bad aul full of bad people. Left at 1pm and soon struck a good caravan road to Akmolinsk, and we met many camel caravans carrying hides. Auls were plentiful and scattered small timber in the flats. At 4pm we came to a fine aul and stopped for the night, the horses being all quite played out. This zimoffka was the best I ever saw. Most prosperous people clean and very polite. A mullah was there visiting and he prayed continually. The head Kazakh, a splendid looking man, had first class horses, a good house and a well under his roof, apparently inexhaustible, which accounted for the cleanliness of his large family. Made 50 versts, over 170 so far!

Saturday, January 9

Left before 8 am, having hired a Kazakh guide to take us to Bootahgorah, the Russian village. He asked 10 rubles and then accepted exactly half! Soon we had to leave the good road and take an unbroken one, heavy with snow. Horses acted badly when the sleigh stuck fast in the worst drift and Malenky Saravska kicked The Brat and broke his seat to pieces. At 3pm we had made only 20 versts and here we stopped at an aul to rest and feed, a bad aul, dirty to a degree! Afterwards, continued the same struggle in deep snow and drifts. Weather very cold and windy, probably 10° below zero. We walked on foot much of the afternoon to save the horses! At dusk we stopped at an aul, horses hardly able to crawl. This aul was worse and worse and full of venomous insects. The men's food had run out so we bought a sheep, cooked it, and also many boorsaks.

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

Sunday January 10

Left at sun-up. Clear, cloudless sky and colder than ever, perhaps 20° below zero. The drivers suffered today and Ahdam froze his nose till the bark peeled off. We tried last night to hire Kazakh horses but they wanted absurd prices so we left with our own. By 2pm, after a fearful wrestle in deep snow, in the same flat where we had such troubles last spring with Mr Fell and Arkin along the same riverbed, we had made 25 versts and reached an aul which was indeed a harbour of refuge. Here we



Winter travel; Frank in the centre beyond the sleigh

rested till dusk and fed ourselves and horses. Being out of oats, we bought barley grain. This was the same aul we stopped with Mr Fell, the same filthy, dingy place. They had horses, so we hired 9 to take us all the way to Karagandy and as Bootahgorah was only 13 versts distant, we left at dusk and at 6pm we arrived at there and went to the house of the old soldier, where we spent the night. Today was very, very cold and we had a very bad time on the whole. Travelling about 40 versts or 255 altogether.

Monday, January 11

We left before sunup, having laid in supplies of food here for people and horses. Began with the Kazakh horses but after 15 versts of hard pulling, six of the nine played out and we stopped at a new

Russian village to rest and feed from 11 am to 1pm, when we started again, Karagandy being only 35 versts away with six of our horses and three of the Kazakh ones. The road was most heavy and, in crossing the Nura, we flopped into a big drift, all in turn and we had to use the tails of many horses to pull out each sleigh. This caused a long delay. From then on till dusk, we crossed many small branch rivers and in each, we invariably stuck fast, and we walked on foot many versts. At dusk we were glad to stop for the night at an aul, Karagandy only 25 versts away. This was a good aul and a 6 months-old camel colt slept

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

with us, being a kind gentle and affectionate creature full of domestic virtues. This was the coldest day of all and we made only 25 versts all day long, 280 altogether.

Tuesday, January 12

Left early as usual. A half boorahn blowing, facing us and very unpleasant. Cold for all! We used seven Kazakh horses and two of ours at first, but soon very soon the Kazakhs gave up and our veterans had to do the work. The road was very much drifted and it was 1pm before we reached Karagandy. Found Mr Nyemkoff at home. This is the Russian Christmas week and they had a big Christmas tree just like ours and, in the evening, until late, many Russian children came with many parents, and danced around the tree singing pretty little songs. Played chess with our host. He is as hospitable and jolly as ever! 25 versts today or a total of about 300 versts to Karagandy.



"The way we travelled in winter"

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

January 13, 1904

Karagandy

[No greeting, probably to Anne]

This is just a fleeting passage for we are still birds on the wing and I have no time to write. We have had a long, weary, but on the whole most enjoyable time, being eight days to this place, instead of five as we expected. And the trip has been full of adventures much like those we had on our first trip with Mr Fell. Heavy snow, drifts and wind-blown, exhausted horses and much flogging. Camping in aul after aul, good and bad, among the people and the beasts and birds of the steppes. We ran out of food and killed sheep after sheep, eating boiled meat two hours after life was extinct. Boorsaks also and oceans of tea! When I think of the possibility that you might have made the trip my blood congeals and I can think no more. It was absolutely impossible. All are well, but the horses are in a sad state and need a long rest to fatten and allow their wounds to heal. It was a struggle



Mr Nyemkoff with his favourite trotting pony

which began on the third day when the snow deepened and storms filled all the road tracks and drifted the flats and hollows full, so that we stuck in every creek bed, it seemed, and every other available place. The trouble lay with the weight of our sleighs for this cross-country travel. They are well enough on post-roads but such Noah's arks are not fitted to leave beaten roads for the open seas and steppe.

But I must say that I was very sorry to see the smokestacks of Karagandy for the happy-go-lucky existence of the past week was hard to leave. No one cared a

continental where we stopped or when we stopped, for food and warmth could be procured and felt to sprawl on and these glorious Kazakh people to watch in their nuclear, genuine and unadulterated states, with five

Bayan Aul: "Bought a young sheep for 2½ rubles to celebrate Christmas for the Russians"

servants to wait upon our every want. Mussen and I forsook our enormous shubas⁵⁵ wearing the light ones and using the big ones as rugs-for-the-lap and the change made all the difference, being warmer and twice as comfortable. Never again shall I bundle myself up in massive bales of fur. Mr Nyemkoff is here and as hospitable as ever. A Christmas tree is in his big room for the children, for tomorrow is their New Year's Day and last night stacks of clean and bright Russian infants came with their strange parents and the children circled the tree hand in hand and sang pretty little Russian songs. We leave for Spassky in about an hour (one pm) and land slap into their new year orgies for they are to hold sports and horseracing if the weather permits, so we shall have a most fluid and exciting time, for if the priest who resembles the Saviour, may do as he damn pleases, surely we may. I will write again as soon as possible but Mussen and I hurry on at once to Uspensky with Bastrakoff and the faithful Anoushka. Goodbye and may we soon meet again in Kazakh land. Tosh.



Getting ready to leave

⁵⁵ Russian for fur coats.



A Russian Post-house on the Government Post roads.
These are spaced about 20 miles apart, & you get a change
of horses, warmth, hot tea & good simple food such as
bread & butter, eggs, soups etc. Some Post houses are better
than others.

10. Spassky: “A baby camel should be a part of every well-regulated family”

Wednesday, January 13

After a fine hot bath and scrub at 8am, we left at 12 am. Warm, thick, snowy boorahn blowing; not unpleasant! At first the road was drifted and heavy and unbroken but, later, we met dozens of great camels coming back from hauling coal to Spassky, at least 200, and then the road was firm and solid. Nearing Spassky, seven versts away, we passed Sultan Djumabek's aul and stopped to call on him. He was delighted and gave us much koumiss, and Mussen had to drink it and look pleasant too! We finally arrived at Spassky at 6pm and found, of course, a big New Year's Eve festival going on, the house being full of men and women all acting like lunatics. This shivaree was kept up until 1am and the priest excelled himself in misbehaviour. They danced and they ate and they drank and shouted 'Oorrah' to their heart's content. To add to the excitement, Alexei Victorovitch⁵⁶ arrived at 10pm with a newly married bride, about whom none of them had heard anything and the news almost paralysed them, causing them to redouble their efforts. This was the craziest New Year's Eve ever seen and never will it be forgotten!

Thursday, January 14, Spassky

Russian New Year's Day! Everyone much quieter today. Alexei had brought our mail from Akmolinsk, letters from Moscow and Kissimmee and many papers! Looked after our horses today, three lame ones and many chafes and sore places. They will get a much needed rest now before we go to Uspensky with the Sultan's horses. The old Sultan came today and all was arranged most amicably. This is the place to learn to speak Russian!

⁵⁶ This is Alexei Riasanoff, I think.

Spassky: "A baby camel should be a part of every well-regulated family"

Friday, January 15

Made all arrangements to leave tomorrow for Uspensky. Mr Mussen and I in one sleigh, Bastrakoff and the faithful Anoushka (who has become much demoralised here during the recent festivities) in another. Glad to leave this place. Has been arranged to send our mail from Spassky three times a month, first, 10th, and 30th, and receive mails then. The Sultan does it all with his horses very cheaply. There are nine posts or relays between here and Akmolinsk over 300 versts of road, all organised by him. His horses also take us to Uspensky; ours are resting with all their shoes pulled off.

January 15, 1904

Spassky

Dear Olive

I really cannot find the right words with which to tell you how awfully pleased I was to get your glorious long



letter written on the way to Moscow. It came as a great surprise because, when we arrived here the day before yesterday at dark, there was no mail for us but it came yesterday morning, and tomorrow Mr Mussen and I go onto Uspensky, so we were extremely lucky.

After the long trip from Bayandy Kuduk and

Travelling in deep snow

1904

Spassky: "A baby camel should be a part of every well-regulated family"

the long silence from you, and the long distance between us, such a letter is no ordinary letter but a ray of sunshine during a bad boorahn and you know what that means!

When Mother sends you my journal describing our many adventures, you will get a long account written from day to day in the same way that you wrote on the train and I am asking her to please send it to you and Marian at once, for I suppose that Marian also will like to hear of such things, although I sadly fear that she is much changed from the girl who went camping with me in the mountains of British Columbia after caribou and silver-tip grizzlies.

We were nine whole days reaching Spassky when, in summertime on good roads, it may be done in five easily. Our troubles began on the third day after we had crossed the Bayan Mountains through the Djaman Aul Pass and the reason was because of the depth of the snow and because there was a stiff crust upon it. The roads are little used and we had to break them nearly all the way with our heavy sleighs. The horses started in bad condition and became worse from day to day, only three of the nine arriving in any kind of good condition and spirits. These three heroes were Jingo Flingo, Malenky Savraska and Shaitan the Long-Maned One. Never did three horses work as these and, many a time, when we were fairly buried and stuck tight in some snowbank, these game horses pulled out the rest. All the time, our men were using extra horses by the tails, fastened here, there and everywhere. It was just a succession of struggles from day to day, the intervals being filled in at aul after aul where we sprawled on felts and watched the samovar fizzle, and listened to the queer chatter of these estimable but grubby Kazakh people. I was very sorry when the journey was at an end for I enjoy the auls much more than Mussen and Atkinson who seemed to be scratching themselves and groaning all day long. Some auls are good and some rather awful, and we stayed with some very prosperous Kazakhs with fine rugs and felt, and stacks of gaudy boxes full of treasures. On the sixth day we ran out of food for both men and horses, only having allowed for that time, so we would buy a sheep for ourselves and our people, the Kazakhs bringing it into the room where we sat for us to inspect it and, at once, it seems, we would be eating it hot and steaming; while they always had boorsaks to sell. For the horses, we bought barley grain which was quite good feed. The Malenky Reeshka went all to pieces and in the evenings, after a long and hard day, he would have to lean up against the shaft to keep from toppling over. The Bolshoi Reeshka (your pet saddle-horse?) I grieve to say, strained the back tendon in his near foreleg and, as he had to keep on for several days after, he now has a very bad leg which I have just blistered; I doubt if he will ever really get over it if worked hard, and we had better sell him when well enough.

Spassky: "A baby camel should be a part of every well-regulated family"

The worst part of such trips is that the horses suffer so, with sore shoulders and sides etc and in the bad places, where every effort must be used, the whip is used very much. The weather was good on the whole, no bad storms, but several attempts, and there were three days of that piercing, clear and cold weather with the thermometer as low as 20° below zero Fahrenheit, during which time Ahdam froze his nose quite severely. One day, our drivers had to walk alongside a great deal to keep warm and they suffered not a little in their cheerful way! Now, all our horses are in fine quarters and living upon the fat of the land and, when Mr Mussen and I go to Uspensky tomorrow, we will use the Sultan Djumabek's horses there and back. On the way, we called upon the Sultan, who made us very welcome and gave us – what do you think – actually – yes – it was — koumiss! And Mr Mussen had to be polite to the Sultan and swallow two whole glasses with a delighted smile on his face. Russian Christmas Day, we spent on the steppe and at night, in the usual hospitable aul, we gave a great gorge of a big fat sheep to our Russians in which all the Kazakhs joined, of course. And you never saw such a greasy, happy mob of people, sitting in the dimly lighted darkness with their sleeves rolled up to their elbows, sucking and munching and making noises while they ate, exactly like a lot of hungry pigs at the same trough, each trying to eat more than his neighbours. The whole sheep was a pile of white and polished bones in about an hour, among 16 people, about five being only children. And they also drank all the water it was boiled in, as soup, in bowlfuls from the iron cauldron. Then the dogs came in and attacked the bones till all seemed to absolutely disappear. We had to buy and eat three sheep altogether.

For the last two days of the trip we used Kazakh horses, or tried to, because they always played out completely after about 15 versts and then, our tired warriors had to buckle to again. We played chess nearly every night and got up at five every morning.

Now, our arrangements for mail; three times a month our mail messenger will go to Akmolinsk and I shall write to you and Marian by all of these posts; so your usual weekly letters will not appear, I am sorry to say. But when you think it over, that the Uspensky mine is 950 versts from the railroad, it is a wonder if any mail ever finds its way! We had one Christmas in Omsk and another in the aul on the journey, and we saw one new year in at Bayandy Kuduk and another one in here, the evening we arrived; and this last, was a wild performance to say the least!

I feel sure that, as I write, you are in Paris at school with Marian and I hope and trust that you like it as much as you expected to and more! To be with Marian is a great blessing for you and if you are in the same room,

Spassky: "A baby camel should be a part of every well-regulated family"

nothing should be wanting to make it enjoyable. When I return from Uspensky, I hope to get your letter from Berlin and perhaps a line from Marian too. You must tell Marian how much I missed her this summer, please!

Goodbye, from,

Tosh.

January 15, 1904

Spassky

Dear Marian,

Back at school again and with Olivia to talk double-Dutch German to! I wonder if you like returning to school as much as I did. In the years to come you will look back with the greatest of pleasure to these jolly days. But if I had not wasted my time, as I certainly did, at school, I should never have had the extreme pleasure of making your honoured acquaintance, and I can well remember my first introduction to you. You may be wearing very long skirts now but, when I made my first bow to you, your skirts were about 3 feet longer than your length and I was frightened to death of you too! If I could only see you both dressed in your steppe costumes, I would be very contented, and you must please tell me if any alterations in size or anything else are needed because I want your permanent costumes to be just to your liking.

I have given Olivia an account, more or less, of our journey here, and later my diary will reach you so I will not enlarge upon it at present.

One begins to feel like a commercial traveler or a gypsy, being always on the move because, since December 18, less than eight months ago, I have travelled from Bayandy Kuduk to Omsk, back again there and then on to this place. And, as we went out of our way to come to Spassky on account of deep snow and went 300 versts instead of 250, I have made already almost exactly 1500 versts or 1000 miles, behind horses all the way. And this is not all, because Mr Mussen and I leave tomorrow for the Uspensky mine which is 125 versts and return here in a week or 10 days. He has kept an exact account of all the versts he has travelled here, only on purely professional trips, and it is a trifle over 4000 versts. My record is over 3000 versts on business trips and easily 1000 more on horseback for pleasure. If there is the slightest chance that you and Olivia will come out here next summer, you must please give me ample warning for, in this easy-going, delightful country, arrangements are only made after everlasting shilly-shally!

1904

Spassky: "A baby camel should be a part of every well-regulated family"

Did Olivia tell you of the enormous white owl we saw with The Boy, when riding over the steppe one day? Here in this house is the most wonderful cat I ever have seen. It is Chinese, all white, excepting a magnificent tail which is almost blue, a dark, rich blueish. Its coat is a very thick, wavy, long-haired mass of silk and the long-haired ruffs alongside its cheeks and under its ears stand out about 4 inches from its head. I expect that in China itself or, say, in Tibet, there must be some really gorgeous cats if this is an ordinary specimen. Passing through Karagandy, the manager, Mr Nyemkoff gave me two Russian books, Treasure Island by Robert Louis Stevenson, and one of Bret Harte's collection of short stories. These, I am going to read in Russian this winter as a means of learning the language in a most interesting way. They look very strange in this queer print. I also saw Kipling and a Shakespeare in Russian but I shied away from the Russian Shakespeare!

Goodbye Marian; I will get off a letter to you as often as I can.

From Tosh.

Saturday, January 16

Left Spassky, the Sultan seeing us off most impressively, Mussen and I in one sleigh; Bastrakoff and the faithful Anoushka in another; both sleighs being troikas. Perfect day for winter, cloudless sunny and no wind. There are three



A heavily loaded camel train

rest-houses between Spassky and the mine for the use of the men hauling ore, coal etc. The first is at the Nura; we stopped there at about 3.30 for a rest and samovar. It is newly roofed and repaired, and cleaner. Went on 30 versts to the next station by about 8pm and stayed there the night. Warm and dry but not sumptuous, in fact, as primitive as possible. We passed many grand strings of camels hauling coal to the mine, and ore from it, over 90 in all, and the road is packed hard and firm although, in many places just off the road, a horse will bog down. We had to change two of our outsiders for that reason at the stations.

11. Uspensky: “If there were relief in sight I would be resigned but these insane people do not know they are insane and this may be their daily routine!”

Sunday, January 17

Left at 9 am with 40 versts to go. Road was very rough, up and down in waves, and snow was deep for the outsiders, so we went with horses in single and had many stoppages. At noon, we came to the last station and had lunch and fed horses. Arrived at Uspensky about 3.30pm. Passed 153 camels hauling on the way and found about 20 more here loading up with ore. Mussen and I were given a small room that Alexei V used when we were here before and Bastrakoff found other quarters easily. Very comfortable and well treated. The manager⁵⁷ is better than I expected and keeps an orderly management anyway! Saw and shook hands with many Kazakh friends who are all wearing the very same identical clothes they wore last April and March, and look exactly the same. Manager is married but the lady is a mud-hen⁵⁸ and very harmless. German type!



Anna Yakolevna; is this Yakoleff's wife, whom Frank several times calls fat?

⁵⁷ Mr. Yakoleff.

⁵⁸ Mud-hen, North American species of coot.

Uspensky: "If there were relief in sight I would be resigned but these insane people do not know they are insane and this may be their daily routine!"

Monday January 18

Up at 8 am. Samovar at 9 am, sweet stuff and meat pirozhki things⁵⁹. At 10am we all went down the V shaft, looked through a great deal of the same workings we saw before, noted the new work and went on to the Annensky shaft through the same preposterous tunnel-way full of mud and water, knee-deep with timbering ready to collapse and down the shaft to the 357 foot level (the lowest). Here is a wonderful new showing of very rich ore in great quantity. All these workings are very wet and the rickety old pumps go steadily. We went up to the surface in the Annensky shaft and got nearly wet through. It is a gymnastic performance and not pleasant! A succession of meals followed steadily, the last at 11.30pm, soup, meat, sweet,



A camel train fights its way through a boorahn

tea, liquor, everything. Played chess most successfully!

Tuesday, January 19

Up at 8 am. Meals follow much the same plan. Very little till noon and then meal after meal until midnight in hot rooms and among many people who talk rapidly in foreign words. A very wearing existence! Went down

again into the mine and saw everything to be seen. They have broken through the roofs of some of the big ore bodies we saw last spring, into the old workings and the result is that there are now enormous caves, very impressive and beautiful but very dangerous: the dangers previously confined to the old workings now being transferred to these new ones. They must have got a lot of good ore in place and in the old fillings which fell through and this much they admitted. In one place (in No. 2) where we sampled very rich ore, they have gouged a big hole, 20' x 15' and 20' deep. They have done other work, not very productive of ore in this part of the mine, and not in the Annensky. Went down the Annensky again and saw their new, small vein of soft, grey-black, tough ore, like lead when you drive a pick into it. This is very heavy and must be extraordinarily rich

⁵⁹ Russian and Ukrainian baked or fried yeast-leavened boat-shaped buns with a variety of fillings.

Uspensky: "If there were relief in sight I would be resigned but these insane people do not know they are insane and this may be their daily routine!"

although I think it contains much antimony. At the smelter they assayed it at 64% copper but I don't believe it is correct. It may be 40 or 50%. Came up again through the same cold shower-bath. Talked with the manager till 2am. Mussen knows and talks a lot of Russian and I join in and help all I can! The manager is quite frank and open and seems to desire to hide nothing. The mine gives one the impression of being far more valuable than when we saw it before and confirms Mr Fell's report.

January 19, 1904

[No greeting; to Anne]

Once more we have seen this mint of buried treasure and feasted our eyes upon solid walls and roofs and floors of potential gold or precious stones. All — at least not all but enough, being frittered and potted away in a manner most irritating. We have seen the bottom of the Annensky shaft which we could not see last spring on account of water and there, at this lowest level of all, the showing is far richer than anything above, and the quantity may prove to be as great when more work is done; there is no reason to believe that it will not. They are shipping as steadily as they can and as fast as they can. This does not mean very fast, of course, but every ton shipped is money out of the Siberian Syndicate's pocket. We counted 150 camels hauling ore to Spassky on our way over, and each camel hauls about 40 poods, not less. The same awful lack of methods (or money) is going on. There are no tools, there is no steel for drills, and the boiler is only run at about 30 lbs pressure for fear of an immediate catastrophe so, when spring comes, the present pumps will be as useless or worse than before, and the mine will be flooded again. The present manager is a far better and more progressive man in every way, but he can do nothing with nothing, and the Spassky mob gives him nothing. This man neither smokes or drinks, not even tea, and he has had much decent mining experience in the Urals. He has checked the drinking on the place and everything is running in a more orderly manner, and he treats us most hospitably. He is rather a queer character, with a gift for humorous caricaturing and rough drawing, being rather conceited about it and plastering his walls with his framed atrocities. He also imagines he is a man of letters and a linguist, and he hauls in French and German words spoken in the Russian phonetic manner and is eternally exhibiting his wonderful powers.

Talk about your strenuous life, this is the place to find it in full bloom! Yesterday as follows: up at 8 am, samovar at once and a flood of people. I drank tea and (Russian word) till 9.30. Went down the mine and looked over all the old places and the new work. Came up the Annensky shaft from the bottom, wet through, at 1pm. Changed,

Uspensky: "If there were relief in sight I would be resigned but these insane people do not know they are insane and this may be their daily routine!"

and had another samovar with sweet frippery, avoiding or not as the case might be, many strong liquors. At 3pm came hot soup, and ropes of boiled beef, cabbage and pudding and preserves etc, tea and strong liquors. Afterwards, both of us fell asleep and slept heavily and in pain till the inevitable interruption came. At 6pm, more hot soup, ropes, jelly, preserves, tea, koumiss and strong liquors. Both apoplectic! Chess followed with our host and fat Russo-German hostess and I played four games (won 3 and drew one) till 10.30pm. Staggered to our room and found a "bannia"⁶⁰ had been prepared for us. This is a new and clean one, so we went and suffered there as usual. At 11.30pm we staggered back, weak and trembling, and found another meal on the table, soup, slabs of boiled meat, cabbage (greasy), jelly, preserves, tea and strong liquors. We were wearing pajamas, expecting and praying for immediate death-like repose! So we hastily donned upper garments over the pajamas and the addition of a necktie made all sumptuously correct. This Act V lasted till 12.30am and then our host turned his tongue loose and talked until nearly 2am. And the rest of the night was interrupted by the efforts of the stove and the number of cats in the house.

If there were relief in sight I would be resigned but these insane people do not know they are insane and this may be their daily routine!

I have snatched from the jaws of Time this letter and must stop, for our messenger leaves at once.

The trip from Spassky was no trouble, the weather being quite perfect and still so.

Please ask Mr Fell (or will you, please) to change the address of my papers at Bolton's Library, Knightsbridge. I will get them anyway but so late and it seems impossible to find time to write here to anyone but you. Also, if Pellew-Harvey could let me know my balance at the bank, I would bless him (as you).

Goodbye,

Toshy.

⁶⁰ Russian for bath: ванна.

Uspensky: "If there were relief in sight I would be resigned but these insane people do not know they are insane and this may be their daily routine!"

Wednesday, January 20

All these past days have been sunny and quiet and today the same! Did not go down to mine for Mussen had notes to work up and the morning is the only time, the afternoons till midnight being devoted to successions of meals and liquids. Our host, the manager, is developing as a character. After one of the suppers, he began to draw various caricatures and certainly he is very good, being quick and full of humour. Then he developed as a poet and read some of his own compositions, then showed us a lot more of his drawings and paintings, and I find he draws horses most accurately and faithfully. Then he recited, told stories, and they all sang, men and women. Finally he capped the evening by producing photos of himself as a strongman, all taken in all seriousness. He is seen stripped to the waist, gazing at his biceps, holding weights, posed front and back view, every way; and, being a short, fat, little man, all that he exhibited were rolls of mush and fat while his facial expression wore the same look of self-satisfaction that all such portraits show. Verily it is a land of lunatics!

Thursday, January 21

This morning found a mild boorahn blowing, what the Kazakhs call a boorassine, meaning 'when the snow blows along the ground in ropes and does not fill the air'. Spent the whole afternoon till dark in the mine, went everywhere and poked about some very dangerous workings. Saw nothing really new but took a number of useful tape measurements of gouges and development drifts. Went down the Annensky shaft and came up the Vladimirskey. Find I can climb much easier than last spring and put it down to riding. Took a few samples either for shipment for London or for assay here from the new ore in the Annensky. A big holiday, St. John the Baptist, so we had the mine practically to ourselves. But the Russian workmen under the new management are orderly and well-behaved. The new work is better but the timbering is still wretched. Yakoleff, the manager, suffers from asthma I believe. Anyway he cannot go into the mine himself, but he is lucky to have an excellent young steiger⁶¹ or mine-foreman, who is an educated mining man and a classmate of Bastrakoff. This young chap is energetic and Mussen says he has good ideas and can be relied upon.

Friday, January 22

Wind blowing hard again today. In the afternoon we went down to the bottom of the Annensky to try to see more of the new small and very rich vein, which they had cleaned out more for us. The ground around it is very wet and heavy and they had been forced to timber the drift up entirely, and to half fill it with waste. This is a result of their poor timbering. We could see

⁶¹ German for 'mine manager'.

Uspensky: "If there were relief in sight I would be resigned but these insane people do not know they are insane and this may be their daily routine!"

very little more than before after all their sincere efforts. We had arranged to leave for Spassky tomorrow so the evening was devoted to complimentary and farewell matters with the usual accompaniments. There are no police here and, evidently, our host and the steiger thought we were safe, because they spoke very freely of the evils of the political system in Russia. They refuse to drink the Czar's health and abuse their church religiously, and they proposed the health of President Roosevelt with a "Hip! Hip! Hurrah!" and followed it with one to Alice Roosevelt. These men belong to the student class and they are intensely aware of the burdens they have to carry; but they surprised us by the freedom of their remarks.

Saturday, January 23

Left for Spassky at 11am, Mussen and I in one sleigh, Bastrakoff and the Faithful One in the other, the Sultan's horses and drivers having waited for us. Strong wind and snow blowing but it was behind us, luckily. Roads somewhat drifted but we made 45 versts by dark when we stopped at Bool-bool-duck, one of the company's Kazakh stations or pickets. Here we enjoyed the never-failing pleasures and pains incident to these strange places.

12. Spassky: “We escaped from the manager’s house with our lives”

Sunday, January 24

Left at 9am. Fine quiet, sunny day, perfect for a drive in winter. Road is good and we made the Nura by noon where we stopped to rest, feed and samovar. Yesterday and today we passed very many strings of camels with ore for Spassky and coal from Karagandy. Altogether we counted 301 on the way to the Nura. Left at 1.30pm and arrived at Spassky at 6.30, 45 versts



Camel trains at Spassky

from the Nura. Found Atkinson had moved into new quarters in a different house, where we have a good kitchen and two other big rooms. All cleaned and whitewashed. Here we can at least be private and roughly comfortable, with our own meals at our own hours. We met our mail messenger at the Nura with welcome letters and papers.

Spassky: "We escaped from the manager's house with our lives"

Monday, January 25

As our baggage from Bayandy Kuduk had to return to that place seven days after it left, which news we learned by telegram from Rosentrater, arrangements had to be made for getting it here as soon as possible, as many things were absolutely needed for drafting and assay purposes, besides personals. So Atkinson arranged with the Sultan to bring all the stuff by contract at once, our horses left at Bayandy Kuduk sufficing to bring Rosentrater. We have also turned out six of our horses on herd with the Sultan, keeping only three for a troika to go to Karagandy etc. This appeared to be the best and cheapest way. This contract took a long time to settle, the old Sultan having lunch and tea with us in our rooms and being very jovial and contented. Lopectzan and The Brat will return for the baggage and Ahdam stays with us, to his great joy. The cook is cooking when she is not talking and the Faithful One is remarkably busy and has much to say to herself. Weather very cold, confining one to the house almost all the time, and the days drag out to their full length.



Spassky in the winter

Tuesday, Jan 26

Last night the wind began to blow very hard from the south-west and by midnight a full sized boorahn was raging. This morning it is in possession of everything, the air being a whirl of driving snow against which you may scarcely stand and through which you see but little. Luckily it is a warm boorahn and stock should not suffer much. Our rooms are quite well organised now and friends drop in for a chat and a cup of tea, the Sultan, the Riasanoffs etc. In the evening, we went over to

Spassky: "We escaped from the manager's house with our lives"

the manager's house and were photographed by flashlight but, owing to the shakiness of the photographer's hand, the plates were failures. We will have to go to tea with these people every now and then as a matter of policy, I fear! The boorahn is nearly inaudible in our rooms, where we are warm as possible with felts on the floor, and no necessity for going outside.

January 26, 1904

Dear Olivia

I shall always use your date and not the Russian one so as not to make scrambled eggs of your brain. We left Uspensky last Saturday in a mild boorahn with a big wind blowing wreaths of white, sandy snow along the ground. As it was behind us it was rather pleasant than otherwise. I never dreamed that there were so many camels in this country as there are here. All the ore from the mine is hauled by camels to the smelter, and all the coal from Karagandy to the smelter and to Uspensky, besides all the supplies to all these places.

I had a slight accident occur to my writing paper apparently, but I rely with confidence up on your good nature and kindly disposition.

[Part of this letter is sadly missing; it resumes]

...its cuds industriously, and when the lump began to run up its neck, if you stopped it, the infant creature slowly turned its neck and head round to put its face right opposite yours and stared helplessly and with amazement. A baby camel should be a part of every well-regulated family and in this country it is, as a rule.

We had a very pleasant stay at the Uspensky mine. The manager is a great character and full of fun. He is a fat little man, always making fun of everyone and you never know whether he is joking or not. He draws very well and the sketches I sent you and Marian are done like lightning and without any care. But he kept us in great amusement every evening by caricatures and sketches of all sorts of things. He is very fond of horses and understands them and draws horses better than anything. He had one picture, especially, mounted on cardboard, in pen and ink almost as fine as an engraving, of a black horse harnessed to a single sleigh in the Russian style, running away at a fearful speed through a blinding storm, the driver helplessly holding strongly to the reins and crouching to escape the cutting wind. This was beautifully done, the whole is being full of ungovernable rage and life. I tried to get this from him but, to my dismay, he said it was his wife's, and she would not part with it. But he was very pleased with my compliments and said he would draw another for me

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and I gave him a rattlesnake pouch to clinch the bargain. So I hope to be able to show you a real Russian picture drawn 950 versts from the railroad in the heart of Central Asia, someday! He played chess in a rather ridiculous fashion, not knowing anything about castling and moving two pawns at once for the opening move. All the time he dragged in French words which he pronounced in the Russian phonetic bill-of-fare manner, and German and Kazakh; and he insisted that Russia would own all Asia before long, China, India, Persia, Arabia, and Turkey, it would all be Russian!

Since I wrote the above we have had a big boorahn. For nearly three days the wind stormed and roared and



The Sultan Djumabek Djebagin

you could see nothing for flying snow. All the snow in the world seemed to be in the air here and it was all moving in a steady churning mass, night and day. Luckily it was not excessively cold or else much harm would have been done to stock. The old Sultan comes in practically every day and takes lunch or tea with us. You would like him very much, for he is better by far than any Kazakh at Bayandy Kuduk. He is a great, big, fine and dignified old man with a nearly white beard, and millions of fantastic wrinkles in his Chinese-looking old face. He is very rich; his clothes are of the finest, while his belt is the finest example of Kazakh silver-iron work! Apparently he likes us for he seems to be quite at home in our rooms and laughs and jokes all the time. As he speaks Russian like a native, we all can converse with him quite freely.

We have turned out all our horses with his herd except the Kouyandy Bay, Jingo Flingo and the Malenky Savraska. This troika we will for our own driving. All the horses have picked up wonderfully and are fat and saucy now. I grieve to announce to you that the Bolshoi Reeshka has a very bad front leg. He has badly strained his back tendons; in a racehorse, it would be called a breakdown. I have blistered him and he has improved, and now his only chance is a long rest on grass.

Our baggage has not yet arrived and it will be three weeks, probably. They started from Bayandy Kuduk the day we did, but seven days later they returned to Bayandy Kuduk and said the snow was so heavy that the horses were exhausted; we are contracting with the Sultan to go and get it all with

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his camels and horses. Lopectzan and The Brat will go also. Ahdam stays with us as our driver etc. We have very fair quarters here, a house of three rooms with a kitchen and are quite private. The Zoon is very busy and the Whining Cook cooks and wrangles all day long in a singsong manner. Our mail man should come tomorrow from Akmolinsk and I am most anxiously hoping for letters, and news of you and Marian, the grown-up. You are now at school and I am very keen to learn how you like it as compared to Allenswood and the steppes of Siberia, and I hope they are not so strict about writing letters as they were at Allenswood.

Goodbye, Olive,

From Tosh.

Wednesday, January 27

Boorahn blew hard all day, letting up a trifle towards night. Not able to do anything. Almost impossible to go outside. Cold is not excessive but the wind of impressive strength! Our mail messenger from Akmolinsk should be back on Sunday and I'm afraid he will be delayed.

Thursday, January 28

Morning opened quiet and warmer! Boorahn has passed by! Not much doing except in the way of working at Russian and writing. Mussen very busy with his Uspensky and smelter reports and Atkinson is typewriting them. Went all over the works this afternoon. Everything is at full blast and they are making a big hole, several of them, in the best of the slag pile, rushing it through the furnaces as fast as possible. The new smelter superintendent is a capable man and the work goes smoothly and uninterruptedly night and day.

Friday, January 29.

Storming again today, what they call a small size boorahn. Southwest certainly is the bad quarter. The Sultan came to lunch today; in fact, he comes nearly every day and seems to feel quite at home. He is very anxious to see the syndicate take possession for he has very little respect for these people and doesn't mind saying so.

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Saturday, January 30

Quiet weather till afternoon when another boorahn blew along and by dark it was in full swing. Our mail is due today and the chances for it look small. Impossible to do anything this weather but read, write and play chess.

January 30, 1904

Spassky

Dear Marian,

Supposing I were to meet you on the street in Paris, do you think I would recognise you? Are you as much changed, being grown-up, as I would be if I were clean-shaved and in knickerbockers? These questions afford me much thought. You must have had a glorious time with Mr Fell in Paris and then your meeting in Berlin must have been a wonder. What a deal you must have had to tell and to hear about and I expect that now you are twice as keen to come to the steppes. But take my advice, don't come in winter and especially at this time of year, because this is the boorahn season and, because there have been several overdue, they are all coming at once. We had only just lately endured one very bad one; today, another comes tearing along after a short respite of calm weather. You have no idea what a boorahn or a blizzard is and you cannot be told either, you must be out in one and have to try to face it to have any adequate conception.

No doubt great sea-storms are frightful and appalling but I doubt if they fill one with more dread or are really more dangerous. There is something peculiarly fierce about a boorahn and it is, I think, because it is as though the attack was in the dark for, no matter if it is daytime, you cannot see anything for flying snow. Remember, it is frightfully cold and, if the wind strikes your bare face, it cuts like a razor and freezes you. You can barely breathe because you inhale small particles of snow and the wind blows the breath from you. You can barely stand and your struggles take all the breath you have. Your eyes fill with fine cloud-like snow dashed at you and your eyelashes try to freeze down to your cheek. You feel perfectly helpless and so small and puny against such a giant of an enemy, and you know that it will have no mercy and you must rely upon yourself. These boorahns are of the same standard as the blizzards in the north western states of America and I was once caught fairly in one there and had to go some distance on foot facing it; and, if there had not been a fence to guide me nearly all the way, I may never have reached the house. It is a feeling never to be forgotten and I

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have a wonderful respect for these boorahns. As I write there is pandemonium reigning outside and I can hear the dull, angry roar through the tight, double windows and great, thick, stone walls. It is all white outside and the white is all moving fast and twisting and whirling about like a gigantic octopus with unseen millions of arms ready to catch you and hold you down and freeze you, with a grin on its face. It is just as if some unknown, bloodthirsty monster were hungrily stalking around waiting for prey, and his roar and thunderous clamour make one wonder why he does not come in and drag you away to his lair in the snow drifts.

The trouble is that this boorahnic monster and the last one, his mate, have no doubt attacked and hindered our mail messenger from Akmolinsk who is due here today. And my plight in the matter of news is pitiable. My last letters were from Moscow and I have had no papers of a later date than December 12th. The whole world may be at war and the King of England may have stepped on another rotten sponge for aught that I know, but if this last catastrophe had happened I feel sure Mr Fell would have wired me at once. The Russians here say that if war broke out between Japan and Russia, and if China joined in against Russia as would be most likely, we would perhaps be in trouble here, along with all the Russians. The reason being that, only 40 years ago, there was a big Kazakh insurrection against the Russians here in the Akmolinsk district, and that the Kazakhs were subdued, but many of them with their leader escaped and crossed the border into China, which is only about 500 versts from the Uspensky Mine. These men, or their descendants, with many other Chinese desperados, hardy mountain-bred, fierce men might easily cross the border again and plunder and harry the steppes in search of the Russians whom they hate. All the Kazakhs are far more Chinese than Russian and all would help such a trouble either secretly or openly. The Russians here say that immediately war began, all the Cossacks here would be ordered to Manchuria and none would be left to watch the Chinese border along with steppes, and that a raid from China would have nothing to stop it. This is probably all talk and rubbish but it is, at least, quite interesting to know that the Russians here are discussing it seriously.

I saw a book lately in Russian all about Tibet and it was full of large and fine photographs. These were most interesting to us because so many of the men and women in the photographs were exactly like the Kazakhs in looks and in dress and, although some were more Chinese in looks than our Kazakhs, the great majority were not and they might almost have been photographs of Kazakhs from here. At the Uspensky Mine I saw a very old man who wore a broad, round and peaked Chinese hat, and the others called him a Chinaman, so you see the border is not so very far away.

Spassky: "We escaped from the manager's house with our lives"

I am sending you some sketches done by the manager of the Uspensky Mine to amuse you. We had great fun with this manager and got him to draw every night. I am sending The Boy a lot more. As a humourist and caricaturist, this man was splendid and he says he has painted portraits and other subjects in oils and has sold them, too, for good prices, besides being on the staff of a Russian newspaper. Have you never any of your drawings to spare that you would send by mail for if so, I would like to see them very much indeed; I am sure you are doing very well with your drawing or painting! You will look after Olivia awfully well, will you not, Marian, because she needs someone to do so, as she never looks after herself. She is a perfectly reckless creature about her own health and I have told her so!

Goodbye and pleasant days, from Toshi.

January 30, 1904

Spassky

Dear Boy,

I am sending you some pencil sketches done by the manager of the Uspensky Mine, Mr Sergius Ivanovitch Yakoleff⁶². The big one where the one man is bowing to another is meant to represent a Russian minister who thinks he is of the very greatest importance, while the other man is apparently overcome by his feelings. The other two smaller ones show ancient horses and an ancient warrior-man of great strength. This artistic manager of a copper mine is great fun and likes better to draw funny pictures than anything else and he drew pictures for us every night to our great pleasure.

I wish you would write and tell me what you are doing these days and how many versts you ride every day, and I do not mean in a bus either. The weather is now altogether too fierce to think of riding and, it is a fact, I have not ridden a horse since the last afternoon that I rode with you and Olivia. Did you see Emperor Billy in Berlin and if you did, I hope you took off his hat to you and clicked his heels together and gave you the grand salute. Did you learn to skate when in Germany and if not, why not? I think that your grown-up sister learning to skate for the first time must have been very funny indeed. The Brat asks after you at least three times a

⁶² A sculpture in iron called "A Kirghiz on Horseback", by Sergei Ivanovich Yakovlev (1862-1930) was sold by a US auction house in 2015; I rather think this is the same man; there is a brief biography of him at https://artchive.ru/en/artists/62905~Sergey_Ivanovich_Yakovlev!

Spassky: "We escaped from the manager's house with our lives"

week with many bows and scrapes and, when I say that you will not be back for a long time, he bangs himself on the head and says "Beet, beet, gammon"⁶³! So you had better come back!

Goodbye, Boy, and may good luck follow you always.

From Toshy.

PS. Big boorahn is blowing now. Don't you wish you were here to roll in the nice cold snow.

Sunday, January 31

Boorahn blew past last night. Quiet again today. Church bells this morning very busy! Mail not arrived yet, noon.

Sunday, January 31

Spassky

[No greeting]

I feel as if I have been writing to you every day and I hope that my journal will not alarm you by its length. Today our mail should arrive and that is a supreme event when you have had no letters for two weeks, and no papers for nearly 2 months. Now that the weather is so miserable, it is almost impossible to go out and the whole day spent indoors is very wearing. It is a merciful dispensation that you did not come here to spend the winter under these conditions.

⁶³ Kazakh phrase presumably.

Spassky: "We escaped from the manager's house with our lives"

We escaped from the manager's house with our lives and are stowed away in a house nearby, and these old Spassky houses are full of life most interesting to an entomologist, besides numerous cats who have to learn by experience that it is sometimes necessary to look for a new boarding house. You would have had to stay in the manager's house and I can imagine no worse fate. Give me cats and cockroaches in preference to crazy people! I spend half my time in wondering what you are doing and where you are and where you are going! And I never have the faintest idea, not having a single clue.

On Tuesday, Mussen and I and our satellites go to Karagandy to prowl about the coal mine and see all there is to be seen. Here we shall be in more congenial surroundings and shall have more to do, although Mussen has been very busy of late sending the news officially to Mr Fell. It will be a disaster if the syndicate does not ante up finally, because these people are making money fast here now and the possibilities for the syndicate loom larger than ever. The mine is a sight, a very busy scene at present and that is always good to see. The furnaces roar and flame night and day and the swarms of ragged, half-clad Kazakhs dash in and out in the glare and heat, looking copper-bronze and savage. Strings and strings of camels come and go by the hundred, bringing ore, coal, or supplies from Akmolinsk, all of which pass our rooms to and fro continually.

[No continuation]



The church at Spassky, interior

Spassky: "We escaped from the manager's house with our lives"



Camels at Spassky

tucked up his gown and joined in, uproariously. This priest showed up wonderfully! He is slight but immensely strong and active and told us he was a Cossack, a fighting Cossack and, if war breaks out he will go at once. He said he could ride a horse according to all the most approved Cossack ways and he hoped war would soon come. He wanted Japanese blood.

Monday, February 1

Mail arrived last evening quite late and was a terrible disappointment to all. Practically nothing came! A few New York Suns, grey with age, no English papers, nothing of the slightest interest to me, nothing! No Syndicate news, no war news; after a 10 day wait with another 10 days staring us in the face! We retired total wrecks! As we were going to Karagandy tomorrow, we had to invite the chief inhabitants of the asylum to a tea-drinking and we did. About 20 came and luckily, the men's minds turned entirely towards trials of strength. The women all played cards by themselves from 7pm to 12pm, while the men, in an adjoining room carpeted with felt, went through all kinds of rough 'sport', which was most amusing. We instituted leapfrog which was much approved of and the priest



13. Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

Tuesday, February 2 Karagandy

We left at 12 am for Karagandy with our own troika, now fat and strong, and another of the Sultan's for Bastrakoff and the Faithful Zoon. A half boorahn was blowing broadside to us and, as we neared the flat, unprotected country near Karagandy, it became very bad indeed. But we arrived around 3.30pm none the worse. Here we found the hospitable Nyemkoff and we wrestled with Russian till late.

Wednesday February 3

On looking out in the morning, we found all the windows banked to the tops in snow and saw there by that a big boorahn was blowing. It blew all day steadily (and is blowing now) so that no one stirred from the house. None of the Kazakh coalminers worked at all because they could not get to the shaft. The big boorahn had undisputed possession of the steppes today. Mussen in the meantime, gained much information about the mine and it is no hardship to be imprisoned in this house. Nyemkoff does not try to force liquids down your throat and if he kept his house cooler there could be no fault to find. We can barely hear the boorahn at all and, unless you look out of the window at the wall of white fog through which it is impossible to see 50 yards, no one would believe the weather was bad.

February 3, 1904

Karagandy

[No greeting]

This is a hurried call. A messenger of the Riasanoffs is going to Akmolinsk. My daily grind must, please, do duty for a letter. It tells all the real news we have to tell but I know that uninteresting news in a letter is like a newspaper that you must read because there is nothing else and which you would rather die than subscribe to. Today is the storm is over. Clear, cold, as cold as can be! As cold as a post with no letters inside it; colder than charity! Tosh.

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Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

February 3, 1904,

Karagandy

Dear Olive,

Just a few words and to send you this postcard for your album. It is from Beeky Beeky and came a few days ago and I thought it would please you immensely. Mr Mussen is also sending you one which he received at the same time from the same very fine man. Both are beauties and we argue much as to the merits. His is the most exciting but I claim mine to be the most interesting. Nothing matters though as long as you get them safely. I will tell you what the Russian writing on mine means, not because I think you are unable to translate it but because I think that you are probably much too busy with more important matters!

Beeky Beeky writes: "I congratulate you on the New Year, I wish you all good things. I hope you have snow and you are able to travel on sleighs. Here also, in Petersburg up to the present time, we travel on wheels."

All the snow in the world seem to be in the air. Every day now seems to bring us a boorahn.

Kindly present to Marian my warmest regards and respects and assure her of my deepest admiration.

Believe me to be forever and a day,

Toshy.

Thursday February 4

Very clear and intensely cold with a strong wind. All went down into the mine, with Nyemkoff driving to the shaft, which is a verst away. Walked long distances between walls of solid coal and came up another shaft where the pumps were working. This was very wet and grubby and have come to the conclusion that a coal mine is not a clean place. Driving back against the wind was an ordeal. Nyemkoff, who drove my sleigh, froze the lobes of both his ears quite severely and the driver of the other sleigh froze his nose and one cheek.

Friday, February 5

Another boorahn in full swing, this time an intensely cold one and going outside an impossibility. A camel was frozen to death last night. Everything a white, howling mist outside and very warm and nice inside. Our host is a most interesting man and is full of queer knowledge and it is doubly interesting now that we can understand him sufficiently. He knows many Kazakh

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

legends and told us a few. The Kazakhs explain the reason why the horse is afraid of the camel. The horse became discontented and went to Allah and complained that his legs were too short and his feet too hard and that his back was too flat so that the saddle slipped and galled his skin, also that he could drink too little water to suit himself. Allah let him away silently to where a camel stood and, showing him the monstrosity, asked him if he wanted to be like that and the horse shied away and fled.

The more we see of Nyemkoff, the more we like him, his house, his mine and all about him, always in a most orderly condition. He is as far ahead of the Russians of his class out here as the seven stars are from the North Pole.

Saturday, February 6

Again the bitter cold boorahn is blowing and we never stirred from the house; in the evening it cleared so that one could see a little but the wind is screeching yet. Busy all day with Russian and maps, and talk about the mine, and Mussen is translating from the Russian the early reports of government engineers on the Riasanoff properties here. Nyemkoff told us today that he dug, one summer, into some very old 'kurgans' or tombs about 65 versts from here. In one he found the skeleton of a warrior, intact. At his head were his great shield, of leather originally, studded with bronze knobs, a long bronze sword, at least 3½ feet in length, and several great bronze spearheads. At his feet were the bones of a dog and a bird (probably a hawk) and his saddle, stirrup irons of bronze and a big carved bronze bit. And I forgot to say that 2 feet above the man lay the bones of a horse. In another, he found many traces of coal and only the big bones of the legs and arms, while among them were tall, thin jars with letters upon them. But here he received a great disappointment for, chancing to leave for a short time, the two men he had digging for him tested the contents of the urns and, finding only ashes instead of treasure, violently threw them all down and broke them all to pieces so that it was impossible to join them again and decipher the letters. He also found many bronze arrowheads. We have arranged, if we are still here, to go with him next summer and dig some more.

Sunday, February 7

This was a better day, although very bad, but we all went down the mine and spent a long time there. Must have wandered nearly two miles, stooping low much of the time because, when the coal is removed, the clay underlying it slowly creeps upwards, filling up the drift. It is one of the problems to be guarded against and latterly, Nyemkoff fights it by leaving in the drifts a tight layer of coal intact. It is a fine sight, the mine and a fine property. Driving back against the wind, I exposed a morsel of my face and it promptly froze. The result might have been worse, they tell me!

