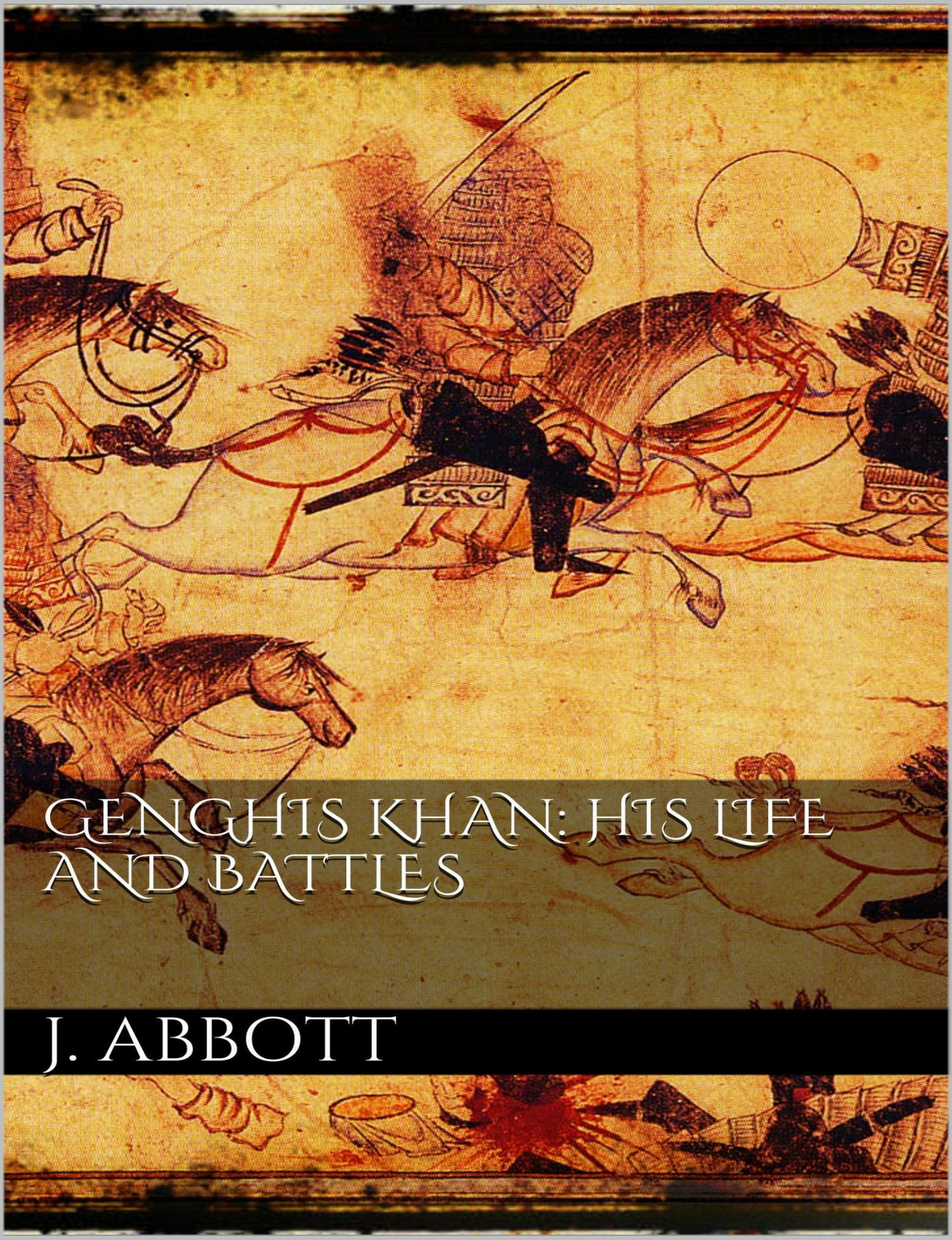

GENGHIS KHAN: HIS LIFE AND BATTLES

J. ABBOTT

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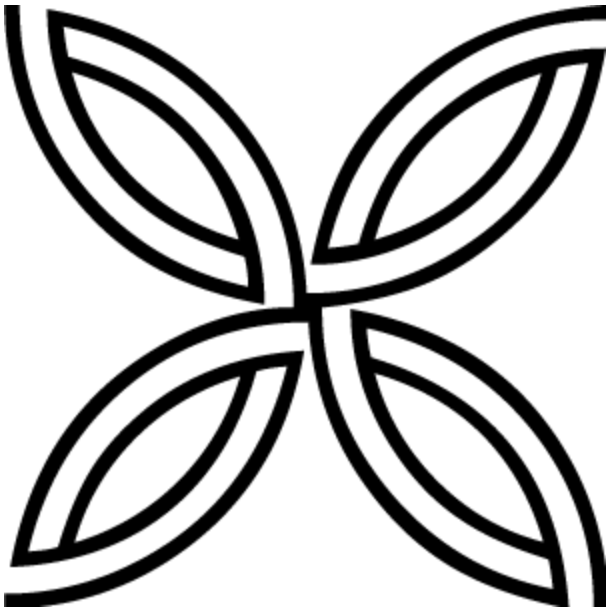
Jacob Abbott



PREFACE.

The word khan is not a name, but a title. It means chieftain or king. It is a word used in various forms by the different tribes and nations that from time immemorial have inhabited Central Asia, and has been applied to a great number of potentates and rulers that have from time to time arisen among them. Genghis Khan was the greatest of these princes. He was, in fact, one of the most renowned conquerors whose exploits history records.

As in all other cases occurring in the series of histories to which this work belongs, where the events narrated took place at such a period or in such a part of the world that positively reliable and authentic information in respect to them can now no longer be obtained, the author is not responsible for the actual truth of the narrative which he offers, but only for the honesty and fidelity with which he has compiled it from the best sources of information now within reach.

Chapter I. Pastoral Life in Asia.

There are four several methods by which the various communities into which the human race is divided obtain their subsistence from the productions of the earth, each of which leads to its own peculiar system of social organization, distinct in its leading characteristics from those of all the rest. Each tends to its own peculiar form of government, gives rise to its own manners and customs, and forms, in a word, a distinctive and characteristic type of life.

These methods are the following:

1. By hunting wild animals in a state of nature.

2. By rearing tame animals in pasturages.

3. By gathering fruits and vegetables which grow spontaneously in a state of nature.

4. By rearing fruits and grains and other vegetables by artificial tillage in cultivated ground.

By the two former methods man subsists on animal food. By the two latter on vegetable food.

As we go north, from the temperate regions toward the poles, man is found to subsist more and more on animal

