

and slips among them like a dolphin, and does not move an eyebrow when they spit right in his face. They are like lambs in his hands, and understand him immediately when he hisses like a snake, clicks with his tongue, whistles and gesticulates. It is no use for Avul Kasim to assume airs with Habibullah, for he catches it hot and is completely cowed. The good Kasim, who was engaged first and had the work of equipping the caravan, had expected to have some control over the other men, but he could not obtain it, and his pretensions were not supported by a firman from me. Mirza is secretary, and therefore considers that he is under no one's orders but mine; and he is always present when the geographical names for the day are noted down or when I consult with the ketkhoda about the route. Seeing also that the Cossacks take their orders from me, and the caravan men have only to attend to their charges, Avul Kasim's plan has entirely failed, and he goes about with the air of a great man whose merits are not appreciated. In Central Asia and Tibet a caravan leader is always necessary to keep order among the other men, but in Persia I am my own caravan-bashi, and everything goes on smoothly without any friction to speak of.

This is now the third day that the camels have not drunk a drop of water, but they show no sign of thirst, and when we halt at a large pool of melted snow they hardly do more than look at it. They are quiet, breathe gently and deliberately, and let their solemn imperious glances wander over the desolate steppe, which stretches before us day after day, without the least sign of anxiety. They seem to be unaffected by the length of the way, by the sterility of the wilderness, and by thirst, and submit to their fate with supreme indifference. Whether the march be long or short, the loads heavy or light, the camels follow their leader patiently and without complaint. They are wonderful animals, and it is good to be in their company. I never tire of watching them and observing their deliberate movements. I constantly discover new traits, and find them very picturesque, and quite in their place in this dreary, monotonous country.