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

Monday, February 8

This day last year I left Kissimmee for Siberia! Today was much better, quiet and behaving respectably. Meandered for ages through black-walled galleries into some old workings near the surface, seeing all that there is to be seen. Watching the Kazakhs work is grand for they are much more at home in soft coal than hard rock and, as they work under contract, they make things hum.

Tuesday, February 9

Another robust young boorahn is busy outside and we did not attempt to face him, for the drive to the shaft is quite a distance and we have plenty of time here. Never saw such stormy, infuriated weather before, anywhere. We expect our mail now every day and bushels of it are due. Nyemkoff's house is by far the best place to stay at; he is glad to have us, makes us very comfortable and does not attempt to force us to drink anything we do not want. We play much chess together and he tells us anecdotes about the Czars continually. He says that the Kazakhs did not drive out the Kalmucks⁶⁴ at all and scouts the idea⁶⁵. He says Kazakhs were practically the slaves of the more war-like Kalmucks and that the Kalmucks, becoming bored by the peaceful steppes, left voluntarily and moved to European Russia where they found all the fighting they wanted. The Kazakhs stayed at home — and here they are. Moral? Lie low and do nothing but live!

February 9, 1904

Karagandy

Dear Willie,

Today your long letter from Berlin came, from the land of that lovely language, and to say that I was pleased would be to say that Mount Everest is high. By the same mail came this postcard and a long letter from Ida, written on the board her steamer on the way to Vera Cruz⁶⁶, of which I send you the very beautiful stamp. Is it not strange that you and she should have written letters from places so far apart and that they should have

⁶⁴ A branch of the Mongolian race inhabiting parts of the Russian and Chinese empires.

⁶⁵ Apparently one meaning of 'scout' is 'Reject (a proposal or idea) with scorn'.

⁶⁶ His sister, later to show herself as a dedicated suffragist. She went, I think to visit Minor in the USA, arriving New Orleans in January; obviously the visit to Mexico was part of that trip.

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arrived at a small spot in the central part of Asia on the same day. The postal system of the universe is one of the most wonderful things! Your letter took almost a month to reach me and Ida's nearly 7 weeks. Part of the delay occurred between Akmolinsk and here, for they come by a camel caravan which took nine days on the road; I am beginning to realise that this is really and truly a very faraway place. I suppose that people might easily think that anyone living out here should be pitied, living amidst the awful horrors of a Siberian winter but, if truth be told, we are living here a life of great comfort and pleasure.

Mr Nyemkoff's house is the nicest I have seen on the steppes, larger, nicer and better furnished than our house at Bayanduckaduckaduck, and Mr Nyemkoff as a host is typical of all one has ever heard of true Russian hospitality. There are plenty of servants, and the cooking and cleanliness are perfect. In fact, Mr Mussen and I are so very contented that we are not returning to our rooms at Spassky until we are obliged to; Mr Nyemkoff has invited us to stay just as long as we please. Every day the boorahns allow, we go down into the mine, and wander up and down black-walled galleries for versts at a time, for the workings extend a very long way underground. There are about 600 Kazakhs living here and camels by the 50 every day, so it has the air of a very busy place, a perfect metropolis on the steppes. All the time, one is hearing Russian properly spoken and it is a grand place to learn; in the evenings, Mr Nyemkoff and I play chess till midnight and, as we are evenly matched, it is great fun. I am only afraid that war will break out and if England is foolish enough to join in we may be hustled out of Russia by Cossacks!

Mr Nyemkoff has three small boys, one of them not two years old yet, wears knickerbockers, walks and runs everywhere, sits at table alongside me, eats and drinks all by himself, and talks Russian better than I can. Never have I seen such a precocious youngster; he nearly kills Mr Mussen and me with laughter. Mr Nyemkoff's horses are splendid and his harnesses are always clean and well oiled, and covered with brightly polished brasswork. We go sleighing in a little light sleigh and fairly hum over the ground. His favourite horse shies like mad at full speed and nearly throws us out, and he thinks that is great fun.

You know how the Kazakhs saw logs in two, standing up, one of them high in the air and the other one at the other end of the log. Well, if a boorahn is blowing, they get more pay for working and sometimes, no matter if a roaring, yelling boorahn is blowing, when the wind lulls for a moment, I am appalled to see the Kazakh away up in the air sawing away as contentedly as if the sun were warm and the air as baking as May, and it has to be very fierce to make him stop work. We can see them from our windows.

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

Ahdam has twice asked me to send you his humblest good wishes and he hopes and prays that you will return very soon to the steppes. He spends his time going back and forth between Karagandy and Spassky with notes and letters from us to Mr Atkinson. We have a grand system of meals here. We get up at 8am, have breakfast at 9am, consisting of glasses of tea or coffee and many sooharries; at one or 1.30 we have a good meal of soup and meat, and a sweet, tea and coffee follow at once; then at 7.30pm we have more cakes, sooharries and tea and coffee; and lastly at 11 or 11.30pm we have another big meal of soup and meat and some sweet, tea or coffee. It really works grandly when you become accustomed to it. Sometimes they work in an extra samovar at 4.30pm but I consider that one rather (Russian words). The Faithful Zoon is with us and she fusses about among our things a great deal, telling herself all about it over and over again. There is also a brand-new phonograph here, a great big one, and any number of cylinders of the best Russian music, for Nyemkoff is musical and enjoys his concerts. He told us some grand Kazakh legends which I will try to tell you.

[There follow the stories of the Garden of Paradise and the Horse and Camel.]

I never dreamed that these old Kazakhs had such good imaginations!

Now, Willie, please remember that your letters are something that I look forward to from day to day, and please do not spare the Rue Erlanger⁶⁷ ink.

From Toshy.

Wednesday, February 10

Until noon or 2pm the day was beautiful, still and sunny but, as we returned from the coalmine the weather had already changed and great gusts of wind-driven snow were coming across the steppes from the storm quarter. By dark, all was trouble again and white blackness. The room we sit in is a southwest exposure with two windows and, although it is tight and warm, we get a good idea of the boorahns from the rapidity with which the windows become banked in the snow. Every morning they are completely shut in and a Kazakh digs them out regularly. In the boorahn he takes them out about every two hours during daylight. He is a sight to see! Mail came today, but only a very small portion of it! The rest had started before by a camel caravan and may be days and days yet. We are going to re-organise our mail delivery entirely and not leave it in the

⁶⁷ Marian and Olivia's lodging in the 16th Arrondissement on the west side of Paris.

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hands of the Riasanoff agent at Akmolinsk anymore. I received one letter from Berlin and a few unimportant papers. Our latest war news is over a month old!

Thursday, February 11

More mail arrived today by camel caravan, having taken nine days from Akmolinsk. The papers are of Christmas date or still more prehistoric. Recent Russian papers talk of war as inevitable in the spring or earlier. Having had no Weekly Times for five or six weeks, I begin to mistrust the censor more than ever. Cossacks here expect the official mobilisation notice any day and all new arrivals cause a flutter of excitement. The educated Russian here says that, in the event of war with Japan and if Russia receives any serious naval or military reverses, there will be serious trouble in European Russia; they say the war is not popular at all with the Russian people and they fear this outlook more than anything Japan can do to them.

February 11, 1904
Karagandy

[No greeting, to Anne]

Your Berlin letter arrived two days ago just in time, for I was at my wits' end for news, but a month and a day is a long time for a letter to come from Berlin. We are getting almost no mail or papers and

I expect that military affairs on the trans-Siberian have superseded even postal arrangements. Mussen is wiring to London to that effect because, apart from insignificant epistles from Clark (secretary) he has practically not heard a word from 3 Walbrook for weeks. Personally I have entirely given up all hope as to the deal going through and I expect to be on the way to England before long. The fear of England's having to join in sooner or later must influence a big deal like this one. Russian papers here are very bitter against England and America



The Karagandy coalfield in 2019

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

at present and freely say that England will assist Japan to reassert her fallen prestige in the east. They seem to take it for granted. Meanwhile, troops are pouring along in a steady stream past Omsk to Manchuria with big guns and stores, and no stranger is allowed near the railway unless under guard.

If this deal falls through it is no use trying ever to do anything, I think, for never was there such a cheap property! This is impressed more upon one after seeing this magnificent coal property, especially as the London assays were so very satisfactory. There is coal to burn here, of uniform size and quality, to be cheaply mined and easily transported. Although we have now seen practically all there is to see here, we are staying as long as possible because this is infinitely the nicest place, Uspensky next and Spassky last by a long way. I am sending a long article with ten splendid Bastrakoffsky photographs to Harpers Weekly by this mail and hope to get at least a year's subscription out of the enterprise. Taking the Kazakhs, their ways, life, stock and country as the subject matter, the great trouble was to limit oneself and to dam back the floods of stuff which one knows now about them. This has been a quiet spot in which to tackle this effort.

Olivia writes very happily from Berlin, but Marian never a line and I don't like this growing-up business a bit if this is the effect, and if it were anyone else but Marian, I would think more. You must have enjoyed Germany I suppose, because you said so but your description only made me shudder. I would like to wipe Germany and all its history from the face of memory. Ida writes at length about her doings in Mexico, Panama, Jamaica etc and seems supremely contented. Please tell Minor that his behaviour to me has been such that diplomatic relations are seriously strained.

Goodbye Anna Oliverovna.

Toshy.

Saturday, February 13

Pleasant day, Atkinson arrived today and returns tomorrow. Also the government doctor came. He had been to Uspensky and Spassky and has headquarters in Akmolinsk. A rough, grubby man and a great talker, who revels in the prospect of war with Japan and frankly said it was Russia's aim to own all Asia some day: Japan, Manchuria and Korea, then Persia, India and Burma and then China. These Siberian Russians are very warlike and entirely ignorant of the strength of the outside world. This man talked of the invasion of India seriously and with the confidence of fate. I told him to try little Japan first and then take breath to think a little, but he laughed like a Sphinx.

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

February 14, 1904 Karagandy

[No greeting, to Anne]

Late last night a Cossack messenger came with orders for a full mobilisation; all Cossacks and all other men liable for service. We suppose war has been declared. Exciting night last night. The man left in less than an hour and there was much weeping among the women. The whole country is roused and full of war-like excitement and confident of victory. Certainly these Cossacks are grand men, and Russians, I shall always have a deep respect for as men, not politicians!

Toshy.

Post is going now.

Lopectzan goes and many other men I know; Rosentrater is one, also Novogeetoff from Rieben's. The secretary at Spassky also, please tell Mr Fell.

Sunday, February 15

Cold and windy. Man came from Akmolinsk today with war news. He said that a Russian cruiser was hemmed in by 15 Japanese ships near Chemulpo on the Korean coast. Seeing the case was hopeless, the captain and crew left the cruiser, having laid a train to the powder magazine, whereupon she blew up, crew going to a French cruiser nearby. This is applauded as great heroism but, if they had fought it out and had done as much damage to the enemy's ships as possible and then blown themselves up, there would have been some sense in it. In the evening the boorahn came back stronger than ever. Very bad at night.

Monday, February 16

Boorahn in full force, worse as night drew on, and darkness found an appalling state of affairs. A few days ago rather a curious phenomenon occurred here. Suddenly a shower of something came down from the sky during a quiet snow storm and the snow on the ground was coloured a brownish yellow. We collected a lot of snow and melted the whole, and it appears to be just sand, some coarse and some very fine. Our theory is that a fearful twisting storm picked it up from the great deserts to the south and south-west and carried it away until the force behind it collapsed. The Great Hungry Steppe below us can tell some tales, no doubt!

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

Tuesday, February 17

Storm had cleared so, after dinner, Mussen and I returned to Spassky with Ahdam and our own troika. Roads not good but quite drivable. Passed very many camels on the way, long strings hauling coal, a never-tiring sight. Stopped at the Sultan's and drank much koumiss with him. He was at his evening prayers when we arrived, praying with two other men, one being a young mullah; all three in a row and all making the same motions at the same time and bowing to the ground to their very forehead in exact unison, just exactly like well-drilled soldiers or music hall artists. They are too dignified and too much in earnest to be laughed at but still if you allow yourself to think about it, it is a pity. Arrived at Spassky about dark and found all well. Our rooms with new curtains (from the baggage) and everything neat and clean, the Zoon in charge!

Wednesday, February 18

Spent morning in unpacking and overhauling boxes of baggage, coming across many old friends long unseen. Guests kept dropping in and the samovar was red hot all day. Mussen goes to Uspensky tomorrow alone. Both Atkinson and I are busy with unpacking assay stuff, and other material and I want to do some blow-pipe work on the rich minerals from the new small vein in the deepest Uspensky workings.

February 18, 1904

Dear Olive,

It may be very funny to have a great war going on and not to know anything about it, but it is true in our case, and it certainly is great training for anyone who is trying to break a record for patience. We have not yet seen a paper to say that war has been declared even, and we can only conjecture from rumours that fighting is in progress by land and by sea. Besides, it will be four days before any mail reaches us at all and all of this will be old so that it will be two weeks before we actually receive any definite news that war is now on. The happy prospect too is always before us that the Censor will most thoughtfully block out anything that he believes will interest us. There is a warm spot reserved in a distant land for that censor!

The news came in a roundabout way to us like this: — last Saturday, February 13, we were sitting around the inevitable samovar, talking and smoking when suddenly, in walked a long-coated, tall Cossack soldier who silently handed Mr Nyemkoff a paper. This was the call for the mobilisation of two regiments of Cossacks, some

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

of whose men were here. This was exciting but did not necessarily mean war, we thought. But — about an hour later or 1am, in walked another long-coated Cossack a most magnificent looking, great, bearded man who silently delivered his paper; and this was the call to arms for all Cossacks and for all other soldiers liable for duty. This meant war, we said at once. The man got a fresh horse on the spot and galloped off for Spassky, 45 versts, having just ridden as hard as he could 300 versts from Akmolinsk; and on his arrival at Spassky he will at once tear on to Uspensky another 115 versts. All these Cossacks will muster at Akmolinsk and, by this time, 6000 of them are on the way to the front, full of war-feeling and talk, although the war, as a war, is not very popular here, because these Cossacks are local in their ideas and care little for Manchuria and Korea and Japan. Lopectzan has gone also, also Rosentrater, the Bayanduckaduck feldscher-doctor man⁶⁸. Quite a few other men here that I know have gone and some of them I was quite pleased to see depart. It is a serious thing for a Russian to be called to the front from the point of view of his family because, as a rule, he is supporting that family and often leaves them nearly destitute. In bad cases, the government helps a very little and friends or relations all seem to help each other. The man who goes to the front practically disappears, perhaps for a short time, perhaps for years and there are no list published at once of the dead or wounded; in fact, I do not think they ever publish lists at all. After his service is over, the soldier received no pension, nothing. He just picks up the broken ends of his former life and ties them together somehow. So it is no wonder that they think it a serious matter and that the women left behind are so distressed, for when the men left here, the family were all broken up. These men all left within an hour after they received the unexpected summons; which is wonderful to think of. The Cossacks are different to all the other soldiers in the Russian army in that there is no limit for the term of service; every Cossack, as long as he is able to ride and is healthy, must go when he is called. Mr Nyemkoff, if he were a Cossack, would have to go. As it is, he has served his time and has passed the age limit, which is 38, I believe.

After the men left, about 20 of them from here and Spassky, there was much speculation as to events and no news until Monday at noon, a man from Akmolinsk said that news had reached there saying a Japanese ship had been sunk and, at 6pm the same day, another man came saying that a telegram to Akmolinsk had announced the sinking of the Japanese fleet off some islands near Korea. He also said that all the troops in

⁶⁸ In Russia, a medical doctor's assistant was known as a feldscher (though that is a German word).

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

Akmolinsk had paraded, salutes were fired and a grand Te Deum song in the churches. This news paralysed us completely and we are still under its influence, having heard nothing since except that a man in Akmolinsk had received news of the death of his brother, a Cossack officer, at the front. This led us to think that the Japanese fleet was not destroyed and that they had landed troops in Korea or Manchuria and were fighting now upon land. You can see what a chaos is going on in our minds and, added to it, we quite expect to be called back to London at any time, because Russia is not at all pleased with England and her friendship for Japan (and I must say that it seems a shame to back up little old yellow men against this splendid race of grand men of our own colour). But it is politics with a big P!

This anti-English feeling is, of course, in all the Russian papers and the people here read them. The nice people put no blame upon us but the unclean ones do and Mr Atkinson was peacefully sleeping at Spassky, a few nights ago, and suddenly a rock crashed through his windows, both the outer and the inner, which threw such a scare into him that, early next morning, he picked up his things and fled to the hospitable home of Mr Nyemkoff at Karagandy, where he is still with us.⁶⁹

If England gives more cause for anger and we are called home, I expect we shall have to dodge rocks repeatedly. The Kazakhs are much distressed and worried about the war. To begin with, the Cossacks grabbed any of the horses they wanted to get to Akmolinsk with and now, if you meet a Kazakh on the road, as soon as he sees you are not a Kazakh, he dashes off at a right angle on to the steppes and he does not care how deep the snow is. If it is deep for him, it is deep for you and he has got to start, that is all he thinks about. The Sultan Djumabek drove all his horses far away to the south in time to escape trouble. The Kazakhs believe that the reason why the Cossacks are sent for is because all the Russians at the front have been killed and, when these men have also been killed, then the Kazakhs will be sent for. They shake their heads a great deal and say "Ai Bai, ai Bai!". Your long letter from Berlin, I treat a somewhat in the light of my latest newspaper news, and I read it every day, so please do it again. It is good to know that you are safe in Paris in these times of trouble.

Goodbye "karsh"

Tosh.

⁶⁹ It is hard to be sure where Frank was for these few days; perhaps *all* the foreigners fled from Spassky back to Nyemkoff's at Karagandy!

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

Thursday, February 19

Fine weather. Clear and cold but sun is gaining in strength and in sheltered spots are thaws and pools. Mussen left with Polichenko (the smelter superintendent) at 11 am for Uspensky, using our horses and povoska⁷⁰ with Ahdam driving. Sultan comes in every day about lunchtime and is always very welcome. We go to visit him tomorrow at his request and in sleighs that he will send for us. Expect a post today, sent for eight days ago by the Spassky office.

Saturday, February 20

Fine weather! Sultan Djumabek arrived in the afternoon to see if our mail man, who is sent out by him, was on time; he keeps a close watch on all his men to keep them up to the mark. At 11pm the mail arrived safely, the man having ridden 300 versts in less than three days, and he came in and sat down on the felt as quite unconcerned as if nothing had happened or ever was going to happen. It was a most prodigious mail, stacks of back papers and a host of letters for all. Latest papers were of January 25; war was not declared yet in our papers.

February 20, 1904

Karagandy

We are getting very lugubrious as to the chances of the syndicate taking up this property, now that war has actually commenced, and we are quite prepared for our recall at any time. And I did so want to put in another Kazakh summer! With the bitter feeling in Russia against England and the chances of a long fought-out war with always the possibility of England being forced to join in, it seems suicidal for any English company to invest largely in anything Siberian. We have sent away our passports to get new ones in their place, the old ones being good only for a year, and our baggage is expected from Bayandy Kuduk every day so that, if we get a wire at any time, we can soon be moving. Even Mussen is cautiously inclined to think that he possibly might be drawn to consider the chances of a recall if many things do or don't happen, and that is a great admission for him to make flat-footed. I am beginning to think we are hoodoos and, if we all go to Mexico and try to make a mine there, sure as fate, Mexico will go to war with the States or Burma or Borneo.

⁷⁰ Another sort of carriage.

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

If we are recalled and nothing else is doing in the London office for some indefinite period, I shall make a beeline for Kissimmee and live in a frugal manner out there until the clouds of war roll away from the sun of my future prosperity. But, in case there is other work to do in the London office, I shall be forced by conscience to grapple with its problems. Having thus made up my mind, I care not how many rocks I may have to dodge on our return through Russia; passive non-resistance will be my humble motto which will conceal a wealth of expressive thought, learned, and never forgotten, from Arizona and New Mexico.

Goodbye, and when you drink tea under the bamboo, please put out a cup and saucer for me because I shall surely be there in spirit!

Tosh.

Sunday, February 21

Fine day! At 2pm, Sultan left for Spassky with Atkinson. Atkinson going because we had news by Kazakh telegraph that our long baggage caravan was nearing Karagandy and, as it goes on to Spassky, Atkinson will be there to store it safely. At 3pm it arrived. 12 fine camels pulling single sleighs and four horses in sleighs; marching along in single file, bringing about 300 poods (5 tons). They had taken eight days only from Bayandy Kuduk and we took nine with our sleighs and passengers only. But they had fine weather all the way and no drifting snow. War rumours are afloat again. This time it is that the Japanese fleet went to Port Arthur and fired upon the Russians killing 15 men on one battleship and the Russians never answered the challenge for some occult reason which flabbergasts and infuriates Russians here⁷¹. Then the 'Japs' steamed away unhurt! One studiously disbelieves everything. Another report arrived that the French fleet had sailed to the east to attack Japan and everyone was very jubilant! Russians here, as a race of big men, heartily despise the 'Japs' as being a race of dwarfs and laugh at them as a matter of course, forgetting all about gunnery and rifle practice. Tomorrow, Lent begins and it is taken most seriously here. I witnessed a strange rite this evening. Two of Nyemkoff's men were drinking tea with us, the blacksmith and the magazine man, both splendid types of good men. When they left, each in turn dropped to the floor and kissed Nyemkoff's feet separately and then he did the same to them, finally all kissed each other on both cheeks, with reports like pistol cracks.

⁷¹ On the night of 8 February 1904, the Japanese fleet under Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō opened the war with a surprise attack on the Russian ships at Port Arthur, heavily damaging the two of the heaviest Russian battleships. These attacks developed into the Battle of Port Arthur the next morning. Ultimately the battle was relatively indecisive. (Source: Wikipedia)

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

Nyemkoff told me after that it was an old custom which is universally followed in Russia on parting for the last time on the day before Lent.

Monday, February 22

Forgot to say yesterday that The Brat returned with the baggage caravan, just as chirpy as ever. He brought the news that Toolpah had concluded, now that war was on, to lie as low as possible, so could not be induced to move. And another Kazakh, Little Jacob, came two days on the trip and then threw up the sponge and hurried back. The Brat wants to go to war and bite someone. He says to kill is necessary, getting very red in the gills. He had brought our remaining six horses, rode and led them. They look bad but will soon pick up here on the Sultan's grazing grounds. Rosentrater, Lopectzan, the little Russian blacksmith, and Novogeetoff were all "called" from Bayandy Kuduk and have gone to Omsk on the way to the front.

Tuesday, February 23

Warm day with some thawing in the sun. The Brat went on to Spassky with the baggage train either last night or early yesterday; anyway he was back here in the late afternoon, bright as a daisy, with letters from Paris which were as unexpected as shooting stars. Some Spassky mail had arrived in a mysterious manner and with that they had sent a few letters, with no papers. Paris letters were dated February 4.

February 23, 1904

Spassky

Dear Willie,

Do they teach you at school to write such a nice letters for if so, I want to go to your school. Your last one was, to my notions, absolutely perfect and I thank you very much. You ask if I am coming over the hills and far away this spring and I consider that I have answered it when I tell you that, according to your Poppa, you are yourself coming here in May or June. Your Poppa seems to take it as a certain fact and additional rooms are to be built to his house in his absence for the reception of his large and populous family.



Hussein "The Brat" painted by Marian in 1905

1904

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

Bring little Pomp with you. You will never regret it if you do and I will always regret it if you don't. I am lucky to have you here again. Goodbye,

From Tosh.

February 24

Boorahn blowing today, not a very fierce one. No war news. We have had no authentic war news at all as yet and do not know the slightest thing about it. It is rumoured here that Lansdowne has been forced to retire from the Foreign Office and that Chamberlain has taken his place. This is the kind of guff that the Russian gazettes publish. They also say that Russia has warned England to leave Tibet at once or suffer all the most unpleasant consequences.

Thursday, February 25

Warm thawing day, snow falling. Man came from Akmolinsk today with letters for Nyemkoff. They contained surprising war news, purported to be copied from official telegrams, to the tune that Japan attacked the Russian Port Arthur fleet and had been heavily repulsed with the loss of two battleship sunk and many other ships injured, five being towed away. No mention is made of any loss or injury to Russian ships and no-one here seems to imagine for a moment that they could have been hurt in the least. Besides the naval fight, in Korea the Japanese landed 8000 men and the Russians fell upon them and killed the last man, allowing no quarter even to wounded. This is highly applauded by all as being by far the cheapest way to wage war. Again, somewhere in Manchuria, the Japanese landed 600 cavalry (what for they do not say) and a regiment of Cossacks pounced upon them, killed 400 and captured all the rest. Not a word is said of any losses to Russians and everybody is very contented and happy. It is no wonder that the government, by a muzzled press, can keep these easily-pleased people in order. They believe everything they are told. Even our host, who is a cynic and a government critic, struggled manfully with his feelings and finally swallowed the whole rubbish. Late in the afternoon the feldscher of this mine returned from Akmolinsk and he knew absolutely nothing about the war. It did not seem to interest him in the least, which seemed somewhat queer in the face of all these blazing victories.

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

February 25, 1904

Karagandy

Dear Willie,

I'm going to write to President Loubet and tell him that the two most charming young ladies in Paris live at a certain place and advise him that, unless he wishes to forfeit my esteem, he will at once drive there with his beautiful Arab sky horses and invite them to go with him wherever they please. Your letter, which came with Marian's, was a great pleasure and, as it arrived the day before yesterday, the 23rd and as you wrote on the second, you see that it was exactly three full weeks on the road. That is about the time that you may always calculate at present. Mr Mussen received a telegram from London and a letter which left London explaining the telegram by the same mail here, so it seems that telegrams in Russia in wartime must go by mail! You are both very kind and good to write so often!

Your program shows most pleasant hours in the morning, I think, and there is not that awful half-washed, half-awake rush in the grey of a cold and miserable dawn that I can remember so painfully⁷². France must be the finest country in those things, and I must say that, even from a political point of view I have buried the hatchet with France and, as long as she behaves so nicely to you and Marian, I am prepared, with polite reservations, to say that she is pleasing to my senses. But I draw the line at Germany absolutely! And if I wish to be very rude to anyone, I say "go to Allenswood!"

It is grand to know that you are really enjoying your music again. You may have forgotten, although it cannot be likely, the name of the little Russian guitar you brought from Omsk so I will tell you it because I am officious and fussy: balalaika. And when are you going to get lessons on the Spanish guitar, that is very important it seems to me. The Boy on the violin, you on the piano or guitar and Marian painting and drawing will include everything to make life pleasant. I shall certainly collect all the jolly postcards I possibly can always for you, wherever that may be. Supposing you send me some from Paris and I send them back again, the postmarks will make them most awfully interesting, more so than new ones.

Your trip from Berlin must have been amusing with an infuriated official wanting to arrest Mr E Nelson Fell of Athabasca and Bayanduckaduck every few minutes.. He will be very funny when he tells us about it and I am

⁷² Cold baths and lessons before breakfast were common in British schools, even in my day!

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

looking forward to his account. I think the way he tells about his walking race in London when he was at the School of Mines is the funniest thing I ever heard!

If you come out also this summer with Marian, and you had better not come without her, I am going to send a man to try and get Djumabek, the finest horse on the steppes, with full instructions to steal him if he can be procured in no other way. So far I have seen no horses here that I like as well, although this is a bad time of year to see good horses.

The other day we were sleighing near here on a fine, well used road with a troika of Mr Nyemkoff's, and we gradually caught up with a camel and a sleigh with two Kazakhs in it. The road was wide enough to pass if the Kazakhs had pulled the old camel a little to one side, but they wouldn't, and just laughed and jogged along grinning. Ahdam was our driver and he squeaked and spluttered with rage at them and they only grinned silently. This went on for a long time until Ahdam nearly had apoplexy with rage and finally pulled out a trifle to one side and drove his right outsider slap, bang! into the Kazakhs' sleigh. The Kazakhs jumped up horrified and alarmed and pulled out a trifle also to the side to avoid that prancing horse, and then began a furious race. Ahdam stood up and made his whip crack on those horses, urging them on wildly. The Kazakhs leaned forward and hammered the old camel steadily, jerked his nose and called to him in long-drawn howls. The old camel, a great big beauty, stretched out his long neck and just flew, his forelegs nearly hitting his chin and his hindlegs nearly hitting him in the chest, rolling from side to side and groaning and roaring at every step. You never heard such a medley of noise in your life: horses' feet clattering on the hard snow, whips cracking, camel yelling, men shouting and calling each other all sorts of bad names, the squash of the camels feet and the sleighs grinding and bouncing about, while Mr Mussen and I were overcome with laughing.

Finally, the camel emitted some dreadful groans and, with no warning, whipped round at a right angle and stopped dead in the deep snow, and the two Kazakhs flew out, great heaps of clothing and boots and landed upon their heads in the snow and we flew on triumphantly. The whole thing happened with a rush and swing to it that was perfectly grand and I shall never forget it. A few days ago, I saw some Russian boys here riding racing camels and it was a sight! Camels can fairly fly but it is distinctly against their wishes, and how they keep those long legs from tying themselves up into knots is more than I can understand when they are speeding. Their heads and necks bob up and down in such a ridiculous bird-like fashion and they know they are not looking dignified and hate to be forced to do it. Camels swarm here at this time of. About two weeks ago I sent some

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

photos and a description of the steppes and the Kazakh people to Harper's Weekly and, if they have any sense, they will publish it someday soon, at least I hope so.

Goodbye, Willie, and good luck with your music and all your work.

From (signed in Kazakh)

Friday, February 26

Warm and windy! The Brat turned up this morning on his way from Spassky to Bayandy Kuduk. It seems that Rosentrater, under the excitement of mobilisation, was more careless than careful about the baggage and one small box containing papers from the office was left behind. This The Brat has gone to fetch; he was riding, of course, and the long trip seemed to afford him feelings only of great joy. Today is a big Kazakh holiday. None of them are working anywhere. It is called 'Great Bairan' in our Mahometan calendar. Late at night, 12pm, our post suddenly arrived, a full day before expected. Few letters and many papers. Letters encouraged us immensely⁷³ as the war apparently will not affect our position here and the mine will go ahead. War not declared yet in our papers!

Saturday, February 27

The mail, not expected till tonight, arrived late last night, full midnight! The round trip to Akmolinsk and back, 600 versts, being done in six days by the impassive Kazakh who sat down on the floor and smiled pleasantly. War has not yet been declared in our English and American papers and they talk about possible peace owing to the Czar's peaceful propensities well known to the admiring world and suchlike bosh! The Uralsky Gazette came through, 2 numbers of February 3 and 4 (Russian date), and war was declared Russian date January 28 or 29th⁷⁴. Spent all this morning translating Russian war telegrams. I learned about the bombardment of Port Arthur for the first time and the Russian telegrams claimed a great victory, and almost said they sank two Japanese cruisers and *did* say that five other Japanese ships had to be towed away. All of which was denied in a telegram from the Japanese embassy in Washington *via* a Reuter's telegram. Russia also said (in an official telegram) that the Japanese landed 600 cavalry and the Cossacks killed 410 of them. Rest of the telegrams were full of congratulatory messages from the white Czar and from everybody else to each other.

⁷³ Note added later by Frank: this was the news that Mr Fell had succeeded in getting French capital to share in buying the mines.

⁷⁴ Russian dates were about 13 days different; war was declared on February 8, our calendar.

Karagandy: "Lie low and do nothing but live!"

So far, it seems, nothing of real importance has occurred. Boorahn blew hard all day, not a very bad one — or it may be that it was and that one is becoming accustomed. Owing to the Kazakhs' two day holiday and no travel on the road, and the storm, the roads are almost impassable and will be bad for a week.



One of Marian's paintings of a local child

1904

14. Spassky: “Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could”

Friday, March 4

Clear and very cold. Post came, but the Russian man who, as agent at Akmolinsk, has mismanaged the affairs of this depraved company so many years and in whose hands our mail arrangements were placed with wide open, anxious eyes, failed to send our mail, kindly sending word it was a big one and would come by our messenger on his regular trip! Sultan came in the morning with the news that his ‘children’ were ill and postponed our visit. Took some photographs of camels; a big bunch of them hauling coal and limestone to the works. At night developed three dozen of Atkinsons films. Very good ones and many most interesting scenes among Kazakhs and others. He takes good views. Russian papers of latest date February 8 (Russian) are very gloomy about the war on the seas and I am going to translate many of their statements today or tomorrow.

Saturday, March 5

Impossible to keep our room decently warm owing to a defective stove or flue or draught. Blankets are



Camel sleds of ore or limestone, arriving at Spassky

1904

Spassky: "Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could"

plentiful! And a reclining position has its pleasures. I'm copying some translations of Russian articles about the war from their own private official point of view and, in their own words literally, they read most amusingly. Found out about the torpedoing of the two Russian battleships and the cruiser at Port Arthur and, as the dock at Port Arthur cannot accommodate the battleships, the papers are very depressed. They would like to put the blame for it all upon someone's official shoulders, but the censor is in the way, so they vaguely hint that something happened which should not have done. Imagine the roar of rage at home if someone came into their best harbour and blew up three of our best ships!

Sunday, March 6

Clear and cold! Printed quite a few photographs in the clear sunshine but it is freezing work. Sultan and a young son weighing about six poods arrived for dinner and, afterwards, as he had brought an extra sleigh for us, we went back with them to drink tea and koumiss as guests in turn. While at his place, we went all over his big windmill which is a most useful affair. The Sultan grows much wheat himself and that which we saw was first rate, able to warm Atkinson's Manitoba heart to great admiration. This windmill, if the wind is strong, can grind coarsely about 50 poods of wheat a day. A Russian is in charge of it and the Sultan benefits the countryside and makes money at the same time. While drinking tea, we sold six of our most worthless horses to the old man for 20 rubles each, about the correct price. We quoted 27 at first and Atkinson clung tenaciously to each successive ruble as the old Sultan pried him off. Finally, both exhausted, they decided on 20.

March 6, 1904

Spassky

Dear Willie,

Two nights ago I developed 36 films for Mr Atkinson and 30 of them were splendid. A number of these were taken on our trip from Bayanduckaduck to Spassky and just before we started. All these are very good films, black ones which are printing splendidly and, if we can get some out by the time this mail leaves, you shall have some although we are very short of paper. Mr Bastrakoff also showed me his albums of photos and asked me to mark all the ones I wished copies of and I marked a great many. Mr Atkinson takes very good photos and his camera is a very clear and accurate one. Some of them show the horses pulling in the snow with The Brat in view and the snow is white and the skies are clear and light. If I am here all summer, I am going to send for a new camera, 4 x 5, with a Goetz lens, so as to be able to get a number of really fine pictures and time-exposures of Kazakhs and the inside of their yurts etc.

Spassky: "Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could"

Since I last wrote, we have left Karagandy and are now at Spassky and Mr Mussen is at present at Uspensky. Coming from Karagandy, we had our own troika and sleigh, with Ahdam, and Peggy, Jingy Pingy and Malenky Savraska, who galloped us along at a splendid pace. We passed dozens of great camels hauling coal and had some fearful struggles in deep snow when we had to leave the road to pass the long strings of camels. But the Kazakhs pushed and squeaked and shouted and the camels groaned and we always pulled through flying. On the way we called upon the Sultan in his "palace" and drank koumiss with him in great quantities. He was at his evening prayers when we arrived, standing up with two other men in a row, one of them being a young Mullah, and their prayers lasted steadily for 15 or 20 minutes. Standing up, bowing, prostrating themselves to their very foreheads, looking to the right side and then to the left, and moving their hands according to regular custom across their mouths and foreheads. All the time, at intervals, the young Mullah would chant out in a deep Kazakh voice, full of throaty gutturals, a sentence from the Koran in which the word Allah we often heard and which he pronounced with much emphasis "Oulllll-ahhh". All the motions of bowings and prostrating were done in exact unison, like machines or well-drilled soldiers and it was a most impressive sight because they are so dreadfully in earnest and so dignified. The Sultan comes in to have a dinner or a samovar with us almost every day; only the very cold and windy days keep him at home. He is now very much at home and as he passes through our kitchen to reach our sitting room, he comes in saying "Fish today" and rubbing his hands together. He has invited us to come and have a big dinner with him as soon as this clear, cold spell of weather passes. The Brat has gone back to Bayanduckaduck to get some office books and papers left behind. He rode off on Shaitan, the Long Maned One, just as happy as ever and said he would be back in 10 days. Since I returned here, I have unpacked a number of boxes from Bayanduckaduck and now, in our room, there stands a most impressive array of Dickens, giving us unlimited amount of good reading. I am deeply into the midst of Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, all my sympathies being with the Barbarians, for Rome and the Romans have disgusted me beyond measure. Serbia and the Serbians of the present day can be easily compared with the Romans of 200 to 250 AD and they are not nice people at all. Of course, if the Barbarians had not damaged so many works of art, I would have liked them much better, but the characters were better than those of the Romans. This winter has been a very long and tedious one, so much indoors and no regular work to do. If we had had this idle time in the summer, we could have turned it to good account in many ways. We get very little war news and the excitement here has all died away. I seem scarcely to know that a big war is being waged

Spassky: "Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could"

furiously. But I do know that I miss you more and more every day and that I'm longing to see you again. Come out here next summer, is what I shall I keep on saying to you; I know that you want to come.

Goodbye.

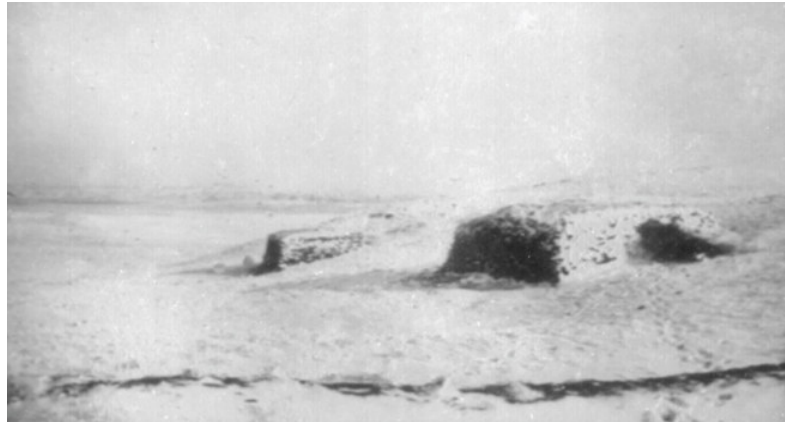
(signed in Kazakh) Tosh.

March 6, 1904

Spassky

Dear Marian,

I wrote to Olivia this morning and just the moment I had finished, in walked the Sultan Djumabek Djebagin with his youngest son, a great strapping young Kazakh in a bright green, long coat. They had dinner with us and drank much tea, most amicably. After dinner, the old Sultan said he had brought his horses and an extra sleigh for us and asked to come to his house to drink more tea and koumiss and we were delighted, Mr Atkinson and I. So the son drove us and the old man drove alone in a stately manner ahead of us, looking perfectly splendid with his great crimson, velvet, fur-lined "malachi" framing his thousand-wrinkled old face and white beard. Near his house stands his windmill and we went to inspect it. He grinds all his wheat and seems to sell a great deal also. It is an old-fashioned windmill with enormous wooden sails, just like the ones that Don Quixote tilted so bravely. Inside are the great double, flat millstones and all around is covered with a layer of flour dust. The Sultan was very proud and we praised its ingenious mechanism to the skies. A Russian is in charge of it and his flat-roofed house all buried in snow stands quite close. We photographed it all extensively. Then we drove on to the "palace" which is not like any other Kazakh house, being far larger. The



A zimoffka or winter-house

Spassky: "Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could"

part where the human element lives is quite a large and high wooden affair and, adjoining it, is a great, low, flat-roofed structure, quite normally Kazakh in appearance with thick turf walls, extending for hundreds of feet. Here he shelters his best horses and other tender or young stock. You go through the same absolutely pitch-dark passage in which you either trip up headlong on some unseen step or bump your beloved head on some low doorway, and finally you enter the house where all is light and warmth. Most Kazakh houses have only two living rooms but this appears to have three or four. His best room, in which he sits in state and receives guests, is covered with fine ornamented felts and camel-hair carpets with a big round table about a foot high in the centre and, along the wall in deference to his Russian friends, a few chairs. A whitewashed stove keeps the room warm and everything is clean and orderly although, I am told by suffering friends, who seem to know, that there are indications of those interesting little creatures which hop so contentedly in the sand of Florida. We were introduced to his very aged old wife. His woman-folk stayed in the other rooms and we only saw occasional glimpses of flashing scarlet and white or vivid greens and soft furs. Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could. But everyone is very much in awe of the dignified old man who sits and gives his orders and pays no attention apparently to anything. Two of his sons drank tea, also with us; one of them, the oldest, his father's successor. This son does not appear to be nearly as fine a man as the old Sultan. Why is it, pray, the seeming fact that the generation just older or much older nearly always is better than the latest one. Is it only imagination or not? I would like to have your views on the subject, speaking generally. Do you think that the human race is steadily deteriorating except in the arts of making money for machinery? I do!

After much tea we turned our cups upside down and said, "Thank you, finished" and soon we went to inspect our horses which are in the Sultan's charge. We sold six of the horses to the old man, horses either in very bad condition or else of no earthly good. The Sultan waved his hand indifferently at them and said, "I buy to eat such." This leaves us nine good horses, three full troikas and that is enough. Especially as, if we buy this whole property here, about 50 horses are included with the mines, some good and some bad. Outside the Sultan's house we saw them drive up a bunch of his horses and I photographed a magnificent spotted horse. We returned to the house and drank glass after a glass of koumiss in bowls (or glasses). Driving home at sundown (7 versts only) when the steppes were all coloured pink and crimson from the glowing sunset, and the distant snowy hills were ablaze with gold and orange colours, passing long lines of slow-walking camels in charge of a smiling, great-booted, contented Kazakh man. A jackrabbit, white as snow, trotted along a slope not far from us,

Spassky: "Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could"

stopping to nibble grass and, when a Kazakh yapped at him like a dog, he sat up on his haunches and listened intently, soon making up his innocent mind and loping off to a more sheltered place. One misses many nice things out here but sometimes I would not change places with anyone. The steppe is Big, Big, Big and gives you the same feeling as being alone some clear night with only the stars in sight. If you come out next summer you will see and understand it all, and once seen, you will never forget. So come and never mind about going to New Westminster this summer. We will take care of you, Olivia and I!

Goodbye Marian

(signed in Kazakh)

Monday March 7

Fine cloudless weather, cold in the mornings but with beautiful evenings! Mussen returned last night late. Reports much work still going on at Uspensky and much good ore coming out of the mine. Everything there at full blast! Our mail comes tomorrow for certain and today Nyemkoff sent us a lot of the latest telegrams (February 12) from the seat of war. They come by telegraph to Akmolinsk and there are typewritten and sold as a paper would be. We shall get them now regularly having shared the expense with Nyemkoff. Many visitors, Kazakhs and Russians, drop in to tea.

Tuesday, March 8

Spring weather. Great thaw in sunny spots. Had a long walk down the river bed on solid ice with great banks of snow 30 and 40 feet high piled up on both sides and enormous boulders jutting through. Struck the Akmolinsk road where it crosses the river and came home with a camel caravan of ours of over 50 great creatures. Proudest procession I ever took part in. Took many photos and saw many wolf tracks in the river bed. Few letters and many papers missing but one, Daily Telegraph of February 11, got through unharmed and gave full accounts of bombardment and night attacks upon Port Arthur and the Chemulpo disaster. Now I can fully realise the stuff the Russian papers have been trying to make me believe, for they have never allowed (or been allowed) themselves to say anything so seriously bad as the truth. Russian papers which came today apparently had more trouble brewing, for Russians reading them pulled very long faces: something about prisoners taken at Port Arthur by Japanese. Atkinson to go to Uspensky tomorrow for a few days only!

Spassky: "Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could"

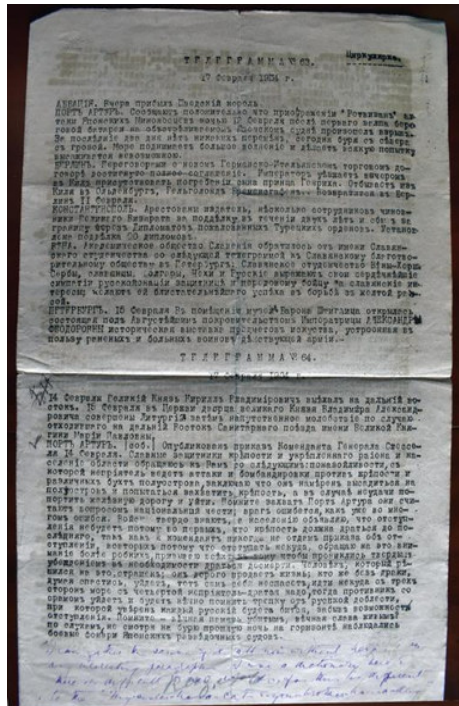
March 8, 1904

Spassky

Dear Marian and Olivia,

I am sending you by this same post a registered letter containing photographs. Will you please forward them when you have finished with them to Mrs E Nelson Fell with my kindest and most worshipful compliments. The descriptions are all on the backs although Olivia will not need them. I firmly expect some most ferocious arguments about my unlucky descriptions but I stand, shouting the battle-cry of freedom, by what I have written. Of course, also, because Olivia knows, all the brown and red and pink photographs are Bastrakoff's and all the nice clear black ones are mine! The letter will probably be opened at the frontier, being fat and dangerous looking, but I have registered it and you are bound to receive it in time. Please accept them as a token of my deep and humble esteem and believe me to be, Mesdemoiselles, your distant Siberian friend,

(signed in Kazakh)



Type-written Russian newspaper

March 8, 1904

Spassky

[The bottom of all pages has been torn off where the signature was removed while the letter was still folded]

Mail has just arrived and is leaving again this evening. A telegram came saying the capital to buy this property had been put up and we are intensely relieved to say the least. The idea of dropping this fine property and leaving it to the mercy of this gang was unbearable. And, since we owe it all to you, it is welcome and, to my mind, the undertaking has gained an entirely new interest and dignity.

Both Marian and Olivia wrote long letters. I sent them 26 fine photographs to look at and to forward to you, thinking that you would probably be on the way to Florida. Most of the photographs are splendid and full of

Spassky: "Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could"

interest, personally for you. Today by mail came a photograph very badly wrapped up and maulhandled by the Russian postal people for you from Miss Mixter⁷⁵, so I opened it and re-wrapped it and I'm sending it back to you by the same messenger. Also came for you some strange winter garments that you ordered ages ago; I was the unfortunate who opened the package, addressed to E Nelson Fell; I took but one glance and hastily covered it up again, feeling as if I had been...

WHAT am I to do with them please? They appear to be of massive, wool, crochet-work and would not be of much use in a Florida summer. They will remain here until your orders come. I will get a box and put them under the charge of some storage company!

Ida writes from Kissimmee very contentedly. She says she now realises the good you have done for Minor and for me and she is prepared to tell you so and she feels awfully nicely towards you. Minor, she is delighted with,



Harnessing the horses in single file

but Quartus dismays her rather. I fear he has slumped himself, as they would say here. Atkinson and I go to Uspensky tomorrow for a few days. I shall take samples in the mine.

Tuesday, March 8

Atkinson and I left for Uspensky about 11am after the immeasurable and, apparently, necessary delays which range from such sordid reasons as waiting for the laundry to arrive (half wet) to the noble duty of saying ceremonious farewells to the lunatics in the manager's house and precinct as the representatives in a far country of the Siberian Syndicate,. Took a light open sleigh, borrowed from the Sultan, with three of our horses and Ahdam, and enjoyed the full worth of a perfect day, cloudless and calm, sailing along

on a road in splendid condition; the road being narrow it was necessary to put our three horses in single file. Having brought

⁷⁵ Untraced.

Spassky: "Small girls and boys rampaged about the doorway, peeping in to see the strangers smoke and to snatch pieces of sugar if they could"

our own saddles, I rode the lead horse, postilion style, to the to the Nura, 45 versts. Life wears a different aspect when riding again becomes a pleasant possibility and excitement came in plenty whenever we had to leave the narrow, beaten road and take to the deeps, passing the frequent long strings of camels. Horses down and up and down again, but the necessity of keeping moving seem to overbear the necessity of keeping one seat and, I must say, it is difficult to handle three horses in a line. We made the Nura in four hours, fed there in the most degraded Kazakh habitation in existence, left, scratching ourselves at 5.30pm and made 30 more versts to the next company station (or picket as they call them) by 8pm. Here we spent a pleasant evening and night in Kazakh style, which is the best!



Could this possibly be Yakoleff, the artist? I wish I knew; and who else would it be?

15. Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Thursday, March 10

Left at 8am. Another glorious, sunny, quiet day. Thawing fast on the southern slopes of hills, bare spots showing. Arrived at 12.30am. Found everyone very cordial and friendly. The conditions are rapidly becoming the same as last spring when we were here. All supplies are running out and Spassky does nothing. Dynamite is almost finished, the store is nearly emptied of everything and finally, as a last straw, Spassky has refused to send them any more coal; so Yakoleff, the Uspensky manager answered by refusing to send any ore until coal came. Spassky said it was no business of Uspensky to do anything except obey orders and Uspensky retorted by saying it would make it its business; and there the matter rests. Uspensky is crazy for us to take hold of the property for it is sadly abused.