food. This seems to be the intention of Providence. In the arctic regions scarcely any vegetables grow that are fit for human food, but animals whose flesh is nutritious and adapted to the use of man are abundant.

As we go south, from temperate regions toward the equator, man is found to subsist more and more on vegetable food. This, too, seems to be the intention of nature. Within the tropics scarcely any animals live that are fit for human food; while fruits, roots, and other vegetable productions which are nutritious and adapted to the use of man are abundant.

In accordance with this difference in the productions of the different regions of the earth, there seems to be a difference in the constitutions of the races of men formed to inhabit them. The tribes that inhabit Greenland and Kamtschatka can not preserve their accustomed health and vigor on any other than animal food. If put upon a diet of vegetables they soon begin to pine away. The reverse is true of the vegetable-eaters of the tropics. They preserve their health and strength well on a diet of rice, or bread-fruit, or bananas, and would undoubtedly be made sick by being fed on the flesh of walruses, seals, and white bears.

In the temperate regions the productions of the above-mentioned extremes are mingled. Here many animals whose flesh is fit for human food live and thrive, and here grows, too, a vast variety of nutritious fruits, and roots, and seeds. The physical constitution of the various races of men that inhabit these regions is modified accordingly. In the temperate climes men can live on vegetable food, or on animal food, or on both. The constitution differs, too, in different individuals, and it changes at different periods of

the year. Some persons require more of animal, and others more of vegetable food, to preserve their bodily and mental powers in the best condition, and each one observes a change in himself in passing from winter to summer. In the summer the desire for a diet of fruits and vegetables seems to come northward with the sun, and in the winter the appetite for flesh comes southward from the arctic regions with the cold.

