

there is water at Keilege and Shekker-ab, but this route, passing partly through desert, partly through hills, is 27 farsakh long and is not to be recommended. The shortest way to Tallhe, 18 farsakh long, lies entirely in desert, and on its three or four days' march no water occurs.

We held a council of war, and all were of the same opinion as myself, that the desert route was the best—Mirza alone voted for the hilly road where there was water, but he was very disinclined to expose himself to unnecessary suffering. The Persian caravan guides preferred the level desert route for the sake of the camels; just now there was a caravan of 200 camels from Ispahan encamping at Kerim Khan, and it had chosen the desert route through Sefid-ab and Mugur in preference to the main road through Kashan and Kum; it halted at Mugur to feed the camels with cottonseed, and it was staying two days at Kerim Khan. As we came up the 200 camels were standing in a long row and drinking from the little canal of the village. These long-distance caravans always travel at night to give the camels an opportunity of grazing in the daytime. *Khar-i-shutur* or camel grass is a steppe plant which is said to grow on the skirts of the desert, and where it is plentiful the camels require no other food; this year it was poorer than usual, and therefore the camels of Kerim Khan were thin. The information given by the ketkhoda that antelopes and wild asses (*ahu* and *gur*) live in the hills before us seems to indicate that the country around cannot be quite sterile.

When the old man told me that the village owned sixty camels, the brilliant idea occurred to me to hire some of them to help us on our way for a few days, and carry hay and straw for our own animals. When the ketkhoda declared that he was willing to let us have five camels for the journey to Tallhe if he received 15 kran a day for each, I took him into my tent and we held a long palaver in the presence of Abbas Kuli Bek and Mirza. His demand was certainly exorbitant, for 30 tuman is half the cost of a large camel. To simplify matters I asked him how much he would charge altogether for five camels to Tallhe, and he replied without hesitation, "Nine tuman."