

erosion edges ; the steppe shrubs were scattered, withered, and poor, and seemed hardly useful for any other purpose than to feed camp fires.

So I walk on in solitude, compass in hand, and take bearings in the direction of the track and of the objects to the side ; I know the length of my step, and can apply it to the reckoning of distances with as great accuracy as the camel's stride. Dry reddish mounds of clay containing sand and gypsum, somewhat protruding owing to its greater power of resistance, stand on either side. Here and there gypsum crystals shine and flash, and when the sun is reflected on their smooth facets they glitter like electric light. Two small watersheds are crossed by my path, which beyond the second guides me eastwards. The bare and empty country stretches out terribly desolate and dead wherever I look ; a curse seems to rest upon it, as though it were doomed never to be trodden by man, and never bear ripening harvests. But that it also conceals certain secrets may be read on the ground where trails of the children of the desert, the wild asses, cross one another in every direction, sometimes in incredible numbers. Not infrequently I pass spots lately trodden by light-footed flying gazelles, and I long to see the animals themselves, and I ought to have a better chance of doing so now that I am alone and no caravan bells scare the shy dwellers in the desert to flight. But, nevertheless, they keep themselves out of sight, and only the spoor is there to give evidence of the animals' existence.

The country is practically quite sterile, and pebbles and loose stones seldom occur ; but where they are to be found they have been utilized for the construction of small cairns, which seem quite unnecessary, for the track follows for the most part a plainly marked though shallow furrow. The only other sign of life in the perfect solitude is the trail of a number of camels, probably those we saw at Tallhe. Their footprints are extraordinarily distinct, even the smallest callosities and inequalities in their footpads being impressed in the soft earth. Two herdsmen and two dogs had been with them.

Now I have left the dark elevation behind me and a