When we consider the different conditions in which the different regions of the earth are placed in respect to their capacity of production for animal and vegetable food, we shall see that this adjustment of the constitution of man, both to the differences of climate and to the changes of the seasons, is a very wise and beneficent arrangement of Divine Providence. To confine man absolutely either to animal or vegetable food would be to depopulate a large part of the earth.

It results from these general facts in respect to the distribution of the supplies of animal and vegetable food for man in different latitudes that, in all northern climes in our hemisphere, men living in a savage state must be hunters, while those that live near the equator must depend for their subsistence on fruits and roots growing wild. When, moreover, any tribe or race of men in either of these localities take the first steps toward civilization, they begin, in the one case, by taming animals, and rearing them in flocks and herds; and, in the other case, by saving the seeds of food-producing plants, and cultivating them by artificial tillage in inclosed and private fields. This last is the condition of all the half-civilized tribes of the tropical regions of the earth, whereas the former prevails in all the northern temperate and arctic regions, as far to the northward as domesticated animals can live.

From time immemorial, the whole interior of the continent of Asia has been inhabited by tribes and nations that have taken this one step in the advance toward civilization, but have gone no farther. They live, not, like the Indians in North America, by hunting wild beasts, but by rearing and pasturing flocks and herds of animals that they have tamed. These animals feed, of course, on grass and herbage; and, as grass and herbage can only grow on open ground, the forests have gradually disappeared, and the country has for ages consisted of great grassy plains, or of smooth hill-sides covered with verdure. Over these plains, or along the river valleys, wander the different tribes of which these pastoral nations are composed, living in tents, or in frail huts almost equally movable, and driving their flocks and herds before them from one pasture-ground to another, according as the condition of the grass, or that of the springs and streams of water, may require.

We obtain a pretty distinct idea of the nature of this pastoral life, and of the manners and customs, and the domestic constitution to which it gives rise, in the accounts given us in the Old Testament of Abraham and Lot, and of their wanderings with their flocks and herds over the country lying between the Euphrates and the [Pg 18]Mediterranean Sea. They lived in tents, in order that they might remove their habitations the more easily from place to place in following their flocks and herds to different pasture-grounds. Their wealth consisted almost wholly in these flocks and herds, the land being almost every where common. Sometimes, when two parties traveling together came to a fertile and well-watered district, their herdsmen and followers were disposed to contend for the privilege of feeding their flocks upon it, and

the contention would often lead to a quarrel and combat, if it had not been settled by an amicable agreement on the part of the chieftains.

The father of a family was the legislator and ruler of it, and his sons, with their wives, and his son's sons, remained with him, sometimes for many years, sharing his means of subsistence, submitting to his authority, and going with him from place to place, with all his flocks and herds. They employed, too, so many herdsmen, and other servants and followers, as to form, in many cases, quite an extended community, and sometimes, in case of hostilities with any other wandering tribe, a single patriarch could send forth from his own domestic circle a force of several hundred armed men. Such a company as this, when moving across [Pg 21]the country on its way from one region of pasturage to another, appeared like an immense caravan on its march, and when settled at an encampment the tents formed quite a little town.

Whenever the head of one of these wandering families died, the tendency was not for the members of the community to separate, but to keep together, and allow the oldest son to take the father's place as chieftain and ruler. This was necessary for defense, as, of course, such communities as these were in perpetual danger of coming into collision with other communities roaming about like themselves over the same regions. It would necessarily result, too, from the circumstances of the case, that a strong and well-managed party, with an able and sagacious chieftain at the head of it, would attract other and weaker parties to join it; or, on the arising of some pretext for a quarrel, would make war upon it and conquer it. Thus, in process of time, small nations, as it were, would be formed, which would continue united and strong as long as the able leadership continued; and then

they would separate into their original elements, which elements would be formed again into other combinations.

