To the south the desert looks dark, and we suspect there is mud; but after three-quarters of an hour's ride we are not appreciably nearer to the belt. The distances are great, and the prospect does not change. When we have ridden three hours the hill of Khur-i-gez seems only a mere trifle more distinct. The hill at Jandak, which was very plainly visible in the morning, disappeared during the day, but came again into view in the evening.

Where the ground is dark and soft the path is often worn down a foot deep by passing caravans, but it is always in one track, not in a sheaf of parallel paths, as is often the case on the western route from Jandak. Evidently caravans on the eastern route never move in several columns, but only in one long row. The ground is lumpy all the way; the holes lie a foot apart, and are in general a foot deep, seldom two. The knolls between them lean over, and are steep towards the south. A round pool of some 20 square yards in area is filled with muddy water; the ground over this small space seems to have sunk down.

Now we are on the black ground, and it consists of soft, sticky sodden clay which adheres in flakes heavy as lead to our soles. It is no use to remove them, for after two steps there are fresh ones on again, and they make walking still more slippery and uncertain. They cannot be removed by the hands, but only a knife can pierce through this vexatious load. Nor does one care to ride on this ground, where the camels tumble one after another. "*Shutur semin mikhured*" ("A camel bites the dust"), say the Persians. Before we get out of this treacherous desert the camels have a complete cuirass of mud on their flanks and bellies.

Then the ground becomes half dry, and its surface is crumpled into very flat long waves. Each of such crests is on an average 20 yards broad and 20 inches high, and in the troughs between the ground is dark. They usually run perfectly straight in both directions as far as the eye can see, but occasionally they are slightly curved; their extension is from WSW. to ENE. Either they are due to some thrust in the general mass of the kevir or