

And then again we started for another day's journey towards the heart of the desert. At first the ground was troublesome, consisting of a hard thin crust of red clay mud resting on soft loose matter in which the camels sank, and only in the erosion furrows, washed by running water, was the soil firm. We steered south-south-east, and entered the mouth of a clearly marked dell enclosed between terraces and mounds 30 feet high. It was like passing through a tunnel; close beside us rose the red barren banks of clay, and above us lay the dark heavy mist, covering us like a roof. At the very entrance of the dell we noticed that a considerable flood must have poured down recently, and we had not gone far before we came to a small creek of almost stagnant water, so bitter that not a single camel would touch it. Even at the last extremity men cannot put up with such water; they simply cannot swallow it. We had come into a treacherous, infernal hole.

For the rest the bed consisted of alternate strips and belts of mud and coarse sand. Where the latter is wet, it gives way and is very treacherous and dangerous. The Persians warned us, and when a camel sank in with his hind legs, we thought it advisable to leave this singular hollow and ascend the mounds on the right side. Here occurs a new bush called *hich*, with green upright needles. The saxaul has gone, but it will reappear here and there farther on. There is no trail in the dell, for all traces have been swept away by the spring flood. As, besides, we are enveloped in this annoying mist, it is often difficult for experienced travellers to find the way, and even our *bellad* or guide, the *ketkhoda*, is sometimes at a loss; but I have already taken bearings of the Tallhe hill, and can give him the general direction. The land is now even again, a gently rising plain thinly strewn with gravel and with an equally thin growth of shrubs.

To the left runs a ridge of low yellow hillocks striped with dark bands of a harder slate, which dip east-south-eastwards at an angle of 15° . Several small dales run out between the hills. A caravan of thirteen camels with two drivers suddenly emerge from the mist, and pass us at a