

was this party waiting for the favourable moment ; it lay there resting and gathering up strength on the very outskirts of the desert, which showed its horizontal line, forming the farthest visible limit of the earth's crust to the north.

The day looked uncertain. In the morning the weather was tolerable ; the wind blew from the north-west, and the sky was half covered with clouds. But at one o'clock the sky darkened and was veiled in threatening clouds, the wind abated and it became quite calm, the barometer fell—everything indicated a change. We had for a time our hearts in our mouths, and wondered what was coming. If we were only on the way—I was longing for a change, for something fresh after these three days of useless waiting. My patience had already been put to a hard trial. If the rain, which no doubt was coming, would only wait till we were out in the desert, that I might see and examine its effect ! Good weather would be best of all, and it would be hard if a fresh fall of rain undid all that the three fine days had accomplished in drying the ground. We should have waited to no purpose, for as the desert was already wet it would be quite impracticable after more rain.

It is, however, very pleasant, voluntarily or involuntarily, to study at close quarters life in a large caravan. Usually I only see them sailing past on their long cruises—now I am myself a member of the party, a travelling companion of the wanderers, and for three days I shall see their ways and doings from hour to hour. Most of their time is occupied in attending to the camels. The voracious animals are stuffed with straw and cottonseed ; they eat all day, as if they knew that they would shortly get short commons, and that they must set out with full stomachs. Their pack-saddles are taken off, and all bits that may lie under the saddle and fridge the skin are removed ; their backs are curry-combed and brushed so that the dust flies out.

Then the men resign their earthly shells to sleep, lying at full length between the camels, with their noses in the air. In the afternoon they bake bread, mend their clouts, drink tea, talk and smoke round their fire, strip themselves and kill innumerable insects with their thumb-nails—their