

CHAPTER XXXI

ANOTHER NIGHT IN THE KEVIR

AT last, however, this long night draws near to an end, there is a faint light in the east, and the pale dawn spreads over the vault of heaven, lately so dark, heralding the ruddy morn. The camels emerge from the darkness, first dimly and then more and more distinctly; they march as they have all night long, and the bells play the same monotonous tune, but now outlines and colours return to view, and I see the drowsy men and the imperturbably calm eyes of the camels and their legs plastered up to the knees with a crust of dried and hardened mud.

From Dag-i-dumbone is seen to the west-north-west a small yellowish-red hill, Cha-leges, and the hill at Chashirin, which was seen from the cistern of Ramazan, is now conspicuous at a distance of 18 farsakh. Kuh-i-Jandak is not visible, for it is enveloped in dense clouds. At half-past six we pass a tract of dark streaks and shallow furrows at right angles to our route. They are like old shore lines, and are possibly produced by different rates of drying or by movements in the soft mass of the Kevir.

"*Incha nesfe-i-rah est*" ("Here we are half-way"), says Ali Murat, and that is a consolation, for I am half-dead with sleepiness. We have kept on for $12\frac{1}{2}$ hours without any break but the ten minutes at the fire. The men would encamp now were they not frightened of bad weather. If it rained now the next 10 farsakh would be turned into an impassable bed of mud. Instead, they hurry the pace to get over the ground. Every step we take northwards gives us a better chance of escaping if the rain