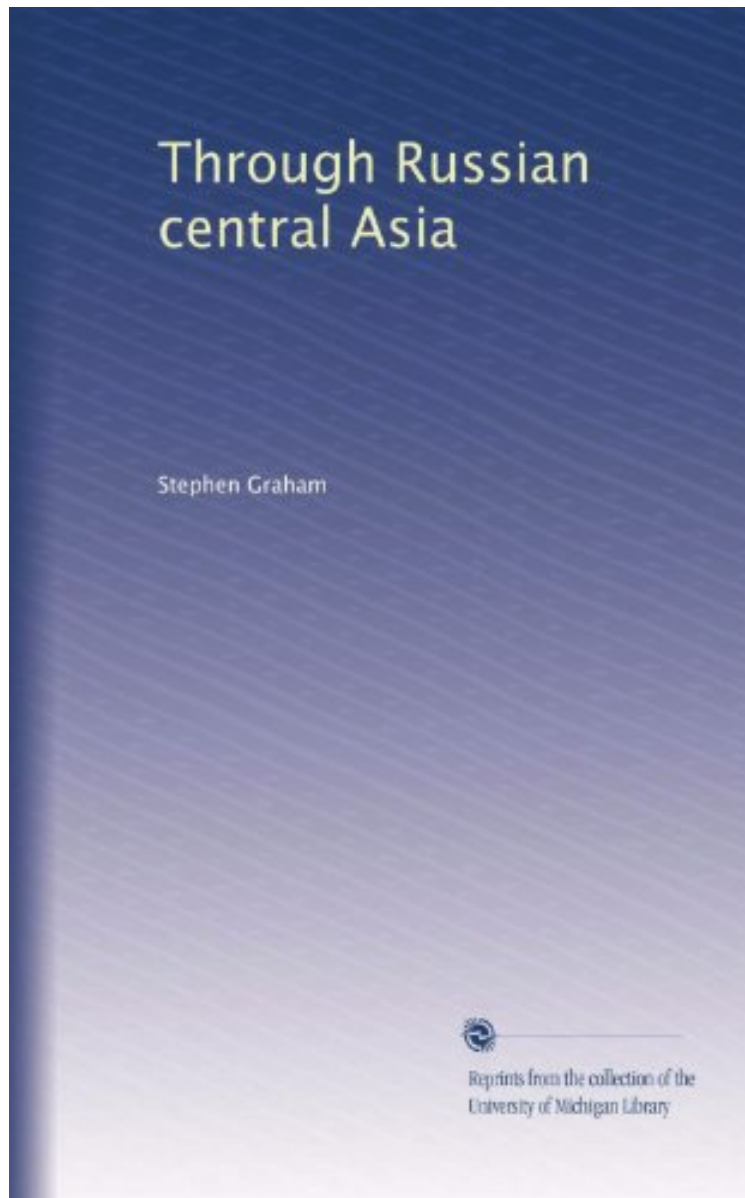


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Through Russian central Asia

Stephen Graham

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the road There was some difficulty in getting on from Tashkent. I had two British notes, but no bank would change them. The clerks held the paper upside down, took it to their colleagues, who were supping tea whilst they worked at their ledgers, took it to the manager to show him a curiosity, and finally returned it to me "with much regret." "Don't think we are savages," said one bank clerk, "because we do not accept your money. The fact is, we've never seen it before and cannot even read what is written on it." Another clerk, a sympathiser, advised me that there was an Englishman in Tashkent, a merchant who did much business and had an account in the bank, bade me go to him, for he would know what the notes were worth, and would no doubt accommodate a fellow-countryman. I obtained the address and sought out my compatriot. His name was something like Kellerman--not very promising. Behold one of the funniest Englishmen I ever met--as clear a German Jew as I'd ever seen in my life, scarcely speaking English, and making all the comic mistakes which Germans make with our tongue, a fat, ill-shaven, collarless old man of a greasy complexion, a middleman buying wool and horsehair and oilcakes and seed from the native Sarts and Jews and Tartars and Kirghiz. He professed to be very pleased to meet a fellow-countryman, and to be yearning for his "native land"--"a nice house in Kentish Town, all fog and wet in the streets, a nice fire, pull the blinds down, and read the 'Daily Telegraaf.'" Every night in Tashkent he repaired to the public gardens, took a seat beside the skating rink, and watched the violent whirl of Armenian youths and their lady friends on roller-skates. Each night between ten and twelve Kellerman might be found in his...