

CHAPTER XVII

THE LAST VILLAGES

My night's rest was twice disturbed by a cat which made itself at home in the tent and jumped over my legs; it doubtless preferred to be under cover, for there was a fine drizzle outside, though so slight that the ground was almost dry in the morning. The minimum temperature was 34.9° , and it felt quite warm when we took down the tent in good time and began to load the fourteen camels. Rahim, who had superintended all the equipment in Teheran, now took his departure with a liberal present, and, as usual, a written testimonial; he was to return with the damaged carriage and took my last letters with him. He must have made a good thing of all the commissions he executed at my expense,—he would not have been a Persian if he had not.

Four chests were placed on one of the largest camels, two boxes and the two tents on another; a third carried my cooking utensils, and so one camel after another was loaded till all stood beneath heavy burdens and tramped out of the village in an imposing procession. They were now arranged in two sets, the first led by Gulam Hussein, the other by Abbas. At the head of each marched one of the largest camels, richly adorned with tassels and red ribands and with a string of tinkling bells round his breast, while the great caravan bells were attached to the side of the boxes of two other camels. It was a fine and attractive sight, and the bells rang merrily as for a marriage feast. Space is limited in the lanes of Veramin, now and then a load grazes a greyish clay wall and the narrow passage is