

I was invited by the Seid to such a festivity on one of our last days in Tebbes. We witnessed the execution from a lawn in the garden. The victim was a fifty-year-old male palm, which was condemned because it had begun to decay of itself. A man binds a loop of bast round himself and the trunk, and swarms up to the top with great activity, planting his feet on the inequalities of the bark, and pushing up the loop of bast again and again. He cuts off the fronds with a sharp axe down to the stem; one after another they fall to the ground, till at last the palm is stripped bare and stands deprived of its crown among its old, still living comrades. Then all the protecting fibres and excrescences are removed from the upper part from which the tuft of fronds springs, and the soft sweet juicy mass called *penir-i-khorma* is extracted. We watch the whole process, and notice that the owner and servant of the garden, who have grown up beside the palm, and remember its history from its childhood, are sad and solemn as if they were committing an act of wickedness and treachery against an old friend. But their scruples soon vanish when a covered table is brought out, and the date cheese is cut into dice and eaten.

The Seid showed me in his garden two palms which were sixty years old. They stood only 5 feet apart, and while one was tall and thriving, the other was low and stunted. He said that if the tall palm were sacrificed, its stunted neighbour would raise itself up and grow to a proud height. Their roots, he said, went down to a depth of 115 feet, where the subsoil water lies.

Certainly Tebbes, for all its remoteness, solitude, and insignificance, is a pearl among the towns of Iran. What a charming paradise this oasis seems to the wanderer through the desert who comes hither from the long lonely road; how many pilgrims have slumbered with bright dreams under its shady palms; how many travellers have refreshed their throats, parched by the salt water of the wells, with its clear spring water from the hills; how many have appeased their hunger with its sweet plump dates! And from the top of the minaret the weary traveller can cast a look back at the last bit of silent desert country