

swallowed up in the darkness, the outlines of the camels are thin and indefinite, and again the animals appear as confused shadows. But still the air around them is filled with the same never-ending clang of bells, which follows them through the desert; a sonorous, vibrating, ever-repeated and prolonged peal, melting together into a full ringing tone in my ears, a jubilant chord rising up to the spheres of the clouds and stars and spreading its undulations over the surface of the desert; a glorious melody of caravans and wanderers; the triumphal march of the camels, celebrating the victory of their patience over the long distances of the desert in rhythmic waves of song; a hymn as sublimely uniform as the ceaseless, unwearied march of the majestic animals through the dreary wastes of ancient Iran.

After three hours' march we have gained 3 farsakh, a hard march; if we keep up the same pace we shall be through at midnight. Wherever an opening appears in the cloudy vault we hope for a clear night, but it is a fraud. Now when the night closes in we are the sport of all kinds of illusion, probably caused by the dim light that breaks through the clouds. We seem to be travelling on a dark shore. To the left stretches out a vast sea with some small islands. We are astonished not to hear the waves breaking, and expect every moment to hear the water splashing round the feet of the camels. Next moment the sea has moved to the right side of the road, and seems to extend indefinitely to the east. A little later, when the gaps in the clouds have changed their places, we seem to be marching along a light furrow between dark banks, while vapour and mist seem to roll over the road. All these optical illusions are due to moonlight; when it strikes the surface of the ground we seem to be cruising over lakes, while the dark shadows are firm land.

Now and again the whole caravan is lighted up, pale blue against the darkness, but the clouds drive on south-westwards, the rift closes up, and all is swallowed up in gloom. Only a small white speck remains on the ground on my right. Is it a piece of salt? No, for it does not