Such, substantially, was pastoral life in the beginning. In process of time, of course, the [Pg 22]tribes banded together became larger and larger. Some few towns and cities were built as places for the manufacture of implements and arms, or as resting-places for the caravans of merchants in conveying from place to place such articles as were bought and sold. But these places were comparatively few and unimportant. A pastoral and roaming life continued to be the destiny of the great mass of the people. And this state of things, which was commenced on the banks of the Euphrates before the time of Abraham, spread through the whole breadth of Asia, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Pacific Ocean, and has continued with very little change from those early periods to the present time.

Of the various chieftains that have from time to time risen to command among these shepherd nations but little is known, for very few and very scanty records have been kept of the history of any of them. Some of them have been famous as conquerors, and have acquired very extended dominions. The most celebrated of all is perhaps Genghis Khan, the hero of this history. He came upon the stage more than three thousand years after the time of the great prototype of his class, the Patriarch Abraham.

Chapter II. The Monguls.

Three thousand years is a period of time long enough to produce great changes, and in the course of that time a great many different nations and congeries of nations were formed in the regions of Central Asia. The term Tartars has been employed generically to denote almost the whole race. The Monguls are a portion of this people, who are said to derive their name from Mongol Khan, one of their earliest and most powerful chieftains. The descendants of this khan called themselves by his name, just as the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob called themselves Israelites, or children of Israel, from the name Israel, which was one of the designations of the great patriarch from whose twelve sons the twelve tribes of the Jews descended. The country inhabited by the Monguls was called Mongolia.

To obtain a clear conception of a single Mongul family, you must imagine, first, a rather small, short, thick-set man, with long black hair, a flat face, and a dark olive complexion. His wife, if her face were not so flat and her nose so broad, would be quite a brilliant little beauty, her eyes are so black and sparkling. The children have much the appearance of young Indians as they run shouting among the cattle on the hill-sides, or, if young, playing half-naked about the door of the hut, their long black hair streaming in the wind.

Like all the rest of the inhabitants of Central Asia, these people depended almost entirely for their subsistence on the products of their flocks and herds. Of course, their great occupation consisted in watching their animals while

feeding by day, and in putting them in places of security by night, in taking care of and rearing the young, in making butter and cheese from the milk, and clothing from the skins, in driving the cattle to and fro in search of pasturage, and, finally, in making war on the people of other tribes to settle disputes arising out of conflicting claims to territory, or to replenish their stock of sheep and oxen by seizing and driving off the flocks of their neighbors.

The animals which the Monguls most prized were camels, oxen and cows, sheep, goats, and horses. They were very proud of their horses, and they rode them with great courage and spirit. They always went mounted in going to war. Their arms were bows and arrows, pikes or spears, and a sort of sword or sabre, which was manufactured in some of the towns toward the west, and supplied to them in the course of trade by great traveling caravans.

Although the mass of the people lived in the open country with their flocks and herds, there were, notwithstanding, a great many towns and villages, though such centres of population were much fewer and less important among them than they are in countries the inhabitants of which live by tilling the ground. Some of these towns were the residences of the khans and of the heads of tribes. Others were places of manufacture or centres of commerce, and many of them were fortified with embankments of earth or walls of stone.

The habitations of the common people, even those built in the towns, were rude huts made so as to be easily taken down and removed. The tents were made by means of poles set in a circle in the ground, and brought nearly together at

the top, so as to form a frame similar to that of an Indian wigwam. A hoop was placed near the top of these poles, so as to preserve a round opening there for the smoke to go out. The frame was then covered with sheets of a sort of thick gray felt, so placed as to leave the opening within the hoop free. The felt, too, was arranged below in such a manner that the corner of one of the sheets could be raised and let down again to form a sort of door. The edges of the sheets in other places were fastened together very carefully, especially in winter, to keep out the cold air.

Within the tent, on the ground in the centre, the family built their fire, which was made of sticks, leaves, grass, and dried droppings of all sorts, gathered from the ground, for the country produced scarcely any wood. Countries roamed over by herds of animals that gain their living by pasturing on the grass and herbage are almost always destitute of trees. Trees in such a case have no opportunity to grow.

