

quickly, but is like a soaked sheepskin coat spread out to dry on damp ground, and that takes time.

Again we discussed the situation thoroughly, and suggested this and that; and at length came to the conclusion that it would be wiser to go to Khur and cross the desert to Turut. While we were still talking about it we heard in the distance a well-known sound—the ring of caravan bells. We all three rushed out; there was nothing to be seen, but the bells sounded louder and louder from the direction of Jandak. A few dark specks at length came into sight from between and over the yellow hillocks in the south, and were followed by others—a long row. A caravan was approaching, no doubt one of the three we had seen at Jandak. It was a solemn sight to see them come cruising like ships towards the outermost reef, ready to venture out on the dreary ocean. The bells clang out more distinctly, but the camels grow larger very slowly. A man mounted on an ass leads the long procession. Do they really mean to venture out? Shall we tell them that it is impossible, or shall we hope that they must get across at any cost? In that case we shall be glad to let them plough up a path for us, for in the track tramped down by a caravan the salt clay dries very quickly, and at any rate the ground becomes less smooth.

“Why have you set out though it rained in the night?” I asked. “It is surely not the first time you have crossed the Kevir?”

“Well,” said the leader, “when we saw you go off towards the desert yesterday afternoon, we decided to follow your track, watered and loaded our camels, and set out at dusk; but when we came to Kotel we were caught in the rain, so we pitched our camp. We thought that you had gone on northwards, and that we could avail ourselves of the path your camels trod down in the desert.”

“We have examined the desert and found that it is quite impossible to cross it now.”

“Yes, I can understand that,” the man replied. “It would have been better to remain in Jandak rather than lie waiting here, where there is neither water nor fodder.”