

Kashan and Ispahan, and occasionally Bakhtiari nomads strayed hither. In Veramin and the villages around are cultivated wheat, rice, barley, pease, beans, green vegetables, roots, plums, apricots, pomegranates, apples and pears, oranges, melons and water-melons, almonds, pistachios, walnuts, etc., and most of the produce is sent to Teheran, which absorbs all that is available. Veramin also produces cheese, sour milk, and *roghan*, or liquid butter mixed with salt and grape-juice and kept in sacks of sheepskin, in which it hardens into a solid mass. The finest food, my servants asserted, was roghan.

Singularly enough, the people in Veramin were very ignorant about the desert, though it lay in their immediate neighbourhood towards the east. They said that they never had any business there, and that in the interior of the desert there was nothing to be found. At the edge of the Takla-makan men are often met with who travel into the desert in search of gold, but the circumstances were different here; the people were acquainted only with tracks and paths in the outskirts of the desert, and could give me no information except about the nearest three or four days' stages and the names of the places where we ought to encamp. They had, moreover, a great respect for the desert, pitied us because we were venturing into it, and could not understand what object we could have.

During our two days' rest we denied ourselves nothing, had more than ample supplies of everything, and lived on what the villages could offer. Fresh water from the snowy mountains and springs flowed in a canal past our tents, and we had no need to spare it, but the time would perhaps come when we should have to save every drop and these drops might be briny. There was no lack of mutton, fowls, eggs, and bread, sweet and sour milk, and fruit, and whole armfuls of green fodder were heaped up in front of the camels, which their teeth ground up like machines, and one could see them thrive and grow fat. And fuel we had in abundance, and our tents were warm and cosy; this commodity also might become scarce some time, and we should have to put up with the poor dry plants the desert afforded.