

Meanwhile the camels came marching up, *katar* after *katar*, each division of six or seven camels led by a man. Their loads were pitched down anyhow, and the camels, fifty-five in number, were arranged in groups of ten or twelve, and in the midst of each group was spread a sheet which was filled with straw. While the camels fed with an excellent appetite, the men took their evening meal of bread, rice, and tea, with raisins, and smoked their pipes and talked.

At ten o'clock at night, just as we had finished our supper, the bells began to ring again. Instead of staying here, consuming their stores and injuring their camels by too long abstinence from water, the men were marching back again to Jandak. But the caravan leader, Agha Muhamed, and one of his servants remained at Haji Ramazan's dried-up well to keep guard over the baggage. Ali Murat accompanied the returning party with his four camels, which also were in need of water and straw, as our commissariat was completely deranged by the unforeseen waste of time. It was fortunate that I had ordered Abbas Kuli Bek to stay three days at Jandak. With the help of a small Persian grammar I always had at hand, I composed a faulty letter to him and Mirza; they were to send us bread, eggs, chickens, roghan, matches, candles, and charcoal for six more days, and for the rest they were not to alter their arrangements, but quietly await our arrival at Khur.

With the experience I had now acquired of desert life and its risks, I perceived that it might very well happen that after the first crossing we might be stopped in the same way at Turut. It might come on to rain at any time, and the eastern route is considered much more difficult than the western, at the head of which we were waiting. It is wetter, dries more slowly, and is bad all through, while the western has at any rate firm ground in parts. But at the worst we could always take the eastern route round to Tebbes, and send a messenger after our men. Now all we had to think of was how to get safely through to the northern edge of the desert, and afterwards matters would right themselves.