Friday, March 11

Fine weather still. Wonderful days for this month! Spent the morning in arranging with a Kazakh worker in silver and iron craft to make bridles, stirrups and some silver rings for the fancy costumes. This man had made some beautiful stirrups for the manager here, just as good as Eemonbai's work and they were not to be resisted. In two and a half months they will be finished, so he said. Went down to mine after dinner and I sized up where I wanted to sample several floors and stopes⁷⁶ and arranged for men and dynamite. It will take several days at the rate they work, and in a week there is to be a great wedding here, in the most elevated Kazakh circles, with horseracing and sports and at night, a real Kazakh ball and we intend to stay for it or know the reason why! Much chess here and it seems that I have developed into a sort of champion. I always thought I would, although nobody would believe it and it is very satisfying to my feelings.

⁷⁶ A step-like working in a mine.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Saturday, March 12

To go down into the mine with a steiger, two men (Kazakhs), sacks, dynamite, drills etc after much trouble. Time set was 'after dinner', this developed into 5pm, when I was told that the men and steiger were in their bath and could not possibly go. The manager was angry and apologetic but did not mend matters.

Sunday March 13

For nearly 3 weeks, every day has been bright and sunny with little or no wind and it still continues. Everyone anticipates an early spring. No one who has not experienced the pleasure of being waked from profound slumber by a great booted and coated Kazakh walking into the room with unexpected mail can realise our joy this early morning. From the skies apparently came this surprise and, in a moment, all was confusion and excitement; because the news came that Mr Fell and two other men were on the way out here and Atkinson, on account of the slowness of the telegram incoming, had only just time to rush to Petropavlovsk to meet them. In two hours he was off!

I have not finished my sampling here and will stay some days yet, perhaps till Mr Fell arrives, for I am arranging to get out all my assay outfit from Spassky to fit up a laboratory here in the same rooms I used before; for the benefit if needed of the foreign engineers. I go down to mine every day and come up soaked to the skin and, as I walk from the shaft to the house, my back hair freezes to my neck, which is not pleasant. The shaft I have to go down was not used last spring, being deemed unsafe; it is just safe now and that is all, and the pumps are in it. As the pumps leak at every possible place, you descend and ascend in a positive shower-bath of ice-water, and the upper 50 feet also, owing to the strong draught, is encrusted with ice on the ladders and everywhere, making it as slippery as possible. My only consolation, which is sufficient to keep me warm and dry, is the hope and desire of seeing the French engineers travel up and down the same place and I hope they will wear the finest of clothes supposed to be adapted to mining. The shaft and its condition has knocked out both the manager and his head steiger. The steiger left today for Ekaterinburg with lung troubles and the manager has them also and cannot go down into the mine anymore. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Monday March 14

This place is even worse off than this time last year. They are even out of ink and the office here now writes in pencil. I find that a little water added to one's ink pot indefinitely prolongs the supply⁷⁷. But there is no doubt that this is by far the most interesting place to live, of all we have tried, from the Kazakh point of view and for delightful and varied country. It is on the edge of a big valley, with the hills at your doorstep; all around, the horizon shows ranges of hills near and far: one range about 15 or 20 versts away shows hilltops running up to 2000 feet, perhaps, from the steppe at their feet. Went down that charming shaft twice today. Once, when the men, six cheerful Kazakhs, drilled the necessary holes; after drilling and dynamiting, it is necessary to leave altogether for three hours to allow the smoke and fumes to disperse, the ventilation being bad at the place of work. So I returned with three Kazakhs at 9pm and absolutely finished my work in that objectionable shaft. Besides the big body of regular ore, over 20 feet in width, the drift cut a small 2 foot streak of at least 50% copper ore. It is exposed now in one place, showing a block 10 feet long, 5 feet high and 2 feet thick. When one considers that it is half copper and that this is only a small fraction of it, the term 'bonanza ore' becomes quite intelligible. And these people are shipping it as hard as they can of course!

Tuesday March 15

I found in the leaves of my 'Seven Seas'⁷⁸ a piece of potassium permanganate paper from which this fine blue ink is made, just as my last visible supply of other ink was almost exhausted. Spent most of the morning riding among a big herd of 600 horses which is pawing snow in the great plain below the mine. The snow is deep in hollow spots which are not visible, so it frequently happens that your horse is in strange positions, which affects the rider equally strangely. This winter, stock can reach the grass and all these horses were fit and happy. Some fine ones among them. The owner came to lunch with us. A grand, old, very stout Kazakh, most primitive in his ways and with the most Kazakh accent imaginable, like the stage Chinaman exactly. He said he had three wives, 12 sons and did not know how many daughters and he added that, as they were of no consequence, it did not matter. I disagreed with him then and there!

This old man is a Kazakh magistrate, living quite near and I foresee much fun with him. I could not work in the mine today where my duty called me, because, as far as I could make out, the roof had fallen in to some extent and blocked the floor space. As they use no timbering at all to speak of, to support the roof of the great caves they make, it is not surprising!

⁷⁷ The remainder of this entry is increasingly faint and pale!

⁷⁸ A magazine or newsletter, I presume, but I cannot trace it.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Wednesday, March 16

Still the same splendid weather. Thaws every day! Rode in the morning along a road leading to a distant aul, through a winding pass among the hills to the north. Glorious views on all sides from the high places. Our group of hills is an isolated one, being surrounded on all sides by a great expanse of flat valley, with much higher hills encircling all. The valley is dotted all over with hundreds of horses, and sheep range the hillsides where the snow is not so deep. In the afternoon I saw, quite close to the mine, 300 horses troop by in single file along a narrow packed road across the great flat below us. At one time, they formed



A herd of horses on the steppe near Uspensky — in summer 2019

a long winding ribbon, it being possible to see all 300 at one time strung out, black spots on the white snow, each keeping his distance to perfection. Place was full of camels yesterday and today, possibly 100; and to see 50 camels clustered around a load of hay and to hear them talk to each other is a solemn, sacred wonder!

It being impossible to do any work in the mine till regular work was over, I went down at 9pm with six Kazakhs and returned at 2am, having done

much and enjoyed myself beyond expression. They are the jolliest set of practical jokers! They thought it a great joke, when one man was pounding on his drill with all his might and speed, to blow out all the candles at once but, to my amazement, the man was not phased in the least and kept on pounding away in total darkness. The roar of laughter that went up shows that they can appreciate a joke against themselves.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Thursday, March 17

Mail arrived at noon. A few ancient papers (English) and a lot of a telegrams which I will tackle soon. Hastily glancing, I saw that Vladivostok had been bombarded and these Russian messages say it is not injured at all. Warm sunny day! In the evening went down into the mine with four Kazakhs to get my last sample in a very wet and grubby place. One of the Kazakhs was a very flippant, half-naked, bunch of muscle and talk and I gathered that he was steadily making fun of me and causing the rest much diversion at my innocent expense, so, after one peculiarly outrageous remark which I partly understood, I made a silent and rapid attack, torpedoing him most successfully with a finely aimed kick and, seeing signs of retaliation in him with his hammer, it was necessary to begin a rapid and effective bombardment which finally sank him in shallow water. The dignity of the white must be impressed upon the yellow; except in some political instances now in progress of development. His fellow workmen expressed their approval of my action by spitting on their fallen countryman and the incident ended.

Friday, March 18

Warm bright days and steady heavy thaws; little streams are beginning to run from big snowbanks. If this continues two weeks more, the Nura will break loose and close us up for a time. My assay stuff arrived this morning. Four camels and four sleighloads, 115 versts and I paid the men five rubles (\$2.50). Had my assay office, same rooms as last year, washed out by the same Kazakh woman who was accompanied by the same husky-voiced old Kazakh dog, my enemy!

Yakoleff went today to have it out with the Spassky office. They treat him shamefully and his rage slopped over yesterday. He says that they are trying to force him to resign and that, if he must, he will sue the company in Ekaterinburg and expose all the dishonesty of the Spassky office crowd in open court. They first refused to send him coal, just at the time of year when the spring thaws will flood the mine unless the crazy old pump is kept at work night and day. This, he countered, by refusing to send ore. Now, when he is almost out of dynamite, they say they have none to send, when he knows that they have.

The trouble is that Yakoleff is straight and they want him out of the way. Last month they cheated him outright on his ore. He sent them loads averaging between 40 and 50 poods each and they credited him with average loads of 28 poods only, when the books of the camel drivers, who are paid by the pood, showed the difference. He is sure that Alexei Riasanoff and the Spassky office pocket all the balance of the copper. Then there is a local company here, the doctor, machinist, Alexei and a Tartar who keeps a store. This crowd bring stuff and to the company and the Tartar stores who sell it. Yakoleff, in forbidding any Kazakh to trade there, has incurred the enmity of this gang and he cannot retaliate as he wishes to, because all the strings are held in the Spassky office and Alexei Riasanoff is there in person. He (Alexei) is steadily milking the property for his own profit and, no news of it is allowed to reach Ekaterinburg. Yakoleff says that Russia is full of such doings and I am now quite prepared to believe it.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

March 18, 1904

Uspensky

Dear Willie,

Sorrow and shame are my portion! I missed my last mail to you and Marian through a series of unlucky events. To sum it all up, Mr Atkinson and I were peacefully asleep on Sunday morning, all the little birds were twittering on the branches of the trees (which do not cover the steppes) and the camel colts were wagging their little tails and kicking up their heels with spring fever. Peacefully we slept the deep sleep of the deep sleepers when in walked a booted Kazakh clump, clump, clump across the wooden floor and bang! as he threw the mail bag down. By this time we were sitting up, blinking our eyes and wondering what horse was in the room; and soon, as we saw the enormous-coated apparition slowly unwinding a sort of boa-constrictor scarf from his neck and pulling the icicles from his skimpy moustache, we realised that this thing was a messenger and that thing on the floor was a mail bag. He said [Kazakh words] and we said [Kazakh words] and the ice was broken. He sat down on the floor after sliding himself out of his boots and several coats and smiled amiably saying "shai peet"⁷⁹ as if to himself only. This Kazakh is an especially fine Kazakh, tall, big and fine-looking, copper-coloured and dignified. He is a nephew of the Sultan's and rides 600 versts every week for us for 10 rubles through all kinds of weather. So you see that he is a very fine man! We show him our illustrated papers and he is delighted, clucking like a hen all the time.

The mail said that Mr Fell and two Frenchmen would be at Petropavlovsk in about 10 days and desired that Mr Atkinson would be there to meet them. This was a bombshell because here was Mr Atkinson, in bed, 600 miles away by road. You never saw such a frenzied individual as Mr Atkinson became. He was out of bed and all over the place at once; and the Kazakh thought he was a maniac and hurriedly left for the kitchen. In two hours Mr Atkinson was on the road and, as I had planned to write my letters to you on that very self-same Sunday, I thereby missed my chance...

⁷⁹ Drink tea.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Saturday, March 19

Positively a really warm day with no need for gloves or other armour. Water ran in streams! The Nura may bother Mr Fell if this continues for 10 days. But it is not likely, although water in the mine may be a nuisance. Finished my sampling yesterday and glad to do so. Unpacked many boxes of assay things today and found few breakages. I am treated with profound respect by the Kazakh workmen here now and went all over their quarters today, out of curiosity. Can you imagine a long room, spaced off on each side into squares of about 10 feet, leaving a passageway in the centre where the common cook-stove stands. Each square, putting up a few rags on two sides as partitions, contains a family of varying sizes. Perhaps 40 families in the room. Talk about a heap! This is almost beyond belief!

March 19, 1904

Uspensky

[To Anne]

I am firmly convinced that you are now at The Point and it is an awful gap to contemplate from this more than out-of-the-way place. Somehow, too, I have lost hope of seeing you this summer and beyond that it is impossible to think clearly. Marian and Olivia both write as if they are going to Florida, and my summer will be drawn blank.

This is a much more interesting place than Bayandy Kuduk! I wish I could see the ways of some really nice Russian people and know enough of the language to appreciate them, because I refuse to accept the habits of even the best Russians here as being representative of Russian gentle society. There is Nyemkoff, in his own good heart the politest of men, with very striking, dignified, almost picturesque ways, but it is at table that one is surprised. Not in ways of eating or holding his tools but in the total disregard, in a sublimely unconscious way, of women present. And they are all alike here. They talk cheerfully and kindly to their wives and always get on most pleasantly, but they never pass anything to them or help them to a morsel and always help themselves and any guests first. And the women see nothing wrong at all but accept it all as a matter of course. And the women never bow to the icon and cross themselves devoutly but the men, the Cossacks, the men of humble station and the nicest of the other Russians all do.

It is grand to see Nyemkoff before and after a meal, get up, walk to one side, face the icon, standing almost at attention and bow several times with his hand passing to and fro across his chest. He does it no matter who is present. He married a Cossack and a most excellent housekeeper and his three small boys are being excellently

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

brought up. I like the custom of shaking hands with the hostess and thanking her for each meal. The boys get up and invariably waddle round solemnly to shake hands. They begin early too, it seems, for one youth, not over 18 months old, is already in stockings, knickerbockers, Russian shirt and belt, and sits at the table with us, behaving perfectly well and handling his glass and spoon perfectly; and speaking more Russian than I. He is a great help to me and I learn a lot of Russian from him. It has been most interesting, seeing all these different families and living their life. Most of them put milk in their tea, I noticed, and drink it strong.

Atkinson should be in Petropavlovsk tomorrow and Mr Fell should be here in 10 days; I am staying here until he comes instead of going back to Spassky. I have got all my assay outfit from Spassky and I am arranging it in the same fine quarters I had last year, so that the French engineers may use it if wanted, and to assay the samples I have just taken. The mine is richer than ever, the deeper you go, and I wish the Frenchmen were here today to see a wonderful exposure of bonanza ore because, in ten days, there will be a big hole in the richest spots in sight. I can also, by staying...[No continuation]

Sunday, March 20

Sunny but with a cold northerly wind and still there was a heavy thaw in places. Took a walk around on neighbouring hills and found, on the southern slopes, sticky mud with grass actually green and fresh at the roots. Southern birds have not yet appeared but I saw a yurt up and going, with the smoke curling through its top most cheerfully. Yakoleff and the doctor returned this evening; they said they drove the 115 versts in 6½ hours which I pleasantly pretended to believe. Nine hours is grand going. Djakin Moustaphin and a Kazakh friend and satellite arrived and lunched with us; at nearly the same time, there rolled into the room that fattest and jolliest of fat Kazakhs who owns the big herd of horses here; he brought his brother and another Kazakh nabob so we had a regular exhibition of tea drinking at full speed. Two enormous samovars were none too much. Mrs Yakoleff pays no attention to glasses turned upside down but calmly fills them up again and the Kazakh admits no mistake in the judgement of his capacity and sslloops it down with that contented 'Ahhh' after each swallow. Djakin brought Yakoleff a wonderful big, long handled, koumiss ladle. It is made from the horn of a mountain sheep, a bighorn wild sheep, killed around here about 50 versts away. It was rimmed with silver, nicely worked, and the handle was gaily silver-ornamented with a silver ring at the end besides. Yakoleff is a great favourite with the Kazakhs. Sent a messenger off to Spassky with my letters to catch the Tuesday mail.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

20 March, 1904

Uspensky

[To Olivia]

... We are also right among fine hills with winding hollows and miniature passes. 15 minutes ride puts you into lovely country, all hills and slopes, steep and grassy with an aul at your feet below. This is a much better place for Kazakhs, real genuine Kazakhs with no Russian ways and manners. This place is the last outpost of civilised Russia to the south except the few post-houses on the road to Tashkent. There are many Kazakh girls and women only 20 versts away and further, who have never yet seen a Russian. They are rich Kazakhs all around. Every day, I see a great herd of 600 horses, little black dots on the snow in the great valley below the mine. A few days ago I am rode out to them and spent a long time looking at them all. In places the snow is deep and I and my horse had some frightful scrambles. This year, horses can paw to grass quite well and they all look fairly fat. The herd man came and joined me and he showed me the finest ones. One was blanketed, a beauty, snow white and just like pictures of Napoleon's white Arab. I said to the herdsman, pointing to the white horse, "Much money" and he just groaned and hit himself on the head with his whip.. Kazakhs are such fun and especially these ones. The same day, the owner of the herd came to lunch with us. I fancy he hoped I would buy some of his horses. Well, Olivia, he was the fattest, roundest, shortest-legged, jolliest, happiest Kazakh imaginable. His face is all covered with smile-wrinkles and his little Chinese eyes twinkled like fixed stars and he laughed and shook all over like a good jelly and gave you the same feelings when you looked at him. He said he weighed 7 poods and I believed him. To see him waddle across the room with his bandy legs and great leather sheepskin trousers was a glory forever. He has invited me to come to his aul and I am going, first chance I get.

A very fine worker in iron and silver came here to bring the manager some stirrups and buckles he had made for him. They were beautiful, not quite so delicate in pattern as Eemombai's. I ordered a set from him with fine leathers and buckles and all, also a real Kazakh bridle with all the buckles and bit silver-worked. Besides, I ordered four silver rings, regular Kazakh ones, with stones set in them, for your costumes. These are all to be finished in two months he says. Mr Yakoleff, the manager here, has drawn for me a Kazakh galloping on a horse, coming three quarters towards you with another Kazakh riding behind. The front rider is wielding a long pole which they use in sports to knock each other out of their saddles. Apparently they showed Yakoleff how it was

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

done here, and he says that, if they have a quarrel, they often settle it this way. The drawing is most spirited and nicely done, everything being correct and in Kazakh style.

I regret to report to you the following disaster to our equine forces. Your most distant and delightful young ladyship; a few days ago while Ahdam was driving the Kouyandy Bay, Leesanka and the Pacing Pony, the aforesaid Kouyandy Bay stopped and refused to go. Ahdam was forced to leave it behind on the road five versts from Spassky. He returned shortly and found the Kouyandy Bay dead upon the road. My opinion was asked about the cause and I, knowing so much about the conditions at the time of death, immediately answered suicide with intent to murder. QED.

Goodbye Willie, goodbye,

Tosh.



*Oxen pulling a heavy load to Spassky: the boiler of a traction engine.
The strange cone shapes behind the lead oxen are the timber stacks at the works.*

1904

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Monday, March 21

Sunny and fine but a cold wind retards the thaw. Another sign of spring today: teams of oxen took the place of camels hauling ore. If the road is good, a camel is splendid but if, during the thaws, bare spots occur on the road, it means a fight with the protesting creature every time. These days they make a fearful noise in their ridiculous struggles. This is the season when camels are dangerous; if you see one with foam frothing out of his mouth and a wild glare out of his eye, keep away, for he has the 'boorah' or 'madness'. Loose ones run amok occasionally. I saw one today. He ran blindly with his head thrown back on his withers so far that all you could see were his under-neck and chin from in front and it was impossible to see where he was going. Every now and then he shook his head and the foam flew on all sides. I kodaked his head at close range and deserve a VC. His owner went to catch him and showed great pluck. His only weapon was a piece of rope about 10 inches long but he dived at him and threatened him and avoided the lunges of that snake-like head and neck, till he caught the nose rope and then he mastered him, using no loud words or anger of any kind. After he had tied him to a wagon, the small Kazakh boy came and mocked the boorah saying "Chee, chee, chee" to him and the camel shuffled about in sullen fury with his eyes fairly green.

Tuesday, March 22

Sunny and same cold wind. Thawing yet. Another yurt in sight today. Am getting the assay office shipshape by degrees but it takes a lot of unpacking and arranging. Saw a fearful struggle between a Kazakh and his horse, lasted about 20 minutes. The horse refused to pass through a narrow gap where a camel with the boorah stood. The man showed no heat or anger but he fairly flayed that pony with his whip and seemed to kick him with his big boots all over his body from head to hips. He never let up until the distracted but stubborn pony backed into the camel in his distress with half the dogs in the place yapping at his heels. The combination of noises, the camel bawling, the dogs barking and the whip cracking, settled it and the pony fled through the gap at a dead run with the immovable Kazakh sitting placidly still. Mail arrived this evening unexpectedly, an extra mail, papers only, with a note from Mussen saying that Mr Fell and one French engineer would be out here on Friday or Saturday next. I have arranged quarters and they will be comfortable.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Wednesday, March 23

Fine sunny day but strong cold north-east wind and still there was a thaw. The rickety old pump in the mine broke down last night and was repaired today. This is ominous at this time of year with a flood of water soon due. Sent a messenger to Spassky with a note to Mussen about some needful assay things. These messengers leave at almost 15 minutes notice in the most unconcerned way. A man is told about it. He says 'Jerrite', pockets the note, climbs on his horse and jogs off 115 versts; all in a few minutes. His family does not cluster around his horse and wave pocket handkerchiefs. I don't believe he tells them anything; he just jogs away. If it were 500 versts it would be just the same. He returns from Spassky on the third day and I give him four rubles (\$2) which includes his horse and all expenses; he is quite happy but he must have the money at once or he loses all his dignity and becomes querulous, fretful and voluble in a squeaky voice. I pretended not to understand the last man's desire for immediate money, only smiling inanely upon him. He went away much distressed and soon returned with all his friends who all spoke at once, men and women. Finally, light dawned upon me! And they all left very pleasantly saying 'The bai has much money'.



A well-to-do Kazakh family in their yurt

Thursday, March 24

Clear, blue, fine, sunny weather, day after day! Steady thaw. Snow begins to look dubious and drawn in expression. Early in the morning a message came from 'Dry Hand'⁸⁰ at Spassky that Mr Fell, M Faure and Mussen would be here this evening. As usual everything had been put off till the last moment and, as we did not expect them till Sunday, of course everything was done at once and

⁸⁰ Unidentified.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

the place was like a disturbed ants' nest, full of Kazakhs running about apparently aimlessly and messily. But out of the turmoil came final order, after all. Whitewash was slapped on walls in bucketfuls, stoves were lighted and formless Kazakh women in strange costumes washed floors. Furniture appeared in the right (or wrong) places and before dark the transformation was completed. At 7pm they arrived. They brought tobacco and a lovely pouch, much welcome news, and a few papers. They also brought some foreign coughing, wheezing colds which promptly fastened onto everyone here 'at first sight' so to speak.

March 24, 1904

Dear Marian,

This fragment of a letter you will please excuse, but Mr Fell is here and leaves in a very short time, and my time is much occupied with him. I will not repeat what I have written to Olivia but will add to the news. Tomorrow we all hope to go on to Karagandy for a day or so and then Mr Fell and M Faure will dash off for Akmolinsk, Petropavlovsk, Moscow, London, Paris, Cambridge and I am trying to work him up into going to The Point before he comes out here again. Mother and The Boy should be either in New York or on the jolly road to The Point. I have given Mr Fell two drawings which Mr Yakoleff, the manager at Uspensky drew for me. The one I wrote about before, the Kazakh on the back of a galloping horse and the other is a scene in the Urals. A man is creeping up, stalking a big grouse bird in a tree and only the man's back view shows. Mr Fell says there is a distinct merit in his drawings and if he had only studied drawing in a scientific way, he might have made a name. The drawings are destined for The Point and there they will be most interesting. I am presenting Yakoleff with photographs with a view to more of his work, which I think is quite legitimate seeing that [my] photography is always so good, no matter what Olivia says!

Mr Mussen suffered a grievous accident to his right hand in the mine. He was taking some flashlight photographs and he had the hardihood (to put it politely) to light a magnesium powder with a match; and it went off and blew him up! All the fingers of his right hand are severely burnt and he had the pleasure of climbing up a wet and dirty ladder about 300 feet to the surface before anything could be done. As I am a kind of volunteer feldscher at Uspensky (it seems) I dressed his wounds and now he goes about with a kind of boxing glove of cotton wool, oil and stuff on his hand. As soon as Mr Fell and M Faure leave here, I shall hurry back to beloved Uspensky, before the Nura bars my way, and there I shall be imprisoned for two or three weeks by the rushing waters. But I shall make strenuous endeavours to get my mail through even if I have to drown a few Kazakhs.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

I take Jingo Flingo with me and I shall ride every day all over the place, having very little work to do. And visit all the Kazakhs around.

Goodbye, Marian. Change your mind and come to the steppes it is better than New Westminster!

From (signed in Kazakh)

Friday, March 25

Quiet warm weather. Could not be better! The nights are clear and full of stars. Monsieur Faure is seeing the steppes in holiday attire. Mr Fell, M Faure and Mussen went down and all through the mine in the morning. They seemed much pleased with what they saw although M Faure rather affects the Sphinx in his demeanour. He is determined not to be surprised at anything. At night, though, we taught him bridge and there he wilted. The Sphinx was forgotten and he acted just like one always wants Frenchmen to act. I began assaying in earnest and had three Kazakhs pounding up rock till 10pm. One of them being old man Ab Rai whom I had working for me last year, and who looks upon my assay department as a sort of side show for his friends. No charges are asked and they waddle in, big boots and malachis and great white coats tightly belted in, and stand about clicking in their throats while, in a monotonous tone, he expands to them the wonders in sight. He bosses the other men grandly and cuffs them on the head with the karagan broom, which greatly amuses them.

Saturday, March 26

Same perfect weather. Small ponds are forming about the works and the cows make up for compulsory snow-eating all winter by drinking apparently all day; and they are now barrel-shaped. Mr Fell has a bad cold and cough and did not go down into the mine but Mussen and M Faure did, principally to photograph several places. In doing so, Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up most successfully. He burned his right hand severely, every finger; he will need two new nails and considerable of his epidermis. My services were requisitioned to make him comfortable and he goes about now with a mass bandages on his hand and his arm in a sling. It might have been much worse! He says he won't do it again! M Faure was horrified, because, he at once said, 'Now there will be no bridge!' And he was right. Ab Rai and I got out four results today, most satisfactory ones!

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

Sunday, March 27

Warm sunny day! This promises to be a grand summer! Today the Minnetonka⁸¹ should arrive at New York. Mr Fell and I have ranged through the mazes of politics, the reasons and possible termination of the war, and the Chinese labour question, often at mealtimes, much to the astonishment of our hosts and M Faure and to Mussen's enjoyment. We have convinced each other in no way and continue to hold diametrically opposite views on all subjects most cheerfully. A great caravan came from Akmolinsk today with stores of food and grain; 20 or 30 camels and a few horses. M Faure was delighted and I photographed him sitting on a great bag of oats in a sleigh amidst many camels. His attitude was '*superbe*', he might have been on a pedestal at the Louvre! Finished my assays, they were truly satisfactory to a rich and gratifying degree hardly thought of!

Monday, March 28

A day of days! Quite warm with a soft wind and everlasting sun. We left for Spassky at 6.30am, the ground being white by a hoarfrost which clung to every blade of grass and shrub. Two of the Sultan's troikas whirled us along under the influence of rampageous, oat-fed horses going home on the very best of smooth, almost ice-clad roads. We made the first 48 to 50 versts in 2¾ hours. Here we stopped to breakfast (having started on tea and cakey things), at a picket called Darriah, a nice, clean place full of camel-drivers and we noticed the condition of absolute health those men are all are in. They had been out in all the winds and stress of winter between Karagandy, Spassky and Uspensky, walking most of the time leading the long lines of camels. Their faces were burned a deep purple brown by the wind out of which background their eyes and teeth were almost startling in whiteness and they were, muscularly, as hard and firm as possible; and talking incessantly. Being always out in the clean snow, the clothes were clean and bright and the huge boots and the tremendous coats, belted in and flaring out below, were a good setting for the massive faces. Our change-horses were on about 30 versts and we found them waiting by the road with another Kazakh.

A quick change and off again; by this time the sun is warm and strong and the scenery wonderful. We are travelling alongside a fine range of almost-mountains, patched and grooved with splashes of dazzling snow; all around is steppe, at present showing last year's grass sticking up a foot above the foot-deep snow and a colour which is the palest and brightest of yellow, upon the white; on all sides are other hills, peaks and ranges, all starting abruptly from the flat steppe. The view is immense and the excitement of the swift troika adds to it all. Mr Fell was speechless and, if interrogated, could only roll his eyes in ecstasy and wave his hand like the southern Colonel. Arrived at the Nura and crossed, of course, easily, on the temporary

⁸¹ A transatlantic steamship. Anne, Fell's wife, was on board.

Uspensky: "Mussen lit a magnesium powder with a match and blew himself up. My funeral will be announced in the papers here, home papers please copy"

bridge which is washed away every spring. But the Nura is rising and has begun to mutter; I must get back to Uspensky as soon as possible if I want to avoid trouble. Arrived at Spassky at about 5pm. Found The Brat had returned from Bayandy Kuduk. He reported a grievous trip in deep snows, but he was fat and sleek and showed signs of having laid up comfortably in many auls by the wayside.



The steppe in summer

1904

Spassky: “A state of hopeless turmoil”

16. Spassky: “A state of hopeless turmoil”

Tuesday, March 29, Spassky

Weather has changed! Yesterday was the hint I suppose. A cold and blustery north wind which became almost a boorahnchik⁸² by evening with fine snow falling and blowing. A day of talks, arrangements, tea-drinking, calling, being called upon, inspecting, packing, unpacking, re-packing, losing things unexpectedly, finding things unexpectedly, coughing, sneezing, wheezing, (the imported colds having sown their seed) and a state of hopeless turmoil amidst which one person alone staggered about in content and she, only, because she is a Zoon. I am sure the Japanese have less trouble in despatching an army corps!

March 29, 1904

Dear Olivia,

This must be but a short letter, if you please and I feel very lucky to get a chance at all. You will easily understand when I say that Mr Fell is here and that my time is his. The days are busily engaged, the evenings are spent in chess, bridge or picquet⁸³ with him. By the way you must not forget all about the picquet you learned because I assure you that you grasped the science of the game most successfully — witness that final assault upon Mr Atkinson. But I am wandering!

Mr Fell, M Faure and Mr Mussen arrived at Uspensky on Thursday evening, where I was all ready to receive them and make them as comfortable as circumstances will allow. As Mr Fell had an outrageous cold, his French accent was fine and as M Faure had also a bad cold, his accent seemrd to come from somewhere deep inside

⁸² Little boorahn.

⁸³ A trick-taking card game.

Spassky: "A state of hopeless turmoil"

him, finally, after a violent struggle, bursting forth from his nose. And when they talked earnestly together it sounded like a Jew's harp exactly. I hope you are learning to make your nose hum and vibrate to the proper tone and I expressly desire you to learn to shrug your shoulders and gesticulate airily with your fingers, because I adore it when properly done. Yesterday we all drove back to Spassky from Uspensky and, Willie, I thought a thousand times how you would have enjoyed the trip. Can you imagine a really perfect day, bright sun and soft wind, grand road for sleighing and troikas of the Sultan's best oat-fed and rampageous horses, with another change halfway. We galloped the first 48 versts in 2¾ hours. At 6.30am we left Uspensky and at 4.45pm we had travelled to Spassky, passing many camels in long groaning lines and lots of Kazakhs riding as no one else can ride. The scenery is beautiful, great expanses of steppe, and glorious ranges of hills, high ones, jagged and peaked, and all streaked and patched with blinding white snow. There was one wall-eyed, blue-roan pony with a blaze-face, pink nose and four high white stockings who galloped the whole 115 versts as an outsider, and I wanted you to see him too. In fact I want you all the time to see something and I refuse to be comforted.

Goodbye and when I return to Uspensky very soon, I will write much more.

From (signed in Kazakh).

Wednesday, March 30

Russian Saint Patrick's Day, although they don't know it! I celebrated it by not wearing any green about me! This day last year, we arrived at Spassky for the first time, meeting the mob who were worshipping vodka in honour of Alexei Victorovich's Angel Day. The same preparations were in progress today and we received express invitations for the evening performance but we are fleeing under cover of urgent necessity to Karagandy. We left at 12 am with Sultansky horses⁸⁴ and sleighs and dragged along on dry ground a third of the 45 versts at least. The same cold, ferocious wind which filled the air with snow in the big, snow-covered flat which extends for 30 versts before reaching Karagandy. Mussen and I were in an open sleigh enjoying this mild boorahn and I froze my lip. Personally, on account of M Faure, I was pleased about the weather and, on comparing views afterwards with Mr Fell, I was delighted to find that he and I for once agree! So far M Faure had only seen the finest of sunny peaceful days and, in the frequent stops, I examined his countenance. He had the look of the hunted and he was trying to put his hands and feet into his pocket at the same time; and Mr Fell was telling him all the horrors of Siberian travel. I showed

⁸⁴ The Sultan's horses.

Spassky: "A state of hopeless turmoil"

him my frozen lip and I know that he instantly thought of his toes. We arrived at 4pm and found the usual warm, clean house, full of samovars and Russian cookery and M Faure instantly pulled off his boots and clapped his toes up against a hot stove, having to be dragged away protesting. Nevertheless, he is alright and we like him more than a little.



Karagandy and Spassky: "Although it is April Fools' Day, Mr Fell decided to start for Europe"

17. Karagandy and Spassky: "Although it is April Fools' Day, Mr Fell decided to start for Europe"

Thursday, March 18 Karagandy

Better weather but very cold yet! Mr Fell and M Faure have a room together and my first view of Mr Fell was seated, shaving, in a cloud of smoke that came in puffs from a strange object, most unmistakably French, which was sitting up in bed in a strange and foreign costume. The instant M Faure wakes up, he grabs his big curved pipe, which is a carved head of Faure the former president⁸⁵, and stuffs it full of his almost black tobacco, and soon the room is dim and thick and dark. He keeps the pipe red hot all day. After 'chaipeet'⁸⁶, they all went into the mine to wander about the long black galleries between walls of coal. On their return, M Faure seemed visibly pleased. Coal is one of his specialities in mining! Business, chess, the phonograph and many meals till 12pm finished the day.

Friday, April 1

A warm cloudy day, no wind to speak of. Although it is April Fools' Day, Mr Fell decided to start for Europe and at about 11 am they left in a light, uncovered sleigh, owing to the probable want of snow in many places, with three of Nyemkoff's good horses. The road being narrow on packed snow, the horses were 'goosummed' Indian and two Kazakhs rode the lead horses with The Brat driving the last one. The Brat goes as far as Akmolinsk. It was fine to see the start, for the horses were fresh! We, Mussen and I, decided to return to Spassky tomorrow, under urgent pressure from Nyemkoff; I improved the time by borrowing an old Cossack army rifle of tremendous calibre and range, and cartridges, and learning all about the whereabouts of the bighorn sheep near Uspensky and the name of the Kazakh hunter who will guide me there. The place is only 40 versts from the mine on two high peaks. They are found there every year! I return to Uspensky as soon as possible.

⁸⁵ Felix François Faure (1841 - 1899), President of France. I have not identified his namesake, Monsieur Faure the expert in coalmining.

⁸⁶ I don't know! Just tea, perhaps.

Karagandy and Spassky: "Although it is April Fools' Day, Mr Fell decided to start for Europe"

Saturday, April 2

Cloudy warm day. Mussen and I returned to Spassky by 2pm. On the journey, the snow falling turned to actual wet and rain, and all the snow on the ground looked dead and worn out. At Spassky, I made arrangements to leave tomorrow for Uspensky with the Sultan's horses. The result of 'economy' in not feeding our own horses oats being that we have to hire. Russian Easter will soon be here and Spassky will be a fine place not to live in! They have already 600 rubles worth of vodka, i.e. 300 of those great big tall bottles for the celebrations and it works out at two apiece for each Russian man and woman at Spassky. About eight Imperial quart bottles!

Sunday, April 3; Our Easter.

A warm cloudy, snowy, misty day. I left at 12am, after superhuman efforts, with a single sleigh, three of the Sultan's horses, Jingo Flingo⁸⁷ tied on behind and the old Kazakh driving whom we call the Baptist, because he wears the right expression and always prays if, by doing so, he may avoid his duty. Snow fell in little crinkly pellets like caraway seeds and, as it was warm and sticky and stayed where it fell, my entire equipage was soon like a frosted cake. You could only see about two or three hundred yards and small knobs in the steppe loomed up like big hills, and karagan brush showed as enormous patches of forest. Travelling was a succession of never-ending surprises. We crossed the Nura easily, but she is much wider and in 10 days she will be hungry! After lunch and feeding horses there, we went on to Darriah, about 65 versts, by dusk, and there stopped the night. Spent the evening learning Kazakh from the camel-men sitting about and my attempts at pronunciation elicited roars of laughter, for the Kazakh is good natured and cares nothing for polite forms and would laugh at himself just as quickly. It was a very crawly⁸⁸ night indeed!

⁸⁷ His favourite horse.

⁸⁸ Meaning insects, perhaps.

18. Uspensky: "Five whole days with two Kazakh magistrates on the steppe, staying at their yurts, and riding everywhere with them"

Monday, April 4

During the night it turned clear and bitter cold, but my direction was southward and the wind was north, which made it better. Left at 7am with nearly 50 versts to do. The road was bad, with new drifts and all covered with a stiff top crust which soon tired the horses, and we made very poor time. The Baptist wanted to stop at every aul in sight but I kept him going till at 2.30pm we arrived at Uspensky. The Baptist never brings his own food so I kept him hungry till dark and he lived on texts and much bowing and prostrations, all aimed at me, for Mecca. Found much sickness here. Everyone seems to be ill, and some quite seriously. The house is invaded by weeping women who sit in the kitchen where I can hear them and moan dirge-like chants and it is very depressing. There is no doctor here as there should be. He makes short trips at intervals and that is no good. I only attempt accidents and surgery and all of these are cases of grippe or influenza. As the Baptist returns tomorrow, I must send this mail very hurriedly to catch the Wednesday post. I shall be alone here till June and I am going to have daily lessons in Kazakh from a good man living here.

Tuesday, April 5

Clear and cold day with north-east wind. This is the week before Russian Easter, and they call it "northern week" because it always is cold, they say, no matter what the previous weather might have been. This time it began sharp on the Monday and I firmly expect to see it become warm again at 12 midnight Sunday. Forgot to say that yesterday I saw quite a number of ducks in one place together on the steppe, walking about very discontentedly for it had already turned cold and they evidently had forgotten their overshoes. Arranged today to get my meals at the secretary's house (or rooms) next to my assay office, owing to domestic differences in the manager's house. He is a would-be Sandow⁸⁹ and affects the part, but she rules him with a fat fist and, as she has no children, she has grown almost too lazy to walk and she apparently pleaded ill-health about

⁸⁹ Eugen Sandow (born Friedrich Wilhelm Müller) was a German bodybuilder and showman.

Uspensky: "Five whole days with two Kazakh magistrates on the steppe, staying at their yurts, and riding everywhere with them"

managing the cookery. Personally, as I wish to learn Kazakh from these men and as all meals here not only look alike to me but *are* alike, it suits me. I also arranged to have a Russian come in every day and teach me Kazakh. He, being an Akmolinsk native talks Kazakh like one of them.

Wednesday, April 6

Clear and cold north-east wind. Everything frozen up tight except out of the wind and in the sunshine. This weather delays the Nura's tantrums. Doctor Bogootsky (Russian name, I believe) arrived yesterday and will not leave till tomorrow. He is the Spassky doctor — until the syndicate has the immediate pleasure of kicking him out. The "children" would have sized him up in five seconds and they would have been quite right, for he has the snipiest little pointed nose ever seen, the rest of him being bobtail terrier. He can't help his ways as he must follow that little snipy nose, and he spent much time trying to insinuate to me what a bad man Nyemkoff is. Nyemkoff fired him both officially and bodily for selling the company's medicines from Karagandy and Bogootsky, who is even now doing the same thing here from Spassky, has not forgotten. All the rascals dislike Nyemkoff and want his blood, at a discreet distance.

Began to feed at the secretary's place. Same old sweet 'cutlets' and minced-up mixtures; cabbage of cloth-like texture is the only vegetable on the place and everything floats in grease.

Today, a caravan came from Akmolinsk to the 'good' Tartar store here, not the 'bad' one. Four horses to each sleigh, telling a tale of bad roads. It was in charge of Russians and I must say, that these young frontier Russians are grand-looking fellows, but there it ends as a rule. The Tartar spent all the rest of the day bringing great bales of stuff into the Yakoleff's big dining-room and showing them, while Kazakhs and Russians flocked in to see and say 'Ai Bai'. All the stuff was cheap and shoddy Russian goods, made to sell to poor Russians, for the Kazakhs have more sense and buy at the Kouyandy fair where there is a big assortment and better classes of goods. Had my first Kazakh lesson this evening, my plan being to get a big vocabulary of words and try to get at the grammar of the Kazakh language through the words. I have prepared a book of Russian words already and this man gives me the Kazakh equivalents. I am wrestling with Mr Fell's cold which he left me with me and not having much real success. Much sickness here!

Thursday, April 7

Clear, sunny and cold in the wind. Every day becomes warmer and the snow is leaving fast again. At breakfast today, the secretary's wife falling ill and being incapacitated, it behooved me to find another place to feed at. This seemed complicated, for it involved the cooperation, apparently, of every man and woman on the place. It was finally settled to complete

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satisfaction but the uncertainty which prevailed all day caused me to have to eat and drink six meals during the day at various places and, not being up to the mark, one would have been plenty! I am now eating at the steiger's, which is very satisfactory because he talks Kazakh like a native and is most willing to help me to learn. I am collecting a great dictionary of words and phrases. He gave me a religious book in Arabic. The Arabic is word for word but in Russian print on one side of the page and the translation in Russian is on the other. It is easy to translate into English and is most instructive. This is a big Russian holiday and I was asked to photograph a group of Russian workmen and families. Being a holiday, the men were considerably 'thick in the clear' and a time-exposure will be a failure. The Yakoleffs seem to cook and eat nothing and as they each stand about 5 feet and would weigh easily 400 lb together, I am wondering how it is done. Koumiss and mutual adulation must be weight-makers and they seem to have no limit.

Friday, April 7

Fine and bright with same bitter north-east winds. Last night they blew a gale and have not moderated much as yet. The few yurts up here look very wretched and are only used as cooking places in daytime. Coal is very scarce here, even for household stoves, and I have difficulty in getting enough for my assay work, of which I am trying to do a little on slags and mattes⁹⁰ from the smelter at Spassky. They promise to be very instructive! Yakoleff is quite determined to keep at work in the mine and, as Spassky sends him practically no coal for his engine and pump, he is calmly sawing up his timber, which costs about four rubles a log or stick, for they are not over 9 inches in diameter, and he has told Spassky that he has about 1000 rubles worth of timber in sight. This is short-sighted policy because soon he will be out of timber and must stop then anyway and timber coming from Karkarolinsk takes longer than coal from Spassky and costs more! All these people ought to be beaten with a stick. The post never came today although due, but the policy of waiting becomes a habit out here and, being a habit it gives satisfaction — almost!

Saturday April 9

Sunny, but winds go through and through you and the sun is but a feeble imitation. Still the Kazakhs ride in and out placidly, sitting down in little groups, in the wind and on the snow, discussing volubly all their gossip with a total disregard for weather conditions. They say they are finding many frozen ducks and also steppe-hens out in the open which is quite likely. The last

⁹⁰ Matte is a term used in the field of pyrometallurgy given to the molten metal sulphide phases typically formed during smelting of copper, nickel, and other base metals. (There, aren't you glad you know that now?)

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warm spell must have tempted many migrants north and, after a long journey, they are thin and weak; on arrival, this cold weather set in and froze up their means of support. This place is famous for steppe-hens and, in the autumn, they fairly swarm! Big preparations are going on for Russian Easter tomorrow, and all hands are cooking and washing out houses, and the air flaps and rattles with multi-coloured clothes. All next week will be devoted to holiday jaunting and vodka will float the population. Anybody expecting an Easter tip from me will get left. Hedman inaugurated that scheme last year here for his own ends and said it was a national custom which it was impossible, dreadful to ignore!

Sunday, April 10; Russian Easter

Same aggravating sun and the same cold wind. Great fireworks last night at midnight and the shooting off of an inoffensive old cannon which should have been buried long ago. This was attended by danger, but the man behind the gun was just as careful as the men before it and, when the time-fuse burned out and the gun went off, everybody was out of range. This morning everyone has white, shiny faces and is walking about stiff-ankled in new boots which creak. Embraces are the order of the day and, as the day wears on, they will increase and become adhesively prolonged. My fare includes several special Easter cakes which stand all day on a side-table and, being of noble size, withstand repeated assaults without losing dignity. Every house contains the same, and baleful coloured eggs besides.

At 2pm Yakoleff had a number of the chief Russians and their families in for dinner and I joined. There was a very old granny present who, being enticed into drinking a glass of vodka, did so protesting; this immediately gave her the most appalling hiccoughs and she was led away weeping with her head in her shawl. During dinner a loud bang was heard and a man soon came hurrying in to say that several gay young Russians had fired off that old cannon in the main residents' street and that all the windows in the neighbourhood were broken. He further said that they intended to fire it off again a little further up the street, so the cannon was captured and brought into the hall of our house where I hope it will stay. Post arrived yesterday. *The Times* is unmercifully censored every week, whole pages being cut out roughly and angrily in great jags and gashes. My mail messenger leaves tomorrow morning for Spassky.

Monday, April 11

Clear and cold. Last spring was delayed in the same way by a steady cold north-east wind that never seemed to let up, night or day. This is also a holiday and the day was spent in drinking tea and, in my case, avoiding, as far as possible, gatherings of tea-drinkers. It is the custom for everyone, of high and low degree, to ask everyone else to their house to drink tea, and this custom admits of as many combinations as there may be found on a chessboard, with just so much difficulty for the person wishing to avoid it all. Every move you make and every conversation lead up to an invitation to drink tea and it is well to know

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it beforehand. The cannon, being fired off in the principal residential district most successfully broke most of the windows to the great delight of the young Russian bloods who engineered the scheme. I must say that they are behaving this year very well on the whole; quite different to last year under Alexei Victorovitch! Like master like man! Minor's birthday today. All Russia celebrated it!

Tuesday, April 12

The wind has not changed and it is no warmer. A thaw at noon for a few hours does diminish the snow but nothing dares to grow and it is very unsatisfactory. The place is full of the same big crows with lavender-coloured backs and breasts that were here last spring. They disappear in the summertime. There is deadly war between them and the dogs. The latter beasts feel themselves to be the official permanent scavengers and regard the newcomers as interlopers. A fine litter of five big woolly pups has been raising itself in our outhouse and they are thriving well upon this

steady warfare, becoming active and fierce. As the crows bond together and attack a lone pup, the pups hunt and fight in a pack of five and keep the crows on the move. When a Kazakh occasionally shoots a crow, all the crows call each other and fly up in great circles till they are but wheeling specks in the sky, flying furiously. After their excitement is over they return to fight the pups again. The irrepressible Russian holiday element spirited away the poor old cannon and banged it off near my assay office and the windows promptly collapsed. This was going too far and, at my suggestion, the cannon will be spiked and laid away to rest.

As no coal is coming from Spassky and Yakoleff could not long stand the pressure of seeing his timber burn, every day a long camel train comes in with great packs of material to burn. This is a kind of stunted juniper which creeps in great branches along the ground on hilly places. The wood is pink-grained like cedar, with blue berries also. It is very resinous and burns well. They bring it from hills about 15 versts away and, although they know the price per camel load (30 kopecks), they have a



Another camel carrying brushwood

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fearful wrangle every time, generally taking the camels away nearly out of sight and always coming back. This may go on once, twice or three times and the word 'Satan' is bandied about melodiously. It is all unloaded just at my window and I take in the show every day!

Wednesday, April 13

No change in the weather. Bright clear and cold. Ice forms on pools before the very eyes of the setting sun. Even the Kazakhs are beginning to grumble and shake their heads. Today being no holiday, everyone went to work and I heard again at frequent intervals the queer, muffled, familiar sounds of underground dynamite reports. Even Yakoleff went down and through the mine himself today for the first time in my knowledge. Saw three hawks. They are spring signs, for they winter to the south. They came sailing hungrily over the camp and threw a fearful scare into the domestic poultry who had probably forgotten all about their existence. But the best spring sign will be a change of wind. Eeskok, the Kazakh who lights fires in the house, brought me today a Tartar grammar in Arabic and Russian but it was in such a horrible and greasy state that all interest was swamped in disgust. I learned, though, that Tartar words are very often entirely different to Kazakh ones, so I will not try to learn any Tartar as I shall be hopelessly mixed. I am trying to get a new Kazakh grammar! A fearful row went on today when a camel pack-train of 10 camels came in with karagan branches piled high. The price offered was three rubles 50 kopecks (\$1.75) and the Kazakh in charge refused it with scorn and abuse. He rode away, leading the lead camel with stern determination. No one followed and in two hours he returned, camels and all, with everybody on the place in a broad grin. Then ensued a fine scene. Everybody joined in until they wore him out. They pushed his horse and beat it towards the unloading place until the perplexed man gave in and led his passive camels to unload. In five minutes, the man was as cheerful as possible and laughing with all the rest. He had got what he expected to get (although \$1.75 seem to me a scandal for 10 camel loads, cut and piled up and brought 25 versts) and they can never resist trying fiercely to get more. They never get it but nonetheless they always try!

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Thursday, April 14

Russian April Fools' Day. They do know of it and call it an equivalent Russian name, but it awakens no strong desires to make fools and I was spared the antics in my food that characterised B.C. mine-cooks. I live now largely upon 'sooharries', those hard dry, porous, excellent rusk things and they are unbeatable. The Russian Army uses it as its chief flour-food, largely because all the moisture is expelled and moisture means weight. A Cossack carries on his horse when marching 7 lbs of sooharries which are equal to double the quantity in bread. All the Cossack women make it perfectly of course. By the way, our spelling of Cossack is all wrong and leads to wrong pronunciation. It is Kazakh here, with the 'a' broad and the accent on the last syllable and it sounds better that way. Same weather and several camel pack-trains.

