

grey clay, usually without a sign of vegetation; but here and there appeared oases of small gardens or thickets of poplars and willows, marking solitary villages. The country is exceedingly sparsely peopled, and there is nothing to indicate the proximity of a large town but small caravans of asses, mules, and camels, which, laden with chopped straw or grain, are on their way to Teheran.

This road is not intended for vehicles; in parts it is good and even, but often we must cross branches of canals skirted by banks of earth and without bridges, and where these are sometimes to be found they are risky for vehicles. But the worst is when a canal has flooded the road, and we have to drive over ice which breaks under the weight of the wheels. At two such places we drive almost right into the mud, and once, when the ice slabs check the wheel, one of the front springs of the carriage goes to pieces; but, however much we flounder, we can still make slow progress.

In front of us to the south-east now appears a slight broken outline of trees, as usual exclusively poplars and willows, trees which can live at the outskirts of cultivation, and also mud huts, walls and ruins dominated by a mosque. We drive into the first narrow lanes of Veramin and have to cross a ditch—but this is the end, the carriage stops, the four horses go on, and both the springs on the front axle give way so completely that they fly out of their places, and with the wheels and axles collapse under the carriage. Never did a vehicle go to pieces at such a convenient moment. It was my last drive on the way from Trebizond, and at Veramin I was to mount one of the camels. The driver demanded 25 tuman for the journey to Veramin, and I was reconciled to the exorbitant price when I saw him make good the damage temporarily with ropes and straps, and cautiously draw the carriage to the nearest forge.

We had driven past the camels early in the day, and had plenty of time to look about in the town Shahr-i-Veramin, as it is called. There is, indeed, a caravanserai here, and the man in charge invited us to enter, but its single room was too dirty and too frequented to be a