

Ararat, had been packed and sealed up and despatched in the bag of the English legation by special post to England and Stockholm.

And on the first page of the new book I wrote, "January 1st, 1906." The day was perhaps lucky for the beginning of a journey, and I wondered what would be entered in the following pages of the diary. The tones of the military band on New Year's Eve still lingered in my ears; here reigned stillness in the leafless trees, eternal and melancholy, but calling me and enticing me out to the limitless desert. A slight strip of cultivation pointed south-eastwards, a promontory in the sea of desert; but in a few days we should leave the last village behind us, and then lose ourselves in a country where no tidings of the outer world penetrate, where no vegetation grows, but yet is so rich in mystical and unaccountable fascination, and where only the winds of heaven sing their dirges over the home of the hyena and jackal.

Therefore I was glad to be on the road, and I rejoiced to see the appetite of the camels. Here there was no economy in their feeding; they were to eat as much as they liked, so that they were fat and sleek when we stood, a few days later, on the edge of the desert and could no longer procure hay and straw from the villages. On them everything depended; they were to carry me and my things to the frontier of the kingdom of the Great Mogul.

I had not slept in a tent for three years and a half, and yet I slept very soundly on the very first night. Early in the morning of January 2 I was awakened by Mirza, who a little later brought in my breakfast, while the other men packed up and loaded the camels. It took them two hours to get ready—that was good for a beginning, and I knew that they would manage it more quickly after experience. The minimum temperature had been as low as 20.8° , and a thin covering of snow lay over the country, which, however, had disappeared at ten o'clock. Consul-General Houtum-Schindler and Preece, who had lived most of their lives in Persia, were afraid that the winter precipitation in the great desert, Kevir, would be a trouble to me, and that the saline ground would be too slippery