

At first we march south-west, but afterwards we are by degrees turned by the Kevir shore straight towards the west, and so are farther removed from the low hills on the southern shore which are our next bourne. Our involuntary *détour* was, however, by no means fruitless, for I was glad to obtain by this means a more thorough survey of the Kevir in its western extremity. Here and there the spoor of a wild ass disappears in a row of dark spots towards the Kevir. These animals, which spend their lives around the treacherous desert where their senses and powers of observation are sharpened to the uttermost, know exactly where the dry crust is hard enough to bear their weight. Only in such parts do they venture over to reach the springs and pastures at the foot of the southern hills. But it would be very dangerous to trust to such a spoor, for even where the ground bears the light, swift-footed wild asses, the heavy, slowly moving laden camels would sink into the slough.

Even where the Kevir seems at a distance level and smooth as a sheet of ice, its surface is covered with rugosities, swells with dry crackling crust, brittle excrescences like hardened bubbles of mud, with dark holes and depressions among them. Here and there we cut across small creeks of such ground and see the leading camel flounder before he can get a foothold, and then with bent head proceed cautiously, feeling his way. There is no danger for those that follow when they see that the ground bears the one in front. But between these brittle inequalities all go staggering as if they were drunk. After a downpour of rain all these dry rough spots must be turned into slough, where one would sink as into syrup.

At mid-day we crossed a furrow 1 foot deep and 30 feet broad, with plenty of saxaul, and then were turned by a desert creek still more to west-north-west and taken away from our goal, the southern hills. The desert stretched westwards as far as sight could reach, and we looked in vain for a place where we could venture over to the southern shore. Rain-clouds hovered over the southern hills which after half an hour had totally disappeared, and Kuh-i-nakshir as well, which we had sometimes before