The tents of the Monguls thus made were, of course, very comfortless homes. They could not be kept warm, there was so much cold air coming continually in through the crevices, notwithstanding all the people's contrivances to make them tight. The smoke, too, did not all escape through the hoop-hole above. Much of it remained in the tent and mingled with the atmosphere. This evil was aggravated by the kind of fuel which they used, which was of such a nature that it made only a sort of smouldering fire instead of burning, like good dry wood, with a bright and clear flame.

The discomforts of these huts and tents were increased by the custom which prevailed among the people of allowing the animals to come into them, especially those that were

young and feeble, and to live there with the family.

In process of time, as the people increased in riches and in mechanical skill, some of the more wealthy chieftains began to build houses so large and so handsome that they could not be conveniently taken down to be removed, and then they contrived a way of mounting them upon trucks placed at the four corners, and moving them bodily in this way across the plains, as a table is moved across a floor upon its castors. It was necessary, of course, that the houses should be made very light in order to be managed in this way. They were, in fact, still tents rather than houses, being made of the same materials, only they were put together in a more substantial and ornamental manner. The frame was made of very light poles, though these poles were fitted together in permanent joinings. The covering was, like that of the tents, made of felt, but the sheets were joined together by close and strong seams, and the whole was coated with a species of paint, which not only closed all the pores and interstices and made the structure very tight, but also served to ornament it; for they were accustomed, in painting these houses, to adorn the covering with pictures of birds, beasts, and trees, represented in such a manner as doubtless, in their eyes, produced a very beautiful effect.

These movable houses were sometimes very large. A certain traveler who visited the country not far from the time of Genghis Khan says that he saw one of these structures in motion which was thirty feet in diameter. It was drawn by twenty-two oxen. It was so large that it extended five feet on each side beyond the wheels. The oxen, in drawing it, were not attached, as with us, to the centre of the forward axle-tree, but to the ends of the axle-

trees, which projected beyond the wheels on each side. There were eleven oxen on each side drawing upon the axle-trees. There were, of course, many drivers. The one who was chief in command stood in the door of the tent or house which looked forward, and there, with many loud shouts and flourishing gesticulations, issued his orders to the oxen and to the other men.

The household goods of this traveling chieftain were packed in chests made for the purpose, the house itself, of course, in order to be made as light as possible, having been emptied of all its contents. These chests were large, and were made of wicker or basket-work, covered, like the house, with felt. The covers were made of a rounded form, so as to throw off the rain, and the felt was painted over with a certain composition which made it impervious to the water. These chests were not intended to be unpacked at the end of the journey, but to remain as they were, as permanent storehouses of utensils, clothing, and provisions. They were placed in rows, each on its own cart, near the tent, where they could be resorted to conveniently from time to time by the servants and attendants, as occasion might require. The tent placed in the centre, with these great chests on their carts near it, formed, as it were, a house with one great room standing by itself, and all the little rooms and closets arranged in rows by the side of it.

Some such arrangement as this is obviously necessary in case of a great deal of furniture or baggage belonging to a man who lives in a tent, and who desires to be at liberty to remove his whole establishment from place to place at short notice; for a tent, from the very principle of its construction, is incapable of being divided into rooms, or of accommodating extensive stores of furniture or goods. Of

course, a special contrivance is required for the accommodation of this species of property. This was especially the case with the Monguls, among whom there were many rich and great men who often accumulated a large amount of movable property. There was one rich Mongul, it was said, who had two hundred such chest-carts, which were arranged in two rows around and behind his tent, so that his establishment, when he was encamped, looked like quite a little village.

The style of building adopted among the Monguls for tents and movable houses seemed to set the fashion for all their houses, even for those that were built in the towns, and were meant to stand permanently where they were first set up. These permanent houses were little better than tents. They consisted each of one single room without any subdivisions whatever. They were made round, too, like the tents, only the top, instead of running up to a point, was rounded like a dome. There were no floors above that formed on the ground, and no windows.

