

higher one, to the north-east, crops up behind it at a distance of fully a mile. The Tallhe hill hides Elburz, and I am deprived of the opportunity of taking bearings from Demavend, which would otherwise be possible, for the sky is quite clear. Here the country is more rolling than before, and it seems that the perfectly level desert must be still far away.

Still I follow a path marked by cairns, which evidently leads to a spring, and still I tramp in the spoor of wild asses. Sometimes I seem to hear the distant, scarcely audible clang of bells, and suspect that my men are following in my tracks; but they had not taken down the tents when I set out, and I have a long start and continue my solitary wanderings.

The same dip and bedding prevail everywhere in the rocks, and set their stamp on the relief; to the north-west the strata break off in a steep escarpment, while to the south-east they dip gently. Now the valley expands, and in the basin shrubs grow freely, and here and there a small group of tamarisks struggles for existence. Down here there is not the slightest sign of snow, and one is astonished that so small a difference of height can have such an effect; but here the land is flatter and more even, and affords no sheltered spots where the snow can linger.

Before me, to the south-east, stands another ridge not far off; it is lower and more denuded than the preceding, and one can see that the dimensions of the small isolated desert elevations gradually diminish towards the south-east and east. Beyond this last ridge is seen, through a gap, what an inexperienced stranger would take to be an open sea, a blue boundless surface with a horizon as even as though it had been drawn with a ruler. This is the great Kevir, the dreaded and dangerous, where spirits keep house, whither but few Europeans have ventured, and which I shall soon cross in a part where no one has been before.

Behind me I see the small elevated group I left this morning, and over its summit sharply defined dark clouds hover; they might be taken for vapour rising from a still active volcano, but either they are composed of dust raised