April 15 Friday

Still fine and the wind struggled round to the south-east for a time and blew hard, but it was only an effort and by evening the north-east claimed it again. Tried to work in the assay office but having to burn 'argai' is futile business. You freeze to death as you stoke and you have to keep stoking steadily to keep from freezing to death; between the two there is not much left for

work. There lives here the most intelligent goose; he is positively human. He follows you about and answers to the name of 'Chigga-Chigga'. If you sit down he solemnly climbs onto your lap and proceeds to slumber; if you object and treat him rudely, he retaliates by fierce pecks. If you stoop and give him a leg up, he establishes himself on your back and shoulders and, from that vantage point, his aim is to peck off your cap, and he will do so if allowed. Nothing alarms him and he bosses all the dogs around and terrorises all the children, having no earthly use for them.



Unloading brushwood

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Alexei Victorovitch and the Doctor arrived in the evening from Spassky bringing me many ancient papers from Atkinson. Our regular mail had not arrived at Spassky, owing to the pernicious influence of a Kazakh holiday. Alexei brought the cashbox to pay the payroll and tomorrow will be a holiday; all paydays are, here!

Saturday, April 16

North-east still blowing strongly. The snow has thawed around the buildings and between them, the ground has dried sufficiently to allow dust of peculiarly unpleasant qualities to blow, which adds nothing to the pleasures of life. Alexei is paying off the force in a casual manner between cigarettes and the Doctor, just like a little fat terrier, is following his snipey nose in and out of quarters and doorways which are veritable holes in the ground. Living here long would convert anyone to the faith-cure business or homoeopathy because, without medicines and without any knowledge whatsoever, these feldscher doctors seem to do good on their visits. An old Russian woman had been groaning around with rheumatism for several days, unendingly saying that the doctor will soon come and cure me; sure enough, today she says she's better. Russians have a great store of faith and this must help them oftener than they know⁹¹. There should be one real doctor at Spassky with feldscher subordinates at Uspensky and Karagandy.

Finished some assay results on smelter products under strange difficulties. Not eating and drinking tea with Yakoleff gives me much more time for everything and my meals are regular: 8am, tea and sooharries; 12am, soup, boiled-to-rags meat, 'barahnny' cutlets, cold-leather cabbage (sometimes 'peetmagnies') tea or a glass of cow's milk and sooharries; 4pm, tea and sooharries; 8pm same as 12am. Without tea and sooharries, life would be void. These hours mean much more Gibbon⁹² and less talk. I wrote a long letter to Beeky Beeky⁹³ yesterday without dictionary or grammar in Russian and Kazakh. He will no doubt admit the 'without grammar'.

⁹¹ Olivia, in later life at least, was a Christian Scientist and perhaps Frank became one too.

⁹² Edward Gibbon FRS was an English historian, writer and MP. His most important work, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, is known for the quality and irony of its prose, its use of primary sources, and its polemical criticism of organised religion

⁹³ Unidentified.

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Sunday, April 17

Fine but colder than ever with the wind in the same direction. At 7am, Alexei and the Doctor left for Spassky. At 2pm Ahdam turned up from Spassky with my mail; letters and papers in plenty but none from Florida. I have lately been considering a trip to Lake Balkhash as soon as spring really opens, being away two weeks at least. The lake is about 300 versts away, nearly due south, and the caravan road from Akmolinsk to Vern⁹⁴ passes through Uspensky. This road could be utilised as far as possible and then there is a branch road to a Popoff claim 80 versts from the lake, where Popoff put up two furnaces and smelted some of his lead-silver ore. On propounding the scheme to Atkinson and Mussen, they answered today: Mussen cannot go on account of his weekly letters to London but sees no reason why Atkinson and I should not. Bastrakoff also wishes to come and, as he is no rider, we will have to take a light carabok for him. The Brat and a Kazakh guide will complete the party with six horses. We shall be back before Mr Fell returns and it looks like a go! Atkinson and I will ride and merely look upon the carabok as a possible ambulance. A tent, boorsaks, rice, dried prunes, a dead sheep, tea, sugar and salt and many guns, rifles and cartridges are my programme, going as light as possible. Cameras of course!

April 17, 1904

Uspensky

[To Olivia, in Paris]

... After being penned up in close quarters all winter I feel like that poor old eagle which so long suffered at The Point and, with a burst for freedom, I hatched this scheme and wrote to Mr Mussen and Mr Atkinson. Today by your mail came that answer. Mr Mussen cannot go but Mr Atkinson can and Bastrakoff wishes to come too and to bring his dog, Mars, the white and russet setter. This rather complicates my scheme for I planned to go with two Kazakhs; each to have two horses to ride with one pack-horse for the tent and supplies. Now it will mean a light carabok, for Bastrakoff is not a rider. But we will go, and be away for two or three weeks. Just imagine the long stretches of almost unknown, rolling steppe, on and on forever, with hills and ranges and rocky peaks, ever-changing, across valleys and flats upon the majestic, grassy steppe. Sunup to sundown, with Kazakhs and horses and the unlimited horizon. It will be full spring too and the grass will be fresh and sweet and the air will be full of larks and other southern birds, while eager flowers will be dotted about everywhere. Ducks, geese and steppe-hens and rabbits will come and offer themselves up for our supper and after such politeness, one cannot

⁹⁴ Unidentified.

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well refuse. But, Olivia, every silver lining has its cloud and if only you and Marian were coming, nothing would be wanting for me. I shall consider it as so much good riding and pleasure wasted because only a third of it will be taken up and that third with only a third of its enjoyment.

I have been interrupted for some time owing to a foolish Kazakh blacksmith laying open an artery in his wrist and I had to be very [Kazakh word] about it so, if this letter smells at all of codaform⁹⁵ you will please blame the blacksmith. Where was I when I left?

— Nevertheless I shall keep a strict account of all I see and all we do and you shall follow the trip on paper some day before very long. We shall take The Brat with us and six of our own good horses, and the Sultan Djumabek Djebagin will supply us with the guide who took us to Bayandy Kuduk last spring and who knows the Balkhash country well. He is a little short man, nearly black with a small, wrinkled up, monkey face, on which grows he sort of oak ridge along the place where his beard ought to be. He is the exact representation in human form of Gus Dirk's beetle-men⁹⁶ in big boots and he lives in a zimoffka just like a pumpkin and rides like a witch on a broomstick. I saw him ride after a runaway horse and, at full speed, a mad gallop, he leaned over, caught the loose horse by the tail and, with a quick move, down went the surprised horse. Nothing could have been neater!

How is tennis progressing? I hope you are giving your mind to it properly and thereby getting a better appetite (for your lessons of course). Don't use a racket too heavy for you and hold it at the extreme end. No-one is so tall that the extra inch or two is a loss and, if you are taking a ball on the back line and find it a hard one, just hit it up into the air, high, aiming of course at the net; it is easier than aiming a low one at the net and often is hard to take for your opponents. It is regular, legitimate play and is called lobbing. Try it! And always make a rule to return a hard ball to take, back to the middle of the net — and let your opponents make the mistake if possible.

Now, good night, Mademoiselle,

From yours always, Toshi.

⁹⁵ Spelling uncertain; anyway, a painkiller I presume.

⁹⁶ Gus Dirks was a pioneer of American comics who specialized in anthropomorphic insect cartoons.

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April 17, 1904

Uspensky

Dear Pomp,

... I have already divulged to Olivia my grand scheme to ride to Lake Balkhash in May and what do you think of that! To leave all vestiges of civilisation and ride a good horse for weeks amidst new country, towards and along an enormous great lake, protected by distance, isolated by great waterless tracts of country. In midsummer it is almost impossible to go there and the Kazakhs are afraid to try, for there are no rivers or even creeks, and the waterholes and shallow ponds dry up. But in spring, just after the snow thaws, we should find enough for our wants. In winter, the Kazakhs drive big herds down to Lake Balkhash to feed them upon the tall grass which fringes the lake and they have winter houses tucked away in sheltered places. In the summer, no one lives there. Along the lake itself, in the tall, reed-like grass, are wild boar, big fellows and also they tell me on all sides, that there are tiger there, real striped ones, but I fancy they must be only big wildcats or puma, for the real tiger cannot stand the cold. There are also wild asses and horses down there, which is well known to many Kazakhs here. I do not expect to see all of those things but, if not, it will not be from want of trying. I have already a big Cossack express rifle carrying a tremendous charge of powder and a soft lead bullet and soon I shall have a light .32 calibre rifle which suits Winchester cartridges, for geese and steppe-hens, and I shall borrow a 12-bore shotgun on trial, to buy if I like it. Mr Atkinson will have a light rifle and a gun and Bastrakoff is a very fine shot on the wing. We three will go and we will take a Kazakh guide and another, our own man, The Brat. For Bastrakoff we will take a light carabok and we shall need six good horses. The tent, plenty of boorsaks, a dead sheep, a bag of rice, some dried prunes, tea and sugar, a few cooking pots with a kettle for the tea. Blankets, cartridges and a few necessities in case of cold, wet rains and there you are, all complete. No I beg your pardon, not all complete. If you and Lee were coming it would be more than complete but, as it is, it will contain a gap that not even a big striped cat dead on the ground could fill.

My new fine camera will, I hope, arrive before we leave and it has a Goetz lens, just like the camera which took the photographs I sent you both, and I hope to get good results; and Bastrakoff shall do the work upon them. Mr Fell will not be out till June or later and, in the meanwhile, we have little or nothing to do and Mr Mussen will stay behind and look after all the babies, and to say that he is displeased would be putting it mildly. I am told by a man who says he read the fact, that there are real pink flamingos at Balkhash but I am sorry to say that

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my idea was that they needed to be nearer to salt water. If there are, you shall both have a whole pink flamingo to wear in your hats⁹⁷. Imagine the sensation you would make in Paris!

Any Point photographs you will send me, I shall bless you for and I will send them back to you most carefully. Your news of the Boat Race came ahead of all my newspapers and you are a genius to remember it. Minor and I have always upheld Oxford because our favourite cousin⁹⁸ went there and nearly rowed in the race, so your news did not fill me with a pure joy. Your news last summer from America about the yacht race also outstripped the papers and you ought to be a famous war correspondent. Every night it freezes hard here and it only thaws in few hours in the middle of the day while the foolish, doddering old sun blazes away all the time in a futile, lukewarm fashion, just making a fearful glare on the snow and nothing else. Your letters tell me your doings splendidly, and I wish that England would join hands (after this war is all settled) with France and Russia, just because Paris and France have been so nice to you, and also because Billy would gnash his teeth and curl his moustache into his very eyes. I am learning a lot of Kazakh language just now and I would rather know Kazakh than Sanskrit, just for the glorious sound of it. Listen to this [long phrase in Kazakh] "Snow beginning to thaw, the road will be bad". Also this [phrase in Kazakh] "Will you drink tea". It is fine.

There seems to be a deep mystery about your height, why, I have not the slightest ghost of a clue. Dare you clear up this fog by an honour-bright statement of the true facts of the case! Height and weight if you please, and Lee also, if I might be so bold! Your ages, alas, I know! Minor and The Boy must be having rare times together and Mother must be revelling in drives behind the new ponies, who must be named by this time and I wonder what! It will be a long time yet before I hear from The Point but I am getting accustomed to waiting for everything till I get blue in the face.

Good night, Marian, in faraway Paris,

From yours always, (signed in Kazakh) Toshya.

⁹⁷ In fact, one part of Lake Balkhash is brackish and, though I can't find evidence, it's entirely possible that flamingos do go there — in summer, presumably, as they do to several other Kazakh lakes.

⁹⁸ Presumably Charles Yates Fell (known as CY) who was a leading light in the St. John's College Boat Club.

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Monday, April 18

Same weather. As Ahdam will return to Spassky early tomorrow, this must go by him. My first preparation for the big trip was to make a beeline for Jingo Flingo and put a blister on his shins, and I left him pawing up the ground and evincing much displeasure. I hope to ride him and he is very precious! Today a Kazakh blacksmith helper got in the way of a fast moving



Another delivery of brushwood

fragment of sharp iron which laid his wrist open and severed an artery and I was called at a jump. He was badly scared. Without these incidents and the daily camel trains of brush, the days would be very dull. As soon as the weather moderates a little I am going to visit Djakin Moustaphin. He is in his zimoffka about 40 versts away.

Tuesday, April 19

Still cold north-east winds with steady tepid sunshine. The hills are all dazzling white and, at the right angle of sunshine, certain ridges and slopes glisten like burnished silver, owing to the thaw and then hard frost which converts their surfaces into pure ice. It is very striking, but grass green would be preferable. The flats are yet great expanses of white, unbroken by any patches of ground, with at

least 2 feet of snow. I sent Ahdam off at 9am with my letters etc. He was riding the fat and frisky Malenky Savraska (the pony The Boy was photographed upon). Saw a Kazakh ride in on a horse today, a full dark chestnut with a perfect mane which swept down below his knees. A Kazakh brought in a wild duck today. It seems unhurt but too weak to fly and many must be dying. This was one of the great big ducks, like a farmyard kind in size, but of a yellow, brick-red colour, black feet and legs and beak, black-blue tail and wings of great spread and of a black-blue interspersed with much pure white. A most beautiful bird. It eats bread and water quite thankfully and seemed not afraid and it can peck like a camel, if needs be.

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Wednesday, April 20

A south wind, something you could face with pleasure. As day grew older, clouds and haze drifted up from the south and, no doubt, myriads of birds came with it, for I saw great companies of rooks flying high and steadily northwards and above them birds so high that they were specks. Larks also have arrived and they spend their entire time, it seems, trying to get nearer to the sun and to split their throats. I had heard of some six months old Kazakh greyhounds in a zimoffka nearby, fine ones, the man said, able to catch a wolf and swallow him whole, he almost said, so I went to view them because I want two good ones for summer coursing. They were away on the hills with the owner and I saw them not at all. But I counted a dozen yurts up and in real daily use. Going into one, all the same familiar objects were there! A fire burning in the centre and the smoke passing straight up and out above, and the women in clean, white headdresses making a felt ring. By evening there was great havoc wrought in the snow and water was running everywhere. A few such days and the snow will be gone, the grass green and then – Lake Balkhash. A Russian here corroborated the tiger yarns, he said the tracks were enormous and still I don't believe!

Thursday, April 21

Horried to see ground all newly whitened during the night, but the colour disappeared by noon around the buildings where the bare spots wear. Spring was planted too deep and I am afraid is all going to root. That comes of not being an agricultural people and serves the Kazakhs right, but the sins of the children of the soil are visited upon the heads of strangers and hurt the wrong person. They go about clad in great boots, felt-lined; great pyjama-like sheepskin, fur-lined trousers; several coats, fur-lined and quilted, long sleeves and a great fur cap; all drawn up snug and tight by a belt or scarf. They are oblivious to changes and sit down anywhere to hold these interminable conversations and they will wear most of these garments all summer. Spring pleasures to them means grass; if grass grew on snow they would be just as happy. We shiver around always because, in very cold weather, we put on just enough to be not-quite-really-warm. And if the weather becomes warmer, we take off just so much in order to, apparently, remain in that not-quite-really-warm stage. New snow paralysed me and I lay on my back and read *Bleak House* all day.

Friday, April 22

Another unsatisfactory day of still fighting winter. Northwest cold wind and nothing genial in the air. The Kazakh master-worker in silver and iron arrived today with the silverwork for a bridle Yakoleff had ordered. As ours (Atkinson and I) are to be the same, I was an interested party. They were very good; a number of pieces, among them some good round knobs; and the bits are very quaint in shape. Altogether such a bridle will be a possession! The other day a Kazakh rode in using a pair of

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wooden stirrups, the first I ever saw out here. He had made them himself and they were exactly the same shape and size as the usual iron ones, being strongly and neatly made, so I bought them for \$0.75. Since then I have seen several pairs and my opinion, previously expressed, that Kazakhs do not use wooden stirrups, is worth nothing. But very few do. I am learning much Kazakh but the verbs are the trouble; they are irregular and often appallingly long. Without a regular grammar to help, it is very difficult but they seem to have a sort of 'reflexive verb' and it is designated in several ways and each way is about a yard long. As they rattle off these long words incredibly fast, it is almost hopeless to catch them. Also they seem to have any quantity of idioms and slang, which does not increase the ease of learning.

Saturday, April 23

This is spring! It must be. A perfectly warm day and I rode without gloves most of the afternoon among the hills to the north of the mine. These hills conceal auls in most unlikely places and you ride slap into them almost before you see them, being greeted by the chorus of dogs. The Kazakhs are busy preparing for the summer. They seem to put up their yurts at the doors of their zimoffkas to dry the felts and air them after long being packed away and slept upon, to repair and stitch and strengthen weak spots. There they were, up in all stages and the women as busy as ants dressed in the most outrageous half-winter, half-summer garments. I saw a most splendid Kazakh greyhound, really a glorious dog, powerful, dignified, long, and swift in looks, and with fierce character, although sensible and kindly to strangers. I wanted to buy him and (in my own Kazakh language) I asked him how much. He said 100 rubles and I said I would give 25 so we parted. The man insisted that the dog catches many foxes and wolves and every year, he earns him nearly the 100 rubles. But I could not see his bet, so I photographed the dog and passed. He may wilt! Somehow they have kept a pure-looking breed, for this dog was all cream-coloured, feathered slightly like a setter, and had the long drooping, fringed ears and brown nose; the rest being all greyhound as we know it!

Sunday, April 24

Still true spring. The right feeling in the air! Everyone was out in the blazing sunshine all day, the children sitting on roofs with their clothes turned inside out, and the men sitting on every nearby hillock-top in glory. The women one sees but seldom, and a good thing too! The Russian population on Sundays is always united to an accordion and it only sounds well when someone plays it walking about on the hillside quite a distance away. Dozens of Kazakhs rode in, left their horses and helped to make those queer groups on the hilltops. The word must have gone round that I want a greyhound because Kazakhs and greyhounds began to come in and innocently plant themselves and the dog in my way and in the direct gaze of my eye. This was difficult for them, when I so desired, but they have more patience than I; seeing that I saw the dog, they then proceeded

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to give the dog, not me, personal notice, to the infinite and alarmed surprise of the dog, patting the offended animal on the head and expatiating by various gestures to their dog-admiring friends how the wonderful animal swiftly catches a wolf or fox or rabbit and chokes it to instant death by the throat. One man, after vainly trying to make his dog attract my eye, deliberately stepped back with his big boots upon the reposeful beast and the loud yell at once gained the man's point. He then proceeded on the above lines. And they were measly dogs! No dog can look worse than a mongrel, half-starved, weed of a greyhound! I rode away to avoid being so affected by the too frequent repetitions of this performance! Travelling is awful! A horse will bog down in all sorts of unlikely places and the rotten snow is an incessant pitfall.

Monday, April 25

Warmer than ever and the sun gaining strength enough to blister the human nose. Ahdam reported the bridge over the Nura washed away and he will have a bad time getting back so, on the principle of not putting off the evil, I am rushing him back at once. When letters will arrive at Akmolinsk it is impossible to say. It may take two or three weeks. All rivers and creeks are running strong, good luck to them! Learned last night of the Admiral Makharoff's sad end⁹⁹. They are just beginning to show some respect for the power and brains and minds of the Japanese, whom they have up to now contemptuously, lumped all together, as ~~Japanese~~ Kazakhs! (It's painful to make an error like the above like telling a funny story and forgetting the point.) I am very grateful to Japan for fulfilling my prophecy is so completely! She can do it on land also.

Tuesday, April 26

Same warm weather and steady sun. Winds ranging here and there from the south. Today the great expanse of white in the enormous flat valley below us is all broken up by streaks of brown, where the tops of low, rolling ridges occur and, by evening, great sheets of water were standing. At dusk, we suddenly heard the sound of rushing water in the flat and I slopped my way there on Jingie Pingie. Sure enough, a strong miniature river was running furiously, being fed by the valley surrounded by at least 100 versts of hills in sight, all pouring their share of water along all their grooved gulleys and winding hollows. I rode out in the evening to the nearest high hills and zigzagged here and there all over them, as it is impossible to go straight to any point you aim at. It is a scene of tremendous life. When the steppes wake up, they do so in a great hurry and on a big scale. Unless Ahdam arrived at the Nura before noon today, he and his horse will have had to swim. The ground is still cold though and no signs on a general scale of vegetation are yet to be seen.

⁹⁹ Makarov was a Russian vice-admiral who died in the sinking of the *Petropavlovsk* at Port Arthur.

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Wednesday, April 27

A warm strong west wind, full of spring feelings, which was pure alcohol in the air and fairly overcame the sobriety of all the Kazakh children on the place. Such races and wrestling and chanting and games! The boys look very neat in pajamas of thin cotton, cut off at the knee; but the girls are always enveloped in the long shapeless bolster affair and they cling to the colossal boots, which are usually men's originally and which they cheerfully wear and, having small feet of splendid shape, they have plenty of room in these boots to tread them down into all sorts of angles, which does not seem to distract them in the least or to affect their natural walk. A Kazakh woman's strides are as long as a man's and, although they do all the rough hard work and everything a man does, they never look masculine in the least; while some of those brawny Cossack girls are men disguised. Of course, with few exceptions, the hard work knocks the grace out of the Kazakh woman but it is all there, in the little bolster of the Kazakh girl, more especially in the motions of hands and arms; and the upright carriage of the boys is a sight to behold.

I worked most of the day on some slag samples Mussen sent but, in the evening, I rode out among the soft, squelchy, clay flats and into the hills. Here I met a Kazakh herder hunting his horses. I joined his hunt and we found them tucked away in a hollow. He caught a horse, transferred his saddle to him, and turned out the one he was riding; this explains why the Kazakh always rides a horse in good condition. He then joined me and we rode on, much amused, for he could not understand anyone riding nowhere in particular and not looking for stock or having any reason for so doing. He spoke no Russian but I managed to keep conversation going and to understand a lot he said. Rain fell on us before we returned. Real rain!

Thursday, April 28

A Florida April day with an east wind. The sun cast shadows as clean-cut as moonlight and, with no haze, the view was unlimited, so I dedicated it to looking at distance from hilltops, sprawling on the warm ground in the lee of sheltering rocks which had absorbed a power of heat. Feeling absolutely cut off for two or three weeks, I can sprawl with a clear conscience and, although Gibbon is heavy to take around, he fits in with the bigness of the view and I wrestled with the Nicene and Athanasian Creed all afternoon and ended being none the wiser. Gibbon, on the lines, is not nearly as interesting as Gibbon between the lines. To express what he really thought, in words acceptable to pious people, was the work of a genius and the sordidness of the early Christians when they became powerful had killed his sense of religion. His creed, as it seemed to me, was reason. His God was reason, everything was made and happened through reason, and everything has a reason which is responsible for its being.

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Friday, April 29

Diamond day! It thawed all last night and the sun came in with a flying start and, most of the day, had the wind behind it. A southern wind here is warm. The flat below shows as much ground as snow and a definite lake has formed, dammed up by banks of 'waste' ore (which is really well worth smelting) hauled there by former lunatics.

This lake was the Mecca to which troops of children went to paddle and bathe in and to which the big-footed Cossack women clumped to rinse out great bundles of newly-washed clothes. The road crosses here and, every time a Kazakh rode along there, a circus of the children occurred. The outlet for the dam is in the roadway and the water rushes through in a stream about 10 feet across. The old stagers of horses plunged in at once; the young ones were skittish and always refused, but the Kazakh never let up his efforts with feet and hands, looking like a windmill in the distance, and always got across, wet to the saddle top. A very strange duck was brought in today, dead. It was all black with a curved-upwards beak, grooved with saw-like teeth and, on its nose, so to speak, was a comb sticking up. The comb was bright and smooth-surfaced, being broader at the base than the top. Yakoleff sketched it in watercolours but he exaggerated its peculiarities till it looked like a duck with the head of a 'gator and the comb was a balloon. He will send it to a museum (the sketch) and says he knows it will be unique and make a sensation; and so it will! I wish Dickens had known Yakoleff.



Kazakh woman with her daughter

Saturday, April 30

Same fine warm fresh day. Steady thaw, so that you could almost watch the change in the big snow-sheets of the valleys. By evening, apart from a few long, winding, white streaks which mark the watercourses, where snow has drifted deeper, the flat was bare. Grass is coming up fast, also herbs and big-leaved plants in wet spots, and leeks are pushing up the ground in the damp, stiff clay of the flat. Camels are shedding very fast, some have already lost all their shagginess and have necks like a plucked chicken, long and scraggy as a bird's. Their winter felts are also taken off and put away.

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In the morning, I saw a big group of Kazakhs carrying something out of the camp, a funeral, and I followed and attended the whole proceeding. First, a large number followed to the outskirts of the mine limits, all being men (with one boy) walking and riding; at the mine limits, they all stopped and the men bearing the burden laid it down so that all could pray and prostrate themselves. This done, the great majority returned and only a very few continued to the cemetery. Six men carried the body (it was a woman); two other men, each of them, carried a board; another man, the husband, carried a big roped bundle of hay and the small boy, the son, carried a big saw. The queer little cemetery, full of piles of rocks on a sloping hillside, was quite near. Here were two men digging the grave, which was then about 3 feet deep in dry rocky soil of limestone rock. The men laid their burden down on the hillside and all examined the grave and held an animated discussion, finally concluding to deepen it. Then they all sat down and chatted contentedly while one man worked in the grave and another man sawed the boards into lengths of about 2 feet, the grave being about 14 inches to 16 wide; I could not see the reason for those 2-foot pieces. All took turns at the work. The bundle of hay, I supposed, was to make a soft resting place for the body, and, in the meantime, the husband was sitting on it with much comfort. He was very silent, a big black-bearded Kazakh and looked very depressed but showed no signs of grief; and the boy's face was only perplexed. The body was invisibly wrapped in a big roll of clean felt and tied with broad, bright bands of camel's hair rope. They invited me to sit down and seemed pleased I was there.

After half an hour's work, they all consulted again, and again concluded to deepen it, and again they sat around and chatted. I noticed the man pour out onto his thumbnail, in the usual way, his tobacco stuff which they chew, but he was evidently much distracted for he sat quite still and the wind blew away all the tobacco little by little; his hand, after a time, relaxed and the thumb took its usual place; he had forgotten all about it. They discussed the woman and said she was a good woman and too young to die and that the baby might die too and that "no doctor" was bad; and I agreed for it was all spoken to me. At last, all was ready and the grave was 4 feet deep. They picked up the burden and brought it to the side of the grave and there, a man measured the length of the body with his whip and concluded the hole was long enough, so they unwrapped the big felt, which I thought the body would be buried in, and inside was a clean white cotton shape, very human. I noticed that, in passing flat, soft ropes under the shape to lower it by, they carefully held up the big felt so as to keep the sun's rays from touching the body and this seemed to be very important. Carefully shielding her, they lowered her down and the hay was still tied up and unused and it was a great puzzle to me, also the boards,. When she was lowered finally, one man (not the husband) stepped down and saw that all was right and then the boards were brought and laid on the surface of the ground across the grave, no earth being thrown onto the body. The boards exactly made enough to cover the entire opening; then the hay was untied and spread over the boards about 9 inches thick, and, lastly, the earth was shovelled upon the hay. The hay was only to keep the earth and stones from falling through the boards onto the body. All helped to put the earth back, using their hands as shovels, even the small boy. When all was done, and the pile neatly patted into a symmetrical shape they rested and said to me "finished", smiling pleasantly.

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Soon, they all, at a sign, half knelt, half squatted in a half circle and one man prayed in a queer sing-song chant for a very brief time. Then they waved their hands over the mound and it was all over. At once they returned, the husband carrying the big roll of felt, the boy, the saw and the men, the shovels. The grave pointed east and west as did all the other graves there, the feet to the east. It was all very simple, very kindly, very respectful and there was nothing to offend anyone's feelings. I am glad to have seen it!

Sunday, May 1

Another lovely day! After the long winter, these days strike home. All Kazakhs are in yurts now but they do not travel about much yet, on account of the wet and mud across their paths. But they are supremely happy and their queer chants may be heard at all hours of the day and night. In the afternoon I rode out due south on the road, the regular caravan route to Tashkent, to find Chuan Chubay an iron mountain of local renown. I found it less than 10 versts away by enquiring from herders and at auls. It is a big hill and it is ore of high grade. It has little vegetation on it and is of a black brown colour, standing up prominently. The whole country around is impregnated with iron and some day it will be a flourishing, dirty, nuisance of a valuable mine. Near it is the most delightful aul I ever saw, full of yurts, people and children. The situation and view from this aul are both glorious and the inhabitants particularly inquisitive and friendly. I spent a long time among them and left reluctantly at dusk, nearly losing my way going home. The Kazakh life is a wonder and a joy; their life must be good to create such absolutely happy faces.

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Monday, May 2

A red-letter day! "Coursing on the Kazakh Steppes" for a big headline. At 9am, a Kazakh and a friend I recently met arrived with his greyhound and proposed a hunt. I was ready and Yakoleff also came, bringing a Kazakh with him to run about and add to his importance. We went seven versts away to some long sloping hills with rocks all mixed up with grass, and wet places where the big snow banks were. We met four more Kazakhs and the same glorious greyhound I tried to buy before. At once we started, strung out in a long line, to beat up jack-rabbits and by 1pm we had killed four. Then we went to a yurt nearby and had a samovar and food and by 2pm were off again. By 4pm we had got three more, one to each man's saddle, and by 5pm we were home. The dogs, two of them, were very good indeed, being sensible, well-trained and full of endurance, for these jack-rabbits are demons on foot for speed and power. They have more speed and staying qualities than the Minnesota jack-rabbits and they have the same peculiarity of almost invariably taking a wide circle to the left. The Kazakh is out for blood, as he eats the meat and uses the skin so, when a rabbit goes to ground under a rock, the Kazakh drags him out (if he can) and promptly cuts his throat. Some of the courses were three and four versts long; only one short one of a few hundred yards downhill and a jack-rabbit is no good going downhill. The riding was execrable! But they ride for all they are worth over rocks and everywhere and one had to follow suit, and I assisted at the funerals of four rabbits. Thunderstorms at dusk. Rain, lightning and grumbling from up above.



Kazakh hunting dogs

Tuesday, May 3

This is written on May 8! I have been away for a trip among the Kazakhs and returned yesterday. Although away on the steppe I took notes and can give each day in detail.

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Last night Djakin Moustaphin, the Kazakh Russian official magistrate and Eeskok Djamanteekoff, the Kazakh magistrate, arrived. Djamanteekoff is Moustaphin's brother; he was dressed very gaily in very fine clothes, for he is the second richest



Djakin Moustaphin and Eeskok Djamanteekoff, with a colleague or secretary

man in the steppes, the richest being Sultan Jengar of the Nura valley. I took them to my room, where they slept on the floor, and made them feel at home. We arranged that I should return with them as their guest for as long as I pleased and, being without outside communications with the rest of the world for a week or two, I accepted and at 9am today, we left.

The day was very fine with a southwest wind and a few rain showers circling about. We jog-jogged along at the regulation Kazakh amble in a beeline southwest, taking everything as it came, and much of it was wet and soft; seeing steppe-hens, ducks of all kinds, whoopers and innumerable big hawks of various colours. At 2pm we had gone 35 versts, and it seems slow but every man, every herder, every collection of yurts we passed had something to say to the big men; grievances, injuries, requests, all were settled in their quiet way from horseback.

At 2pm we came to Djamanteekoff's yurts, Moustaphin's being 15 versts further on. Here we stayed two hours, eating and drinking: tea with

sugar, and boorsaks strewn all over the table. After half an hour came the enormous wooden platter of meat, which consisted of horsemeat, mare's meat (they distinguish them) goat and sheep meat, all mixed together, and everyone bared his knife and waded in. All talk stops and only the sound of pigs at the trough is heard. I was plied with choice morsels and ate them all, of every variety.

Soon a very old Kazakh came; he was treated with much respect and he was certainly a fine specimen of the bluff old squire. He had a grievance to air and he aired it against an imaginary enemy, his whole face twitching with rage. It ended in his asking

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the magistrates to come as his guests (of course that included me) to his yurts and try a case there, against his enemy in person. His yurts were 30 versts away in another direction, due east.

We left soon, about 20 Kazakhs lined out abreast, jogging along together, and had to cross the Djaman Sara Soo River (Bad Yellow Water). This was deep and strong but we crossed alright and soon came to a lot of yurts where we dismounted so that I could be shown some fine Kazakh silverwork made there by an enormous, old, white-bearded Kazakh, who gave us much koumiss. Our aim was along the valley of this river, a glorious expanse of grass as far ahead as the horizon, with jagged, granite-topped mountains to the right about 5 versts away and Djamanteekoff, who talks Russian, told me it was all his land, even the mountain range, where there is an old Kalmuck topaz mine. We passed swarms of horses and other stock all belonging to Djamanteekoff; he showed me with great pride his winter aul, tucked far off under the flank of the mountain. He said he owned 1300 horses, 1000 sheep, 100 goats and 100 camels, all this valley, and had, besides, 20,000 rubles in his strongbox. Seven fathers before him were rich and it was all his! His age was exactly mine, even to the month, and this struck him almost dumb and clinched his friendship, and he promptly asked me if I would take his son, if I lived at Uspensky, and teach him English ways, entirely at his expense. He is a very fine-looking man of the Turkish type and his son was a wonder to look at, a little chap seven years old. He told me to come to him for anything I want, anything, and I see a chance, if Roos Bai does not turn up, to get the costumes I need.

The sun went down and, the night being cloudy, it was very dark and almost impossible to see. The old man's eyes being weak (he was 77 years old) we half lost our bearings and he could not find his yurts readily. This is the season when horse thieves from Karkarolinsk way scour the country and once, when some of our horses whinnied to something in the dark ahead, they all stopped and whispered, "Thieves". Immediately, they made a wide circling movement, the old man being the central pivot, standing still and rapping with his whip on his saddle to guide the rest. There were about ten of us about 20 yards apart so the movement took in a complete circle 400 yards wide in thick karagan scrub. Nothing was found and we jogged on, finding the yurts about 9pm by a fire burning outside. All was comfortable in no time; clean yurts, fine felts and carpets, samovar and much horsemeat, the old man being rich also. I slept between the magistrates and it is the tick season! Exactly the same ticks as in Florida. They (not the ticks) sit up and talk till 1 am always it seems, and it was a long day for me.

Wednesday, May 4

Up at 7 am and, after the simple wash that a small kettle of water poured onto your hands can afford, and after they had all prayed, the samovar and boorsaks appeared and the old man came from his own yurt. Soon the yurt was cleared for action. I sat between Djakin and the old man, with Djamanteekoff the other side of the old man. Kazakhs rode up from all sides and came in and soon the yurt was full. Next to Djakin appeared another oldish, grey-bearded, squint-eyed Kazakh, a foxy, wolfy

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man, an evil thing to see. He was the "enemy" in the case, which was about pasture delimitations, I gathered. The old man eyed his enemy with much disfavour and, as he had previously told the magistrates all about his side of the matter, Djamanteekoff told the squint-eyed Kazakh to proceed. He began with a stream of words that never ended and the Magistrates sat imperturbable, except that Djakin always wears a smile. Soon the old man began to fidget and pluck at his clothes and get apoplectic, and then he exploded and volleyed words at his enemy, and they both talked at once loudly and fiercely. Djakin hushed the tumult with hand up-raised and his pleasant smile, and asked a few questions which both answered at once with fierce glares.

Then the magistrates conferred politely together and witnesses were called upon to speak, no oaths being given or any such nonsense. They spoke from where they sat, big, dignified men and, apparently, their testimony was all against the squint-eye. And again as each man spoke, the babel arose between the enemies and the old man kept calling the enemy "Shorshkah" which means "Pig", absolutely the worst Kazakh insult imaginable. Soon he became so angry that he commenced to spit at the enemy (across me) and, whenever the enemy spoke, he mimicked him derisively. The enemy had sat, quiet and unmoving, coiled like a snake, controlling himself, bearing all these fearful insults but, suddenly, he dashed his whip-thong into the fire till the ashes flew in a white cloud; he whirled upon the old man with eyes green and his teeth snarling and said something, with a hiss. The old man, struggling to rise and kill him could only gargle inarticulately with rage, while Djamanteekoff quietly held him down and soothed him firmly. Moustaphin, with his pleasant fatherly smile, calmly took the whip out of the maddened enemy's hands and looked at the fire. When the old man recovered his language, it consisted mostly of "Shorshkah" with fists up-raised and quivering. Never have I seen such rage, and he was very close to me.

All the witnesses being heard, with several episodes and similar explosions intervening, the magistrates discussed it openly and drew with the forefingers in the dust and then decided against the enemy who, having heard bowed his head in acceptance and called for his horse. Then he began to unburden his heaving soul of all the venom it contained and argued with the judges; Djakin answered him with his pleasant smile and, from the effect on the rest, pulverised his arguments; and Djamanteekoff took up one of the ridiculous small, three string, Kazakh guitars and strummed upon it, absolutely ignoring the tortured man; while the old man laughed bitter laughs, punctuated with much spitting into the fire. The horse came and the enemy strode out, mounted his horse and said "Karsh" to Moustaphin and Djakin by name, most pointedly and was gone; but the old man said "Shorshkah" instead of "Karsh". Then they all, judges and everybody discussed the case and laughed for a long time.

We then rode away due south to try another case, going into most attractive country filled with herds and yurts. Arrived, we first had tea, boorsaks and horsemeat, and then the second case began. This case was most instructive for Djamanteekoff was one of the interested parties involved, so the case was tried before the owner of the yurts, our host, who was also a magistrate of Kazakhs, and Djamanteekoff took no part in it at all. I had thought in the last case that the decision went to the

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rich and powerful old man as against the squint-eyed, poorer man, in the old familiar way; but now I believe that their differences are all simple ones and are judged with absolute justice according to the lights of, not law, but commonsense which is much more just. For here was, practically, the chieftain of the district, a rich influential man, against a poor-looking young Kazakh with a very open and honest face; and the decision went against Djamanteekoff, the rich man. The judge was almost the image of Maccajahn, our Bayandy Kuduk patriarch, only he was very greasy and dirty, which detracted not in the least from his dignity. This case, which was about the right to cut karagan brush on a certain tract of land, was most politely conducted and, although Djamanteekoff was not pleased, he scarcely showed a sign and bowed formally in acknowledgement; and soon both contestants were hobnobbing happily. Djakin was much amused at his brother's downfall and chuckled at him all through the case. The relationship between the brothers is a pleasure to watch.

We soon left about 2pm and rode back about 35 versts towards Djamanteekoff's yurts, skirting the base of the mountain range, which was of the same queer, stratified, granite formation as the Bayan Aul Mountains. Later we passed Djamanteekoff's winter aul. Nearby were many evidences of Kalmuck life; an old dam, many graves with big headstones and in one place, the remains of an old stone aqueduct which, our Kazakhs said, stretched up into the hills to a spring. Djakin told me there was, no doubt, gold in the graves, ornaments etc and, when I asked him why he did not dig it out, he said, simply, that it was impossible to disturb the bones of the dead. Darkness overtook us so we stayed for the night at the yurts of a cousin of theirs, a well-to-do young Kazakh, and spent a most enjoyable evening around the karagan fire in the yurt, watching the horsemeat boil in the great iron cauldron, surrounded by a circle of brown, bearded faces all wrapped in perfect contentment. They boil the meat about three hours and it has been previously well smoked. The plan is to light the samovar and begin to boil the meat at the same time; in an hour the tea is ready and is drunk and boorsaks are eaten; then two hours later the meat is ready and is eaten



A Kazakh meal, the meat wrapped in a layer of fat from a fat-tailed sheep to keep it moist

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alone; your hands being washed before and after eating the meat. This manner of procedure occurs invariably in all the yurts, the intervals being devoted to bowls of koumiss at any moment, and it is small wonder that the Kazakhs are fat and strong and healthy.

The tick question requires constant and thoughtful attention, and Djakin's man scratches Djakin's back.

Thursday, May 5

Last night a curtain was drawn and the wife of our young host sat behind it all the time; whenever she passed in and out, she whispered and the curtain was pulled towards the doorway to hide her movements. She was peeping curiously around the curtain and I caught a glimpse of her; she was of the Hindu type and that seems to explain her desire to be veiled, so to speak. All the other Kazakh women show themselves freely. After tea and boorsaks, we mounted and re-crossed the Djaman Sara Soo River, arriving in about two hours at Djamanteekoff's yurts again, which had moved about 10 versts in our absence. Here all is very gay and luxurious and Djamanteekoff's wife is a most engaging person of the Egyptian type, with most impressive features and very smiling and gracious. Again tea, boorsaks and horsemeat, while his wife showed me her treasures, among them being a knife, fork and spoon of old silver with a French name on them and on the ancient case. Djamanteekoff showed me his 150 ruble shotgun, made by Krupp of Essen and his gold watch (which he never winds up). And Djakin bought nine horses as if he was buying a few apples, strolling about and pointing at one, then another, with his fatherly smile.

At 2pm we left, saying goodbye to Djamanteekoff and started for Djakin's yurts, driving the nine horses before us. The wind was almost a gale in our faces from the south-west and I envied the Kazakhs' long sleeves as it was cold and I had no gloves, and Djakin soon lent me a coat which had sleeves to my knees. Our way lay across Djakin's domain, stretching, in endless fields of grass, broken by ridges and lakes, to the Sara Soo proper, 20 versts distant. His yurts were 15 versts away, he said, but the joke was that they also had moved in his absence and he could not find them in broad daylight. He was much amused and we rode up to hilltops to scan the view below, and asked everyone we met, riding on and on, here and there, in vain. It was nearly sunset when we found them, having written at least 25 versts with the nine horses ahead; the yurt-caravan had just arrived from a trek. All was confusion but, in scarcely over an hour, 9 yurts were up and all was in place and at home; the samovar was started and the meat on to boil. Djakin's wife is a majestic person of the broad, fat-faced Mongol type, not engaging and hopelessly domestic, and he has a big daughter who is the great heiress of the countryside.

Djakin is solidly prosperous, but I missed the gaiety and gay apparel of Djamanteekoff's surroundings. He has two enormous hooded eagles, great taloned monsters, that sit and waggle their hoods all day long on their low perches. He also had a young hawk who is tied and not hooded. He goes in for greyhounds also and had some beauties. The Kazakh in charge of his birds

Uspensky: "Five whole days with two Kazakh magistrates on the steppe, staying at their yurts, and riding everywhere with them"

is a deaf and dumb man, who grunts and moans his desires in a bloodcurdling mixture of sounds and gestures, for he knows no sign-letter language.

Djakin's wife, being domestic, prides herself upon her cookery and the big cauldron is going all the time. She sits and directs, and three or four men, in enormous boots and sheepskin breeches, do the work and, at night, it is a weird sight in the big yurt by the light of the karagan flames. Djakin pays small attention to his family and only his small boy takes liberties with him. His Russian secretary was there and I gave him all the bad news, which spoiled his appetite woefully. After a long evening, delightfully spent, I retired with the Russian to his yurt and the tick question had again to be seriously considered.

Friday, May 6

Last night was very cold and stormy with a touch of sleeting rain but the yurt stood it finely. This morning it is bright, cool and clear with north-west winds. The day was spent in Djakin's big yurt or just outside, watching the ever-moving herds and herders and the contented Kazakh existence. After tea and boorsaks at eight, we had a sweet nutty food and a white creamy cheese which Djakin handed me with a beaming face, for he is very proud of his wife's cookery and takes all the credit to himself. All day, when the big cauldron was not boiling meat, it was concocting strange foods on the most massive scale, the big men-cooks labouring like Trojans. Wheat was pounded up and thrown in and stirred, curdled milks were cautiously added under the watchful eye of the big Mongol woman and flat masses of thin dough floated on the surface of the atrocious looking mass. This was evidently a great effort and all laboured reverently. The big, nice-looking, pink-faced, daughter unearthed from big chests the family-best china and cleaned it, frequently licking the spots which her eye said were dirty, wiping the articles carefully. And Djakin sat from 8am till nearly 12pm playing Kazakh draughts with black and white pebbles on a board marked out on a piece of paper, with a devoted friend of the game. Only meals



A Kazakh rider with a hawk

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disturbed their occupation and each game only consumed about 10 minutes. Both were fine players and well matched and, no matter who won or lost, they cared not a rap, but chaffed each other and laughed like two big boys. Darkness merely called for a candle and the game proceeded.

The place swarmed with lambs, colts and kids and four baby camel-colts staggered in and out of the yurts like intoxicated, fledgling blue-herons; and when the camel colts were suppressed and quiet, the mother camels came and moaned like banshees at a funeral. Everybody happy, everybody well! At mealtimes, the yurt is full of his men, herders and workers, often their bigger boys and their wives, and don't forget the dumb man and, after eating his fill, Djakin hands round big bones and handfuls of meat, calling out the man's name, who takes it and then leaves enough on the wooden platter for his wife, big girl, small boy and small girl who proceed to finish everything. The bones go to the dogs, the greyhounds, who poke their heads, long and white, around the felt flap of the doorway and sniff the lovely odour. The eagles are carefully fed and tended and the hawk eats at table on the wrist of the dumb man. I concluded reluctantly to leave tomorrow morning in case the mail had arrived at Uspensky, and Djakin seemed quite disgusted, with his pleasant smile. So the day ended very late at night.

Saturday, May 7

On appearing early in the morning I saw that they were preparing for another trek, all the camels being brought up, 60 or so in number and, as soon as we had done our tea and boorsaks, the yurt we were in began to come to pieces. I waited until it was all finished and, in only about an hour and a half, all the 60 camels were packed and loaded, every man, woman and child assisting, except Djakin. For his family, Djakin has a tarantass with a troika; he rides and, I noticed the big girl mounted a camel with a platform flat seat on it, covered with cushions and gaily ornamented with tall curved posts and a pheasant tail-feathers, and red and blue strips and tassels of cloth. I left then when they were ready to leave, with a Kazakh servant of Djakin's to take me back. And we returned by a different way, shorter and most direct, but across some very wide and bad flats where the going was very soft and treacherous, requiring much time and care. At a yurt we stopped for dinner and had tea and then horse again, among a poorer class, but just as hospitable. I wanted to pay but Djakin's man would not hear of it and said I was Djakin's guest until I arrived at the mine. It was a fine warm day and the scenery was glorious. We stopped off in yurts for koumiss and I never paid for a thing. The people were told I was Djakin's guest and they just dashed about for everything with glee, for Djakin is beloved among his people. So, in the evening, I arrived at the sordid, dirty old mine, feeling 20 years younger and at peace with all my thoughts.

About 180 versts in five days, all the travelling done on four days on the same horse, Jingo Flingo, who arrived home in perfect condition, having fed upon grass only. The steppe is full of flowers and herbs already and grass is becoming quite thick. Post

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had not arrived, so my conscience was relieved. On the trip, I learned a lot of Kazakh talk and can now understand a lot that I hear. I am back to Gibbon again.

Sunday, May 8

Perfect day. I am appalled by the amount I have written but, in future years, I shall like to see it all again, in print. Yakoleff sent a messenger to Spassky who said he could cross the Nura safely but I did not hear about his going until he had gone, owing, I suppose, to Yakoleff's thoughtfulness, (for some reason or other unknown to me) for you never can guess the devious wanderings of the Russian's mind. My mail has not yet come but it should come now any day.

Monday, May 9

Very warm sun today. Absolutely glorious weather. Even now the with northern slopes opposite are lined with broad streaks and blotches of white, where the deep snow-banks die hard. The hills are quite green and the flats are fast becoming dry. In the afternoon, Allay the Tartar boss here, invited all the Russians and me to a tea at his yurt just over the hill. Yakoleff accepted, so I did! He gave us much meat, including dear old horse again, and I did him full justice. His wife was also a Tartar and wore the strange saffron-yellow dress, very loose and flowing. that Tartars seem to prefer. She did not wear the Tartar cap but a very clean Kazakh white headdress, edged around the forehead with red stitching and seed pearls; for Allay the boss follows the ways of all bosses. Expected mail all day, in vain!



A tarantass on the open steppe

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May 9, 1904

Uspensky

Dear Pomp,

... I have been away for five whole days with two Kazakh magistrates on the steppe far off south, staying at their yurts, and riding everywhere with them. I saw two Kazakh trials before the magistrates and I have eaten any quantity of horsemeat — and may inform you that horsemeat is very good; will you believe it? I never had quite such an interesting trip in all my life. The two magistrates are the most powerful men in this district, and their word is law among the Kazakhs. Djamanteekoff is the second richest man on the whole steppes, for he has 300 horses, 1000 sheep, 100 camels, 100 coats, owns a whole valley of many versts, also a mountain range and a topaz mine and has a strong box full of money. His yurts are very fine and he is most hospitable. He asked me my age and was perfectly delighted when it was exactly the same as his own and when he found out that even the month was the same, he nearly fell off his horse with astonishment. He then became very friendly and asked me, if I lived at Uspensky, I would take his son and heir and teach him English ways ; I was quite safe in saying I would, because I knew I would be living at Spassky instead when the work begins. The boy was a nice little chap of seven years old. It was grand to live their life and see it at its best in the homes of the chiefs.

Djakin Moustaphin is a great old sportsman and keeps eagles, hawks and greyhounds. I saw his two eagles and how I wish that you could see them! Imagine two colossal eagles, bigger than our bald-headed ones, of a dark brown, uniform colour, sitting on low wooden tripod branched perches, each wearing a leather hood which blinded his eyes to keep him from attacking the lambs all around, and fastened by a leather thong to one foot. On the hoods was a tassel of leather, and this they wagged continually, seeming to like the rattling of the sound. But it was their enormous talons that were most striking, the length of the claw, the spread of the foot and the thickness of the leg bone; the hind claw was like this [illustrated] and, if anything, I have made it too small and not curved enough. The man in charge of the eagles and hawks was a deaf and dumb Kazakh. He could handle those big birds though and they seem to like him and when he groaned and grunted at them, they seemed to understand; perhaps he knows the bird and animal languages and could hold long conversations with them, who knows! It may be so!

