

Though I was at a centre where several large caravan routes meet and cross one another, it was anything but easy to buy camels. Consul-General Houtum-Schindler and the Persian servants of the British legation did their best, and both Tatars and Persians came daily with long strings of camels, but either the prices they asked were absurd or the animals were of poor quality and tired, and did not look as though they could survive a long desert march. One evening a dealer came to the legation and asked 40 and 35 tuman respectively for the two fine camels he brought with him. The price was moderate, but fortunately I resisted the man's importunity, and told him to come back next morning. When the pack-saddles were taken off the animals, their backs between the humps were found to be very sore, the skin was worn off, the flesh was exposed and emitted an unpleasant odour. The camels were not worth 10 tuman apiece, and the dealer went off with his property smiling resignedly at the failure of his trick.

At last appeared three Tatars from Tabriz with fifty handsome camels, and by means of the spying and gossip that is rife in Persia we had learnt that the Tatars must, for some reason or other, sell their animals. I had the Hindu veterinary surgeon of the legation and my own men as advisers, and chose the best fourteen out of the fifty—that was the number wanted for our baggage. Of these five were quite giants, elegant and splendid animals, and the rest, too, were in excellent condition, entirely free from blemishes, and without the slightest gall. The breeding season had begun, and they were therefore testy and restless, white lathery froth lay on their flabby lips, they ground their teeth, rolled their eyes, and uttered a low gurgling sound. For all the fourteen I paid 975 tuman, or £184, a high price, but the largest were worth 100 tuman apiece.

Well, now they were mine, and it was a pleasure to me during the two days before the start to go and look at them, and watch one truss of hay after another disappear in the group in the courtyard, and to know that they were resting and storing up strength for the hardships before