

the steppe belt; but farther out the surface of the Kevir becomes darker, and in the distance gleams a pure white streak, beyond which is seen a thinner black line which looks like water. One would gladly believe that the thin surface salt in the small creeks nearer in front of us are collections of water; but we are deceived by the mirage, the light and distance, and by the perfect flatness of the desert.

Mirage plays us many pranks in this level country. The hills we lately saw rising like islands out of the desert have quite disappeared to-day. And beyond a summit of the southern hills, which is seen due south-east at mid-day, and seems to be the extremity of the little range, crops up a row of small hillocks which appear to float a little above the horizon. It is again mirage which produces this illusion, and after a couple of hours these knobs melt together into a continuous chain, low and light blue owing to the distance. Even the clouds deceive us, and when they sometimes lie low down one is inclined to take them for hills. In the afternoon they lie only in the south-east, the whole sky elsewhere being clear.

A strange camel goes for two hours in front of the caravan; he has neither halter nor cloth, and one is inclined to take him for a wild one. He has, doubtless, strayed from a herd, and we pass him and get rid of his company, when Nevengk rushes at him, and he stops to meet the attack.

During the latter part of the march the shore becomes more irregular, and we cut across the innermost points of several small bays; one of them is bounded on the east by an equally sharp-pointed peninsula, in the prolongation of which four small holms of firm soil stand up in the Kevir just like islands in a lake. Two antelopes are grazing on the steppe, and Hussein Ali, who is usually lazy and has a wonderful capacity for lying asleep on his camel, becomes wakeful and animated immediately there is a chance of sport, but he blazes away at random, and there seems to be no danger to the wild animals that come within range of his gun. It was very different among the Russian and