Djakin told me that the Kazakhs do not hunt foxes in spring or summer, but wait until autumn when the young ones are well grown, which is sportsmanlike and proper. He says the eagles catch more than the greyhounds

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and that they pounce down and grab them with those huge talons in the neck and drive their beaks into the brain through the eyeholes. A Kazakh does not care for a wolfskin so much as the fox's, but they kill wolves if they trouble their flocks. His greyhounds were also enormous and very powerful and graceful and he values his dogs at 100 rubles each, for they are not afraid of the biggest wolf; two of them together despatching any wolf. His hawks were of different varieties and were all young, swift and keen looking. They are merely tied loosely by the feet and are not hooded, and they carry them about into the yurts and everywhere. Djakin says he will take me in the autumn and show me how his eagles kill foxes and I will surely somehow manage to go. In certain places, there are swarms of foxes he says.

Hearing nothing but Kazakh all the time, one could not help learning and I can speak a number of words and distinguish verbs, nouns and other parts of grammar; I could get along alone for simple wants. Both magistrates speak Russian also, so I could always fall back on that. Just before leaving for this trip, I spent a day with four other Kazakhs coursing jack-rabbits and the greyhounds picked up seven.

There were two hounds, long, lean white dogs with long-fringed ears and feathering down the backs of their legs. They are beautiful dogs if pure bred. As the rabbits (hares really) always live near or among rocky hills for protection from big hawks and eagles, it makes it much harder for the dogs but they, the dogs, overhaul them at a wonderful rate and go bounding among the rocks as if they are almost flying in the air. Riding is a fright, because everyone tries to be first at the finish if they get any kind of a decent start and, unless your horse is fearless and surefooted, something is going to break. By the time the kill is completed, and if you are there, you are popping out with fright. You can see your own eyes! Jingy Pingy thinks it is a fun game and when hounds go, he follows with keen pleasure and never falters, just slams through everything; and where a horse is not afraid to go, surely is fit for anyone.

I am expecting letters every day now, having had no news of any kind for two weeks. I don't know anything! The war, the politics, the strifes and the squabbles, the pleasures and pains of the outside world are all behind me and almost out of sight! But now I hear that the Nura can be crossed on horseback and I am waiting, hooded, on my perch, to strike my talons into the mailbag and tear out the contents with my beak. And I am furious and can smell sealing wax in the wind!

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And now you lucky girls, you are soon sailing Westward Ho to the land of promise. I so often think of our last long ride to Lake Hart when you tumbled off that fence into the lake near Mississippi creek. But if you were coming here I would take you to Djakin's to be his honoured guests and you would be supremely happy.

May you have a glorious summer and find a skunk please for Minor and tell me all about The Point itself out of the bountiful kindness of your being.

From (signed in Kazakh), Toshiy.

Tuesday, May 10

Another fine day but blowing hard from the south-west which generally betokens trouble. Checked over some slag assays to satisfy an insane idea, all the morning; and until 4pm monkeyed with a piece of ore a Russian here gave me, from a claim in the neighbourhood; found much lead and a little silver. He said it was the other way about and still believes it; in the way of all prospectors! In evening took Jingie Pingie for a spin and roamed over the hills to the south. 20 minutes ride takes you to the top of hills with 100 versts in sight on all horizons: lakes, hills, ridges, flats, ranges; green, brown, hazy blue, yellow, all the shades imaginable. No one has a better park to ride in in the summer time! No mail has come and I have made up my mind that it will not come until Saturday evening. So, tomorrow morning at 8am, I am going to climb on Jingie Pingie, say farewell, and set sail for Djakin's yurts, 60 or 70 versts away; for, on Thursday and Friday, big Kazakh holidays, 1000 Kazakhs will assemble at his yurts and hold sports and he asked me to be sure to come. I shall take a Kazakh with me and a toothbrush; nothing else. Back on Saturday evening to open my many letters which never come. I forgot, the Kodak must go and 48 films! Goodbye!



A successful jack-rabbit hunt

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Wednesday, May 11

At 9am I left with a Kazakh (Allay the boss's brother; dressed in a bright green holiday coat) for Djakin's. Day was cold and windy, north-west, but it did not matter a bit. As my Kazakh only guessed at the direction vaguely, we zigzagged from aul to aul asking where Djakin's was, crossing the Sara Soo continually which made the ride there at least 70 versts. Country flat of course along the rich valley; and along the Sara Soo are numbers of old 'kurgans' ancient monuments to the dead, some being very interesting. Stopped at 2pm at a yurt for tea and boorsaks. Here were several women, dressed most gaily who were particularly familiar in their ways. They tried, laughingly, to take my watch and ring from me but I fought them tooth and nail. I have never seen Kazakh women act like that before and it was interesting, if unpleasant. My Kazakh was horrified and shocked and so was I!

Anyway, I left intact and we arrived at Djakin's after a very long ride. Near Djakin's we found a dead horse and a man of Djakin's busily cutting it up for meat. I recognised the deceased animal; it was the horse that my Kazakh guide from Djakin's to the mine rode with me. It had petered out placidly on his return home and it was now to furnish much succulent meat for Djakin. Later on, I fancy, I helped to eat the deceased. They received me fondly in his yurt, and all his family including the tall, shy, quiet girl, treated me as a family friend and not as a foreign infidel stranger. Night was cold and windy!

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Thursday, May 12

I discovered I was a day ahead in my calculations but Djakin said it was all the better. The holidays are tomorrow and the day after. This day I spent largely visiting Kazakh friends I met on my last trip, at auls all around. You may see here at one time over 2500 horses and many foals, scattered in the valley in full sight, belonging to Djakin, Eeskok and a few hundred other Kazakhs; besides the sheep, cattle and several hundred camels. This is the best of Kazakh society in wealth and breeding. The



A Mullah, painted by Marian; he has a broken foot and is probably not the one who so affected Frank

valley of the Sara Soo is Fifth Avenue, be it known! Among my numerous calls, I found Djakin's big girl and she, not under the parental and maternal eye, came and cut up my meat for me which we ate together in a greasy, friendly manner. This was an enormous honour, for these aristocratic Kazakh girls are more haughty than princesses. Also called on Djakish Sagentoff at whose yurt we spent a night on the last trip with Djakin. He owns the shy wife of Hindu type who hid behind the curtain. Today she was apparent in full embarrassed view and she is particularly beautiful. Djakish showed me his grey stallion which will race tomorrow, a most striking, neat and powerful horse of thoroughbred appearance. Called on Eeskok Djamanteekoff and saw all his finery, saddles, bridle, stirrups, all silver-worked. Also his two eagles; and rode through his big bunch of horses. Drank koumiss to the point of collapse. His is very strong and it does actually behave like alcohol in a mild degree, if you drink enough!

In the evening, Mr and Mrs Yakoleff, with a Russian driver, a gay Cossack, and two Kazakhs, arrived with a troika, carabok etc. Spoiled my fun largely, for I like the Kazakhs best alone and Djakin is stiff with Yakoleff, not liking him too much. Djakin gave us, as guests, a big yurt to ourselves and we ate in there, but he hauled me off between times to his own family yurt where all was placid but that a Mullah sat, with his head wrapped in a white turban and, at intervals, broke out most

unexpectedly and alarmingly with loud chants and prayers! He was a fanatical-looking person and would cheerfully have cut my infidel throat. This went on till 12 midnight, many dozens of guests coming and going all the time. Horses tied up, saddled, or hobbled in schools all around; and real good humour. I might add an interesting fact. A brother-in-law of Djakin's touched me for 10 rubles today in the old familiar way. And I gave it freely, for tomorrow is race day and the fever gripped him strongly; he said he would repay, also in the old familiar way!

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Friday, May 13

This was a holiday and all Kazakhs had on their best clothes and rode their finest horseflesh. Djakin's big girl was a flaming, dazzling, shimmering sight and Djakin's smile was enlarged all day. These wife showed me Djakin's big girl's best clothes, which were locked up; also her own. They were all of silk, made by her and the colours are in perfect harmony. Sandals, ornaments, coins, and silks in great profusion, most wonderfully stitched and fashioned and folded up by an artist in packing. Djakin's big girl hovered around in great confusion. A steady stream of callers riding up all the morning; koumiss flowing like water and the samovar red hot while, in another cook-yurt, the boorsaks were being made in bushels with the dumb man in charge; and men in sheepskins and big boots, bare-chested and brown, kneading the dough in a most muscular manner. Djakin's hospitality is proverbial. He once killed and ate 40 horses and 60 sheep on one holiday, he told me with his simple smile, as if he were asking for a light.

In the afternoon early we all went to a great concourse of yurts, about 50 all told, about three versts away. Djakin's big girl with Mrs Yakoleff left in the carabok, with bells and galloping troika. Here were assembled perhaps 1000 Kazakhs, riding from afar in long lines, abreast like cavalry, from all directions. The yurts were all welcome for guests, with koumiss, meat, tea and boorsaks. In one, some women sang in chorus while Kazakhs on their horses encircled the yurt and listened, 500 strong, in rapt attention. If a Kazakh was noisy, he was instantly bonneted with good humour and precision. The singing was not lovely but pleased the riders immensely and the women were unseen all the time. I was introduced to a holy Mecca-Mullah, a kindly old man, and I left the Russians entirely, cruising around with Djakin and Sagentoff, the racing man and Eeskok, the gay and frivolous. The absence of vodka makes it all a harmless and jolly form of fun! And this went on until sundown when we rode home to Djakin's in long lines abreast, with Kazakhs singing and playing their banjo affairs from their horses. The hubbub simmered down at 1 am.

Saturday, May 14

This was race day and, as the Kazakh consults the convenience of his racehorse instead of the grandstand, the race began at 8am, more or less. At six, everything was life and bustle and I inspected Djakin's two racehorses for the last time. One was far too fat and the other a lean shadow. I told Djakin so, but he only said "God will decide"; having washed his hands of all responsibility. At 7am the Kazakhs were coming in troops, strung out abreast in perfect lines as they love to travel. Soon we were off to the racecourse, 5 versts away. The day was perfection. A conical hill with a flagpole was the finishing point, with a great concourse of mounted Kazakhs. The starting point is miles away, out of sight, and the 28 starters cantered off at once with no fuss, to begin. The distance they must go was about 20 to 25 versts to the start. They then race back the same distance to the finish in a straight line. This is an appalling feat when you come to think of it, for the riders are small boys, not averaging

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10 years old. As it would be a long time before they returned, the Kazakhs settled down to rest. The young and giddy wrestled, but all were thinking of the race and eagerly discussing the 28 horses. No sign of any betting was to be seen.

After a while, selected groups of Kazakhs on splendid horses rode out along the track of the race and occupied hills in the far distance, both to pass the word along swiftly of the approach of the gallopers and also to act as place-markers to the exhausted racers. They are allowed to dash among the competitors, grab the long halter-rope ahead and drag the horse along while other enthusiastic friends beat the racer from behind. It was a thrilling sight. Here came the almost invisible sign to the straining hundreds of eyes and, at once, all mounted, while far off the black specks closed around the central mass and the small dust-cloud enlarged. As they came very swiftly nearer, the mob had increased to easily a hundred frenzied Kazakhs around five straining racers, all yelling, whipping and shouting. They swept by with our gay Cossack in the thick of it, laying into Djakish's grey stallion with cruel effect for, from second place, he drew ahead by two lengths and won the long race. Such a glorious rush of many men and horses I never expect to see again; I was quite close with Jingo Flingo trying his best to keep up.

Djakish's victorious horse then paraded like a peacock and I never saw such a proud object. He knew all about it; and they brought out the horse's dam, a fine old grey mare, and paraded them together. Yakoleff had the tact to offer Djakish 100 rubles for the horse. 100 rubles! When 1000 would not buy him! Djakish simply said he was not for sale. This was a big race and they came from far and near! Djakin's horses never finished at all till it was over but he congratulated Djakish genially; Djakish being Djakin's cousin. This ended the meeting; just one grand exciting race and the Kazakhs lined up again and rode back to the many yurts in the neighbourhood. Again, tea and boorsaks and meals at Djakin's and, at 11.30am we said "Karsh" to the entire family, starting back for the mine along with the carabok. The first 35 versts were done very fast and I let the carabok go on and jogged along with the two Kazakhs, arriving at 9pm, 70 full versts. Found my mail had come this morning from Spassky so I timed my jaunt very correctly. My enforced seclusion by the Nura had not been wasted.

Sunday, May 15

Busy writing letters to send to Spassky. Mussen and Nyemkoff will be here now any day. I'm afraid to write more as this is already a book, badly written! Ate, drank, went to sleep.

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May 15, 1904

[to Olivia]

... Djakin's horses were decorated with their tufts of feathers on the foretops and tails, and he pulled some feathers from the back of his infuriated big old eagle and hung them to his horses' necks. The racers were just ahead, Djakin just behind them and about 30 of his guests lined up on each side of him, mounted on the best horses, with silver mounted bridles, saddles and stirrups, and with coats of flaming stripes and vivid greens. Kazakhs everywhere, long lines of cavalry coming from all the four quarters of the steppe. The hill which was the finishing point was in full sight, a single, sugar-loaf-shaped hill, standing in a great plain. There were about a thousand Kazakhs assembled and, as Djakin was the judge, he was greeted respectfully and affectionately. A prancing group of 28 racers collected in the circle of 1000 Kazakhs. Djakin told them a few things in a fatherly way and then waved his hand; the Kazakhs parted on one side and off cantered the racers to their far-away starting point, escorted by about 100 enthusiastic admirers. They cantered away while the hundred admirers dropped off at various stated and arranged places within a distance of about five versts from the finishing point. Then the great crowd talked and laughed, and jogged about, or dismounted, all waiting patiently. Some few wrestled but the great majority had come to find out which was the fastest long distance galloper of the steppes and took small interest in anything else. This was about 7 o'clock in the morning. About 8.45 there was a stir among the riders on the faraway hills where the horizon met the steppes and a murmur passed over the crowd. Everyone mounted and gazed up the long flat. There, far off, you could see the scattered horsemen closing in from the sides like a fan and, in the centre, was a black clump with a little cloud of dust around. It came and grew and soon you heard the wild yells and the whips and it was a sight! I rode to meet it and to join in. There were five gallant racers close together and the glorious grey was in second place; while all around and among them were the 100 or so Kazakhs who rode at the start with them. They were on picked, fresh horses and they were galloping furiously, beating the racers with their whips, each man choosing the horse he wished to win. As they came abreast with me, a wild sweep of rushing men and horses, a roar of voices, whoops and whips. Jingie Pingie joined manfully and I could keep up sufficiently to see the glorious grey horse win by a very little. How such a number of men could gallop so fast and so close together without any accident was a marvel. Djakin pronounced the grey horse of Djakish as the winner and he received the prize of three camels and then the horse paraded with intense pride with the old grey mare who was his mother. The race was over and the champion was declared. There were no bets to decide and all at once left in the same long lines for their yurts,

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and we rode back with Djakish and his horse, feeling very proud indeed. It seems all wrong that you and Pomp did not see it. No continuation.

Monday, May 16

Fine weather. Sent a messenger to Spassky today with my mail. The man provides his own horse, rides there and back, 150 good miles, for \$2 cash. They brought me some crystals today from what is claimed to be an old topaz mine. I tested them with blowpipe tests and they all point towards topaz. Some were clear and pale yellow, most being clouded and grey. The place they come from is 40 versts away.

Tuesday, May 17.

Perfect weather; snow-banks are still in sight on hills, but the flat is quite dry and you may ride almost anywhere. Russian reports of the Battle of the Yalu have killed 15,000 Japanese and 3000 wounded besides. People here believe it joyously. Nothing doing my way; I expect Mussen at any time.

Wednesday, May 18

Fine day with scorching sun. I rode with Yakoleff and several other Russians to a lake 18 versts away, to shoot ducks. It is a typical steppe lake; there were ducks and geese but they were wild and knowing which, as they are nesting, was a good thing. Several guns made much noise but the day's bag was one coot. I found one Russian in the lake up to his waist, shooting up into the air to hear the shot fall into the water all round him; I hurriedly left the lunatic. Found a hawk's nest on the ground with two white eggs, like hen's eggs. Later, womenfolk arrived and tea and sweet cakes etc and we returned by 9pm.

Thursday, May 19

Splendid weather. This is the Czar's birthday but the Russians did not know it until I told them. They only knew it was a holiday and that is all they cared about. Mussen arrived in the afternoon bringing letters and papers. War news is pathetic for Russians and they feel it keenly. In the evening Mussen and I rode to the Iron Mountain, Chuan Chubay, and brought back samples. The ore is a straight haematite and would be worth a mint anywhere else.

Uspensky: "Five whole days with two Kazakh magistrates on the steppe, staying at their yurts, and riding everywhere with them"

Friday May 20

Another splendid day. In the evening Mussen and I rode out south to try to find a copper claim about 20 versts away. We never found it and were nearly eaten up by mosquitoes. They are very bad, the Kazakhs say, all this month. Coming back, we stopped at some yurts to drink koumiss and there we found Djakin Moustaphin and Eeskok Djamanteekoff on some tax business; many Kazakhs being there also. We had tea and a chat and then they rode with us, about 20 of them, to the mine. Here Yakoleff was very hospitable, invited them all in, poured samovars into them in steady succession, killed a sheep and had it brought in in the Kazakh style. We all waded into it ferociously. This went on all night till dawn, interspersed with music, songs and dances and from both Kazakhs and Russians on their respective legs and instruments. It was a great success and the Kazakhs were charmed. At dawn they all mounted their horses and rode away, full to the neck.

Saturday May 21

Fine hot day. Rain is needed for the young grass. Prepared some iron samples for assay tomorrow. In the evening Mussen and I rode to Chuan Choobay again and Mussen prowled about with a hammer, geologising. Mosquitoes make riding almost impossible.

Sunday May 20

Splendid day. Assayed iron samples until 4pm. Then we all, Yakoleff and many Russians, with women and children, held a kind of picnic at a spring nearby: samovar, cakes and much boiled sheep which was cooked on the spot by Kazakhs. Later the scent of the sheep attracted many Kazakhs and a fine gorge ensued. Had to make a smudge smoke to keep off the mosquitoes.

Monday, May 23

Rained last night and today more showers fell, coming from south west. We packed up all the assay outfit, ready for shipment to Spassky,. Took us all day.

Uspensky: "Five whole days with two Kazakh magistrates on the steppe, staying at their yurts, and riding everywhere with them"

May 23, 1904

Dear Willie,

It is a long time since I wrote to you and I am wondering where this letter will overtake you. Will you get it in Paris in a matter-of-fact way or will you ride down to the station and wait for the train that is always late and get it at Narcoossee? In a day or so I leave this delightful place, where the steppe is big and grand, where all is on a bigger scale than ever, hills, mountains, flats and hospitality, and I go to Spassky, where the grubby old zavod roars and blackens, where the steppe is smaller and meaner, where the Russians are contemptible and the Kazakhs half Russians! Sorrow and shame!

Mr Mussen is out here now and he is my jailer. I leave in chains soon.

I have been to Djakin Moustaphin's yurts, for four whole days and nights, living the same wonderful life, and every day displayed its best and freshest weather and I had to ride about 200 versts across the steppe and away from roads and Russians. There I met many Kazakhs whom I knew and I felt quite at home; and this time I was treated as an honourable friend of standing and they took me into their private yurts and did not hide their womenfolk from me as they did before. I met Eeskok Djamanteekoff again, the rich Kazakh, and went with him to his palatial yurts where his bard sang and improvised songs in my poor old honour. Also I visited the yurts of Djakish Sagentoff, a cousin of Djakin's and there I saw a most glorious grey horse who was in training for the coming great 25 verst race, which I saw and about which I will tell you.

Uspensky: "Five whole days with two Kazakh magistrates on the steppe, staying at their yurts, and riding everywhere with them"

As his yurts were quite close, I used to jog over on Jingo Flingo¹⁰⁰ to see the horse do his gallops every early morning. A small boy rides him. The plan is simply to gallop him unendingly over the steppe here, there and



*Abish making boorsaks,
painted by Marian*

everywhere for about an hour. Then he comes back as bright as a daisy and they slowly ride him at a walk for about two hours until he is cool; and all the while the Kazakhs sit around and admire him and say 'Eeeai, eebai!' every now and then feeling his muscles. The horse is then well rubbed down with a rag of rough camel's hair and his coat was as glossy as could be. He was more like a thoroughbred than any horse I ever saw on the steppes, a big, tall fellow, dappled grey, deep girthed with grand legs and a brave sensible head. I write at length about him because a good lesson follows. Djakin also had two horses in the race but they were not as good horses to begin with, and he is too busy a man to give his personal attention to their training. So one was too fat and the other poor thing had ribs like bed slats with no mattress and, for a long race like that, against the champions of the whole steppe, they had no chance; even I knew that!

The great day came at last. At break of day, all was action and it was glorious with a fresh dew wetting the grass and a cool south wind to temper the blazing sun. All the early-morning long lines of Kazakhs abreast rode past our yurts to the racecourse a few versts away, while we hurriedly drank hot tea and munched boorsaks¹⁰¹. Everyone was

excited and when a racer went by, with a little monkey boy...

No continuation.

¹⁰⁰ FVA's much prized horse.

¹⁰¹ Boursaks (as they're apparently usually written) are a unique fried bread with a puffy appearance consisting of flour, milk, salt, sugar, eggs, butter, and yeast.

Uspensky: "Five whole days with two Kazakh magistrates on the steppe, staying at their yurts, and riding everywhere with them"

Tuesday, May 24

Grand day. Mussen and I, and a Kazakh guide, rode 35 versts to the yurts of Boy Djiggit, the Kazakh master-worker in iron and silver. He is making my bridle and stirrups. We found him at home and at work and he was very hospitable; he gave us tea, boorsaks and horsemeat and fairly filled us up. Mussen has learnt to like koumiss and we also drank largely of that. Boy Djiggit is also a holy mullah from Mecca and he showed us very strange maps and plans of the temple at Mecca that he brought back from there; it was a great favour for him to show them to us. He and I are old friends at Uspensky. He made me, as a gift, as I watched him, a coiled snake, silver ring to wear; he put it on his prayer turban and got out his prayer rug with the crescent upon it and then prayed for a long time, most fervently. After he finished, he gave me the ring and said he had prayed that the ring would keep me from all harm when I wore it, and men with faces like his do not lie. We exchanged pocket knives as a further token of friendship. I also bought from his wife a small clasp that Boy Djiggit had made from an old 10 kopeck piece and some silver wire. It is very nice work indeed. We rode back by 9pm, mosquitoes being a torture.

19. Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

Wednesday May 25

Fine day and a few rain spots. This morning we left for Spassky; Ahdam and a troika and our two saddle-horses. We lunched and fed halfway to the Nura and by evening, reached the Nura. Here we camped for the night, having our tent and had a good swim. As my last mail messenger to Spassky was beset by five Kazakhs near here, and beaten from his horse, which they stole, Ahdam had to sit up all night with my big revolver and watch our horses. Nothing, though, occurred. I rode most of the day to avoid the dust.

Thursday May 26

Up early and off again at 7 am after a glorious camping night. Arrived at Spassky before noon; found Atkinson well, also found papers and letters for me. In the afternoon Atkinson and I rode out to inspect some yurts for our use here; they were alright, so we ordered them to be put up tomorrow at the works in the garden under the trees.

May 26, 1904

Spassky

Dear Marian,

Today I and Mr Mussen arrived here from Uspensky and I was delighted to find letters from you and Olivia. Letters from you bring back in a flash everything we have ever done together, and my mind gropes back many, many years, for you are really getting hopelessly old. Lake Hart, The Tough Nut Trail, Alligator Lake, Crawford Bay and The Point all crowd each other in a friendly scrimmage and, I believe that of them all, cleaning the ponies and feeding the ducks offer the most delightful memories, for those were glorious days, free any kind of responsibility.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

...Before I left the mine, we had a grand surprise visit from Djakin Moustaphin, Eeskok Djamanteekoff and about 20 other Kazakhs, their friends. They arrived in the evening and swarmed into the manager's house, where I live. The manager was alright, and he at once ordered a luckless sheep to be killed and cooked for a great feast. We ate it at intervals in the Kazakh style, all except the hide, and we kept up the entertainment until dawn of the next day, when they all mounted their horses and rode away, greasy and charmed. All through the night, they and the Russians played on their trifling, small, guitar affairs and danced, and sang everlastingly. Their dances are a mixture of Scottish reels and darky breakdowns, quite interesting and graceful. One young Kazakh sang quite nicely and without the slightest backwardness. They are far too natural to know what shyness is. The Russians all danced their national dances and played the accordion in a nice, spirited and noisy fashion. It was a most happy night for everyone, for the Kazakhs spread a great contentment over all that they come near.

Some days ago a Kazakh was at the mine and I heard him play his 'dombrah' or little, long, futile guitar. Remember that this instrument has only two strings and is miserably made; but the music that man evolved was wonderful. He was a master of his instrument. He knew much music and all his music was descriptive and he could interpret it faithfully. He played a piece which opened quietly, then came a fight and much fury, followed by sad tones which announced a prison and finally came a Kazakh woman, his wife who came and sang to the prisoner, and sobbed on the strings of the poor little two-stringed instrument. The musician would not play the piece again for he said it made him sad. Then he played a wonderful horse race, a long 25 verst race with a story. The story was told by one of the small boy-jockeys, who was far behind and very much distressed. So the small boy, as he rode, despairingly, prayed to Allah to urge on his horse and to give him strength and wingèd feet. He prayed so earnestly that Allah helped the horse and the horse drew up and up while the galloping music quickened its stride and grew louder and louder until, with a splendid burst of speed, the small boy and his horse won the



A Kazakh musician drawn by Marian

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

race, and the musician broke out into a wild chant of praise and thankfulness. It was wonderful! You heard the horses galloping plainly, and he imitated the beat of the hooves with quick raps on the board of the guitar while his fingers thrummed a perfect rhythm of movement. You heard the whips crack and the boys shout and your own pulse grew rapid.

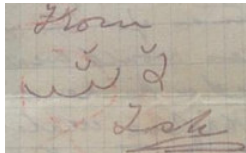
Then he played a Kazakh lullaby which was the sleepest, nicest, most innocent lullaby I ever heard. And all this on a footly little instrument. It seems a shame that such a born musician should have wasted his time on such an instrument. He sat cross-legged, never looking down, gazing at nothing and played his thoughts, unconsciously as it seemed.

... The war news waxed exciting and Japan is proving herself to be stern material. Russians here are very despondent and one feels very sorry for them.

Goodbye, and I hope to be able to write regularly again now and to resume my talks with you.

From,

Tosh.



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¹⁰² Many of the letters from this period ended with a signature in these characters which are, I presume, his name rendered in Kazakh — and so written in Arabic script.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

May 26/7, 1904

Spassky

To Marian

... I wish I could come to Paris! I am torn with desires to see you both, lording it and strutting it in Paris, with all your best plumage and town ways. But the sunbonnets, pinafores, short skirts and brown legs will always be the costume that I shall revere most, when we madly caught rice-boys¹⁰³ in the rush-beds. It must be, though, that we shall have some grand times together again. Anything otherwise seems impossible!

I am back at the big works and the big furnaces and slag-heaps, having left glorious Uspensky with its perfectly choice Kazakhs behind me, and I am very sad. Last night Mr Mussen and I camped on the banks of the Nura with Ahdam, our Kazakh driver and servant. As horse-thieves are very plentiful just now, Ahdam had to sit up till dawn with my big army revolver watching our five horses. My last messenger from Uspensky with your letters for the post had his horse stolen on his way back to me. Five Kazakhs dashed at him near the Nura, knocked him off his horse and kept on knocking at him until he said, "Come in", when they made off with his horse and were seen no more. No Kazakhs assaulted us to our great distress, for we were well prepared and anxious for an adventure. We had a moonlight swim and the river ran surprisingly strong. Tomorrow Mr Atkinson and I move into yurts here and we have found a splendid spot, quite close to a grove of birch trees along the river here and near the small artificial dammed-up lake. There, it will be absolutely private and the place is well-sheltered from the furious south-west wind, about which Olivia may tell you a good deal.

Friday May 27

Holiday. Church bells twanged all day. The yurts arrived and were put up. In the afternoon, Atkinson and I moved in with all our things; it is a delightful spot and quite private.

¹⁰³ Thought to be a derogatory term for Chinese or other Asian descent used during the gold rush days in California.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

Saturday May 28

Continued glorious weather. Loafed about the shady yurt all day, reading and writing letters.

Sunday May 29

Mail leaves tomorrow so wrote letters madly. In the evening we rode around the hills quite near. Atkinson used his new horse. I shoed him for contracted feet and he went better, but Atkinson was badly stuck when he bought him and he volubly bemoans his luck.

Monday May 30

Colder day, inclined to rain and blow. Sent the mail to Akmolinsk. We rode in the evening, about 10 versts to quite a high hill, on the summit of which are traces of an ancient fort. It must have been a great fighting point in the old days, for it commands the whole country. Found two Kazakh herders on it. Like sentries.



A shooting trip

Tuesday May 31

Fine though inclined to rain. Mussen and I rode to Karagandy to see Nyemkoff and to dig with him in old kurgans. We called on the Sultan's yurts on the way. The old man was away unfortunately. Karagandy is as hospitable as ever and the home of chess.

Wednesday June 1

Rained all night and most of the day. Great driving storms from the south-west. Stayed in all day.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

Thursday June 2

Fine fresh day. Mussen rode off to see a copper claim 17 versts away and Nyemkoff and I went to the kurgan place to dig. Here we found a big Kazakh aul and many Kazakhs, so we decided to put it off till the aul moved on, to prevent all possible complications, for the Kazakhs do not like this digging very much. So we went shooting, along a river quite near. We got several snipe, a big long-legged kind who squawks steadily, a duck, two gulls and, coming home a dog! It was a Kazakh dog and, as we passed the aul, it dashed out to attack Nyemkoff's pointer; Nyemkoff, without any hesitation, shot it dead from the carabok in the most casual manner. Mosquitoes were a fright!

Friday June 3

We had arranged to fish with nets in a river near, but we were surprised to see Bastrakoff, his wife and Atkinson drive up. We knew Bastrakoff was taking his wife to Ekaterinburg and that he was going by Bayan Aul, for it was all arranged. He returns in about a month. He has had bad luck, his baby died a few days ago and his wife is ill. Atkinson said he was going to Bayan Aul also for he had just heard that the police have seized all of poor old von Rieben's things at Bayandy Kuduk and among them they have got all our dynamite and four of our caraboks. So Atkinson has gone to try to get them. He will also try to bring Roos Bai and to buy Djoom. This dislocated the fishing. Soon, also our mail came unexpectedly with Nyemkoff's, and I received letters from Paris and The Point and many papers.

Saturday June 4, Spassky

Grand weather. Left Karagandy to ride back to Spassky. Called again at the Sultan's and found him in. He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw. Colours and rugs are glorious. Arrived at Spassky at 5pm and fell headlong into a tub of cold water in my yurt.

Sunday June 5

Good weather. Spent a lazy Sunday day, writing letters and reading. Our regular mail came today. Letter from Mr Fell written in Petersburg on his way here. Russian war news is bad medicine for Russians but they take it like men and say, "Wait a while".

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

June 5, 1904

Spassky

Dear Willie,

Your last delightful, oniony letter arrived like the olive branch to Noah and his Russian battleship. As Noah felt, so did I, and the pigeon being a great big Kazakh made it none the worse. To think that you, fresh from the onion-strewn, fragrant steppes should have made such a mistake makes me — very pleased indeed. And in the bubblings of your mirth you cast reflections as big as rocks at the dumb, faithful head of a real horse. For I want to tell you that Jingy Pingy is a real horse. He proved that last winter in the deep snow struggle from Bayanduckaduck, and he has proved it again this spring underneath your humble and devoted servant. He carried me 600 versts in three weeks and wound up as fresh as any meadowlark sitting on the top of a pine sapling. Handsome is as handsome does and he did it to the hilt. While the Kazakhs I rode with changed their horses, Jingy Pingy only sniffed with disdain. And again, as a long-distance racer against horses, not professional racers, Jingy Pingy took the cake, the whole cake and nothing but the cake and, in three separate races against Kazakhs riding their own horses. Every race was about 10 versts long and Jingy Pingy ran those horses, picked horses, to a panting, sobbing standstill. He left Uspensky the cock of the walk and his fame has spread to Spassky and Karagandy. He is a better and stronger horse than last year and I have been teaching him conscientiously to improve his obstinate ways, with a view to handing him over to your Papa on his arrival, as a well-conducted, sensible horse, bridle-wise and anxious to please. This can be done if one man rides a horse always, and keeps other men off his back, so Mr Mussen and Mr Atkinson have never thrown a leg over JP this year and, what is more, if they do I will cut it off. As far as the armchair part is concerned, if one is bumping to the Kazakh time for nine hours a day, no armchair is too comfortable or too convenient.

Since I last wrote, Mr Mussen and I have been to Karagandy and, yesterday, riding back, we frightened a hawk off its nest. As we came back to see it again, the hawk's mate swooped down and struck Mr Mussen's hat with its claws, uttering all sorts of diabolical screams. Mr Mussen had a gun, so I took it from him for fear he would hurt himself and, while he held the horses, I went on to find the nest in the long grass, one eye upon the desperate hawks. When one of them nearly took my ear off, I blazed away two shots at them to intimidate their fighting blood, being as careful as a bad shot can be not to hit either of the gallant defenders of the young and innocent. For in the nest, were four small hawks just hatched, little fluffy things, all curved hawk beak and eyes. We carefully marked the place and we are coming back to get a young hawk in about 10 days when they will

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

be big enough to be removed with safety. It will be fine to have a young hawk or two on perches around and, later on, a Kazakh can train them for us. Now, Willie, Pomp tells me that she may possibly come out to the steppes in the autumn with Mother and The Boy, and, of course, I am shouting for joy. But, she also tells me, that you will probably not come too. Although I expected that you would be in Paris all next winter, nevertheless it is a hard and savage blow. It is not necessary to tell you how sorry I shall be because I know that you know it, but you don't know how much I shall miss you, you have not the faintest smallest idea. But in my temple of joy there shall be a shrine set apart for you, and there I shall always see you and before it, I shall always express my thoughts and wishes. Nice girls are not to be missed every day and when the occasion arises, it is a bitter misfortune.

You asked me a question lately about Marie Antoinette and I will answer it in this way. I am very sorry for both Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI because I don't like republics at all; and their fall meant an end to that form of government which they upheld. I think that France is a miserable country to what it used to be and I would like to see the Royalists back again on the throne of France. This idea now prevalent, that one man is as good as another, I think is all rubbish, for I know that they are not; and it breeds the worst kind of snobbery in otherwise quite inoffensive and harmless men's breasts. If I knew more, or anything, about French history I would be able to answer this much better and I am sorry. If you would like to pursue this question farther in my direction, I shall be charmed to pursue it back.

Coming back yesterday from Karagandy, we stopped at the Sultan Djumabek's yurts. We found him in the most gorgeous yurt. The interior was white and very high, the felt was white as could be and thick and strong; inside and outside the white was ornamented in bold red and black patterns. The wooden lattice was painted in bands of yellow, brown, light blue, light pink and white; the supports to the round wooden top were painted in bands of the same colour. Along one side were a great pile of boxes all cased in white felts, gaily ornamented in red patterns and along all of one side hung, from the height of the roof and drawn into the curved sides, a glorious rug blazing with colours and with a tuft of fluffy owl feathers in the centre of every pattern. This rug was all fine embroidery, much of it being in gold and silver thread. Beautiful Bokhara rugs cover the floor and there, the old Sultan sat with his grand old smiling face and white beard. He gave us koumiss and wanted to kill a lamb and he was just as nice and kind as he could be. I am writing in my yurt and, whenever I hear anyone outside, I wonder if it is you coming to your yurt which stands, as it used to, near mine.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

You are at The Point now and you will tell me all about it, please, because I want to be there and see it with you and I can't.

Goodbye, Willie,

From (signed in Kazakh) Tosh.

Tuesday, June 7

This is the Czarina's birthday and is a big holiday. Flags are flying and Spassky is bright with barbaric-coloured dresses. Mussen and I rode out to see some copper claims and small mines to the north-east. Some show much work and good ore. Mosquitoes are a perfect pest! Nyemkoff arrived in the evening and the priest with long hair and flowing robes. Chess was started and everyone present succeeded in mating the priest in very short time.

Wednesday, June 8

Grand weather. Spent most of my day in the yurt reading up textbooks in smelting so as to answer intelligently Pellew-Harvey's letters. I see much work ahead of me of most intricate analytical kind and I must break new ground or be broken. Nyemkoff left in the morning and I arranged to go to him on Saturday to dig up Kalmucks and ancient Scythians. Mussen, Nyemkoff and I have organised a small syndicate to share expenses. Sultan comes in almost every day and demolishes a samovar.

Thursday, June 9

Glorious weather! Much technical reading most of the day in a scared look-behind-and-see-if-he's-coming sort of fashion¹⁰⁴. Life is full of trouble! Rode out on Atkinson's new horse whom I am trying to cure of lameness (not a thoroughpin¹⁰⁵; worse, contracted heel). Soon I trotted into a big steppe-hen who stood and gazed at me, a monstrous creature; I was alarmed and dashed back, lame horse and all, for a gun. Returning, the monster had disappeared but I saw two whoopers. Made a long

¹⁰⁴ A memory of school life, perhaps.

¹⁰⁵ Thoroughpin is a cosmetic blemish of the hock involving distention of the tarsal sheath of the deep digital flexor tendon just above the hock.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

stalk and got one at 77 yards. Stalking without cover is easy now; the bird can't see you for mosquitoes. I lost more blood than the bird! These whoopers whoop like Florida ones but, on examining this one, I find it to be much smaller, white tufts on each side of head instead of red patches and much black feathering on the breast instead of blue.

Friday, June 10

Same sunny bright weather! Spent all day, nearly, wrestling with smelting problems and finally sent off a letter to Pellew-Harvey telling him my views as to the kind of new plant needed here. I would like to see his face as he reads it. The letter, really, embodies Mussen's views but dear old Mussen is more cautious than ever and would rather die in his tracks than allow his views to escape him. He lives in a nebulous cloud of possibilities, beliefs, hopes and uncertainties.

Saturday, June 11

Fine day but hot. I rode to Karagandy in 3¼ hours in the heat, but Jingie was gay and full of oats. It was quite impossible to move Nyemkoff anywhere as it was bath night and that sacred Russian rite had to be performed. I must say that the difference before and after in the Nyemkoff family was most strikingly apparent. Weather is hot and dusty.

Sunday, June 12

Blazing hot day. Nyemkoff and I left at 9am with four Kazakhs and shovels, crowbars, picks etc. to dig in kurgans about 15 versts away. They are situated near a river of some size and the place must have been a fort once and a great battleground, for the walls still show where the fort stood and all around are these great mounds of graves. After starting the Kazakhs, we drove along the river and I shot my first big steppe-hen, a grand bird weighing 18 or 20 lbs. It is surely a bustard. Just now they are feeding on leeks and they must be buried in the ground after plucking for two days, to get rid of the smell of leeks. We got other small snipey birds and a few ducks. Going home we soon were delighted to have the mail arrive. Papers etc, no letters.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

Monday, June 13

Day of scorching hot south wind. Just like Minnesota. Nyemkoff backtracked, said he was busy in the coalmine, so I went with another Russian to the kurgans. The Kazakhs had dug a great hole in one and there was nothing there, so I changed them to another and much bigger mound. Then we went to the river and had a glorious swim. Russians are no good in the water. They bob up and down like spinsters at Margate. Then we made tea and ate sooharries. Going home, I shot 5 beautiful snipe. Atkinson turned up from Bayan Aul and, after tea and a much-needed wash, drove on to Spassky in the usual violent hurry to catch a mail. Horses may be killed but one's correspondence to Worcester, Saint Paul and Quebec must be kept up.

Tuesday, June 14

Another red hot day. Nyemkoff's house, hermetically sealed, nearly killed me last night. He backed out again, said he was sick, so I got a horse from him and rode out to the kurgans. The Kazakhs had dug a regular shaft in depth and were working away as if the possibility of a grand cave-in on them was far away. I dragged them out with my tongue and set them to work in another place. Nothing was visible in this last big hole and I have a poor opinion of this

group of kurgans! Rode back and then felt like riding to Spassky in the cool of the evening. Jingie was fresh and soon appeared and with him another horse, which I recognised as Nyemkoff's long-distance racer, a great big fine horse. Riding him was a small, wiry Cossack. Nyemkoff told me casually that he was sending him with me to Spassky with a message. I saw that it meant a race but I said nothing, only I gave the Cossack my heavy gun to sling on his back to even up the weights better and we started. We rode the 45 versts in 2½ hours, and 20 minutes may be subtracted for stoppages for koumiss. One 10 verst stretch we got down to business and, at the end of the furious gallop, the Cossack, who took the lead for eight versts, wilted, for his horse was in deep distress and he pronounced Jingie the better horse. So still we hold the palm!



A kurgan near Uspensky, Marian's painting

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

Wednesday, June 15

Hot dry weather! Sleeping in the yurts is a blessing. All our other arrangements are upside down again. We have moved our rooms to other quarters and our old rooms will be the assay office. Today, four men are tearing down the cookstove in our old rooms and generally preparing for new assay furnaces and assay quarters. All my assay things have arrived from Uspensky and it begins to look like business. Got a new rifle from Akmolinsk today. Mr Fell writes from Moscow that he will be here in two or three weeks.

June 19, 1904

Dear Willie,

The old familiar sound of the rain pattering on the felt roof near your head is going on as I write and the sweeping, slashing southwest wind is booming over the steppes, driving the low clouds on before and fraying their thin parts into ribbons and streamers. It is the first day of the rain and the weather is still warm and soft. My yurt is well protected by bushy, birch trees but the familiar rushing sound of storm, creaking of roof staves, and flapping of loose ropes reminds me of that weird and wonderful night we spent at our camp in the Bayan Aul Mountains, just before we left. My yurt does not leak a drop and it is high and roomy. The floor is entirely covered with felts and above them, camel's hair rugs of fierce stripes of scarlet, orange, white and black. I have a doubled-up mattress, like the one in your last room, on the floor with a rug on it, and a big pillow and this is the Sultan's seat whenever he calls. And the Sultan comes whenever he is in Spassky, for he likes the quiet, and sits cross-legged and happy while I regale him with koumiss and candies. Every day, a Kazakh brings me a tall bottle of koumiss and, by the next day, it is always finished. And all the time I long that this yurt could be at The Point just as it now stands, with rugs, felts and all, with a low, round tea-table for everyone to sit round on the ground, within reach of the puffing samovar. It is wasted here, covering my miserable head.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

Now, I have an awful event to unfold to you. Mr Atkinson went to Bayanduckaduck and returned some days ago. There he saw that immortal horse Djumabek but he did not bring him to me because he said that his forefeet were in such an awful state with great cracks. Hussein, The Brat, also saw him and said it was impossible to bring him and so did Razmussin, so I have bowed my head in sorrow to the inevitable. Maybe later, the inevitable will grow those feet out properly. Nevertheless, I have been circling like an eagle on high and my eye has fallen upon a certain horse of great wonder and promise now in the Sultan's herd, 50 versts away. From several men the fame of this horse has reached my ears and I am going to see him next week and feast my eyes upon his perfections, and, at the same time, to spend the night with the grand old Sultan and feast my appetites upon a boiled sheep and other Kazakh delicacies in the good old way. The horse is young, a grey with spots, I believe, a good saddler and [Kazakh words] the Sultan says. Mr Atkinson also found that all about Roos Bai; Roos Bai's family is in Bayan Aul but Roos Bai was away at Kouyandy Fair (where I would be if I had the wings of a turtle-dove). So far so good! Atkinson left careful instructions with Razmussin to send Roos Bai to Spassky just as soon as he returned. Also, Mademoiselle, I have made the acquaintance of a Tartar merchant at Karagandy, drinking tea at his house and eating a lovely Tartar dish with rice, raisins, onion and mutton in it. This man, I am sure, is an honest and a worthy man for he has an open, massive face and a spreading chestnut beard. His eye is calm and thoughtful and there are no lines of cunning in his high and lofty forehead. His smile moves across his face like a ripple across a deep and shaded pool and the ends of his fingers do not turn upwards, neither are they short and fat or full of chubby creases. His walk is soft and noiseless, like his voice, and he looks at you fearlessly like a cow chewing it's cud. At last, I said, I have found an honest Tartar merchant! He was then and there appointed in my mind to the unparalleled honour of being the chosen instrument by which the materials for two gorgeous, young ladies would eventually be placed in the hands of Roos Bai, the Kazakh creator of creations. On the steppes, things move slowly and one falls, perhaps, into that habit, but in time — the bigness and majesty of the steppes accomplish all things.



Anipa, Adham's daughter
painted, of course, by Marian

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

Today The Brat and Ahdam came to my yurt and with wide, delighted grins, begged me to send you and The Boy their respectful compliments. And when I said I would, by the very next post, The Brat grew red in the face and asked me to give him notice in plenty of time of your next coming. On my asking him "Why", he said, strutting up and down the yurt like an angry bantam, that there were many bad Kazakhs at the works and he would beat them all before you come, and Ahdam grinned feebly and said [Kazakh words] so, you see, the steppes have not forgotten you at all. Mr Atkinson also brought back from Bayan Aul some perfectly colossal wolf skins, far bigger than Florida deer — and I am not joking. They are the colour of coyotes but as big as



A present day Kazakh meal of horsemeat featuring slices of sausage made of intestines, with noodles; the white dishes hold a variety of soured mare's milk products

timber-wolves anywhere. All this time I am nearly crazy to know all about your doings at The Point and, if your kindness will overflow with ink upon paper you will find that kindness is made of the best elastic.

*Goodbye, from (signed in Kazakh)
Tosh*

June 19, 1904

Dear Pomp,

The mail comes today and, if I get a letter from you I shall wish I had waited so that I could answer it. Are you acting as Housekeeper-in-Chief at The Point as you did before? If so, I

can imagine the perfectly wonderful little French dishes you are now making. Olive is probably making boorsaks and boiling horses and dead sheep in a big cauldron out on the lawn, while you are daintily serving up quails' tongues on toast and caramel iced custard. I wish I could send you a few slices of really good smoked horsemear because it is quite ridiculous to despise horse, then run yourself out of breath to eat pig. Of course the Kazakhs carry it a little too far and when your host, who is working away like a carpenter at a boiled red-hot horse's

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

head in front of him offers you the immense eyeball he has just gouged out for your benefit, it is time to pretend that you don't hear or don't understand.

I draw the line also at the root of a horse's ear and at his nostril with the long bristles sticking out. Apart from these small but impossible trifles, I found that it was possible to follow the Kazakhs step for step. Probably in France, they would so cook the strange and dreadful sights as to make them eagerly sought after by the most fastidious!

... Coming back from Karagandy a few days ago, I found the same hawks' nest again which I had marked, and in it were four big, fat, gaping hawklets. They were too young to move and I was glad to go away because I know, now, how fishes and small birds feel when two hawks together, swoop at them. They were most aggressive and I hit them with my whip several times, they came so close and with such a rush. A fireman's helmet would be a fine help. I had a Cossack with me. He laughed at first but finally his eyes grew wild and fitful and he sat on his horse with his head under one arm trying to look dignified and unconcerned. I am going back there in a week and I will take Atkinson with me for my own private amusement. My idea is to have two hawks, tame, for you and The Boy, if you come here this autumn.

I had another long distance race with Jingo Flingo against a Cossack lighter than I on the Karagandy champion. Jingie took his measure and looked around for more. So now every Kazakh at this place is planning how to beat Jingie and they are arranging a race to come off in a few days. Five horses are so far entered besides Jingie and



The start of a horse race

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

the distance will be at least 15 versts. I won't race less than 15 and I would prefer 25, for Jingie is a long distance locomotive. If they put up small boys, I will have to also but if they ride themselves, I shall ride Jingie myself for Jingie has no ambition and takes a deal of beating and I know all his tenderest places through long and thoughtful experience.

I am awfully pleased to hear that you are taking to tennis kindly and enthusiastically. Girls with riding-wrists usually make good players. I have in my eye a delightful place sheltered with trees and near our yurts, a place for a fine tennis court. Any summer that you young Ladies of the Lake will leave your Lake and come to the steppes, you will find a tennis court awaiting you, unless I'm much surprised.

If you come here in the autumn I have just the rifle for you. Light and small, well sighted, kickless, smokeless and not loud-sounding. Jack-rabbits are thick on the hills quite near and jack-rabbits are good to eat and have warm skins for gloves. If you come, you must bring plenty of indoor games for the long winter, not forgetting fives balls and a backgammon set. Books in thousands will be needed although I have Gibbon's Decline and Fall for you. Are you riding much, you, Olivia and The Boy and how are the new ponies?

I enclose you a plan of some old Kalmuck remains which I have recently seen. They are very interesting. Is not it sad that there is no authentic knowledge or detailed history of the steppes in the early ages, even of the Roman Empire.? When one rides all around and sees the many evidences of war scattered here everywhere, it is mournful to know nothing of the stirring life that roamed and ambushed and invaded and fought in great combats where are you now see but stones, grass and grazing stock.

