



VAMBERY AND HIS DONKEY.

A GREAT TRAVELER.

BY JOHN LEWEES.

It would be very natural in any of us to suppose that no man who depended for his conveyance upon so small a donkey as that one on the opposite page, would be likely to go far enough to gain a reputation as a great traveler. But although a small donkey is not to be despised, when it comes to pulling and carrying and bearing hardships, still the man in the picture did not depend upon a donkey.

Indeed, with the exception of his own legs, he did not really depend upon any of the ordinary methods of traveling, for he seemed to be able to go pretty much where he pleased, whether people in general were able to get there or not.

This man—Arminius Vambéry—was born in Hungary in 1832, and very early in life became noted for his knowledge of languages, especially those of Eastern countries. The first use that he made of his knowledge of these difficult tongues was to teach them to other people.

He set up at Pesth as a teacher of languages; but as the Austrian authorities expelled him from the city for political reasons, he concluded to travel, and put his acquirements to a practical use. So he went to Constantinople, and thence to many parts of the East, never before reached by a European traveler.

Some of the places which he visited were considered to be sacred, and no unbeliever was allowed to come near them, under penalty of instant death were he discovered. But Vambéry disguised himself as a dervish, and traveled, sometimes alone and sometimes with pilgrims and caravans, through the deserts of Tartary to the city of Khiva. From here he made his way to Bokhara, a celebrated city of Central Asia, one of the great seats of Mahometan learning. It ought to be a learned place as well as a religious one, for there are said to be one hundred and three colleges and three hundred and sixty mosques within its walls. A good Mahometan in Bokhara might go to a different mosque almost every day in the year.

When Vambéry had satisfied his curiosity in Bokhara, as far as was possible, he pushed on to Samarcand, an important city about one hundred and thirty miles to the east. Samarcand possesses the tomb of Timur, and used to be the capital of

one of the greatest empires ever known, and the center of Asiatic learning and commerce. But it has dwindled away very much since that time; and when Vambéry visited it, it was full of interest, of course, but bereft of much of its ancient magnificence and splendor.

We cannot follow Vambéry in his various wanderings. Sometimes he bestrode his little donkey, and sometimes he sailed in curious vessels on the Caspian Sea. He lived in Turcoman tents; hunted wild beasts; traveled with caravans; rode alone on his camel at night through the solitary desert; met with escaped murderers who lived in caves; came across a whole army of wild and savage asses, who offered battle to him and his party; attended grand festivals, where all the guests plunged their hands into the dishes; went to fairs where everybody, buyers and sellers, was on horseback.

At one time, he came very near being discovered by a sharp young prince, who declared that he believed he was an Englishman in disguise. But the good dervish, Vambéry, seemed so offended and shocked at such a speech, that after awhile the prince was very sorry that he had hurt the poor man's feelings.

At last our traveler, having reached the borders of Persia, on his homeward journey, threw off his disguise, and mounted on a good horse and attended by a faithful servant, soon reached Teheran, where he was cordially welcomed by both the English and the native citizens. Even the Persian King thought so well of his exploits that he made him a member of the Order of the Lion and the Sun. I don't know what particular advantage this was to Vambéry, but it was a compliment, and I suppose he liked it.

Vambéry has written a book called "Travels and Adventures in Central Asia," and also several other books about Persia and Asia.

When I last heard of him he was Professor of Oriental languages at the University of Pesth.

It is a very fine thing to travel and see strange countries and strange people, but when you are obliged to make believe that you are a strange person yourself, and run the risk of being killed if you are found out, it would, in most cases, be better to stay at home.