Such was the general character of the dwellings of the Monguls in the days of Genghis Khan. They took their character evidently from the wandering and pastoral life that the people led. One would have thought that very excellent roads would have been necessary to have enabled them to draw the ponderous carts containing their dwellings and household goods. But this was less necessary than might have been supposed on account of the nature of the country, which consisted chiefly of immense grassy plains and smooth river valleys, over which, in many places, wheels would travel tolerably well in any direction without much making of roadway. Then, again, in all such countries, the people who journey from place to place, and

the herds of cattle that move to and fro, naturally fall into the same lines of travel, and thus, in time, wear great trails, as cows make paths in a pasture. These, with a little artificial improvement at certain points, make very good summer roads, and in the winter it is not necessary to use them at all.

The Monguls, like the ancient Jews, were divided into tribes, and these were subdivided into families; a family meaning in this connection not one household, but a large congeries of households, including all those that were of known relationship to each other. These groups of relatives had each its head, and the tribe to which they pertained had also its general head. There were, it is said, three sets of these tribes, forming three grand divisions of the Mongul people, each of which was ruled by its own khan; and then, to complete the system, there was the grand khan, who ruled over all.

A constitution of society like this almost always prevails in pastoral countries, and we shall see, on a little reflection, that it is natural that it should do so. In a country like ours, where the pursuits of men are so infinitely diversified, the descendants of different families become mingled together in the most promiscuous manner. The son of a farmer in one state goes off, as soon as he is of age, to some other state, to find a place among merchants or manufacturers, because he wishes to be a merchant or a manufacturer himself, while his father supplies his place on the farm perhaps by hiring a man who likes farming, and has come hundreds of miles in search of work. Thus the descendants of one American grandfather and grandmother will be found, after a lapse of a few years, scattered in every direction all over the land, and, indeed, sometimes all over

the world.

It is the diversity of pursuits which prevails in such a country as ours, taken in connection with the diversity of capacity and of taste in different individuals, that produces this dispersion.

Among a people devoted wholly to pastoral pursuits, all this is different. The young men, as they grow up, can have generally no inducement to leave their homes. They continue to live with their parents and relatives, sharing the care of the flocks and herds, and making common cause with them in every thing that is of common interest. It is thus that those great family groups are formed which exist in all pastoral countries under the name of tribes or clans, and form the constituent elements of the whole social and political organization of the people.

In case of general war, each tribe of the Monguls furnished, of course, a certain quota of armed men, in proportion to its numbers and strength. These men always went to war, as has already been said, on horseback, and the spectacle which these troops presented in galloping in squadrons over the plains was sometimes very imposing. The shock of the onset when they charged in this way upon the enemy was tremendous. They were armed with bows and arrows, and also with sabres. As they approached the enemy, they discharged first a shower of arrows upon him, while they were in the act of advancing at the top of their speed. Then, dropping their bows by their side, they would draw their sabres, and be ready, as soon as the horses fell upon the enemy, to cut down all opposed to them with the most furious and deadly blows.

If they were repulsed, and compelled by a superior force to retreat, they would gallop at full speed over the plains, turning at the same time in their saddles, and shooting at their pursuers with their arrows as coolly, and with as correct an aim, almost, as if they were still. While thus retreating the trooper would guide and control his horse by his voice, and by the pressure of his heels upon his sides, so as to have both his arms free for fighting his pursuers.

These arrows were very formidable weapons, it is said. One of the travelers who visited the country in those days says that they could be shot with so much force as to pierce the body of a man entirely through.

It must be remembered, however, in respect to all such statements relating to the efficiency of the bow and arrow, that the force with which an arrow can be thrown depends not upon any independent action of the bow, but altogether upon the strength of the man who draws it. The bow, in straightening itself for the propulsion of the arrow, expends only the force which the man has imparted to it by bending it; so that the real power by which the arrow is propelled is, after all, the muscular strength of the archer. It is true, a great deal depends on the qualities of the bow, and also on the skill of the man in using it, to make all this muscular [Pg 36]strength effective. With a poor bow, or with unskillful management, a great deal of it would be wasted. But with the best possible bow, and with the most consummate skill of the archer, it is the strength of the archer's arm which throws the arrow, after all.

