

have a harder structure, either of rock in a more or less weathered condition, or of fragments and splinters from the screes that fall towards the bottom of the depression. It is an exceedingly singular and fantastic landscape, and, as before, we find that the herdsmen have a great respect for the interior of the Kevir. The Dom herdsman said that when continued drought prevails, the surface of the Kevir is covered with a harder crust which bears well, but that, all the same, it would be very dangerous to venture over it with a large caravan. He compared it to a sheet of thin ice on a morass, and said that a caravan would be in danger because the crust might give way altogether beneath the camels so that they might be all drowned at once. But he had also heard that in the middle of the Kevir, inaccessible to any human being, there were oases with fragrant grass, waving palms, and sweet clear water. Like most other peoples, the Persians have a capacity for picturing the unattainable in very attractive and charming colours.

The tired camel reached the camp, but in a very feeble condition. Though, like the others, he had abstained from water for four days, he would hardly look at it, an indifference which is regarded as a very bad symptom. Loaves were kneaded for him, but he had no appetite. In the evening the three camel drivers sat round a fire in the open air, mending defective pack-saddles and shoes, talking and smoking, and curiously lighted up by the red glare of the flames. They were rather tired after the day's long pull uphill when they went on foot, while Mirza and Avul Kasim did not take a step. It is a great thing that all are contented and well, and hitherto I had not heard an ugly word in the caravan.