

charcoal; *seghal drust mikunend* ("they are making charcoal"), say the Persians.

A welcome refreshing breeze sweeps over the peaceful country from the north-east; the thermometer marks at one o'clock 48.2° , and my servants want their usual mid-day meal. It is usually Abbas Kuli Bek who asks if I have any objection to a halt of ten minutes, and while the men enjoy a drink of water, a piece of bread, and a pipe, I make notes, take bearings, and read the meteorological instruments. As for myself, I abstain from luncheon, and am accustomed not to drink at all during the day; one is better without it in the desert; the Persians drink constantly, and yet are always thirsty.

With the mountain Kuh-i-doldor standing like a beacon in the south, we continue on our way eastwards over dreary, thinly clothed steppe, very seldom crossed by tiny furrows. At a couple of hundred yards' distance to the north are seen the backs of the dunes rising above a quite luxuriant belt of saxaul which grows on the edge of the sandy sea. From among the copses a camel herdsman appears, and comes up to have a talk with Kerbelai Madali, and then vanishes again among the bushes. If we did not know the actual conditions, we could take an oath that a large lake lay to the south, the more so that the hills to the south of it seem to be reflected in its surface; and yet it is only an illusion of mirage. Lakes in this country! A man can travel here for weeks without seeing a drop of water on the surface, and the little that exists beneath the ground is artificially extracted by scattered wells well hidden in the mouths of valleys. We have just had some precipitation, which does not remain on the ground but evaporates without leaving a drop behind; it sounds, therefore, an exaggeration to say that rain and mud are the greatest dangers on a journey through the Kevir.

We gradually approach the dark range Kuh-i-cheft, and the Nigu hill, which shines in shades of pink, shows more and more of its details. Either the plain is absolutely sterile, or is coloured yellow by scattered shrubs; sometimes it is crossed by lines of saxaul bushes running north