It is very different in this respect with a bullet thrown by the force of gunpowder from the barrel of a gun. The force in this case is the explosive force of the powder, and the bullet is thrown to the same distance whether it is a very

weak man or a very strong man that pulls the trigger.

But to return to the Monguls. All the information which we can obtain in respect to the condition of the people before the time of Genghis Khan comes to us from the reports of travelers who, either as merchants, or as embassadors from caliphs or kings, made long journeys into these distant regions, and have left records, more or less complete, of their adventures, and accounts of what they saw, in writings which have been preserved by the learned men of the East. It is very doubtful how far these accounts are to be believed. One of these travelers, a learned man named Salam, who made a journey far into the interior of Asia by order of the Calif Mohammed Amin Billah, some time before the reign of Genghis Khan, says that, among other objects of research and investigation which occupied his mind, he was directed to ascertain the truth in respect to the two famous nations Gog and Magog, or, as they are designated in his account, Yagog and Magog. The story that had been told of these two nations by the Arabian writers, and which was extensively believed, was, that the people of Yagog were of the ordinary size of men, but those of Magog were only about two feet high. These people had made war upon the neighboring nations, and had destroyed many cities and towns, but had at last been overpowered and shut up in prison.

Salam, the traveler whom the calif sent to ascertain whether their accounts were true, traveled at the head of a caravan containing fifty men, and with camels bearing stores and provisions for a year. He was gone a long time. When he came back he gave an account of his travels; and in respect to Gog and Magog, he said that he had found that the accounts which had been heard respecting them were true. He traveled on, he said, from the country of one chieftain to another till he reached the Caspian Sea, and

then went on beyond that sea for thirty or forty days more. In one place the party came to a tract of low black land, which exhaled an odor so offensive that they were obliged to use perfumes all the way to overpower the noxious smells. They were ten days in crossing this fetid territory. After this they went on a month longer through a desert country, and at length came to a fertile land which was covered with the ruins of cities that the people of Gog and Magog had destroyed.

In six days more they reached the country of the nation by which the people of Gog and Magog had been conquered and shut up in prison. Here they found a great many strong castles. There was a large city here too, containing temples and academies of learning, and also the residence of the king.

The travelers took up their abode in this city for a time, and while they were there they made an excursion of two days' journey into the country to see the place where the people of Gog and Magog were confined. When they arrived at the place they found a lofty mountain. There was a great opening made in the face of this mountain two or three hundred feet wide. The opening was protected on each side by enormous buttresses, between which was placed an immense double gate, the buttresses and the gate being all of iron. The buttresses were surmounted with an iron bulwark, and with lofty towers also of iron, which were carried up as high as to the top of the mountain itself. The gates were of the width of the opening cut in the mountain, and were seventy-five feet high; and the valves, lintels, and threshold, and also the bolts, the lock, and the key, were all of proportional size.

Salam, on arriving at the place, saw all these wonderful

structures with his own eyes, and he was told by the people there that it was the custom of the governor of the castles already mentioned to take horse every Friday with ten others, and, coming to the gate, to strike the great bolt three times with a ponderous hammer weighing five pounds, when there would be heard a murmuring noise within, which were the groans of the Yagog and Magog people confined in the mountain. Indeed, Salam was told that the poor captives often appeared on the battlements above. Thus the real existence of this people was, in his opinion, fully proved; and even the story in respect to the diminutive size of the Magogs was substantiated, for Salam was told that once, in a high wind, three of them were blown off from the battlements to the ground, and that, on being measured, they were found but three spans high.

This is a specimen of the tales brought home from remote countries by the most learned and accomplished travelers of those times. In comparing these absurd and ridiculous tales with the reports which are brought back from distant regions in our days by such travelers as Humboldt, Livingstone, and Kane, we shall perceive what an immense progress in intelligence and information the human mind has made since those days.