You find remnants of extensive dams across rivers, small valleys, many forts upon well-chosen hilltops, burial mounds in great numbers and, in one place, I found remains of a stone aqueduct that stretched brokenly for miles to a mountain range where there were springs and great reservoirs of snow. For these were some of the people who conquered Rome and overran Europe and made history with a big H in other parts of the world.

I hope you are now hot enough, Marian, and not suffering from cold winds at midday. Its grand to live where you don't need a warm blanket of snow on the ground to raise the temperature. Never mind what Lee says!

Goodbye from Toshi.

Spassky and Karagandy: "He wanted to kill a lamb but we pleaded for koumiss only. He has the finest ornamented yurt I think I ever saw"

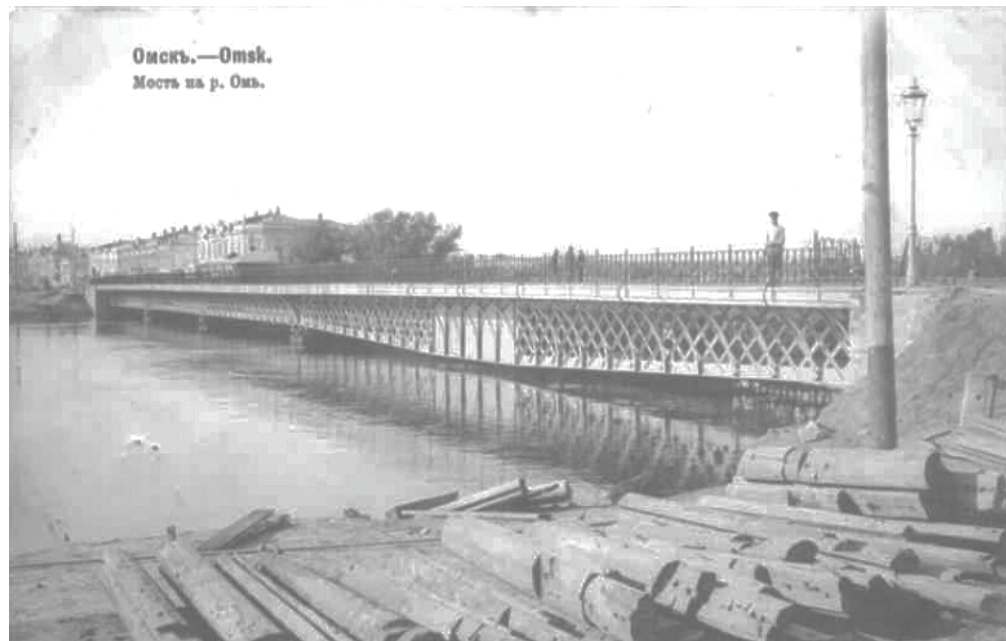
Monday, June 20

Grand weather! Furnace and carpenter work going on steadily in the new assay office. Nothing to chronicle!

Tuesday, June 21

Same weather! Furnace rising slowly. Settled that I should go to Petropavlovsk on Thursday and I sent Ahdam on horseback to Akmolinsk for, when I go with Alexei Riasanoff there will not be room for him. Hard rainstorm in evening!

Packed up and made last arrangements, for they may take me for a Japanese spy with designs on a bridge. My new passport is in Akmolinsk and I cannot leave there without it.



Omsk bridge, from a postcard

20. Ekaterinburg: “Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow”

Thursday, June 23

Very hot day. Left at 1pm with Alexei in a big covered hearse-affair and drove to Karagandy by 4.30pm. Ended by our stopping the night with Nyemkoff who is very touchy about the war. He gets the *Novoe Vremya*¹⁰⁶ which is very anti British. He is a very high-spirited man, full of pride in Russian size and might, and it nearly kills him to feel Japan's boots wiping themselves on him. He continually brings up the subject of Russia's plight and finds patriotic excuses for her for which I admire him for. We agree upon the theory that once your country is at war, back it right or wrong!

Friday, June 24

Fine day and hot, with travelling thunderclap showers. We left at 11am (instead of 5am as agreed) and immediately, from the door of the house, had the worst runaway I ever took part in. Nyemkoff had given us three of his horses, wild ferocious maniacs and the Cossack driving had no control over them. They at once at once plunged off and galloped madly, all three together, over many coal-heaps, between houses and fences and posts, which we missed by several hairs-breadths only and through this tangle of stuff towards the steppe in the right direction. Still galloping at racing speed, they arrived bang at a lot of workmen's yurts and went through them like a comet, just missing one. I caught a glimpse of a host of women, babies, boys and girls fleeing with flapping clothes and we were gone, with all the dogs in camp after us.

Still tearing along, the off-outsider began to kick furiously and a jolt nearly threw the Cossack off the seat; his leg flew out just in time to stop a kick. He hung on, but he was about done up. The horses swerved off and aimed straight at a sort of creek with up and down banks — a desperate place for a smash-up; I made preparations to take to my wings and sat with my

¹⁰⁶ Novoye Vremya was a Russian newspaper published in St. Petersburg from 1868 to 1917.

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

legs dangling over the side, and I remember saying to myself that it was no worse than jumping off a Broadway car between blocks. Alexei grinned the whole time.

As luck had it, the horse kicked over the trace on his side and backed up, so that his long tail became wound in the hub and axle of the wheel and it finally wound him up so that he sat down and fell over, stopping the caravan almost on the bank of the creek. This horse was badly hurt in both hind legs; one hind-leg may have been broken. The Cossack eased his feelings and his injured leg by beating the prostrate culprit savagely over the head with his whip. The horse's tail was hopelessly tangled in the wheel and had to be cut; we went on with the other two, soberly, and at 3pm changed horses on the steppe and made tea. I had a shot at a big steppe-hen a long way off and missed.

Kept up until dark, when we stopped and changed horses again on a river called by the Kazakhs "Butt Pakk" which means "Mud" and it was the slimiest, clayeyest of all places. At 9pm, went on and travelled all night, a glorious night with good moon. At sunup we arrived at the Ishim River. This is of good size here and actually goes to Petropavlovsk where there is a big steel railway bridge over it. Had a fine swim and shot a big beautiful snipe bird.

Saturday, June 25 Akmolinsk

This is a glorious place and the banks in the bed of the river, covered at flood-time, allow a mass of grasses and flowers showing almost a tropical growth and variety. We had no more change-horses so we rested ours until 2pm. Putting up a tent we spent a very contented time. Baroffsky, the government mining engineer of our district, whom we met at Bayandy Kuduk, drove by and stopped to drink tea with us. He was on his way to Spassky and Uspensky. Leaving at 2pm we arrived after a grand trip at Akmolinsk; the Ishim runs through Akmolinsk and is a big, wide, fine river here.

Sunday, June 26

We went straight to Yegoroff's house to stay. He is the Riasanoffs' agent here and is a most obsequious and obliging. He had my passport for me and hired for me a carabok and got me three good horses; in fact, did everything. I found Ahdam here and also found some mail for me, no letters alas!

Ahdam and I left for Petropavlovsk at 12.30pm after dinner. All the first stages are long ones, the first over 77 versts and with a light carabok, no-load and three rampageous horses, we made it in five hours 20 minutes which is the fastest time I ever did for the distance. The road is perfect and we galloped most of the way, passing hundreds of wagons and many bands of Cossacks going up to join their regiments; another mobilisation call came lately. All available men, up to 43 years must go.

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

Soon we reached the timbered country where, on the flat or rolling ground, are great clumps of beautiful larches, birches and big, upstanding fir trees while between are many fields of grain, green and glowing. The land is rich and the whole country in capable hands would boom and become another Iowa or Minnesota. It was bright twilight and then the nearly-full moon asserted itself and, as all the horses were good, we romped through this fine country at great speed, going 160 versts by 11.30pm. The villages are queer, half Russian and half Kazakh, but they look substantial and well-to-do. Owing to the war and the draining away of the men, there are many unfinished houses and buildings, and the women, the old men and boys are doing all the agricultural work. It is a far richer country than the Bayandy Kuduk-Pavlodar-Omsk country!

Monday, June 27

We kept it up grandly all night and morning with intervals for tea, milk etc, fairly flying! Until, about 2pm, the weather changed and big sopping rain-storms appeared on all sides. So far, we had travelled with private horses not on the post-road. This is more expensive but is far better. Between 2pm and 4pm we were in a drenching rain and, with the open carabok, we were soon soaked. To add to trouble, the roads became lead and the galloping horses and the whirring wheels covered us with mud. It looked like rain all night and when, in the evening, we struck the post-road, I was determined to leave the carabok and hire a povoska, a big covered affair. As it happened, we had to, for we twisted the axle of the carabok, crossing a very dilapidated bridge. At this place, 330 versts from Akmolinsk, we had made a record, doing it in 28 hours counting all stops. Given no rain and the light carabok I would have made the trip from Akmolinsk in 40 hours instead of exactly equalling Atkinson's record of 48. We plugged along with the heavy rig all night but the horses were small and feeble and the post-drivers were miserable creatures. I eased my feelings by tipping them varying sums from five kopecks to 20 instead of the usual 50 they expected.

Tuesday, June 28 Petropavlovsk

As morning came, things improved. The rain stopped and it was warmer, but the roads, drivers and horses were just as bad and the post-houses on this route are not good. It is twilight until 10pm and dawn breaks at 2 am. This astronomical observation is true because I saw it and it is worthy of record when seen through a halo of revolving, flying mud. By sticking to the one idea of getting there, we finally arrived at Petropavlovsk at 12.30. We drove straight to Pootkoff's house. He is the Riasanoff's agent here, who receives and ships all the copper. He is a queer little old-fashioned Russian, with long hair cut level with the lobes of his ears. He cannot read or write and yet he holds this position of great trust. He is a most obsequious and serf-like and, from his looks at first sight, as faithfully honest as a good dog. As the hotel here is beyond contempt, we

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

shall always stop with him. His house is large and clean and sufficient. I found no telegram from Mr Fell and wired him again. As Pootkoff cannot help me with telegrams, I rely solely upon my own excellent Russian.

Later on we walked and drove all over the town and surroundings; this is a much better time than I expected, of about 30,000 inhabitants. The river Ishim runs through it and supplies water and the big steel railway bridge is in full sight from the town. This bridge is guarded by 200 soldiers. We drove to the Cossack barracks; their horses are merely good-looking Kazakh ponies, sound and young and tough. Then we drove to a camp of recruits and watch them drilling in squads. They are a big lot of men but seem to be free from the cares which spring from intelligence and they have the mouths of the confirmed vodka habit. The railroad looks lonely, quiet and hopelessly innocent, so do the telegraph wires but every now and then a long freight train lumbers by.

Wednesday, June 29

After breakfast, Pootkoff and I again went out to see the town, taking in the stores largely. There are some fine stores, one in particular that deals in everything and hundreds of small ones which are run by Tartars as a rule. This is a great Tartar town and the streets are full of Tartar women in the gayest of apparel. I found a photographer and gave him many developed films to print. After dinner we drove to the railway station, for at 2pm, the train from Moscow arrives and at 6pm the train from the Far East. Extra ones may come in at any time. The station seemed to be wide open for everyone and no-one has desired to see my passport which I hug so tightly. The train was full of soldiers and officers in many uniforms and there were quite a few women passengers. Newspapers were eagerly bought up and also telegraphic slips, and crowds listened while someone read aloud. The faces of the crowd looked serious and dogged like those of a stubborn nation at bay! There is a great change in Russian opinion of the Japanese. All talk of barbarians and yellow pygmies is over. This is largely due to the reports of Russian prisoners from Japan who relate how splendidly they are treated, and the letters are published widely in the papers. Russians here are delighted and surprised and compare this with the Turkish War. In return, the Japanese prisoners are treated royally. There are many in Tomsk, more in Ekaterinburg and Moscow. All of them, officers and men, receive their full pay from Russia and the officers are wined and dined with great hospitality. The Russian wounded are well treated by Japanese hospitals and all this tends to gladden the responsive and emotional Russian heart.

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

England is being highly praised for her strict neutrality and correct behaviour and she is more acceptable than America, who is not in good favour at all, at all! American cartoons of Russian plight fairly infuriate Russians and I must say that the ones the Literary Digest¹⁰⁷ publish are going rather too far!

Thursday, June 30

Luckily, I wrote letters all the morning and despatched the daily effusion for, at noon, came a telegram from Mr Fell in Ekaterinburg telling me to leave at once and to come to him. This exactly suited me and I packed up hastily and joyously At 6pm the Far East – Port Arthur – War train arrived and a big crowd was assembled to greet it. On-board were a lot of sailors from the distant Pacific Squadron and they were the heroes of the occasion.

Ahdam and Pootkoff saw me off; as Ahdam has never before seen a railroad or a locomotive, his face was a sight when the long train rolled in headed by two big engines. On leaving, every moment was of interest, for every bridge is heavily guarded and single soldiers crop up every now and then, most unexpectedly, guarding culverts and other points of care. We passed many side-tracked trains filled with soldiers going to the front. Very much artillery, with men, horses, and wagons all on the same train. These are from the west of the Urals and are a grand-looking body of men, far away above the standard of the Siberian Cossack who is greatly overrated.

The work being undertaken on the railroad is prodigious; Russia evidently means business and is preparing for the possibility of a long war. New sidings are being put into every station, two and three tracks, and the road-bed is being ballasted with crushed rock over long stretches. New stations are being built with local labour. The new station houses are log structures put up as excellently as only a Russian can. They build them with as great freedom as if they were handling brick and the result is a perfectly tight wall, better than brick. I had a first-class smoker all to myself the whole journey but, as there was no dining car, I joined in the scrimmages at the many stops for refreshment and sustained life successfully.

¹⁰⁷ The Literary Digest was an influential American general interest weekly magazine published by Funk & Wagnalls.

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

June 30, 1904

Petropavlovsk

Dear Pomp, Lee and Boy,

The undersigned wishes to say that he is off in about an hour to meet your Poppa in Ekaterinburg. He feels obliged to add that your Poppa telegraphed to him in very strange Russian with a peremptory order to come at once and when your Poppa is peremptory it is time to move; and that he had hardly posted his letter to your Mamma when the telegram came from your Poppa and the laws of Russia will not let him get that letter back.

The undersigned is going to hold a wounded soldier's hand and he is going to draw diagrams for the officers on board to show them how they ought to have won their battles; for the undersigned has heard all about it from other Russians who stay at home, and knows all about it. The undersigned will try to write to you all from Ekaterinburg if the demands upon his time by your Poppa will allow him.

The undersigned wishes you all a profound goodbye,

Tosh,

Ahdam is with me and sends his humblest Kazakhest regards. He is still bowing, mumbling and grinning toothless grin as I write.

Friday, July 1

Got up early so as to miss nothing. All morning we passed train-loads of soldiers going east. They seem to be perfectly happy, well fed and healthy. I saw no signs of vodka, never once and the sound of the accordion comes from one end of the train to the other. They invariably besieged the sailors from our train and plied them with eager questions. It would be hard to find more orderly men on a long journey. I arrived at Cheliabinsk where I must change for Ekaterinburg and then I waited 2½ hours. This was very acceptable and allowed me a lazy meal in the big dining-room full of uniforms and gold buttons. I saw on the platform a full-blown general and his staff, a most ridiculous sight! Imagine an old, doddering, knock-kneed dandy, tottering about, feebly shaking his forefinger in the faces of all his staff who replied with profound kowtows, salutes and bows to his squeaky old scolding. This old man had moustaches, snow-white and a foot long, and a row of medals all across him; long spurs and pointed high-heeled patent-leather boots and a "waist"¹⁰⁸ but a more ridiculous old figure I never saw.

¹⁰⁸ Does this mean he was wearing a corset; I think so.

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

Travelled at the sedate and dignified amble of Russian trains through very attractive country, stopping long times at the many stations, apparently for no earthly reason until, at nearly midnight, we arrived in Ekaterinburg. Here I missed Mr Fell who was waiting in some dark corner of the waiting-room where I quite naturally did not go, but I drove to the hotel and he arrived on my track. We talked till 4 am, broad day.

Saturday, July 2

Today is the day that two young ladies start from France for America and my fervent good wishes follow them. After coffee and rolls in Mr Fell's room, we went to see the museum; this is an interesting place full of gorgeous Uralsky minerals, with stuffed birds and beasts and fishes, with costumes...

The diary ends here

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

July 3, 1904

Ekaterinburg, Amerikansky Hotel

Dear Marian,

When you receive this letter, you will be as gay as a lark and the sympathy I am expressing at this moment is directed to you, not at the moment you receive it, but at the moment when that condolence was written, on solid land in a mountain-range in Russia. You are now murmuring, "Oh, I wish. I were dead" or, "Bother this old ship," "Ooooheeee! I know it is going to roll over", and so on with variations which all mean the same thing. You must not think that this pleases me. It does not please me in the least; of course it doesn't.

Now, if you had faith, you would never mind whether your body went up and down against your for, Marian, your mind should direct and control the mere muscular movements of your body. You should learn to concentrate your mind so that it does not feel small affairs which affect your body, such as heat, cold, fatigue, sickness, joy, pain, anger, sorrow and all uncharitableness. I know that you have too much sense and good manners to contradict this but if you have any thoughts upon the matter, please revert to Minor, for I have it on his own and most undisputed (there was no-one to dispute it with him because no-one else knew anything about it) authority that he faith-cured "a toothache out of his face", and that he once faith-cured warts off his hand or perhaps it was his nose, I am not sure. He knows!

I have just left Mr Fell. It is a hot and sultry day and it is just after dinner and he has gone away to a dark recess in his room to read "The Nation"¹⁰⁹. He says that he is very behindhand with the news and that he will now try to catch up. He is very well and we are getting as much fun out of life as possible.

Since I last wrote to you, in my beloved and distant yurt, I have come a long way, and I miss the yurt and its simple accessories far more than I like this place, with its chokingly stuffy rooms and complications. The trip, by horses and by rail, was very enjoyable, especially the early part where we just drove along contentedly and camped where night found us, only requiring water to be at hand.

At Petropavlovsk I saw signs of war, not my first signs, for I passed bands of Cossacks coming up to join their regiments, but real signs, camps and tents, and soldiers drilling madly, and guards at the railway station and

¹⁰⁹ The Nation is the oldest continuously published weekly magazine in the United States, covering progressive political and cultural news, opinion, and analysis.

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

all along the line. No-one asked for my passport; in fact I travelled all the way from Ekaterinburg through legions of armed men before anyone asked for my passport and the man who finally did, was an oily, obsequious little snipey-nosed hotel servant who bowed humbly with his eyes bulging out of his head for a tip. I was rather disappointed for I hoped that bearded and red-eyed police officers and great roaring and ranting army officials would order me before them and demand my passport and then, I would have the haughty pleasure of seeing them draw in their horns and of offering them a cigarette in a condescending manner. But things always go wrong when they are unimportant!

Let's ride to Lake Hart tomorrow, what do you say? I'll ride Darwin or the estimable and aristocratic Cow. I wish I could!

Goodbye from

Tosh.

June 11, 1904¹¹⁰

Ekaterinburg, Amerikansky Hotel

[To Anne]

I am sending you today a small memento of this memorable trip and I trust that it will meet with your benign approval. Someday, a small cardboard box will undoubtedly arrive at The Point, covered with cotton (sewn over), string, and seals in red and blue ink; a most imposing sight. Inside, will be a pin for you, a brooch each for Marian and Olivia and a small jasper-handled knife for The Boy. You will also find two unset stones of alexandrite for you, please. The stones are green in daytime and red by lamp or electric light. You may prove this in daytime by striking a match and putting it near them. The stones in the pin and brooches are, to my notion, perfectly beautiful. They are chrysophras¹¹¹, a product of the Urals; never have stones so completely taken my fancy. The alexandrite stones are peculiarly and solely Uralsky products and, some day, I intend to

¹¹⁰ The date must be a mistake; he must mean July 11th!

¹¹¹ Chrysoprase, chrysophrase or chrysoprasus is a gemstone variety of chalcedony that contains small quantities of nickel. Its colour is normally apple-green, but varies to deep green.

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

get a really fine one. (They run up into high figures according to the richness of the double colours). I saw some like emeralds by day and glorious rubies at night; and now I know all about them and where to get them. This town is full of most beautiful mineral treasures made into jewellery and table ornaments. It is the home of all the treasures of the Urals; but I am greatly handicapped by Mr Fell's presence and the necessity of running his gauntlet to ask for money. Someday, I am going to supply myself with gold and bills beforehand and I am coming here alone.

If you knew the difficulty I have had to send this box, you would value it far higher. I took it to the Russian Bear in the Post Office. He looked at it long and exhaustively. It was beautifully sewn up, sealed and addressed. He said, "It is impossible to send it." I said "Why?" He said, "Here is some black cotton used in sewing," and he scornfully pointed out about an inch of black stitching among the white. "This," he said, "is entirely unsendable, it is not right, you must change." I left, talking rapidly to myself.

The next day I returned, with a newly sewn, sealed and addressed arrangement in white thread, a work of art. He took it, pounced on it, and for a long time turned it over; then he said, "I see only four seals, there must be five. It is unsendable, it is not right, you must change." I retired, bewildered. At the hotel I told Mr Fell, who promptly grumbled about using so much of his beloved English Londonsky sealing wax. I stood that.

The next day, I returned — it is a long and dusty way. The Russian Bear grabbed the box and I pointed out the fifth enormous seal. He again examined it on every side and finally said, "The string it is necessary to be putted its self on the outside and the seals over the string. It is unsendable, it is not right, you must change." I went out and slammed the door.

At the hotel, Mr Fell scowled and growled at the use of the last piece of a whole stick of beloved sealing wax. He almost mutinied and hinted that I was a blamed ass! But I persevered. That box had to go.

I returned to the Post Office the next day and the Bear grunted out a recognition, for I had become a familiar object to him. He then, once more, took a long and careful survey of the box and produced five printed forms, with much detail on them, to be filled in, separately on each, in Russian, French, and English, addresses, value, weights, description of each item, all to be inscribed in three languages on five forms. I staggered away again with the forms and the box and left the door wide open. I took the forms to Mr Fell at the hotel. He merely thought it very funny and a good time to laugh, so I left him, and hunted up Mr Stein. This man agreed but forgot all about it; so I took the forms and the box back to the jeweller and poured my ungrammatical troubles

Ekaterinburg: "Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow"

into his grinning face. He said, "Of course I will, why did not you before to me come yourself. Many times I have sent these things, I know how! It is very easy!" I shook his hand and said "Goodbye" and restrained my desire to kick him.

So you see that, even in Russia, one can have one's troubles!

Agreement is signed and paid for and we leave for the steppes tomorrow, I am glad to say! Mr Fell will have told you! He has had an anxious time and I am glad I was here for, at times, when Arkin's dishonest agreement hung in the balance, he was very much perturbed and saw possibilities of the deal falling through.

You see, he refused to sign Arkin's agreement and made them change it in a number of important points, over all of which they raised a great fuss and threatened to break the deal. But Stein, our lawyer, was an admirable helper, a diplomat, and he and Fell gained all their points; with the result that the agreement which has been signed is a fair one for us and allows us fair play. You can imagine Mr Fell's relief and pleasure.

Goodbye, please come soon, for life is terribly short and time is passing steadily — without you.

Tosh.



A Kazakh family

21. Spassky: “We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle”

August 15, 1904

Spassky

Dear Miss Willie,

You notice this polite beginning I hope; please notice it at once! This means that I have neglected you dreadfully. Sorrow and shame are my lot; sleepless days and dead-to-the-world nights; Anooshka's soups and the washing that never comes! All because I did not write to you when you were sorrowfully languishing at The Point. The post came and went and I grew peaked and forlorn but — never could I escape the feeling of someone's elbow sticking into me somewhere for, since my return from the House of Pootkoff to this black spot on the green steppes, we have lived like over-ripe fruit clustered in soggy masses on one branch; and you know how the birds come and pick holes into you and how the spidery things choke you up with offensive woolly cobwebs, when you live like that.

Even my beloved yurt was not sacred! I found it full of 10 million small odds and ends and 10 dozen big misshapen bundles; with a storm-tossed, hard-featured cot and a dotty-legged, strange-looking, vulgar table, both exactly in the wrong places, all belonging to the otherwise-angelic Mr Mussen. Now, things are better, and I have my yurt all to myself and it contains big, bare, felt-covered spaces where I can see the shape that ought to be seen. All day I am very busy making little green, blue and pink liquids in glasses and watching them



Frank in the assay office

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

change colours miraculously and, when night comes, there seems to be a strange sandy feeling under my eyelids. Last night at sundown I kicked and beat myself and took myself by the scruff of my neck and shook myself and said "Wake up you!" (you may fill in the blank). But, of course, a furnace went wrong at once and ate great holes in its interior, and caused much anxiety and, of course, your Poppa decided himself to stay up until the trouble was over and, of course, I decided myself to stay up with him, and there went your letter again!

At 3am, after watching these ragged scarecrows of happy Kazakhs wrestling with hot flames and molten slags in a wild flaring jumble of red flares and roaring clashing sounds, we saw the trouble over, and about 100 red-hot, glowing copper bricks poured into rows of moulds. And one ragged scarecrow made such a fuss and was so sincerely distressed when his awful old tattered coat was burnt in another place!

This evening I took myself by my throat and said "The mail leaves tomorrow morning" and when my tongue was black I heard myself say "Alright, I'll write," so here I am talking awful rubbish to you, afar off, and enjoying myself very much; for, when you arrive in Paris I insist that you shall find a letter awaiting you.

I gratefully acknowledge two glorious letters from you! I liked them ever so much!

Good night many times from

Toshy.

August 15, 1904

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

... Do you credit my statement when I tell you, honestly and truly, that I am at this moment, slowly but surely freezing to death in my yurt. It is night and the top is wide open and the stars are as keen and bright as daisies and there is no wind at all and it is August the 15th. A few minutes ago I was startled by a sharp flapping of wings in my ears all around me, not a bat-like creepy flutter but a good sensible downright flap and, to my wonder and delight, I found that my visitor was that wildest and most gamey of all birds the true jack-snipe. Flying overhead, he had been attracted by my candle and, in his simple way, came fearlessly, straight to see what it was. I caught him, absolutely unhurt, long beak, square-shaped head with his eyes in his eyebrows,

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

beautiful plumage and wings and his wonderful, tapering legs. He did not seem afraid and I put him outside on the grass, into which he trotted off with his head ducked very low.

Birds seem to be restless tonight for some good sensible reason unknown to us, for I hear ducks whicker-whicker overhead every now and then; and I have come to believe that winter is stalking this way. A Kazakh brought in yesterday a young wolf cub and, before I could get him, another man got him. This was a blow for I wanted it. He was a nice young chap and I saw him first, surrounded by Kazakhs and Russians, collared and chained, his tail well between his legs but perfectly self-possessed and holding all his many wits at his instant control. He let me pat him with absolute indifference and he could have been made a friend.

Anyway, his owner hauled him off at arm's length and he slunk off in a loping, shambling way, apparently unafraid. The next morning he was gone, having slipped his collar and scratched his way to freedom and, I have no doubt, that he went straight to his old home in the rocks and long grass and karagan, from which he will emerge years later to kill many a colt, kid and lamb. Seeing that they can be tamed, I have bespoken another one and it may turn up someday. I don't know where or when you will read this or when I shall see you again but I do know that I want to see you very much indeed and that I hope you will come here this winter. Good night!

From Toshy.

September 4, 1904

Pavlodar

Dear Young Ladies,

Will you most kindly excuse a joint letter, written under difficulties impossible to remain sane under. It is quite late tonight and, what with the buzzing of flies to my lamp and the everlasting chatter and squawk of people nearby, I am praying for a tidal wave to come from some far-off ocean, high and raging! I want to tell you both how I missed you during my late drive across country from Spassky to Bayan Aul. Away from the post-road and Russians, just steppe and Kazakhs and camping by rivers and creeks; and starlight nights, with a real sun and fresh winds. I shot four steppe-hens and saw flocks of them besides, and the biggest and finest of them all

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

came to a sad and unexpected fate. As we camped that evening by a glorious creek, a friendly Kazakh came riding up, a most charming young steppe Kazakh with most insinuating ways. He had tea with us and criticised my Arabic writing with wonderful tact and made himself a valued friend.

Sleep time came inexorably and he said he would stay because his horse was tired and lame. I went to sleep and, whenever I awoke, I heard our Kazakh and the stranger murmuring, and gathered mistily that they were doing something. Dawn told its tale of woe! My finest steppe-hen, a 20-pounder, lay, a heap of bones, upon the ground near the fire and two gorged and contented, sleeping Kazakhs were stretched alongside. They had



*Eemombai, the smith, in typical clothes and boots,
at Dsunos Khosie*

devoured it all and even the feathers were in the pocket of the stranger for further use. We had another steppe-hen and the joke was upon us but, under the placid and unanswerable simplicity that they were hungry, it was quite impossible to be annoyed. Nevertheless it will never occur again, even if I have to use steppe-hens for my pillow.

Oh, and yes – I have actually found Roos Bai in Bayan Aul and I have already sent him on to Spassky so that your costumes now are assured facts, almost as good as finished. At last the tangle is unravelled and the result will be gorgeous. We go back to Spassky tomorrow and I am wondering already why you are not both with me to help me to really enjoy it. Goodbye to you and I will try and write oftener when I am again in some anchorage.

... Imagine a diamond day, a flawless brilliant, with a mellow sun and a fresh, clean breeze and Djessoo Bai. I

drove out there with Razmussin of the pleasant face in the skeleton of a carabok (without the basket) and with three rollicking grey horses which burned holes in the wind whenever Razmussin said "Booee! Yap!" to them in his persuasive way. From Djessoo Bai we changed horses and drove to Dsunos Khosie Mine where I was to inspect a lot of timber wanted at Spassky. We were back at 2pm when I had a glorious swim in the same old

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

place and, after tea, meat and luscious fresh potatoes, melons, and a pipe, I took my camera and went over all our old haunts. Along the beach at the far end where the long reeds (koomish) grow, in that jolly pool, I found a pair of wild ducks and saw a perfect mob of geese swim away from the reedbed to the deep water ahead. I photographed the big rock we so often climbed, and I climbed it again. I saw the harbour The Boy and I made and it was in a sadly dishevelled state. The lake is much lower this season on account of little rain and the creek is a small trickle that you can almost step across dry-foot.

I met Eemombai, our chubby, little master-worker in iron and silver. We had a long and nice friendly talk and he sends his good wishes to you and to [Kazakh words meaning, I think, all the family] at Spassky. He clasped my hand in both of his when he said this and was dreadfully in earnest. He says when the [Kazakh word] comes to Spassky I must write and tell him and he will move to Spassky, bag and baggage. I have had a perfectly wonderful day for all is as it was, clean and green and golden sand and blue water. Where the yurts stood is all mowed afresh and stacks of sweet hay stand around. Never was that such a place. Tomorrow we leave for Spassky and here goes for another glorious drive, and — I have forgotten — I am so sleepy.

From Toshi.

September 12, 1904

Karagandy

Dear Pomp,

... The question about you coming to Spassky this winter has been everlastingly discussed between Mr Fell and myself, and the result was this fateful telegram which sealed your doom. No one knows what a disappointment it was to me and I am more sorry now that I know you really wanted to come very much. But, if you will come, with Olivia, in the spring, say end of May, then I can promise you a really glorious summer, with a yurt to live in, rides and drives and camps, Kazakh sports and thousands of wonderful steppe views. If you were here this winter, you would go away with a sad feeling about Siberia, a feeling of failure and disappointment and probably not so well and healthy as you are now, and all of us would be full of worries on your account all winter long. The Boy would be fighting his own shadow in a month or two and get red in the face if the clock ticked in a way that did not suit his ideas of harmony. But, oh Pomp, bring your little Parisienne sister and we will make the steppes home!

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

Just now I am a doctor of high degree and my efforts have been attended with high success. Arriving at this place, I found Nyemkoff's house in a sad state, a small boy very ill indeed and everybody standing on their heads and wringing their hands. On the horizon, a man galloping to Akmolinsk as hard as he could clatter (and Akmolinsk is 180 miles away) for a doctor of the highest degree.

I took charge of the boy and the most the dire responsibility of failure, for there was nothing else to do and, after two days and nights of work and walking on tiptoe, feeling pulses and taking temperatures and fighting high fever, I am glad to say that, when the doctor of highest degree arrives, he will find the little chap out of all danger. I gave the boy the same size doses that I would to a pointer or a setter and exactly the same treatment and it was easier work because he did not bite!

Why don't you, now that you may be in Paris all winter, study some physiology of health and then go on to and the actions and usage of simple drugs and their doses so that, someday, when you may be in some far-off spot where doctors are miles and miles away, you may be able to help some poor little child who is raging with fever and cannot say what is the matter with him. I have always thought you would be an ideal person in a sick-room and it is grand to be able to have some knowledge and confidence in yourself and not to be forced to stand on your head and wring your hands. This is only a suggestion but I do believe that it is a good one, if you can only get over your youthful prejudice against all doctors for sometimes, a doctor is like an angel descending from the sky who performs easily what, to the uninitiated, are apparently miracles.

My trip back from Bayan Aul was a grand drive through glorious unlimited scenery in perfect weather. I shot two more big steppe-hens, magnificent birds, and a lot of ducks and I saw a real Siberian wolf, a great big yellow, bushy-tailed, loping, slinking creature, who came out of a river-bed from the thick willows and crossed our track far ahead. Then he waited, 250 yards from us, and I took a shot at him with my .32 rifle. The shot landed at his feet and he sprang up like a great yellow rainbow, his back arched most gracefully and loped off to some distant hills. I sent another shot after him and again he jumped to one side like a flash and after that he stretched himself out into a long, low, bounding line and was soon out of sight. We got three steppe-hens altogether coming back so we did well. I have a wonderful new gun which is a marvel.

Goodbye and please write whenever you can, for I enjoy your letters more than I can tell you.

From Toshy.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

October 2, 1904

Spassky

Dear Willie,

A date which fixed itself in my mind, a very rare occurrence, was that the 28th of September was your opening school day and on that day I pictured you being dragged there with tears and horror. The door shut with a bang and I heard the loud, hungry laughter of old women who gnashed their old gums. I passed a dreadful day and, until I hear from you again, I shall be most uneasy and shall jump at shadows. Don't be chained (unless it is to a piano) and refuse to eat bread and water. Send me a wireless message and I will come at once and lay siege to 7 rue Erlanger, Paris XVI.

I want to tell you before it has all melted, that the snow has come. A few days ago a storm broke upon our yurts. Snow blew in and icicles hung down, and the wind searched my bones. It was not as bad, by any means, as the storm that you and I suffered at Bayandy, but it was quite bad enough and it did not really clear up for three days. Mr Atkinson's yells and outcries cracked the ice in the pond nearby but he stayed it out, from shame, as a sturdy Yorkshireman. By the way, we had a fearful argument the other day at lunch. Mr Atkinson and Raspadeeny Felloo¹¹² began it quite pleasantly about nothing in particular but soon I heard "No they are not," "Yes they are" and then, "They can knock the spots off them anyway," "No they can't", "Yes they can!" Apparently the talk had turned to the merits of North v South and it gravitated to Yorkshire and Devonshire. I was appealed to and I, of course, said that the North always won and, of course, any Scottish county could "knock the spots" off any English one. The lunch broke up in a fearful uproar and Mr Hiram Jones¹¹³ thought we were in earnest.

Today it is Indian summer and as glorious in a yurt as it can be. My fox is still the same, hating me with a fierceness far too big for his small body; but I sometimes fondly imagine that he is more resigned to my detestable presence. Hope springs eternal — and he still hopes to spring at my throat.

Goodbye, Willie, and remember that I'm always thinking of you in Paris.

¹¹² Spelling uncertain but anyway refers, I think, to Mr Fell.

¹¹³ Not identified so far.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

Tosh.

October 2, 1904

Spassky

Dear Marian,

... I have recently acquired a young fox who resides in my yurt and affords me much amusement. He is about 2 months old but he is a very precocious, knowing youth and has all the airs of a full-grown one. He loathes me and I fear that his dislike is the prejudice of birth which is a dreadfully difficult thing to overcome! He eats out of my hand and allows me to stroke him, anywhere further than 6 inches from the point of his wee, shiny, black nose. Within that radius he never fails to bite!

While he eats from my hand, he clearly intimates that it is only hunger which forces him, and he eyes me with unutterable hatred. He does not growl but he utters queer little kettle-drum sounds which roll up from his boots and get shriller as they reach his mouth; and he snorts at me steadily with little hoarse puffs which blow his cheeks apart. He has a habit like the coon of frequently turning his head to one side in a strange, self-conscious way. His eyes are quite enormous and like a cat's; in daytime, they are distinguished by vertical slits in a sea of soft brown and at night, they are almost black, the pupil round and wide.

It is at night that he gets gay and then he dances around wildly, playing with his bones and chain. At dawn, the many dickie-birds who sleep in the trees all around the yurt begin to wake up and cheep and the fox becomes the keen hunter. He sits up or stands with one forefoot raised and his sharp little nose quivering, listening, eagerly turning his head from one chirp to the next. He buries all I give him, in his hay. He desires me to see nothing he possesses. All his bones and his spare meat are most carefully buried as soon as I turn my back. The tin he drinks water from is always buried in the hay and I have to hunt for it when I want to refill it. While I am doing this, he sits aloof, quivering with hate and green-eyed rage, watching me unearth all his sacred treasures. Who knows but what all these bones and this tin basin are the emblems of his religion, which I desecrate, and perhaps he loses caste if I touch them. He never flies at me in attack, he is much too dignified and he knows too much. But he eyes me with disdain and a hatred which distresses me. I wish you could see him for he is a strange little character. For grace and beauty, he is a wonder. His puppy coat is getting red but his prevailing colour is a golden red.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

This is Sunday afternoon and Mr Fell has gone away to read The Nation and, I must say that he reads very silently, much more silently than people read in Pullman-car sleepers. He is very well indeed and he's getting quite enthusiastic about the copper we are making and the great amount we are going to make.

We have great fun with Mr Jones. Mr Hiram Jones is Welsh but he is all that the Englishman is ever supposed to be by the people who see the most to laugh at in him. He is a second, older, bigger edition of Clark who came to the Athabasca and said, "Will yer koindly parss the potyters". But the amusing thing about Mr Jones is that he absolutely believes all he is told, if you keep a straight face. Mr Fell told him that an old, old Kazakh who stokes our stoves was only 32 years old and that Asiatics age very quickly. (He must be 75). Mr Jones said, "Really now, really, I wouldn't have thought it, how very strange! Dear me!" And even now, Mr Jones cannot distinguish between a Russian and a Kazakh. Bastrakoff cut off all his fuzzy hair and wore a fez to keep his head warm and we told Mr Jones he was a Mohammedan and that this was a big festival, the "Hammababadradam" which all Mohammedans celebrated. This he instantly believed and still believes.

We are all very busy and the works are just humming. On the payrolls are about 1300 men and, with contract men, it will total up to nearly 2500. There are 500 wagons and one thousand oxen hauling coal and ore and, in winter, there will be 500 to 600 camels at work. Copper is pouring in a steady stream and going to the railroad. Come out in spring, Marian, and see it all, please.

Goodbye, wherever you are,

Toshy.

October 9, 1904

Spassky

Note in pencil by Anne: "From the assayer at the smelter who has been with us ever since he was a youth, a Scotchman".

Mr Fell goes to Akmolinsk today on business connected with the sale of copper and he may have to go to Petropavlovsk so that he may be away only a week or, perhaps, two or three weeks. The next mail should bring some news of your whereabouts to him and we will send it after him by special messenger.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

Things are rolling along fast here and copper is becoming a flood. We have also improved the grade of refined copper so that now we are shipping 99.5% clean copper which can be sold anywhere. There is a fearful amount of work being done, smelter men, men hauling, miners, contractors, a mob of people, all busy. Spassky has about 900 people on the actual payroll and with Karagandy and Uspensky the payrolls amount to about 1300. This is not all by any means for, with the men working and hauling on contract, there must be nearly 2500 people depending upon the mines, with 1000 oxen and 500 wagons. When snow comes to stay we shall have from 500 to 1000 camels bringing supplies, ore and coal. And all of this is in its little infancy!

What we need most are buildings, places to live in, and that will be done next year. Mr Fell calculates that, at the present rate, we shall pay for the whole place in two years. There is much yet to be overcome, but things are moving smoothly, if slowly, towards success. It is grand to be connected at last with a really booming concern that puts in the shade all of BC put together. So you can well imagine that Mr Fell is in good health and is feeling his oats to a surprising degree. Von Stein will probably not return here anymore for, when Mr Fell meets him on this trip, he says he wishes him to be in Moscow to sell the copper to best advantage. And when Mr Fell gets his expected papers which officially recognise him as High Cockalorum out here, he will indeed be Lord of all he surveys. The good ore rolls in and the good copper rolls out and it seems to be easy!

Our domestic arrangements are settled for the winter. I shall have a room near Mr Fell's in his house, which we have named the Hotel Metropole, because every troupe of officials stays here upon arrival. Atkinson and Jones are in another house nearby, and we all eat together in the Metropole. At present there is a troupe registered there also; being the Superintendent of Instruction, Obstruction and Destruction of Education and Schools — at least, his uniform calls for the title if value is in gold braids and buttons. He has his secretary. They all do.

The next troupe is billed for appearance here in about a week's time. The official doctor and his secretary and uniform will appear in the well-known Russian drama entitled "How to accept a Bribe without being seen" interspersing the acts with other marvellous sleight of hand tricks. I am still the unofficial doctor and have not killed anyone yet, thanks to the hardy constitution of the Siberian race.

I am still in the yurt and, I must say that it is very fresh in the early mornings. We have had one fall of snow of respectable dimensions with wind, hail and wet and now we are having a glorious Indian summer. This summer, spring and autumn have been almost perfect from the point of view of the person who just wants to breathe the air and see the sunshine without discomfort.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

My aim in life just now is how to get away for a whole week to hunt foxes with eagles with my friend Djakin Moustaphin and his brother Djamanteekoff, without wounding the official feelings of the Boss. Of course, I should not go; but this only makes me all the keener to get away and let the work pile up and be ——¹¹⁴! I want to see an eagle catch a fox before I die!

My tame fox is the most beautiful, graceful, wild animal I ever saw. Speed, grace, intelligence and bravery are all there, wrapped up in most beautiful red fur and looking through big, thoughtful eyes. I shall keep him all winter and hope to show him to you in the spring. Roos Bai has almost finished Olivia's costume and will begin Marian's at once.

Goodbye, I launch this out into a great space with feelings that no-one will ever see it or hear of it again.

Tosh.

October 9, 1904

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

... I saw a very queer little animal the other evening near a dried-up creek where there was cover. He had been drinking at a pool. It showed me in the dim light a most fantastic sight. In sudden alarm, it jumped up and bounded off in a series of high sort of buck jumps, showing me a pointed face, an up-curved back and a long bushy tail, and making such a wonderful sight that I stood and stared open mouthed, not wishing to shoot. I would just as soon have shot at Puck or some goblin fairy for, I firmly believe, it was not a flesh and blood creature.

The man with me, a Kazakh, called it some queer name but he seemed pleased I did not shoot and refused to follow it up, with profuse apologies. There are many strange stories and fables and legends on the steppes and



Kangaroo rats, painted by Marian at Spassky in 1905

¹¹⁴ Damned, I imagine!

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

I am sure this weird little creature that figures in ghost-like Kazakh stories. His dancing, bounding way of going will always haunt me!

Mr Fell is going to Akmolinsk today on important business connected with the sale of our copper and perhaps to Petropavlovsk so that he may be away for two weeks or more. It is a great blow for us for without him we shall be very dull. I am still living in my yurt and it freezes hard every night. Still the fox and I manage quite splendidly together. Roos Bai will soon begin upon your costume as he has nearly finished Olivia's, and I shall keep him at

it steadily. I am glad that the Uralsky brooches arrived safely.

Goodbye, Marian, I envy you your winter at The Point so dreadfully! Remember me unkindly please to Minor and Quartus. They will know!

Toshy.



Razmussin's room

October 13, 1904

Spassky

I am rushing off by a wildcat mail a few photographs that you will recognise. All were taken on my trip to and from Pavlodar and from where the pass begins going towards Bayan Aul, to the valley where we camped so gloriously. I have the films rigorously guarded for they are the apples

of my eye. Really I think they are perfect and some are well worth enlarging. The little smith Eemombai is grinning with delight at being photographed for you. His coat hangs as only Kazakh coats can. He made me promise to write to him to tell him when you next arrive and he will ride over to see you; probably on the same little sway-backed white pony. Notice please the oleander in Razmussin's room trying to push the windowpanes I would and also, please, the icon in the corner. I called this photograph a triumph. I had a photograph of myself

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

holding up, bashfully the big steppe-hens I had just killed with a most scientific right and left, but my heart failed and I sent it to Ida. You would only see that I had a beard and would not look at the splendid birds, and your remarks, I can guess!

My big new camera was placed in my path merely to try my soul, for the focusing scale is not placed properly. I make lovely fuzzy blurs on the films and then go out and bay at the moon. I could make a fuzzy blur of the German who made the mistake in Germany and live happily ever afterwards.

Mr Fell is still away in Akmolinsk and is having most dreadful weather. As soon as he started, all the good weather broke and it has rained, sleeted and tried to be bad ever since; but he has a covered concern and many bales of fur to put on. I am concerned more for his language than his health.

I have vacated my yurt with some reluctance and a great deal of pleasure! It was like living and sleeping under a pine tree in the rainy season and just as cool and airy. Now I am more comfortable than I ever thought I could be in Siberia. A room to write in that does not grow goose-flesh on you when you look at it, warmth, dryness, and, above all, peace!

My Kazakh who breaks up the ore samples rejoices literally in the fine name of "Boh-ish-pie" and he finishes up with "Bygum"!! We are ladling copper at a terrific rate and the merry round goes on night and day. Our ore is running 23% regularly, our slags are less than 0.5% and we are making 99.5% refined copper at last. Everyone is busy and joyful. I have not been eagle hunting yet but there is yet time and Mr Fell is away! As the Kazakhs say, "Who knows?". I begin to believe you are a myth and a dream only.

Toshy.

October 13, 1904

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

... I believe I have learned how to develop and print decent prints now, for no one else has touched this; I get the chemicals and mix my own solutions now, avoiding Eastman's Kodak mixtures as I would one of those pretty little fairy creatures whose names are never mentioned.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

The yurt ones are hard for there is so much smoke in the air and the Kazakhs will move, to scratch their noses or to kick a dog or something else of more importance than photography. The one where the white wolfhound shows, I took last spring out at an aul near the Uspensky Mine. I saw that dog, with one other, kill seven hares in less than four hours. He is a pure Kazakh wolfhound and I tried to buy him to no purpose. A Kazakh will not sell anything he really likes, he just says "No he wants it too," not even if you offer him much more than it's worth. He just says "No use" with a cheerful smile. Please tell Captain Trench when you next see him that I am



Frank with bustards he has shot

behaving shamefully to him but that I really will write to him very soon. I have only just lately moved from my yurt to a comfortable room next to Mr Fell's, and now I can write letters without shivering the pen out of my hand. Snow has fallen already and ice formed over our small home-lake last night. Soon the white, warm blanket will cherish and comfort the ground and all will be cosy and — beastly

Goodbye, far-away creature.

From Tosh.

October 24, 1904

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

I am awfully pleased that you like your brooch and I thank you ever so much for the nice way in which you said so. That you wear the brooch and that it gives you pleasure is all the world to me.

...I am getting daily lessons from my fox. I keep him in a part of the assay office where it is cold and dry and there is a window where he sits on the cill all day and watches the life outside. He is growing fast, big and saucy and his coat is glorious. I cannot make him like me to handle him but, if I leave him alone, he suffers me and bears my presence uncomplainingly. He refuses to eat if anyone else is present, spending his time indignantly coughing his cheeks out at them and uttering coon-like throaty rattles and wheezes but, alone, he eats out of my hand and seems not afraid. I must get a really young one someday!

1904

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

I am going to Uspensky Mine in a few days (you may miss your next Sunday letter) to Mr Mussen's, and both of us are going to ride out 30 miles to Djakin Moustaphin's zimoffka where we have arranged a two-day eagle hunt for foxes. Imagine hawking for foxes with eagles! My new fine camera is now working well and I know all its hidden secrets so I shall get some glorious photos. I shall carefully note the costume of Djakin's big girl and any new things I shall notice I shall have copied in yours, for Djakin's girl is the height of fashion on the steppes and I have a great admiration for her. If I can, I will send you her photograph and you may see your costume, so to speak. Olivia's is nearly finished. It was finished once but Roos Bai was crazy to make her another camisole, of a fancy Tartar pattern and style and I am pandering to all Roos Bai's professional enthusiasms on principle, so jumped at his proposal. So the little Parisian sister will have two camisoles to paralyse Paris with. Roos Bai says you must have a broad, silver-braid belt to your camisole and I have sent to Akmolinsk for it. The Sultan's women will make your fur cap. The Sultan has agreed and that settles it. Mr Fell is as well as I ever saw him and we are booming at the works.

Goodbye, Pomp,

From Tosh.

