

of the fire. The oldest, a man in the forties, with clearly-cut features, clad in a thin blue coat, with a black cap on his head and a pipe in his belt, let out by degrees that it was only 2 farsakh to the village Alem; he could not answer for it that we should find provisions there, but he offered to show us the way to the village if he was first paid a tuman; the 10 kran were counted out at once, but two of them seemed to him suspicious, and he wanted others in their place. The charge was, indeed, very exorbitant, but it was a good thing not to have to turn back to Ashin. Anarek was too far out of our course, and it was several days' journey more to Jandak.

While the other herdsmen continued on their way, the man in the blue coat led us north-eastwards to Alem, which we probably should never have found without him. After a while he bethought him that he had forgotten his cloak and ran back after his comrades, but Abbas Kuli Bek knew his good countrymen and suspected that the man had an intention of making off, so he followed him. They came back presently, and then the new guide marched at the head of the caravan. He pointed north and north-east and said, "There is Rig-i-jin, the sand desert, and north of it the great Kevir." One could see that the horizon to the north and north-east was broken by dunes.

The shrubs on the steppe are scattered and the pebbles are larger. The north wind is strong and feels icy cold; it drives the sand obliquely against us, and we see it lying in the furrows running north-north-east. It begins to snow again, at first slightly and then more densely, and all the surroundings, all the small hillocks, disappear, except the one we are making for and which is still seen in faint outline through the veil of snow. Wet, yellowish-red strips of mud remain in the shallow furrows left by the stream which flowed down after the last rain. Now and then a hare scuttles away on our approach, but there is no other game.

The snowfall is very dense, falling in whirling flakes and sweeping past our faces like tufts of cotton-wool, chasing one another in eager play, large as snowballs and