

We were now in a district where all the snow had disappeared, leaving only small pools behind, and had we possessed a pump we would have emptied them and thrown away the wretched water we carried in the skin bags. For in some of these the water was brown, and in others had a suspicious colour as if it were mixed with ink. It had an unpleasant taste, somewhat like that of rancid oil, and we drank it with strong tea, plenty of sugar, and ice-cold, swallowing a cupful at a gulp, then breathed with open mouth and instantly lighted a cigarette. But we do not mind, and in consequence of the high humidity of the air we have not much thirst. It may be worse later on if we lose ourselves in the great desert.

It is twelve o'clock; the mist is just as thick, we are always at the centre of the same small spot of earth where the horizon is lost in the fog. There is no change; we march over the same steppe with its thin carpet of gravel, with the same shallow furrows now pointing more to the north-east, probably turning in their lower stretches eastwards towards the Kevir. The track is plain, for here many caravans have passed, if for no other object than to collect fuel for the villages and Teheran. No steppe shrubs grow on the path itself, which is recognizable as a brown strip without the patches of rime which occur everywhere else. We march on to the sound of the bells, south-eastwards, always surrounded by an impenetrable wall of mist; one mile after another is traversed, and one feels like a squirrel in its cage. Hoar-frost accumulates on all the exposed hair of the camels till they look spotted all over.

After three hours' march a series of very low insignificant hillocks come into sight on the right hand. Between some of them, 10 to 15 feet high, an erosion channel winds from south-west to north-east, and this place is called Summek or Sumbek. Some snow remains on the north sides of the mounds. About a farsakh to the north is Kole-hauz-i-Summek, with a road dating from the time of Shah Abbas, which is said to pass the camping-grounds Sefid-ab, Germ-ab, Moghar, Shur-gusun, Baghrabat, and Habibabad before it reaches Shahr-i-Isfahun,