November 7, 1904

Spassky

Yesterday I returned from a full week away on the steppe, eagle-hunting! I went to Uspensky first, picked up Mussen and went on south 40 versts to Eeskok Djamanteekoff's yurts. We arrived there at three in the afternoon and found that he had left at noon for Djakin's yurts, 50 versts away. They sent a messenger after him at once and, at 3am, Eeskok, Djakin and a goodly array of sporting friends arrived with eagles and dogs and beaming faces. That made 100 versts for Eeskok in 15 hours and it was taken as a matter of course! We then hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish (the young Kazakh blood), riding all day with the eagle over and around great granite peaks and glorious hills; the plan being to take the eagle to the highest place possible, on horseback if possible; or the horse is left and the man and eagle climb higher. There they stay, motionless until game is sighted, when away goes the eagle and the man dashes for his horse and tries to break his reckless neck following the flying bird; our part being to beat up game in the winding gullies and rough spots. These two days we had poor luck, seeing no foxes or wolves but the eagle swooped close to me and killed the biggest owl I ever saw or dreamed of. I have the complete skin and, as luck would have it, this is the bird that the Kazakhs

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

get the tufts of feathers for the girls' caps, so Marian's costume will have a tuft killed in full flight by an eagle. This eagle also picked up a young kid and mauled it so that it had to be killed. It also just missed a puppy, dashing at it with hooded eyes. Verily a fierce, outrageous bird! I have many photographs to be developed and I believe they will be a success.

We spent another night at Eeskok's yurts, when he presented me with a magnificent Kazakh wolfhound pup of



Eagle with its handler and kill

two months. This pup's father helped to kill five bighorn sheep single-handed, besides any number of wolves and foxes. We saw tracks of bighorn sheep and the evident home of a bear in the rocks and, as these mountains are the headquarters of horse thieves and Kazakh robbers, we saw signs of them frequently: fireplaces built around with stones to conceal the glare, small piles of hay hidden in the rocks and bits of rag stuck to bushes as signals. We were a party of nine, all armed, or else it is dangerous to hunt here. One night at 9pm while we were eating supper, wolfing horsemeat in Eeskok's yurt, a wolf entered the very flock of sheep which was among the yurts and tore the throat of a big ewe so scientifically that, although the uproar of dogs, men and women scared away the wolf, the sheep soon bled to death. Wolves are an ever-present menace out here.

Politics are raging on the steppe, the same old politics that rage in Kissimmee and it is most amusing. Djakin was up for re-election as magistrate and he is

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

the John Lee¹¹⁵ of the steppes with a well organised ring. The elections are on now and many horses, cows, sheep and camels change hands instead of money. Mysterious messengers came riding to Djakin, wherever he happened to be, and they would ride off to one side and whisper, and away the man would jog with his orders. We went to visit another, rich old Kazakh who travels to Turkestan every winter for rugs, silks and precious things and, at my request, his two daughters clothed themselves in their finest apparel to be photographed, for Marian's especial benefit. This old Kazakh said he had a fine eagle and would come to the mine to us and hunt it on the surrounding hills, so I waited a day at the mine for him. We hunted all day, the old man bringing two eagles and, although I saw the two eagles chase a fox a long way and also chase a wolf, and although in both cases they nearly killed, the fox and the wolf got off finally. Speaking from the point of kills, I would far rather hunt good dogs than eagles, but from the point of interest, the eagle wins. The eagle saw the wolf from a high peak where I also was and swooped down into the valley until it was a mere speck, very hard to follow, and jumped that wolf so that we saw him plainly. There followed a hot chase but the wolf doubled every time the eagle made his dash at him and got away in some high bush. The eyesight of an eagle is something to make you hold your breath and wonder at when you actually gauge its power.

Eeskok Djamanteekoff has promised me another wolfhound pup in a month's time and, if the young ladies and The Boy come next summer to these beloved steppes, we will catch jack-rabbits and foxes and perhaps wolf; sure as fate!

Our weather was glorious until I drove home and now a mild boorahn is blowing. Copper is booming and all are well.

Good night,

Tosh.

¹¹⁵ I can't trace this person; Frank amended it to read Tammany Chief when he started editing; Tammany was an organization within the Democratic Party, widely associated with corruption, dominant in political life in New York City in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

November 19, 1904

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

It seems so funny to be writing this so early in the year but here goes, with a loud yell, guaranteed to reach you:— A Merry, Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to follow. Notwithstanding that Mr Fell has prophesied a green Christmas, the ground here is all covered in spots by those same white blankets which don't keep you warm; and, Marian, every Russian is big enough and hairy enough to make a fine Father Christmas. The tree will be the greatest difficulty. Instead of going to Lake Hendon, we have to go about 100 miles there and 100 back on sleighs to a place called Beel Argash. Beel is axle in Kazakh and Argash is wood and the Kazakhs travel for hundreds of versts to it to make their ridiculous wooden axles for their ramshackle wagons. I camped at a well near it on my way to Bayan Aul this summer.

... We are going to keep the Russian Christmas, 13 days after the real one, and we shall give a big tree for the Russian children who are legion here. The priest, in long hair and robes, will officiate and he will bless the tree and walk around it with a big cross and much ceremony. Then the children will form a circle, joining hands around it and they will sing pretty little Russian songs, all as sad and plaintive as they can be for a lot of happy children. Mr Fell will see that the presents on the tree will reach the children and oceans of refreshments will be swallowed. There will be music and dancing, and singing and reciting and generally a most hilarious time. So you see that we shall be busy and that Christmas will be celebrated at Spassky.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

Your costume is now being fashioned by the hand of genius and I shall have ample time to make it perfectly, wonderfully complete. The photographs of the two big girls I am sending you gave me several new ideas which will appear upon you in good time. I hope you like the postcards. They are all by my camera and all my own work. This camera is a possession worth owning and I see great enjoyment with it till I reach the mumbling stage when my nose touches my chin.

My wolfhound pup I have named "Toolkah" which means fox in Kazakh and the other one I have been promised, I shall name "Kashkeer" which is wolf in Kazakh talk. This pup is a glory, a grand collection of uproarious spirits and mischief. If I leave it at my room I have to chain it or else I find my whole place strewn with torn paper, books, hats, slippers and everything else. Mr Mussen and I measured it at two months old and Mr Mussen did it as if it was a survey in the mine. These are the figures:

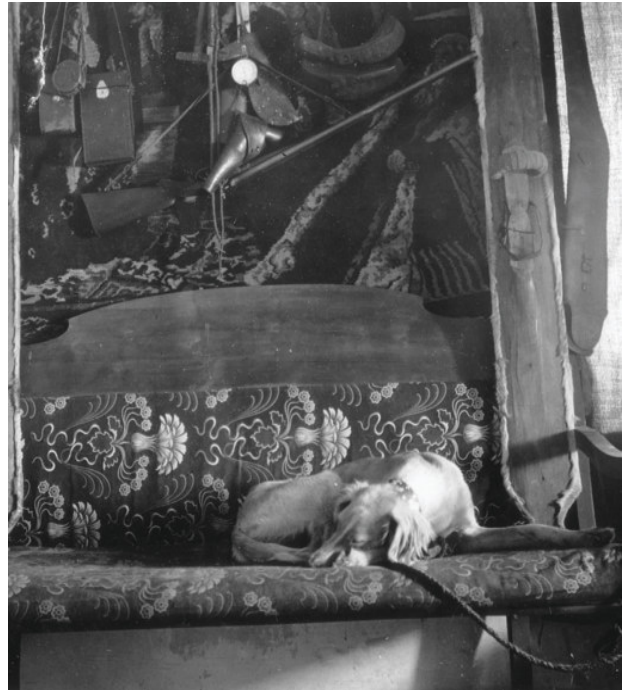
[I have omitted the exhaustive table of measurements]

For a two months old pup I call that quite large. I will try to photograph it for you to see. I have to watch it closely or else the Kazakhs would steal it in a hurry, for it comes of the finest of steppe strains.

Much as I don't want to, I must stop so, again, with a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to Marian, I remain,

Yours devotedly,

Toshy.



A pampered wolfhound — Frank's? I can't be sure

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

November 26, 1904

Spassky

Dear Willie,

I am wishing you a Merry, Merry Christmas, and I am hoping that you will be as happy as such a nice girl should be. I am sure you will have a glorious time because I am under the impression that a collection of young ladies may generate a vast amount of fun, and Paris at Christmas must be a joy and a delight with its wonderful cathedral services, its glorious music, its shops, decorations and gaiety. I shall wonder what you are doing. Last Christmas at Omsk, this Christmas in Paris, next Christmas, where will it be, Willie?

My greatest pleasure is to allow myself to think of you when I am quiet and undisturbed; and one is always comforted by the knowledge, no matter how disconsolate one maybe, that someday one will see you again. If it will be next summer then indeed, my cup of place will be full. I have written to Razmussin telling him to get that incomparable horse Djumabek for me this winter, on the chance of you coming.

We have had a grand excitement here. A few nights ago, just before suppertime, a man dashed into my room and shouted that the laboratory was on fire. I flew, as it was locked, and it was true, the roof and inside were blazing; the big whistle was blown and, in 15 minutes, 100 people were there with buckets of water and unlimited shrill, Kazakh talk. Soon the Fire Brigade dashed up in style – a big water tank with a troika and a pump, worked by many men, on two great arms, forcing a good stream through the hose. As I knew the place well, I took the hose nozzle and started inside. The smoke was so intense and overpowering that I had to crawl in on hands and knees where a little air remained. I was thinking more of my explosive chemicals than anything else and, having doused them well, I went to work on the actual fire. This was quickly put under control, luckily, but the smoke, having no exit, was appalling. Long after the fire was out, excited Kazakhs climbed up on the roof and poured buckets of water down the chimney onto my hot-plate, raising clouds of hot steam to add to our troubles. I was very angry and it was very funny and I came to the conclusion that it that it was more funny than I was angry, so I crawled out and turned the hose on them. Very little damage was done¹¹⁶ but if my chemicals had begun to explode it would have been serious.

¹¹⁶ Frank added a note to himself to "relate what Atkinson did" but, sadly he did not.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

Mr Fell was away at Karagandy when it happened. The people turned out in great force almost at once and nearly everyone came running with a bucket of water which is an excellent idea. This is practically a small town and we think that it has actually a larger population than Bayan Aul. All's well that ends well, after all.

Mail should have come this evening and we were most disappointed – as usual. My wolfhound is growing like a weed and promises to be a great big dog and I am anxiously expecting the other one. A pair of them will be treasures and if you come and if you bring along Pomp and The Boy we shall have some glorious gallops after jackrabbits, foxes or wolves. Mr Atkinson saw seven, great, gaunt wolves in a pack the other day, only four versts from the works. Imagine seeing a troupe of seven big fellows out for mischief and destruction and imagine being a sheep out here. It must be fun to be a wolf and rather depressing to be a thoughtful sheep.

Today I rode out to see a strange sight: our winter's supply of beef is being killed and stored up in a great magazine where it will remain frozen hard all winter; now, I am not joking when I tell you that they are killing as many as 150 head of fine cattle just as quickly as they can do it properly. I never saw so much beef hanging up and piled up in one place before. The work was going on in a gulley on the steppe near a zimoffka and I took a lot of photographs¹¹⁷. All Kazakhs at work, men and women; all cheerful it seemed, and even the cattle themselves. Spassky is now a big concern, Willie, and it gets bigger every day. It is full of life and movement, and work and bustle!

*Again let me wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and then I will reluctantly say good night.
Tosh.*

¹¹⁷ Indeed he did, but I have not included them!

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

December 4, 1904

Spassky

Ypa [Russian for hoorah] for Roosevelt! I almost wired to him but it was three weeks after the [presidential] election when I got the good news¹¹⁸. I am going to write to him and send him some hawking-with-eagle photographs. No man is perfect but I do believe that he works harder to do right than most men. History will be the sweeter reading if such men make it!

I am imagining you driving up and down the beach, cold nights and dark nights, arranging for a big Christmas festival and I wish I were with you to do the driving, and anything else to help. Our Christmas will be gay enough, from the Russian point of view, but I fail to find any real enthusiasm for their doings. There is to be a play, a concert, a Christmas tree and a dance, unlimited food and general intoxication. They are now rehearsing the play; I have, so far, avoided all invitations to attend without offending feelings. Russian plays all hinge upon drink and the intoxicated man is always a leading feature; this play is no exception and the players reel around through the parts most naturally.

Lately, this question has been uppermost with us, for it became almost intolerable. Vodka was brought in steadily and if it is get-at-able, the Russian workman never refuses. Our work was interfered with and something strenuous had to be done. We found out, a few nights ago, that your old friend Tokay was storing and selling vodka, so at once (9pm), Mr Fell and I and the (Russian) smelter-superintendent sailed out on a raiding expedition. We went to Tokay's abode and found him about to retire. He was much taken by surprise and vociferated his innocence. Mr Fell uttered a monotonous demand for his store, until Tokay produced an enormous bottle of vodka — you know the size (containing 8 gallons¹¹⁹) — which merely produced the same dirge-like demand and desire for more. Tokay produced another and then, after more vociferations of complete innocence — another. Mr Fell told him to call for his "time" in the morning and then we left, each bearing an enormous bottle. These we took just outside and dashed to the hard frozen ground, leaving the shattered fragments as a warning to malefactors.

¹¹⁸ Frank had enlisted in Roosevelt's Rough Riders in the Spanish-American war of 1898 and he and Theodore Roosevelt remained friends for life.

¹¹⁹ 3.8 litres to the US gallon. Some bottle! Can this be right? 5 litres is the biggest I can see anywhere nowadays.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

The next day the Tartar store was searched and much more was found. This was all confiscated and then the word went forth that Roos Bai was harbouring strong liquors. His place was visited, none being found, but it proves that the Tartars are a tricky lot. They sell at exorbitant prices, rob the workmen and cause trouble. Roos Bai has been sternly warned that the eagle eye is upon him and to mend his ways. In shrill squeaks he intimated that there was a conspiracy against him, but he was badly rattled. Now every workmen desiring to get "thick in the clear" must order his starch through the office. At certain times and religious festivals they must have it, and then they will be allowed. Spassky is a regular rabbit warren, full of people coming and going from Akmolinsk or Karkarolinsk and it is very hard to stamp this thing out. Like Umslopogaas¹²⁰, the woodpecker, I drive my [geologist's] pick with long points, through great bottles of liquid and it is an inspiring moment.

Spassky is booming steadily; this month (November) the output will not be as big as last because necessary building work on furnaces etc has been going on which will enable us to keep up an output of 50,000 rubles a month or better, every month in the future. Imagine, we made a profit of 33,000 rubles in October. Ready money seems to be a source of trouble but it is only temporary. Improvements are made all along the line; for instance, refined copper now averages 99.2% at least, instead of the Riasanoff 97% stuff, and we shall get it to 99.5% or higher when our new calcining furnace is ready, which will roast the matte and oxidize off the arsenic and antimony that adulterates our refined product.

I am soon having a new man in the assay office to help Bastrakoff and me keep the work under. We are loaded with work and this help is much needed. This is a most interesting place to work in, for our field of labour is a very wide one, from the ore in place in the mine, all through the various changes in its journey towards copper bar form, to the assaying of coal and iron ore, fireclay, firebrick, red brick, limestone, quartz, boiler scales, flu dust and so on, never endingly. I am making arrangements for apparatus to allow us to make a complete analysis of bar copper and, when I leave this place, I should be a better chemist by 100%. And it is all interesting, one thing bearing upon and fitting in with another, with the result that something is definitely known and decided upon. Mr Fell's sphere embraces the whole horizon and he is very happy.

Good night. I wish you were here! Tosh.

¹²⁰ A Zulu chieftain from novels by Rider Haggard; armed with an axe, he was known as 'the Woodpecker'.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

December 4, 1904

Spassky

Dear Marian,

You will be glad to hear that it is a nice, warm, slushy night with a steady drizzle of rain falling. You will be delighted to hear that somebody has taken all those fluffy white blankets off the ground and you will be charmed to hear that the temperature rose at once. All this has happened and the good work goes on. Never was there such a season in the remembrance of the ancientest Kazakhs of the steppes. The old Kazakh weather prophets shake their heads and express the utmost surprise and disgust. We have had no real winter yet, a little frost, a



Butchery at Spassky; hides and carcasses

little snow, some blow and fuss but no winter. Last night it never froze at all and, all day, the water stood in pools. If it now freezes hard and stays that way, it will cause the starvation of thousands of head of stock on the steppes. You see, stock has to paw the snow reach food but, if the grass is frozen into a sheet of ice, they paw in vain and die by hundreds and thousands, for there is never enough hay to keep them going. The spring we first arrived in was the end of just such a winter and stock was then in a deplorable state.

Besides, we lately caused to be butchered 170 head of fine beef, believing that winter is due and they are all in a big store

room patiently waiting to be eaten, and I fear that they will be very disappointed if we get no steady frost mighty soon. It is a serious matter, I assure you for those ghostly beeves will haunt the steppes, the Kazakhs say, unless they are eaten.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

The Kazakhs says that if you kill anything and do not eat it, it will haunt you, always appearing when you are in your worst difficulties and when, by doing so it can do use the most hard. Imagine a herd of 170 beefly ghosts charging the camp some dark night, headless, footless, skinless, red and bony creatures, belonging to another world. Personally, I am going to eat beef all winter even if it does stay warm, out of that store room too, to appease those rows of grisly ghost. A Kazakh at Djakin's shot a dog, wantonly, while we were last there. A grim silence followed while the man, in a hushed manner, took off its skin. The meat, he left where it lay. That night, the man talked uneasily in his sleep and the Kazakhs told me that he was telling the ghost of that dog to keep off and to leave him alone. I did not envy that man a bit.

Good night, Pomp. I feel quite creepy!

Toshy.

December 11, 1904

Spassky

Dear Pomp

I don't know what I have done to deserve such a nice letter from you. It brought The Point back to me so that I could see and feel it and I groped through my work the rest of the day in a sort of dream, breaking expensive and almost irreplaceable glassware and spoiling assays right and left. Catching minnows with a seine net must be a great sport. The wily shiner who has evaded and scooted past you all these years must have turned pale and faint. Don't you remember, the windy, stormy day that you and I took a sail in the Watermelon, when we ran before the gale, half full of water and beached ourselves in safety, just in time. I never told you at the time, but I expected every minute that the water which sloshed about from bow to stern would surely sink us and I wondered to myself how you could manage to swim in a skirt and if it would help you or not and many other. But all's well that ends well!

I believe I know the stream and hole near Tiger Island where are you made your big haul. The Butlers used to fish there but they, in their usual modest and reserved, almost shy manner, never told anyone about it and I

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

got the information from Mose Tindall¹²¹. That reminds me – has Mose ever dug out that rattlesnake den near Tiger Island which Fred and I tried with him once. Fred will tell you all about it. He will not have forgotten as it was such a lovely day. Thank you very much for the sketch of Walker¹²². It is now on my table in front of me where I can see it at any moment you have just called the old scamp's resigned expression of boredom which he wore on special occasions. I will send you a photograph of my new dog, the Kazakh wolfhound. She is turning out very well, being intelligent, sensitive and inclined to be obedient but, as a means of mischief and a collection of wild spirits I think she is unique.

The fox is now a great big, fine fellow, a fluffy ball of beautiful fur, iron-grey, yellow, brown and black and splashed with red. He is a ferocious creature, despising and loathing the human race and, two days ago, I had a fearful tussle with him to loosen his collar which he had outgrown. My Kazakh and I knelt upon him and gave him no chance, while green lightning flashed from his eyes and his hoarse coughing language cursed us by all the gods of his wild ancestors. My Kazakh was bitten on the ear and head in the chivaree but he thought it was a great joke and a cause for much laughter. He said, in Kazakh of course, "Fat fox, teeth blunt; thin fox, teeth sharp. This one fat one pood".

The Kazakhs have just had a three days holiday and they certainly made the most of their fun! Only twice a year do they have these gay times. For thirty successive days they ate nothing and drank nothing between sunup and sunset, even little children of 8 years of age, and they do not play at pretending to keep the fast; they just keep it strictly as a matter of course, all of them. The holiday began when the fast was over and lasted three glorious days of feasting and games on horseback. Spassky was overrun with gaily dressed, greasy-faced, happy Kazakhs in their best clothes, all in the highest spirits, joking, and beaming upon everything.

Their pet game on horseback is very simple and very rough. A man is given a fox-skin, or sometimes a live kid, and he dashes off. All the rest, perhaps two or three hundred of them, follow at a dead gallop, the idea being to grab that thing from him at all hazard and dash off yourself. Any roughness is allowed except actual blows. If you can knock him down, horse and all, so much the better, everyone roars with laughter and the injured go

¹²¹ A particular friend in Florida.

¹²² Frank's dog in Florida.

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to their homes to drink tea and eat sheep. I saw at least 300 mounted men close behind one fine young chap on a grand and gay black horse. The young chap was going at a wild gallop, almost turned completely in his saddle, dangling the fox-skin derisively before his half-crazy pursuers. They closed upon him and, in a short time, I saw six men go down, horses and men, spread-eagled and sprawling, while the evasive fox-skin changed hands rapidly. There is no regular finish and no winner as far as I could see. They keep going until the horses are all pumped, and then they draw rein and laugh over the funny incidents.

Then they wrestle on horseback and play at picking up coins from the ground. This last amusement they are not good at for they ride with such loose girths always that the saddle frequently skips at the critical moment and dumps the man. It is only the vast amount of clothes they wear keeps them from serious injury. I was invited to a big tea-gathering where games were played and it was most amusing. The pet game is also very rough. Someone begins by worming his way through the swarm of men and women sitting cross-legged in heaps. He or she stops before some unfortunate and deals him or her a fearful great slap on the cheek. If the slapped one winces, he or she must start off and slap someone else. And the way the men slap the women, hard and fierce resounding blows, is a terror to witness. And they laugh until they cry! The women, too, are not backward with their slaps while it is all done in the most perfect and simple good humour, absolutely incomprehensible to me. The joke is on the slapper if the slapped ... one does not wince. They call him a weakling a babeling, so he hits the next person twice as hard; if that person does not wince, the crowd shakes with laughter and the slapper is covered with confusion. And begins to think he's really no good. Anyone slap me like that and I'd get even if it took 40 years with hard labour.

*Good night. It is time to fall into a trance for eight hours!*From Tosh

December 15, 1904

Spassky

Dear Minor,

There is nothing like making a clean breast of it but it nevertheless lessens none of the guilt. Penitence at the point of a pen may be bought like peanuts. But I must say that your picture, which I had turned towards the wall, is now once again facing the world as unblushingly as ever of old. Durn you, do you think I never want to hear what you are doing and how you are getting along? Am I a mud-hen with no thoughts except for food and

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

eggs. The truth is that I have been keenly anxious to hear about your doings, year in and year out and that you cannot write to often to suit me. My news, God knows, you have had; weekly editions, dailies and extras and the same old one-man press is still running.

Quart wrote me also, the letter arriving with yours and Quart shall get his reward. I like the way Quart writes now. He seems to be taking his new venture seriously and earnestly and if Quart masters the intricacies of business with a big B, he will surely make us all rich even if the wail of the disrupted orphans and the howls of the impoverished sound in our callous ears.

My business instincts must have been dormant all these past years, not dead, but sleeping like Mr Fell does, because I seem to have come out on top of late. After we came to Siberia and after I had seen Spassky and the mine, I invested £100 in shares with the company and I dragged old Mussen in with me; and again last February I put in £100 more, still dragging the hefty and reluctant Mussen with me. Then, recently, the company has made me a present of 100 more shares. Now, every £1 share, I am told, calls for three shares in the new and present company and we are further told that shares will go up to 2, 3, 4 or £5 before a year or two, which is not at all unlikely. So I count upon 700 shares in the innocence of my soul.

The last mail brought the news, unofficially, it is true, that the decree to make a railroad between Omsk and Tashkent has been signed. This railroad must come to us for coal, besides the fact that we are almost in the direct road. I am going to buy more shares if I can get them on the ground floor. It is no gamble at all when you have seen the mine and know the facts. We have a bonanza. Why, the coal deposits alone are worth a mint apart from another mint in copper. Someday, people will break their foolish necks to buy shares at big prices. It should mean a big thing for Mr Fell. So I sit and dream of Paradise Island¹²³ and a place free from this poor white trash of snow.

If you come to Europe next spring and the family leaves for the steppes, you must come also. I'll chip in with all your expenses back to Florida again if you will make it a go. Come and see the Kazakhs and die laughing when your time comes. Today I was walking in a most dignified manner through the works and a little ragged 2-foot brat of a Kazakh boy chirped up at me "Where are you going? Tell me at once!" I answered, "Going to

¹²³ His home, an island in Lake Tohopekaliga, Florida.

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the devil," in fluent Kazakh, and he gibbered back like a flash, "Oho, going home are you?" For pure cheek and independence they are hard to beat.

The photograph, I enclose, you may recognise. I sent it with a dogged indifference to all remarks derogatory to its wonted appearance. I have been cutting that crop now for almost a year and I know its inestimable value. I mainly ask that you send me one of yours in return and don't be too long about it either or I'll anathematise you forever.

It is delightful to hear of your good fortune in regard to your work but you are getting no more reward than you deserve. The VP keeps me posted as to your doings to a certain extent, and told me that you are in with Abrams¹²⁴ on this fence-cutting cow-tail cutting case which I hope you will win, hands down, and thumbs down too when it comes to deliver judgement. I have no patience with dirty work done in the dark. It is so easy to do to begin with and carries no danger.

Goodbye, Minor, I know that every wastepaper-basket in your office is full and overflowing and my heart bleeds for you.

Goodbye again, Tosh.

December 18, 1904

Spassky

[To Anne]

It is queer to look up at the photograph of The Point and to see it breathing warm and green shoots and fluffy cross and sports of blazing sunshine and to soon be there in all but the futile, immobile flesh; and then to come back from there and to see one's miserable, muddy clay sitting in a cold, large and white-walled barrack, surrounded on the outside by leagues of white snow over which a biting, snarling wind incessantly roams and rages. Then you ask yourself, "Why do you do it" and, as there is no answer suitable, the subject is dropped. Life seems to be a question of being miserable to make money. They are lucky who can be fully satisfied in their daily work only, and who do not want anything else besides. As I have always told Minor, never grumble at your

¹²⁴ Not traced

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

lot, for you live in the right place, no matter what the work may be, or words to that effect. Snow and sleighs and camels and pig-footed enormous-coated Mongol men! There is nothing else visible. The mail should have come tonight and it has not and all the world is blue and green to me just now.

Tomorrow is a big Russian holiday, the Czar's Angel day, and as Nyemkoff's name is also Nikolai, it is his name day also, so I and Atkinson are driving over to see him and to drink his noble health. He is a most untiring sportsman who infects those around him and, at Karagandy, he has started a regular craze for trotting horses, driven to very light sleighs. There will be racing tomorrow and much jollification.

The works are booming in a steady go-ahead style and new furnaces are nearing completion which will ensure us a steady monthly output of nearly \$40,000 with a finer grade of refined copper. There is plenty of ore ahead and plenty of coal and it is just a question of plant to reduce it to dollars fast or slowly. Everything except the question (the inevitable one) of ready and immediate money, is working harmoniously and with no apparent friction. Christmas preparations are underway on a big scale!

Good night. I am at The Point.

Tonight I can think of nothing else.

Tosh.

December 28, 1904

Spassky

Dear Willie,

... Our mail is very late this time. Nine days ago it left and it has not yet returned so I missed my last Sunday's letter to you and I am very sorry. The mail just before Christmas brought us some grand, enlarged photographs from The Point. Mine is the one of the dear old home with you and Pomp and Darwin and Barney and Zippy and Columbia and Curly and Thor and the Jaybird and I am looking at it even now. It is my very favourite photograph for it recalls the happiest time of my whole life. It seems like yesterday to me and now it is all so different and never will come back any more. This long and bitter road which has no turning, leads you on and on, straight ahead, and you never pass the same thing twice and you can't turn and walk back and you mayn't lie down and you mustn't squeal and that's what they call life....

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

...The truth is that you must not pay any attention to this rubbish I am writing, and see for the truth is that I want to see you again so badly that I am nearly crazy and see the world through mud-coloured spectacles. And I mean what I say! We had quite a festive Christmas day even if it was 13 days before the Russian Christmas. The men here worked a surprise upon us. They announced through the fine old Russian foreman that they were all coming up at 6pm as soon as the big whistle (which is just like a steam bike) blew. They came, troops of them, all the furnace man, all the masons, all the carpenters, the blacksmiths, the drivers, the engine-room men, the office-men, the bosses and all the men in the higher positions. We gave them good cheer and they drank our health and hoped we would be healthy and live long at Spassky. We drank the Czar's health and they sang the Russian national hymn. They then drank Mr Roosevelt's health and King Edward's and the long-haired priest made a speech.

Soon a fiddle appeared, and a guitar and several accordions, and dancing began. All were men present, but they danced quadrilles and all kinds of queer step-dances in the greatest good humour. And every now and then, some of them would break out in a deep throated chorus. And the men were very touched and grateful. Always before, the men were allowed to go to the kitchen and no further. It was a great success!

Everything is now working here with the greatest harmony and Spassky is booming. We are sending off caravan after caravan to Petropavlovsk, loaded with bars of copper and, night and day, the furnaces roar. It is like the Athabasca only 50 times as big. Great camels stalk about in hundreds and Kazakhs are like flies around a pot of honey. Come and see it! It seems so funny because our real Christmas is still a long way off and we shall still have Christmas trees and entertainments and jollifications. I am going to attend the church services here on the Russian Christmas. So far we have had very little snow and not much real winter and we need snow badly for hauling big loads of coal and ore on our sleighs. Good night you nice Willie; I am sorry that my letter is ending.

From the same old

Toshy.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

December 31, 1904

Spassky

It is a shame to write you such a scrap of a letter but the system which sends out a mail is responsible for any irregularities. The mails leave now at any time at a moment's notice and no two days are alike in any week. One never knows when to write or when a mail is due to come or go. I suppose there are reasons, but it would be easy to send a regular mail always and as many irregular ones as one wanted in between. But the office is the one bear-garden in Spassky now and the mailbag is the football in the middle of the scrimmage. This is the outcome of going to breakfast and being told that the mail will leave in a few minutes.

Our Xmas did not pass by quite unnoticed for all the men, the Russians, both workmen and men of higher grades, came up to drink our health and give their congratulations. This lasted all the evening and into the night. They danced and sang and played weirdly upon violins and accordions.

The joke is that we shall have Christmas all over again and New Year's Day tomorrow before we have seen a Xmas tree. The Kazakhs will keep our blast furnaces running or else we would be in a bad way, for the Russians will fight the enemy, sobriety and will fall in heaps and be untended by doctors or Red Crosses for days.! Such are the horrors of modern war!

This place is surely the meeting-ground of all the camels in the world, mobs of them, self-possessed and busy! All are well and the work is going on unceasingly night and day. Copper is moving to the railroad in a steady procession of camel caravans. Goodbye.

We have had no mail for almost 2 weeks.

Toshy.

January 12, 1905

Spassky

This is the worst place on earth to write letters from. The defining "inflatus" refuses to come to the only grimy heap upon these hundreds of miles of spotless snow. One day nearly follows another regularly and that is about all. Every day brings its zavodkin successes in terms of copper and even that is getting monotonous. But it is grand to be able to say that this is, at last, to are dead certainty, going to be a success of the first magnitude.

Today a small mail arrived, most disappointing except for the fact that it told me officially I possess 600 Spassky Copper Limited shares. The shares I had in the Siberian Syndicate have been converted into the new Spassky ones. The 600 have cost me £200 and they will bring £1200 today in London. I always knew that really I had a genius for making money, although no-one would believe it. And I by driving and goading Mr. Mussen, have done the same by him. He is here now and his face is wreathed in one smile. "My ambition (this is a phrase of Atkinson's) now impels me to strive and strive till I've been called a Napoleon of finance. I used to have hankerings to be called a "Silver-tongued orator when I lived in the States but the steppes have intervened and robbed the polish off that idol. I long to eat my meals munching into a telephone and to give orders which will cause panics on all the exchanges when my mouth is full.

One seems to be rather far away and somewhat side-tracked just at present, but they say that "You cannot keep a good man down" and these old sayings always have a basis of truth. Anyway I would rather own Spassky shares than Rio Tinto, Calumet and Hectar! It's like seeing your own



Razmussin and his wife

1903

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

horse win the race and that is the height of all bliss. Just fancy I could buy a herd of 300 Kazakh horses and be a bai and watch other people work for the rest of my life; I would go south to Lake Balkhash if I had any sense though there are very bad horse thieves there. Every problem is really a problem! No continuation.

January 22, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

We are now the playthings of winter, being caressed or razzle-dazzled according to its pleasure. Tonight it shows its highest manners and it is better to hide in your hole than to go out and face it. A boorahn with a broom at the masthead is careering around and by morning the steppes will be clean and very white. The last three days have been more than cold. The cold wave came with a north-wester, suddenly and, the first evening by our official thermometer, the reading stood at 22° Fahrenheit below, the next evening it had moved to 35° below and yesterday evening it collapsed to 55° below zero. Now we have only the word of that silent thermometer as to the truth of these records and I confess to being sceptical, but Mr Fell is prepared to die in defence of it.

The fact that he naturally loves to exaggerate does not induce me to believe more strongly; but the fact also that we live in such warm houses does induce me to think that the extremes of cold may envelop us and leave us almost unaware of the fact. This morning the wind had changed to due south and it was warmer (still below zero) but the day developed a full grown boorahn which is a peculiarly offensive one. Mr Fell and Atkinson drove to Karagandy this morning intending to return this evening, but no horses were born who would face this wind and flying snow, and they will stay there till the blizzard passes on.

Just now our greatest trouble is a dearth of coal to smelt with. There is any amount mined but it needs hauling and the Kazakhs do not muster in sufficient force to do the work. There must be 600 camels and sleighs hauling coal and ore and we need 1000 at any rate. Flour is very cheap and the Kazakhs have had plenty of steady work from us with the result that they feel rather prosperous, and no Kazakh works unless he positively has to. Next year we shall certainly have one or two tractor engines and trains of six cars of 10 ton capacity to allow us some independence. Last month we rolled out 4590 poods of refined copper at 12.75 rubles a pood. So far we have made nearly 20,000 poods of copper, half of it being profit more or less. It is a bonanza! We are smelting large quantities of ore running 30% and 40% copper.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

I have heard from Razmussin at Bayan Aul that he has got the horse "Djumabek" for me at last, and I am sending a man for the horse at once. And Ida writes that Olivia's Tartar costume has arrived in London. She is delighted with it and will send it on to Paris by the first friend going there. Marian's will go by Mr Fell when he goes to London in a month or six weeks.

Good night. Boorahns are unsettling things!

Tosh.

January 29, 1905

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

It seems to be a long time since I heard from you, or am I mistaken? To put my sentiments into the words of a Russian here who is learning English fast, "Although I am ashamed constantly for this, nevertheless I will again to drink tea at you".

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

Mr Fell and I have come to the conclusion that bad Russian, as it is spoken by English people, cannot be as funny as bad English spoken by Russians. Russians never seem to want to laugh at us but when they start to say anything in English, it is irresistibly funny to us. This Russian is the smelter superintendent. A tall, black-bearded, black-complected, shaggy, black-haired and whiskered man, with a voice like a foghorn and very deeply impressive, and a character to admire and to be amused at.

At one of our Christmas festivities, at the dinner table, Atkinson was skylarking as usual and, in a lull in the conversation, this deep bass voice was distinctly heard to say, "Although you constantly pinch me nevertheless I will drink your health." And if he does not understand what you say to him in English he always answers unhesitatingly "Very dangerous!"

I feel sure that we all have nicknames among the Kazakhs. This Russian smelter-man I have spoken about is "the Black Camel " to the Kazakhs, Mr Fell is "Volkoon Bai", or the Big Boss. Hiram Jones is the "Dumb Man", because he knows no Kazakh or Russian and gesticulates frantically in his agonised endeavours to make himself understood.

I am goading the lazy and the slothful Roos Bai into finishing your costume in time for Mr Fell to take it with him to London or Paris but it is an awful business to keep Roos Bai at work. It promises to be a gem of the most brilliant lustre. All are well but spring is a long way off. Lake Balkhash ahoy!

Goodbye, Pomp, surely you will come in spring. You cannot contemplate anything so cruel as a trip elsewhere. the steppes await you, kneel to you, implore you. Come!

Tosh.



Oliva and Marian in costume

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

February 1, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

I am filled with bad tempers. Some Kazakh scoundrel has stolen my puppy dog, my fine wolfhound and I am bereft of such lovely hunting visions. It is possible that it will turn up again but the blow has entirely shattered all my previous good impressions of the Kazakh race. These zavodkin Kazakhs are lowdown offspring of Shaitan, anyway and I always did say that. It is surprising how often you find yourself right when you don't want to be. To think that a Kazakh has been watching me feed my (his) dog for all these weeks brings the foam to my lips for I am convinced that they can steal a dog whenever and wherever they want to. Those voluminous coats were made to receive stolen goods and a man who thinks nothing of stealing your horse will have no scruples about your dog.

I wish I knew your plans. Mr Fell is leaving in less than two weeks and he seems to be very hazy also as to the future except that he must return soon. If you come out to the steppes, please give me some few weeks warning. It may make things roll smoother for you and yours when you arrive.

It seems such a pity now for you might quite well have spent the winter here. The climate has been so far wonderfully good with very little real cold weather. You would have enjoyed the early difficulties and troubles, although I do not mean to insinuate that you are in any ways combative by nature. When you do arrive, money will drip from on these flat roofs like water and we shall splash in molten pools of it.

Remember that if you come without a side-saddle it will be only because you want to give up riding, there will be no other legitimate reason and you will keenly regret it day after day and week after week. Cannot you bring Minor with you? I'm sure he can learn great deal from Russian law and go back a sadder if a wiser man.

The works continue steadily. The dearth of coal has been tided over and there are 875 camels hauling at present. We shut down three blast furnaces but doubled the amount of ore going to the remaining three which gave us the same amount of copper output on less coal supply. The days are all much alike and give one very little to think about it, much less material for writing. It is shameful that the novelty of the steppes should ever wear out.

Good night,

Toshy.

1905

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

February 13, 1905

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

The proverb about ill winds blowing nobody any good, or words to that effect, comes true oftener than any other. Probably the tears have been chasing themselves down your wan cheeks for two dreary weeks, all because your Poppa was delayed in Siberia but, I am trying to tell you as fast as I can, that, if he had gone on his scheduled time, your Kazakh costume would not have been ready to take along. Now it is ready and I am almost anxious for him to go. I desire you, when you look at it, not to fall into ecstasy over the marvels of Roos Bai's work, but to turn the sweet stream of your ecstasy upon the marvellous manner in which I made him work. It is no use to have a machine capable of doing the finest things, all ready and set up, even well-oiled and declaring what it can do, if you have not got any steam to do the push work. This you know! I began to do the push work last September and, by steadily pushing, I have at last succeeded in the fact that Roos Bai has turned out two complete costumes.

His work is not a patch upon mine for I had to combat all the wily excuses of the Asiatic race. It seemed to be an intricate and complicated point of honour with him not to do anything, although he always said it would be finished "The day after the morrow". To enthuse him, I even lowered myself to pat his dirty little baby upon its greasy head one evening, and the baby has never stopped bawling yet.

Anyway, Marian, the result is very fine indeed and I am not ashamed to send it. It is strictly Kazakh and it is beautifully done. The little upper silver brooch was done for me while I watched, by a Kazakh friend of mine 40 versts from Uspensky Mine; he made it in his yurt at his funny little forge, and his name is Boz Djiggitt. He has been to Mecca and is a holy man. The fact that his friends deny the fact that he was ever within one thousand miles of Mecca, does not keep me from believing he was. I prefer to look up on him as a holy man because he always brings out his best prayer rug and puts on a big white praying head-dress and proceeds to pray a long prayer for me. We are sworn friends and we swapped knives upon it. Although he beat me badly on the swap, I still believe he is a holy man; in fact I consider that almost as a proof.

He is a master-worker in silver. That rank out here is about equal to the rank, in America, of Master-Worker of Fish Stories because you can never believe a single word either of them say. Boz Djiggitt swore to me on his prayer-rug last march, nearly a year ago, that he would make me two silver bracelets and four silver rings in two months' time and he has repeated that swear every two months since.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

Once I weakened and ordered the same order from another Master-Worker of Fish Stories in silver who was highly lied about by Ahmet the Bai, a recommendation above reproach, and I rode a long way to see the man himself, carefully telling him how slow Boz Djiggit has been and insinuating that he looked quicker. He sneezed loftily at Boz Djiggit and all his doings. That was last October. I rode away feeling better about it and almost hopeful. Nevertheless, nothing happened. I waited, as if in mourning, until a decent time had elapsed and then, under the guidance of our Tartarsky policeman, whose jangling sabre and be-dazzling uniform are a sufficient recommendation, I ordered the same from his brother in Petropavlovsk. That was last December.

There is nothing to be said except that, up to the present moment, not one of the orders have turned up and, some day, 6 bracelets and 12 rings will arrive as surely as the sun will rise tomorrow. The Kazakh believes in not doing anything in a hurry but he always eventually does it.

So you see, Marian, that I have tried to get you these things. They cannot be got ready-made, not the kind I wanted you to have. The two bracelets I do send are very old, the old Kazakh style and I was very lucky to get them, but I wanted a pair of the massive silver bracelets that these dignified Kazakh dowagers wear. When you come out here yourself, I will get them for you.

At the neck of the dress is a hole for the stud I send, and the intervening gap is closed by a brooch as a rule. The only ones here are hideously modern Russian ones that the Kazakhs now affect and I avoided all thought of them; so, please wear your chrysophraz pin and rest assured that it is strictly in Kazakh style. Notice, please, also, the dates on the coins of the dangles to your hair.

Your hair, to be quite correct and fashionable, should be in at least 8 plaits, 4 of which on each side are, lower down, joined making two at last, to which the dangles are attached by a ribbon of any colour. I send the hat of a young and unmarried girl, and also the white headdress of the married one. With the white headdress the dangles are not worn. If the room is warm, I should, personally, wear the white affair. The tuft on the hat came from the owl which I saw killed by the eagle.

Goodbye, Pomp. Come and ride. Don't wait too long.

From,

Tosh.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

February 13, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

... Mr Fell as is as worried as if he had missed a train he had run a mile to catch. Everything seems to clutch and hold him here as inevitably as tanglefoot¹²⁵ and he is becoming desperate. He must wait for von Stein, it appears, to sign some pesky papers and Stein will not be here for a week at the earliest, so that London cannot possibly see Fell before March 1st, if he has any business to transact on the way.

I wish to warn you about two important matters he will consider unimportant: Anoushka is not here anymore. She has gone forever — to Omsk — in disgrace. The Keeley Cure¹²⁶ is her only chance for future salvation, or else she will be ejected from the loafing places around the throne on account of the exhilarating influence of her breath upon the innocency of the surrounding angels. Even the most long-suffering of men finally turned and she instantly disappeared for ever.

The other point is that the cook, which he calls a good cook, is a very bad cook and, although grease is good for bearings, there are bearings which cannot stand it if they are soaked in it for too long without any warning. I find it very difficult to make suggestions of any kind, even connected with my work or for the tentative good of the works, because we have argued upon the Boer War and the fiscal question and Japanese character too long, and now invariably and instantaneously we take opposite sides upon any question. If I say that a new cook is needed when you come, the answer comes pat, that this is the best cook that ever existed and, if I say that a servant is needed for you when you come, the answer is that there are thousands of women at the works all waiting in the line for the given signal to race...

No continuation

¹²⁵ A sticky substance put at the base of trees or other plants to trap insects.

¹²⁶ The Keeley Institute, known for its Keeley Cure or Gold Cure, was a commercial medical operation that offered treatment to alcoholics.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

February 23, 1905

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

The seemingly impossible always happens, if it does happen, in an impossible way. I mean the bracelets! For a year I have in vain tried to get them and my teeth are worn with gnashing. Mr Fell was to leave in three days; impossibilities by the million glared at me. Fate wafted in a grubby old Kazakh with Chinese moustaches and oblique eyes across my path and I nailed him to the floor of the lab. Before I let him go, I made him promise to make me all I wanted. He got on his horse and rode away in a great hurry and, I said to myself, "There goes my last chance," and my barometer was very low. Today he arrived perfectly and scandalously delighted, waddling into the lab and tugging at his numerous coats, grand-coats and grandfather's coats. Finally, after a fearful struggle, verging upon apoplexy, he produced a random mass of camel's hair but which was heavy with something. My pleasure so redoubled his that it was dangerous to be near him for he blew the thawing fragments of ice from his Chinese moustache and queer, heathen beard in little explosive showers like shrapnel.

There were the bracelets and the rings, and, he said, he worked upon them day and night, incessantly, from the time he left me, and I believed him or, at least, made him believe that I did believe him. Mr Fell leaves in a day or two and he seems quite sure that you will also return with him in May or June for certain. The spring, O Marian, is the best time of all on the steppes but remember, that it must be spring and not early summer for the early summer brings such clouds of yellow-backed, yellow-eyed and yellow-legged mosquitoes that life on these rolling steppes is a song of woe unless you are in a house.

You have never seen such swarms of skeeters. They live shamelessly in broad daylight in the valley, upon the rocky hilltops, in the wind and in the calm, where water is and where it is as dry as the tomb of a mummy. They light up on you and demand your blood and take it, apparently welcoming sudden death. They last about three weeks only and, in that time, you never see a cow except with its tail hoisted over its back going madly anywhere, oblivious even of its urgent family duties. Do not time yourself to come in late June or else buy much mosquito-netting for the drive. This is no joke, please; I really mean it.

No continuation

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

February 24, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

A letter from Marian today will keep me in good temper all my life to come. She writes "Myrtle" as if it were a turtle, with an 'm' ahead of it and, in her rounded writing, it looked able to waddle. Her letters beam with good humour and pleasant thoughts.

After a fierce flurry punctuated with dreadful language, Mr Fell is leaving tomorrow for countries of boiled shirts and stiff things round your neck. He thought for a time that he was not to go, but his practised habit of always finding a loophole served him well. It is a grand thing that he is going for he surely needs it. The old Bull of Bashan, von Stein, goes with him.

I am sending Marian's fancy dress and it is all complete except some buttons that Mr Fell is pledged to get in Petropavlovsk or Moscow. Your shawl is also packed but I must own up about your clasp. Maybe at a distance it is easier! When I had a second camisole made for Olivia at Roos Bai's earnest request, I was at a supreme loss for a clasp and I felt sure you would have been the very first to put it on Olivia's camisole, so I did and I will get you another, honour bright!

Mr Fell has agreed to bring out a set of small boxing gloves and please remind him and see that he does not find his loophole. The Boy must learn. Indian clubs can be made here to suit his age. If rackets and balls are forthcoming, I believe I can guarantee tennis but that seems rather a bulky idea. Ping-pong [Russian words]. There is no mention of Minor coming so I suppose that is an impossibility. He would enjoy a sight of the steppes and a touch of the Asiatic. What a fine Kazakh he would make — in summertime!

Before you arrive, Mussen and I expect to have been to Lake Balkhash and back, spending most of the month of May in the doing. We are sternly saying nothing about it, for we both know that, if many people are gathered together for a purpose, nothing is ever done. He will make all preparations at his place and, someday, I will get my horse and ride away to meet him with a camera, gun and rifle, three wolfhounds and a trusty Kazakh. Then the trip will come off. The powers that be are willing that we should go. Last year this trip was blown away by the winds of never- ceasing talk and counter-talk, fruitless zipper-yowling and gazing at the moon.

Are you prepared to launch a trusting family upon the steppes again or does your heart fail you. You know the conditions; they are very similar here to those at Bayandy Kuduk. Grown-up daughters seem to complicate the situation alarmingly. Why didn't you stop them, stunt them!

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

I rather like growing up, myself but it is bitter to see them. All their troubles are yet ahead and coming nearer every day. Especially women! Goodnight. It seems impossible to believe that you are coming!

Tosh.

March 2, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

... No sooner did Mr Fell leave than Atkinson was stricken with some influenza malady which so completely prostrated him that he took to his bed or, worse than that, he took to my bed (his room being cold). For the last four days he has been as optimistic in his remarks about the welfare of his country as any stump-orator for the opposition.

Old J [Hiram Jones] has had another attack of horrible agony which he again said he was surprised that he had the fortitude to stand, and life, as far as I am concerned, is a matter entirely of other people's symptoms over which I have no control. It is a very long time since we had any mail, longer than usual and I am reduced to reading ads in the Morning Post!

Goodnight,

Toshy.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

March 17, 1905

Spassky

Dear Marian,

I do not recollect if I thanked you for a grand long letter about your camp with Minor and The Boy. Those kind of days are never forgotten. They are blessed possession which no one can steal and they are always with you, alone or if you are in a crowd of chatterers. ZIP! You are thousands of miles away among the pines and in the quiet of the woods. Without such chances to escape chatterers, life would be an incessant listening to gabbling nothings.

Last Saturday and Sunday I spent with two Russians, both keen sportsmen, on the Nura river, shooting and using my skis for the first time. It was a strenuous time for I had not ridden, to speak of, for months. They drove and I rode, and that afternoon it meant a ride of 60 versts for we went on to Sultan Jengar's house to sleep. Then up early at dawn and out in the cold, greyness of a crackling frosty dawn. On with the skis and off we go over the deep snow on the bed of the river, sliding (and falling) along with a swish, swish in the



"The Sultan Jengar is a Pig; that much I learned". I wish he had said why!

dazzling white softness. But ski-work calls for muscles that, it seems, are never used at other times, and it calls loudly and incessantly; and it was a weary me that dragged itself home at noon to swallow cups and cups of hot tea and to feel gingerly where the heel-strap had rubbed me raw. Out again after lunch (minus the heel-strap) and away for the white banks of deep white, dotted with bushes and small, snow-laden trees, seeing many white ptarmigan, jack-rabbits and big black gamecock. Killing a few too, and missing more, for the skis always tangle up when you are wanting to shoot and you find yourself down, spread-eagled with your gun buried in snow.

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

The Nura is a beautiful sight in winter, finer than in summer! The Sultan Jengar is a Pig, a Shorshkah, a Sveeneeyah; that much I learned and, when I left, I offered to pay him for expenses and I never will be his guest again. He is as different to Eeskok and Djakin as the bounds of possibility allow. A Hebrew-looking, miserly man; the richest Kazakh on the steppe, with three thousand horses and the fear of the miser in his heart. I would not swap his horses for his feelings.

Riding home it got so cold, so biting cold after dusk, that I wilted and crawled into the sleigh. One needs long, loose coats to ride in, in winter, like the Kazakhs use. Our skimpy little civilised coats are useless. I am having one made now. Djoom, the finest horse of them all, is now here and I tried him yesterday. He has lost none of his old ways and filled me with rejoicing. You will like him awfully.

I have tried to imagine you in New York in a full-fledged butterfly state, and I cannot. I gave it up. Mr Mussen and I have about decided to take two camels to pack our stuff when we go to Balkhash; two swift pacing-camels, besides the saddle-horses, Kazakhs and dogs. Camels can carry so much and their backs don't get sore. This is the worst time of the year when you are just bursting to see spring; and spring dawdles and draws back. Good night,

Tosh.

March 19, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

I get strange, distorted glimpses of you in the [Kissimmee] Valley Gazette and it is sad to think that, from that messy source, I get more indications of your existence than from anywhere else. It seems to be my fate to write to winds and waving treetops and to pick as a reward an occasional fir-cone which falls on my astounded head. "Brothers and sisters have I none" — etc and the answer is the same. The last I heard of you was that you had gone to Kissimmee to see off the Treasurer of Yale University. A deed which evidently was appreciated by Harris's unctuous and slimy soul. After that — blank!

Just now, every idiot whose wish is father and mother to all their expressed thoughts is saying that spring has begun but, as I write this evening, it is snowing and blowing in approved January style. At dusk I went out for a stroll around the works and I came upon the crusher gang, the Kazakhs who break up the ore and limestone with single hand hammers for the smelting charges. They were contentedly sitting on rocks in all the smother

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of wind and whiteness, beating up rocks into small rocks and each man had a cheery smile and a Kazakh "How are you, Bai?", for me; all as happy as could be. Not a single day this winter have these men quit work for stress of weather and it is all done sitting down with absolutely no protection.

All the Kazakh chariot-boys furiously driving the chariots with charges for the smelting beds have also never failed in a single day, weather come what may. Just now I saw two of them coming down the slope, abreast, standing wide legged and furiously driving a race, whips falling incessantly, when a wheel came off, and one boy flew with a thud to the ground. I heard his distant wail of grief, long drawn out, but he was wailing for the wheel, not for himself. Our last Kazakh messenger to Akmolinsk was less than six days making the round-trip, 600 versts, in bitter weather. I have found out that they have no word for, "To wish or to desire" in the language. That I think, is proof pure they are a race naturally contented.

I am now reading Carlyle's Frederick the Great and I like it better than his French Revolution. The French Revolution gave me the horrors and I wish I had never read it. It is a loathesome story when it is all ended. There are 13 volumes of Frederick but I wish there were 53.

All is well so far here, all six blast furnaces running, two scarifiers and the refinery. Coal and ore are coming in well at present, but the roads need more snow and, if we have a thaw sufficient to break them up within a month, there will be a shutdown of the works for want of coal. Probably it will come in six weeks and last until the roads are fit to use again. I wish you were coming and that I knew it for certain.

Tosh.

April 7, 1905

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

A long, very welcome letter from you gratefully acknowledged. From the gilded lap of the New Yorksky luxury, too! The schedule of your round of pleasure just made my head swim and my pulse flutter. When did you sleep, or don't grown-ups sleep? It seems to me that I know one or two who insist upon it and for whom the dose can never be too heavy. The item that paralysed me, more than all the rest together, was the 20 calls in one afternoon. If that included tea and large current buns at every call, how did you get home! My mind refuses to go beyond tea and large current buns. Perhaps you drank rainbow spray and ate butterflies' wings or thistledown. Anyway, 20 calls in one day and alive to tell the tale! What did you say to all of them? A type-

Spassky: "We hunted two full days with Eeskok, Djakin and Djakish riding all day with the eagle"

written conversation on your cuff, I suggest, as a good scheme. Or may I assist you for a second appearance in that act by the recital of the inevitable conversation of a Kazakh making calls.

[There follows a long reported conversation of Kazakh words]

Now that, it seems to me, is a general conversation which fits all cases and hurts no one's feelings. I recommend it to you must seriously. I can pay calls most successfully on the strength of it because I have tried it.

Goodbye Marian this is the last mail till the Nura subsides. Come out. Don't fail, please. Riding is grand even now!

From Tosh.

April 7, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

Since I last wrote, a great change has come over the steppes. Instead of snow, crisp and white, and metallic ground, all is slush and mud and yellow, streaky snow. Streams are running in all directions, water madly trying to find its level and never doing it. People are so different, they always trying to find other people's levels instead of their own.

This is probably the last mail that we can send before the Big Nura busts itself wide open, but here at Spassky it should only make a difference of 10 days or two weeks. This is three weeks earlier than last year. The small amount of snow this year should allow the steppes to dry up much earlier and we expect to see coal coming in again by the 28th April.

We have enough coal to keep the refinery running steadily but the blast furnaces are shut down (today was the first day) on account of the sudden and alarming rise of the water in our pond. But anyway they would have been forced to shut down very soon for want of coal; although old Jones of Wales will not now admit it. He says it is the water and refuses to see any further.

Kazakhs are out in yurts already; a few! It looks a certainty for over 6000 poods of refined copper for this month. The refinery has not missed a minute so far and is doing good work. And yet the office is "broke" with a mythical, German cashier on his way here with money. The cashier is always on his way to Akmolinsk for money, waiting at Akmolinsk for money, or coming back from Akmolinsk with money – the office in the meantime

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being "broke" and holding a continual siege against irate Kazakhs. The cashier arrives – with money. Whisht! – Half a day and it is all gone! The office is again "broke". The weary round commences. The cashier goes for money, waits for money, is on the ride back with money, and the siege is again in full swing. The cashier merely runs the blockade successfully once or twice a month. A fat German man with a fat German mind.

Riding is possible every evening now, hearty canters through mud and snow and all, and life again appears to be worth living! Everybody is getting out guns and borrowing powder, wads or shot from everyone else and duck and goose stories which float about in Russian accents would make the Ancient's hair straight with envy.

The excitement which throbs through Spassky's veins is whether the caravan from Akmolinsk that is bringing the hiccups and staggers for Easter in liquid form will arrive before the Big Nura rudely bars its way. The Russians believe in prayer, and if there is anything in prayer, they will surely win. If Russian words were paving-stones, the caravan would arrive in time.

Goodnight. I will write by every mail but they will be uncertain.

Tosh.

April 8, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

It is late in the night and I have just been entertaining a big Kazakh magistrate and his entourage; a truly fine old man with every wrinkle in his face put there by a smile of surprising proportions. He had the same quiet, simple, self-possessed big young sons with him, and the way they watched over all the old man's wants was joy to see. The sons were offered wine (not by me) and they, being young and the wine being red, looked cheerfully at it and then asked the old man. He said without hesitation, "Drink if you so desire, but for me that great sin will never be," and they smiled at him and then steadfastly refused. He had them in perfect hand by the reverence they bore him.

He was returning a visit I put in at his place yesterday and the evening before. There he treated us (for Atkinson was with me) as the best Kazakhs always do, and we slept on silk with silk quilts for cover. The old gentleman smokes cigarettes, in a way I have never seen before, for he draws in the smoke and you never see it again. I looked to see him burn up spontaneously, but he never did. We hunted jack-rabbits with dogs all day, three of his and two of mine. My big dog is evidently a prize, for he made monkeys of the old man's dogs to the old

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man's positive delight and he (not the dog) hung jacks to my saddle till there was no more room. You will see him I hope. The trouble is that in summer time, all the decent Kazakhs leave the Spassky neighbourhood and trek to more water. This is a dry...

No continuation

April 12, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

The last mail which Atkinson brought, on a flying trip to Akmolinsk, presented me with a host of letters, two from you, others from Marian, Olivia and Mr Fell in Ekaterinburg. My profound pleasure, too deep for written words, when I get letters from you, is always made more shallow by a remorseful feeling that I am certainly not capable of doing enough to deserve such nice letters.

The weather has a direct influence on all my feelings, and feelings mean doings, and to live this pent-up life, muffled and scuffled in mountains of clothes and doing the same old grind of absolutely no real interest, every blessed day, puts me into a grumpy temper that only a really good book can partially relieve. I want to be alone always and the sight of a truly suffering humanity would afford me extreme pleasure.

To the children, as children, one can always write. It is a relief to write or talk to a child and, when they grow up it will become more difficult. Marian doing the gay whirl on the social merry-go-round saddens me. Does nothing ever stand still when it is perfect in life? Must there always be changes and struggles for imaginary improvements? It is grand to hear how she enjoyed it and how well she did it, but it cannot make her any nicer or so happy in the long run. Thank goodness she spells as she always did. Social whirls will never alter that! The truth is, that I dread the least change in the girls and I can see that changes are coming. I have already seen them in the letters. They are so absolutely choice that they will be made a great deal of in society; and modern ways of doing that are what good old Carlyle would call "putrid effervescences of lunacy".

I want to warn you not to be led astray by rosy accounts of luxurious Spassky. Do not be over pessimistic — you will be safe if you imagine another Bayandy Kuduk in comforts but, without your own cook, Spassky will not be as good. Things are run here in the same penurious manner and the office is always broke. Of furniture, worthy to be called such, there is practically next to nothing; a trifle better than Von Rieben's. As a personal factor in such matters I am sidetracked, I can only worm in and lay eggs in likely spots where they will hatch

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my designs. This place is too big and complicated, and the assay office is the only restful haven where work gets done, free from people's lacerated feelings. Old man Jones, alone, tried to ruffle the quiet waters of the assay department in Mr Fell's absence but I took the opportunity to tell him what I thought about him and all his fat-headed ancestors, male and female and neuter, and he will never bellow at me any more.

Nyemkoff has gone and all his little enemies left behind are barking with astonishing bravery at his distant shadow. So that plan is spoilt about the infants' Russian. But I have been sounding Pavel Petrovitch (The Black Camel) on the subject and I feel sure that he will be only too pleased to teach Russian and at the same time to learn English. He taught Atkinson, and well too, and he has the books, the patience and the humour. As he knows a great deal of English, he would be far better than anyone else here and he would teach the infants very fast. He is a perfectly straight, honourable man, fit to be trusted with anyone's children. A regular time could be arranged with him, I have no doubt.

My secret idea is this. I hope to be in a yurt when you all, (yurts, by the way, in Spassky, I fear, are out of the question for the girls) and the room in which I am now, I thought might make an excellent school-room and spill-over room. This is next to your house and a very worthy woman, with a family, takes care of it. Here they could have regular lessons with Pavel Petrovich. It is sad about the yurts but this place contains the scum of the steppes and yurts seem to me to be impossible for the girls. There is no privacy here; Kazakhs of the lowest kind and drunken Russians are liable to turn up anywhere. For the ordinary riding and driving and walking about, it is all right, but yurts are different.

I am alarmed lest you be rushed out here in a hurry, for your house will not be ready for you and your discomforts will be acute and daily. It will be a good two months before it can be got ready. Two new rooms must be built on and if you come before they are built, you will have to wade through mortar and all the debris of a Cossack mason.

You remember your first impressions of the "dear old home"; can you stand a repetition? Live among the fleshpots of Europe the last dab of plaster is drying on the wall and the last streak of white wash is dry. It is too cold to build rooms now and, when they do begin, you know the rate they work at.

Your house at present consists of a dining-room and four other rooms, so arranged that the utmost publicity for all is secured. Never was a house worse adapted to receive a family of retiring and modest ideas. Russians live in a mob and seem to like it. Your two new rooms will be back a trifle, so that it will not be needful to walk through three rooms to enter a fourth. Yurts for the infants would solve the question but I vow and declare that

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the thought makes me shudder. Pay no attention to protestations of forthcoming comforts, wait until you have them in your hand and then praise. Even today, the rabid economist in the office, with his reputation to make and his ambitions at stake, kicked at the idea of ordering plain white paper to cover up the rough planks of the ceilings. He said it would cost 100 rubles which was a gross and palpable exaggeration. After a short but heated discussion, he hurried away, head hanging low, to write the order!

If you are seeing The Sphere these days, you will be seeing photographs of the steppes and quotations from my descriptions for which I am being paid large sums in guineas. The editor writes to me as if I were a long-lost but distant friend. I now look upon The Sphere as my personal milch cow, which is luxuriantly fed at somebody else's expense; and the editor brings me the milk when called for.

This evening, being warm, lukewarm, I rode out on the Djoom across the big snow-flat to the nearest hills to see the sunset behind. All beyond was dazzling white to the far horizon, with all the more prominent places tinged with pink and glittering yellow. I found a herder with full-grown and fledgling camels and a flock



Camel caravan, painting by Marian

of scared sheep, all huddled in a trembling, bleating circle. The herder said he had just seen a big wolf and he evidently told the sheep, who seemed to have faith in what he said. Wolves are ranging widely now. This is their hungry time! Tosh.



22. Akmolinsk: "Have you ever risen at 3 am, put on clammy half-dried things and gone out into sleet and wind, in the early grey of dawn to mount a shivering, peevish horse and to sit upon a wet saddle?"

April 16, 1905

Akmolinsk

Atkinson and I have just ridden in at an hour's notice with two Kazakhs. There was trouble about the fat German cashier. He had the money but would not bring it out, being afraid of the rivers, so we dashed in to get it. It is spring and rivers are running madly. We had a bad time at the Sokar between the works and Karagandy, spending the night there, crossing on an ice-jam early at dawn when it was cold and freezing. We rode to Akmolinsk in three days and have been falling in ice-holes and fighting all the way. Really the dickens of a time.

Arrived yesterday evening and found cashier had left at last. We are now after him, leaving at once, for he will probably be stuck at the Nura and we will get the money (for Easter) and get across somehow.

We are off again at once and will be back at Spassky in three days more.

A roaring, glorious, trip and all are well. Ordered a lot of furniture for you here. Goodbye. Off again gone again, Mike Finnegan.

Wish us luck please, we need it. It rained wet sleet on us all one day and night and snowed and blew cold all the time. Still it is still storming and snow blowing.

Tosh.

April 21, 1905

Spassky

Although I feel as if I shall never catch up with lost areas of sleep, I must write you tonight. All rivers are running full and strong but a mail is to be sent tomorrow, trusting to the belief that a Kazakh can do anything – for money!

Akmolinsk: "Have you ever risen at 3 am, put on clammy half-dried things and gone out into sleet and wind, in the early grey of dawn to mount a shivering, peevish horse and to sit upon a wet saddle?"

From Tuesday evening to Tuesday evening, Atkinson and I rode 700 versts at the very least, suffered untold privations, wore out horses, frost-bit and sun-blistered our faces, — all for a fat German cashier. Was ever so much done for so ignoble an object! We left on Tuesday evening at an hour's notice with two Kazakhs and three spare horses and rode away just as the fine weather was breaking up and the south west wind was blowing up wind, snow and trouble. We went 25 versts daily and found the Sokar, usually an insignificant little puddle of a stream, barring our roadway. The Kazakhs sounded it with long poles and it was no use. They jabbered to Kazakhs on the other side and it all meant that we must wait till morning when the Sokar would be short of water, owing to the frost.

We slept in an aul on its banks, a disturbed and painful sleep and, at dawn, 4am, were up and away. Riding along the banks we found where an ice-jam had formed in the night and the various pieces at various angles were cemented together by frost; and we safely scuttered across, horses and all, much to the horses' astonishment. That was Wednesday. Karagandy was the next brief stop, for tea and to feed horses. Then we went on steadily into the region of snow and ice.

We crossed the Nura with no trouble, for she had not broken loose as yet and going 15 versts more by evening, we stopped at an aul for the night. It had rained, sleeted and snowed most of the afternoon and the snow was soft enough to let a horse through to his middle. Have you ever risen at 3am, put on clammy half-dried things and gone out into a repetition of sleet and wind, in the early grey of dawn to mount a shivering, peevish horse and to sit upon a wet saddle? If you have not, please don't! Your clammy things soon freeze into a consistency of cardboard and your horse insists upon stumbling repeatedly.

This day's ride was across a piece of wild steppe with no auls, devoted to wolves and horse-thieves; 90 solid versts to the next shelter. As the sun rose, the snow turned to rain and sleet and the deep snow became very soft. There were several creeks to cross, with water running under the upper crust of soft snow, and all the rest was a sheet of 2, 3 and 4 feet of the same soft snow. It was an incessant struggle, with much dismounting, sometimes ungracefully when your horse fell down, and much walking to lead your horse, an ungrateful, plunging lunatic, to a place with firmer footing.

Crossing one creek was ticklish work. It was deep below with water and soft above with snow and the horse led across was likely to disappear. Every horse had to be taken to a fresh place for twice over the same spot meant disaster. In leading Jingo Flingo across, my foot and boots (big Kazakh boots) stuck and I was fairly cornered with Jingo plunging after me like a demented thing. One of invaluable Kazakhs ploughed his way to the rescue

Akmolinsk: "Have you ever risen at 3 am, put on clammy half-dried things and gone out into sleet and wind, in the early grey of dawn to mount a shivering, peevish horse and to sit upon a wet saddle?"

and, after a wild tussle, calmly sat on Jingo's head while we all thought of that deep water below. My foot finally came free, leaving the boot behind, but my ankle was nicely ricked which made things ever so much pleasanter afterwards. To cut it short, this went on till evening when we staggered into an yurt, having spent 12 hours in the saddle (it felt like years) without bite or sup for man or beast. Wet through and horridly hungry!

This chanced to be a grand place. A large zimoffka of well-to-do people, full of fine children and hospitable Kazakhs. To bed at 10pm and up again at 3am, after a scratchful night, with a long day ahead, is a weary prospect. This dawn showed a change; it turned bitterly cold and, all day when we waded creeks of snow, slush and ice, our splashed boots froze solidly in the stirrups and we had to hammer them with whip-stocks to dismount. We rode all day, 80 versts, and arrived in Akmolinsk on Friday evening — to find that the fat German had left!

The only thing to do was get to get back as quickly as possible, before the big rivers, the Ishim and the Nura broke loose so, at 8am next morning, we pulled out.

A healthy southwest boorahn was blowing, the air was a fog of snow and it was particularly cold. How

the Kazakhs found their way I never shall know but we were pleased because the cold would harden all that soft stuff and let us make time, ensuring our return to Spassky. We rode back the 80 versts to the same big, aul of the jolliest Kazakhs and children. Another 3am performance and then the long 90 verst ride across the inhospitable land. This was now hard and firm and the boorahn was over and in its place a blazing sun.



A group of cheerful Kazakh children

Akmolinsk: "Have you ever risen at 3 am, put on clammy half-dried things and gone out into sleet and wind, in the early grey of dawn to mount a shivering, peevish horse and to sit upon a wet saddle?"

This sun, upon a sheet of glassy white, was intolerable to the eyes, hour after hour, and they streamed with water. One Kazakh had blue glasses and he took the lead; we followed, blindly, eyes half shut. It was to me the very worst day of all. By 5pm we had done the 90 versts, lunching in the open and then, at the aul, we learned that the Nura had broken loose and was running freely. We did not care because we had arranged to have a boat from Karagandy sent there as we came through before, with a Russian to handle it and spare horses on the other bank.

We were lucky to find another big ice-jam in the early morning, all tilted and toppled and cemented together by frost. It did not look inviting and we demurred, preferring the boat, but our chief Kazakh (a grand specimen of a man) was indignant and he said, "Of course we must go, Allah put it there for us to cross, Allah is helping us and it will be quite safe." We imbibed his fervent belief and so did the horses and we surely got across after much sliding and horse-beating. Then we gaily rode on to Karagandy and on across the Sokar, which had chased its insignificant little self away already, to Spassky, to find that the German had not arrived.

All Spassky was wild with rage. We planned another campaign to find that lost man. We sent a boat off at once to the Nura at the winter road-crossing and went to bed and, next morning, Atkinson and I again, with fresh horses (I took Djoom this time) left for the Nura at 5am, to find him. In crossing the Sokar at a lower place,, Atkinson and his horse fell into a deep hole and all I saw were two horribly surprised heads above water. Atkinson parted from his horse and we pulled him out, big boots and coats and all, and then we pulled the horse out. We had to ride several versts to a yurt and it was bitter cold! There, Atkinson dried his clothes and emptied a flask.

While this was going on, a Kazakh arrived from the works to say that the German had arrived, having taken a wide detour, about 100 versts round. So we rode back, doing 100 versts that day by 7pm, 700 versts in all in a week. Djoom pulled all the way out and all the way home, being as fresh as a daisy. But Jingo Flingo is not a horse, he is a hero. He alone, of our six horses on the long trip to Akmolinsk and back, never played out. He carried me there and back, 600 versts, cheerfully, and his back was not ruffled. Atkinson's horse played out before the trip was half done and his back is a sight. All the other horses had to be changed and rested, using the spare ones. Anyway, Russians here have learned that Britishers can ride as long and as far as themselves and they are much pleased and do not forget to say so.

Akmolinsk: "Have you ever risen at 3 am, put on clammy half-dried things and gone out into sleet and wind, in the early grey of dawn to mount a shivering, peevish horse and to sit upon a wet saddle?"

As the blast furnaces were shut down,, the work in the assay office was such that Bastrakoff and the new man could easily take care of it in my absence. Atkinson is planning to go to Uspensky for a week's trip in about a week, and then, on his return, I am going to Mussen's and on with Mussen to Balkhash.

In Akmolinsk, Atkinson and I ordered a lot of furniture for your house. It is impossible to make it here, the carpenters are so busy. Chests of drawers, big bureaus for hanging long things in, washstands, some easier (not so very easy) chairs, curtain stuffs and some camel's hair rugs. They are working on your house now and beginning to begin upon the two new rooms. No one seems to expect you or Mr Fell out before the middle of June.

March turned out 6700 poods of copper and April will probably show 4,000. Coal will be coming in by April 15th and, as soon as these Easter holidays are over, Spassky will hum again.

Please thank The Boy for his last jolly letter. I cannot answer him tonight but I surely will. All people at Spassky, Kazakhs and Russians are very happy and contented, but Karagandy needs a good engineer-manager badly. Things are all at sixes and sevens there. And please don't forget to bring your German/Russian cook along. She is indispensable. Von Rieben is at Bayandy Kuduk and we have wired him to come and pay us a visit, which he will never do.

Spassky is being cleaned up as it was never cleaned before. Paolovich is of an artistic temperament and he has an eye for good effects.

Please do not think I am forsaking your interests in going to Balkhash. Your house will be as good as Spassky can make it and the furniture will be in it, even to bathtubs painted white, or Atkinson will suffer the death of an angleworm.

Good night. You have no idea how anxiously I am awaiting you and your flock. It will be a grand summer!

Tosh.

April 25, 1905

Spassky

Dear good Willie,

Your letters are a constant delight. Never was that such a champion writer of nice letters! The last one, telling me of the very latest plan, about destroyed what little reason I imagined that I had. To meet two inestimable

Akmolinsk: "Have you ever risen at 3 am, put on clammy half-dried things and gone out into sleet and wind, in the early grey of dawn to mount a shivering, peevish horse and to sit upon a wet saddle?"

young ladies in Petersburg and travel with them along those everlasting, never ceasing Siberian rivers for days and days and days and days! But I am trampling my excitement down for these fine events never come off if you hop up and down too high. I must be silent and watchful, coiled and ready.

It is great and glorious news about Pomp's fancy dress and, by the same mail, came a letter from Ida, saying that you had yours! I am enclosing a cheque for £2.10 to account for that measly Custom House man. It must be great for you having Pomp with you again and she must have much to tell you of her experiences in New York.

A few days ago, I really did you think that spring had come. The grass is sprouting and the steppes are full of birds: ducks, geese and even a few steppe-hens I have seen. But, this evening, it began to blow and fuss and now (10pm) it is snowing hard and the wind is singing it's little "wheeeoooh" song around the house corners — just in the same old way as February.

... Two weeks and I hope to be on the road south with Mr Mussen, Balkhash bound— I only wish that you and Pomp were to be with us.

Goodbye Willie till we meet in Petersburg.

Tosh.



Lake Balkhash

1905

23. Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

May 12, 1905

Spassky

...You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous! Today our siege was raised! The Nura has given in and we can now send and receive. It has been a longer siege than last year's and this spring is a later one than last year's late one. No news for weeks! Tomorrow morning (in fact this morning) I am off for Lake Balkhash – at last. It is almost 2 am and I am still fitfully packing madly! Loading cartridges and dancing about over guns and dogs and rolls of beds and boxes, big and small.

My room is a sight and, as I am surrounded with bags of boorsaks, stray cheeses, cold perogi, with a box of candy in sight and a bottle of Russian zabroffka in reach, what is the use of going to bed at all. See the sunrise with open eyes and be a man — say I! All the morrow to sleep in a carabok behind a prancing troika! The portly Mussen looms behind it all in a most hospitable manner.

Two letters came today from The Boy in Hanover and I have been laughing ever since. His searching and vindictive remarks about that German family, winding up with this philosophic outburst; "There is won [sic] aggravating thing in Germany which I have to bear in silence is they do blaggard England to great extent the only way I can stop them is to when they get to bad to give them a box in the tummy in which they can call me an Ass and I turned green and get my fist ready they stop!!!!" That, I think, is a fine way to face the world when you are all alone in a foreign land, outnumbered hostilely. That was Frederick the Great's manner of facing all his troubles and it wins every time, if properly intended! Please send or give him the enclosed. I cannot sleep till I have written an answer to him.

You will be coming soon and you will find your house in order, rooms enough if the girls come later. They write that I may meet them in Petersburg. Such dreams seldom are realised but such a trip to meet such girls fills me with desires to start at once!

Good night and a long goodbye! No news from you leaves me somewhat in the dark! Goodbye!

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

June 3, 1905

Omsk

[To Anne]

I am here — across your path — and I intend to sleep across the railroad tracks. Telegrams from the Bull of Bashan shed a sickly glimmer but no satisfaction. He says you will leave on July 6th, Russian date but how can I know that he knows anything about it! His grand Dukely address creates a profound sensation here and that's all I do know, and that makes me sneeze, just exactly as if I were looking at some dazzling, far-off light.

If you have not ordered rooms by telegram, when you read this, please wire me to the address of Hotel Russia. I went first to the old Zaytzeff Hotel and find it is hopelessly deteriorated and, as there is a new hotel now open, the Russia, I changed. The Russia is new and clean and infinitely better in every way. No noise, no dirt, polite servants and promptitude. I arrived here from the Kouyandy Fair via Pavlodar and steamer three days ago and I have been madly buying sheets, towels, pillow-cases, pillows, mattresses, blankets, a complete dining set for 12 people, complete set of knives, forks and spoons for 12 people, as per order; and I added a coffee machine [word missing] coffee set in chinaware, [word missing] and other extras not as per order, for which my head will be laid at my feet all dripping with gore!.

Talk about the trials of furnishing a house! Why, I can buy everything in one day!

Tell the infants, if you please, that I bought 18 horses at the fair, including the best coal-black saddle-horse at the fair for The Boy. Among them were two perfectly matched troikas. Buying horses from Kazakhs is the greatest fun on earth and I do believe that now I am on to all their tricks. It took me three days to buy one troika — at my price. Those days were fairly crammed with amusing incidents. I was arrested in Pavlodar [word missing] police. I was taking in the views at night on the river shore, peeking about most harmlessly, I thought; but they released me with bows and scrapes and salutes. Please wire your start and when you should arrive in Omsk in plenty of time ahead, for there is fearful competition for rooms at both hotels. At the Russia I can get you the best rooms if you only give me time ahead.

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

*Ida writes me about Minor's stay with her and how they saw the Stimsons, and seems to be delighted with Minor and all his ways. I left all well at Spassky and the whole place piled up with Kazakhs and bricks and mortar. Your rooms will be ready. Soon we meet at last! Goodbye,
Toshy.*

June 7, 1905 Spassky

I have so much to say, so many words close together, that I am opaque, befogged, and want to fall back upon generalities which will include, in a vague way, everything. Balkhash is a myth no more, and I have something in the back of my head which will be a companion all the rest of my days and



Frank's shopping on its way home from Kouyandy

nights. It was better than expected! We never saw a Russian from the time we left Uspensky and we never wanted to. We never camped in the most solitary expanse of white alkali and sagebrush, dry and waterless and blistering, without a Kazakh rider would ride from somewhere and drop in socially to tea. They are ever-present, even in no-man's land! They come with cracked lips and dried up skin, and they are just as cheerful as the skinny, hungry horse is miserable.

You arrive suddenly from this everlasting ride in glare and white dust upon an immense stretch of blue-green, shining water, fringed with golden beach and green grass, and great beds of high yellow cane; points and islands of bright red rock, all lapped and moistened, cool, clean and infinitely peaceful. Clear, fresh water, and enough to drink! The waves roll in and you lie on the beach and listen — to The Point. Birds, birds, birds! All friendly and full of curiosity. Gulls, cormorants, pelicans, coots, divers, ducks, geese, swans (great white monsters) and

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

again, gulls in infinite variety, besides hundreds of queer birds that whistle and call and ha-ha-ha and shriek and squabble. Great bald-headed eagles fly close to you and fish-hawks sweep under your nose.

Among the rocky points that ran into the blue-green water are great beds of wild onions and clumps of wide-leaved, wild rhubarb. And where the storms scatter water ashore they grow luxuriously and, far inland, winding among the hills, you find lagoons full of flags and koomish, the high yellow cane in which ducks and geese and swans are all nesting in great safety. Wild tulips, too, fine sturdy plants, with blood-red flowers and others orange and streaked with crimson. We dug a lot of bulbs for future growing in distant lands.

Ten days we enjoyed all these delights, never leaving the lake. A full moon kindly accommodated us and, across the horizon of water, at night, a great glare always arose to the south where some fire was raging in the high cane. Wild pigs were abundant from their tracks, but we only saw four, killing three and capturing the fourth. They are the craftiest pigs imaginable, never making any noise; no grunts, no squeaks of rage or alarm. You may pass nearly over them and they lie still. We luckily stumbled upon a big one with young ones (they fled to a small patch of koomish which Mussen and I and two Kazakhs surrounded. Finally, after chasing a Kazakh, who fled yelling, the pig charged Mussen, point blank. He fired at 6 foot range and missed, and it knocked him down and tried several times to bite him. I had time to come up close and put the solid ball from a 12-bore shot gun into it and Pig never knew what hit it.

Ducks, we killed only for immediate food and we rifled a few nests for the same honest purpose, but it seemed a shame to trespass upon these confiding birds when they were keeping house. Wild mallard eggs, newly laid, are better than pompano¹²⁷ in all its glory. The Kazakhs were very strict about not eating pork and to butcher the pigs they stripped to the waist and, having announced it as a "great sin" they...

No continuation

¹²⁷ The Florida pompano is a species of marine fish; odd comparison! In editing, Frank changed this to "any domesticated eggs".

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

June 8, 1905

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

A grand letter from you hit me on my return from — Balkhash. That dream was not a fluffy white cloud after all as luck would have it, but a solid rock of reality. And if you were here. I could talk to you about Balkhash for hours. It was a wonder of a trip, ending up in a fairyland; to leave it was sorrow, just straightforward sorrow! Imagine all you can about the lake and then know that it was better than anything you imagine. Next spring you shall surely see it or I will change my name and all my ways and bite on sight. There is a good road all the way, a very good road and it is an easy five days journey which can be done in four quite well. When you arrive, it is the very finest place to camp possible. Such views, such bathing, such fishing and with a boat such boating, such shooting, such photographing! We shot wild pigs and ate them and we brought a young one back with us which Mr Mussen keeps at the mine.

The Kazakhs are pleased whenever you kill a pig because they say a "Shaitan" lives in every one and they are very much afraid of them. Pigs have their troubles, too, for they are most afraid of camels. A camel sends them to cover, quaking, for hours. You should see the glorious gorgeous wild tulips growing among the rocks. We dug a lot of bulbs for future use and great wild rhubarb plants with leaves a foot across. We tried to cook the stems of these leaves but found them too woody, so we tried the stems of the great flowers they were pushing up and these stems were excellent, regular rhubarb, only sweeter. Wild onions abound in great clumps, some clumps being 2 feet across, the same plant. These are splendid eating, raw, and we would pocket boorsaks and, when fooling up in the hills and rocks along the lake shore, all we had to do was to sit down next to a big clump and pull up long, white-stalked, spring-onions and eat. Another vegetable we found was a root like a fat carrot with



Mussen at Lake Balkhash with a young camel

1905

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

a carrot-green top but with white meat; raw it was no good but, when baked in the ashes, it was quite fair, a mixture between a potato and a turnip with enough of a suspicion of a parsnip to make me loathe it and to make Mr Mussen eat it with positive greediness. We cooked all our fish and birds, and even pig, in clay, burying it all in the hottest of ashes.

Coming home, we found a lot of animals in some Kazakhs' yurts. We got two young antelopes, little friendly, calf-like things. One died on the way back unluckily. Also three young foxes and a young wolf, all very youthful and tame, and finally, a young, full-grown and trained hawk with which we shall catch ducks, I hope. The young wolf is the best of them all. He is exactly like a dog in his ways and waggles his tail when he is pleased. Foxes are far too much like cats in that way to please me. They lay their ears back and wag their tails when they are angry and they jump and climb too well to be useful as pets.

About the tennis court. Grand news! I accept that challenge instant! But, please bring the balls as well and also all measurements of the size of a double court. I will get the ground prepared somehow and we will have grand games. You will be here so soon that it seems queer to be writing.

Goodbye Marian,

From Tosh.

June 9, 1905

Spassky

Dear Willie

Your letters tell me of all the interesting things you see and hear, and I trot along after you to see and hear them too. I assure you that I do and that I get a great deal of pleasure. It is my aim of life now to take you all down to Lake Balkhash; and where there's a Willie there's a way!

I left Djoom at Uspensky; I came back and they brought to me a fat, smiling horse who waddled up and smiled greasily at me and he was creased all over and shapeless, just like a baby's ankle. But I will get him into shape again soon enough.

Jingo Flingo carried me there and back and did all the extra work that there was to do. He is a marvel of endurance. Really, you would admire him now. He has carried me 1500 versts during April and May and the actual riding was all done on 17 days out of the two months. So far I have arranged in my mind to keep him for

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

The Boy. He is gay as can be and perfectly reliable and shying will be good practice for The Boy. In dead and solemn secret, I will tell you that we have found just the horse for Pomp. A five year old, went to Balkhash and back, grand trot and gallop, very fast, kind and intelligent, and full of jolly, friendly ways and a good looker. Mr Mussen has him at the mine. I am looking out for a horse for Mr Piffard¹²⁸ who is very keen on riding and if I go to the Kouyandy fair I shall have a fine chance to find a good one.

Willie, you ought to see the colours of the water of the big lake under a blue sky. Never have I seen such a wonder of a colour! It is neither blue nor green, but it is more green than blue and more blue than green, all in light, hazy, tints. And on its horizon, mirages where clouds dip down and are duplicated upside down in the air in great long queer streaks. On the road, there, in the long stretches of white alkali covered with sage, we saw many most deceptive mirages. A fine clear, shining lake would appear afar off and, travel as you please, it never came nearer and finally faded away. It was necessary to watch the horses and dogs to know if it was really water; they take no interest in mirages whatever!

We took six days to go to Balkhash and nearly five to come back, spending ten whole days at the lake shore. I had an adventure with a wounded duck. It fell into the big lake and swam away. I sent a Kazakh after it; he tried as far as he could stand but, not being able to swim, he returned. So I swam after it, hating to see it drag a broken wing; I swam and it swam, out and out and, whenever I was in reach, it dived and kept going, and the wild race kept on. Finally I began to feel sort of tired and I turned around and the shore looked a mighty long way off. So I paddled for home, glad to leave the duck behind, and it seemed twice as far. A long lazy swell was drifting in. About a couple of hundred yards from shore, I rolled over and take a long overhead backstroke, and I heard the Kazakh begin to yell and bellow but I was tired and kept up the backstroke until rested, and soon I touched welcome sand below. I saw the Kazakh with his back to me facing Mecca and praying for all he was worth. Up and down he bowed and prostrated himself, all the time chanting aloud in a perfect furor. I heard the words "Angleshinn" (Englishman) all mixed up with his talk and he ended up always "Allah Akbar"! He did not hear me, he was so engrossed with his wild praying until I spoke out loud to him and then he turned amazed and half afraid as if to run; soon dashing up to me and laughing and shouting, patting me on the head and on the back and showing intense pleasure. He said he watched in great fear all the time, but when I took the

¹²⁸ Charles Piffard seems to have been highly regarded by Fell; though why is not clear. Piffard moved to Fellsmere in 1913 and become the president of the State Bank of Fellsmere. Unfortunately, after the state auditor found \$30,000 missing from the assets of the bank in 1922, Charles Piffard and family left, never to return.

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

backstroke, where the both arms come out overhead out of water together, he thought I was waving for help and, after several wavings, he concluded that it was time to pray. He said that if a man when meant to swim what Allah would have put webs between his fingers and toes and that, as it was, it was an entirely foolish business to swim without them; and — I agreed for I was not wanting any more just then.

Goodbye Willie; come as soon as you can, please. I may meet you in Omsk or Pavlodar!

Toshy.

June 14, 1905

Spassky

[To Anne]

Your letters flutter down from the clouds and herald your coming. Soon, with a rush, and a great wind you will arrive and I shall meet you, not on the shores of the unknown (where I would prefer to meet you) but on the station platform at Omsk. The fiat has gone forth and I am left speechless with pleasure. Omsk it is to be and a quiet time on the river before the hurly-burly of the everlasting ride begins. I take in Kouyandy Fair on my way and buy horses with jabbering Kazakh horse dealers to my soul's content. My dates are to be so-and-so, set forth in Mr Fell's inevitable folder. I leave Spassky the 26th June, your date, and drive to Karkarolinsk and from thence to Kouyandy, to strike the best time at the fair. I arrive there the 28th or 29th, I stay there three, 4 or 5 days, depending on the rate I can buy 20 horses. I have no hurry and time is nothing. A tent accompanies me and the faithful Ahdam and I come and watch the Fair as long as it may be. I send the new horses back and I leave for Bayan Aul, say, the 3rd July. I talk with Razmussin about our trip back and arrange about horses for troikas etc, and then I jog to Djessoo Bai Lake, where we camped and I proceed, calmly, to camp there until July 12th when you will be in Moscow. Then, on the morning of July 12th, I make a dash for Pavlodar and on to Omsk as soon as possible, to meet you on July 18 on that station platform. So, please, at any time between July 4th and 12th, you may wire me in Russian to Bayan Aul, or else to Pavlodar, telling me of the day and by what train you left Moscow. I will get the wires in Bayan Aul or Pavlodar. You had better order rooms at the Omsky hotel from Moscow and be sure that, this time, you have better accommodation than last time. If you leave Moscow earlier than July 14, please wire me to Bayan Aul.

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

Are you bringing a cook who speaks German and Russian for, if not, I repeat with great solemnity, you will greatly regret it. You will find no such good cook as we had in Bayandy Kuduk. This one, I repeat, is as foul a specimen as ever breathed heavily through its nose. This evening, fried fish appeared. They smelled so highly offensive that, the weather being hot, Piffard removed his plate to a far place. All revolted from them except Mr Fell, who calmly finished all of his and asked absently what was the matter.

I merely mention this to try to prove that some people are not to be followed, with impunity, in their judgements on cooks or cookery. Grease will clog your ways and slime your thoughts!

The furniture question is booming. One chest of drawers, without handles, has been finished and it is the only one in the house. And when Mr Fell showed it to me, tears were in his eyes. Work by his own workmen always opens the sluice to his emotions. I had happened to ask, "What are you going to do about finishing the rooms?" He looked at me in amazement, real and suffering, and said "Furniture, oh the furniture is alright, I know it's alright, come and see!" And he dashed off in that distressed, hurried manner, and led me to the aforesaid squad object, and then it was that I saw those beads of emotion trickle down his chin. He was so in earnest, and really thought he was so much in the right that I would have sooner tried to convert him into being a heathen than break that furniture spell. He tries so hard and the result is so funny.

I gouged him to the extent of three camel's hair rugs be bought at Kouyandy. Money is flowing like Easter vodka here for the works, but he said sadly, "Don't get expensive ones!". I found him in a room in your house this evening. The room contains two tables, small and at crooked angles, and the floor and tables were littered with papers. His feet were on one table and his chair was tilted back. His hat was on the back of his head and he was horribly happy. He said "Good evening, Mr Agnew, and how are you today, Sir" in a stentorian tone. I don't know what I said but I know I hurried away. Being so different to other men makes him think differently about furniture, I suppose.

You mention about The Boy's room being next to mine. Do you forget that I shall be in a yurt. Our dwelling house is to [be] all altered and enlarged. The Boy could have a yurt to next to mine if you pleased. It would please me beyond measure!

I got a letter from Miss Stimson just before starting on their great race and she said, if the winds where high, they had a chance to win; and our latest paper, May 27, told us that the Fleur-de-Lys was in a good second place nearly across the Atlantic. If they win, I shall cable wild congratulations! Your new rooms are going up fast and the fireplace is included.

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

Good night.

I will write to Moscow!

Toshy.

Our latest news is that Minor is with you and I am hoping against hope that he intends to come on here with you. It seems probable that I shall meet you in Pavlodar, for I shall, probably again, go to the Kouyandy Fair to buy many company horses and from there, go on to meet you. But I pin my faith to no plans more than a week ahead, having been shipwrecked so often. You will miss the Fair if you only leave on July 5. It begins June 23rd and lasts about a month. I never took seriously to my inner self the hopes of meeting you in Petersburg or Hanover, it seemed too good to ever come true and, sure enough, this blamed tutor arose from the unknown to effectually stop me.

The Boy's letters are a perfect treat. He has a pond of humour inside him which is deep and still and very beautiful.

I am writing upon the green leather writing case which will always form part of my future life and it is already an old friend.

One owes you so much that it seems futile to thank you for anything but I assure you that if my thanks mean anything to you — you have them always and all I have. The case is just what I would like a case to be and I am very proud of it.

It must be strange to be with Minor in Paris or anywhere in Europe. A reunion in Florida seems far off yet but it is quite a distinctly nearer and, I hope, Minor is keeping a fraternal eye upon the destination of Paradise Island. The "Agnew Bros" need that haven and need it badly and it is not an impossibility.

I got for you down at Balkhash a very old, very long-barreled, muzzle-loading rifle with the long curved wooden prongs in front just like the ones the Tibetans lately used¹²⁹, rifle-belt with powder-horn, knife and sheath, bullet pouch, powder measure, horn for greasy rags and bullet-mould in stone. All this was on a Kazakh hunter and it

¹²⁹ The British invasion of Tibet began in December 1903 and lasted until September 1904. The expedition was effectively a temporary invasion by British Indian whose purported mission was to establish diplomatic relations and resolve the dispute over the border between Tibet and Sikkim; I presume this is what Frank was referring to.

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

was all for you and The Point. Mr Fell fell down before it, speechless. It looks as old as the hills of Balkhash and it is all worn and smooth and brown and shiny with incessant use.

This is the first chance I have had to write to you since my return. One mail did leave at 15 minutes' notice which I knew nothing about. Piffard is alright. I like him very much and we get on famously. He is a great acquisition to our liveliness at Spassky.

Good night! I wish I were coming to Hanover to meet you – so much! But Pavlodar will soon follow — or Spassky for dead certain!

Toshy

PS. In connection with your household arrangements at Spassky, I would suggest as your steadfast motto, "Trust everybody but cut the cards yourself"! When you once arrive, your chances are poor, for excuses for putting off are the breath of the Spassky breezes.

In Omsk, you could wire your desires and get all you want and, if I go to Pavlodar to meet you, what is going to keep me from Omsk? The goods could come by boat with you to Pavlodar and then our teams will do the rest. They have just begun to begin to think about starting to begin to prepare to build your two new rooms!

June 19, 1905

Spassky

Dear Willie,

... Just a week today, I leave this black blot of coal and chimneys upon the face of the steppes, to go by slow and majestic degrees to you; you may think that I shall go to the Hotel Zayzoff, but I won't. I am going to that platform to pitch my tent and wait to stop that train, for I am in mortal fear that you will in some strange way, unaccountable to all, pass by and forget that Omsk is only four days from Moscow. You may forget the day of the week and month. How do I know! And I intend to take no chances! I shall hurl a large rock on the track and the train will stop right there.

Another awful thought has just struck me; I may not know you!

I never thought of that before. Two grown-up young ladies of very learned and Parisian aspect may float by me, and their long skirts will go swish-swash and I may be left sneezing in the dust and wondering where Marian and Olivia are! Can't you both pin a white ribbon on your left arms so that I may know you.

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

Djoom is as fat as his skin will allow and as cheeky as possible. I am allowing Mr Piffard, by your leave, to ride Djoom, while I ride Jingo Flingo and he treats Djoom with respect, being naturally a good rider and kind; but he does not know what a treasure he is riding and does not fully appreciate.

At the Kouyandy Fair I am to buy a horse for him, but I will also find a horse for The Boy, if I have to ride every horse out of the thousands to be seen. Yesterday I rode Atkinson's new horse and my dog Koobahkoos caught three jacks all alone. This new horse is a big long-legged racer and was unbroken a week ago. He threw Mr Atkinson sky-high twice and then The Brat, but The Brat got mad and broke him finally. Now he is a great horse to ride, light-mouthed, very light, and he can gallop like smoke. Now, Willie, I want to tell you fairly and squarely how glad I shall be to see you, and if it is the same Willie that went away, I shall be so happy that I can't say what I will do. Goodbye.

Toshy.

June 19, 1905

Spassky

Dear Pomp,

Omsk is the watchword! Just as soon as you step off your train you will see a crazy sight. That will be I! If your train is late, my tent will be there and there will I camp. I shall stay there like Casabianca¹³⁰, until further orders that don't come. Years after, people passing in trains will say "Who is that old man" and they will say "He is waiting for a train that left Moscow 49 years ago; give him a kopek".

We shall have a grand drive from Pavlodar to Bayan Aul and it is on the post-road and that is not so thrilling except when the horses are wild and dash off madly. But my plan, which carries Mr Fell's full consent, is to stop at Bayan Aul to rest and break the journey; and my idea is to take you all out to Lake Djessoo Bai and to camp two or three or four days, depending on the weather. I shall have 3 tents and a yurt can always be got also. Then, we shall drive across country to Spassky, and when night comes, we'll camp again in the three tents.

¹³⁰ "Casabianca" is a famous poem by Felicia Dorothea Hemans about a real incident; the poem starts: 'The boy stood on the burning deck...' Casabianca remained at his post and died when the flames caused the ship's magazine to explode.

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

The Kazakhs will do all the work and cooking and we shall always pitch tents at noon to rest, have tea, and to feed horses. In this way, given decent weather, which is a certainty in July, we shall arrive fresh and contented. I shall have the supreme pleasure of the river trip with you, where we can talk and talk in peace and quiet. I have so much to tell you and so much to ask you.

Omsk! Omsk! Change here for Spassky Zavod!

*Goodbye for a short time,
Tosh.*

June 19, 1905 Spassky

Dear Boy,

I have a great secret to unfold unto you and I am writing it very small so that no one will hear. I want you to grab Minor from some unseen place and to jam him down in your trunk and (never mind his squeals) bring him out to Omsk. Sprinkle Grape-Nuts upon him through a crack in the trunk and give him a Coca-Cola twice a day. He will be perfectly happy and he will get fat if you give him peanuts. He prefers peanuts but don't give him peanuts or else the trunk will be too small. From Omsk to Spassky I will attend to him and he will never see Kissimmee any more!!!!

Just imagine what it will be like to hear the conductor say, "The next stop, Ladies, will be Omsk, change there for Bootahgorah, Kouyandy and Spassky said." The first thing you will hear on the platform and I will be my mellifluous Russian, spoken in commanding accents, and if I speak English with a Russian accent you must not mind. A young wolf and two young foxes are howling for you at Spassky. They seem to know you are coming and they refuse everything but food as comfort. Really they are grand. Quite tame and not in the least afraid. The wolf might be a puppy dog for all his squeaks are those of a puppy and he wags his tail. We shall have a grand drive to Spassky, for all arrangements are settled and we shall have plenty of horses. No cold and



Omsk! Omsk! Change here for Spassky Zavod!

Spassky: "You are coming so soon that letters seem almost superfluous"

shuddering weather but the green steppe, all smiles and chuckles. We'll camp on the way and take it quite easily and travel in the cool of the morning and evening. There is no hurry and the road is long and has no turning.

Remember my motto, "Never let anything hit the floor". It will carry you safely through life.

From Tosh.



The endless steppe

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