

so dreamily and pleasantly, with such a plaintive and mysterious moan. It was so solemn and lonely in this wilderness, whither man hardly ever comes. The sky was clear, and the wings of the flies glittered like diamonds in the sunshine.

Here we were half-way to the *leb-i-hamun* or the edge of the lake, as the men called it, and after half-an-hour's rest we went on again through quite a thicket of saxaul of a greenness which showed that their roots descended to the ground water, but these children of the steppe were not so fresh and of such a deep-green colour as the tamarisks. Among them the sand was higher, dunes as much as 20 feet high being passed, with their steep sides always turned to the south. Occasionally we rode over a flat bestrewn with fine gravel. It has the effect of oil on waves; where gravel occurs no dune can be formed. On some stretches the dunes were very fine and of regular shape, and their forms indicated northerly winds.

We rode at a rapid pace. To-day I had a guide in the front seat, but sometimes, when the way was bad, he went on foot. On such an occasion, when I was sitting with both legs on the near side to have the sun on my back and the breeze in my face, my camel unexpectedly stopped, lay down on a sandhill, rolled on one side, and threw me backwards, so that I fell full length on the sand; but my left foot was still in the stirrup, which was too small, and when the dromedary got up again quickly I should have been in a very nasty predicament if my foot had not got loose at the last moment.

We are in a sea of sand-dunes, all traces of vegetation have ceased, before us are seen some ruins on an eminence, and we ride thither and rest awhile in the long-abandoned village of Zirre. The walls of six houses still stand upright, while two others have entirely fallen to pieces. Here we leave two of the dromedaries and three men, while I go on with the guide.

Now the ground consists of hard yellow clay, where the north wind's ploughshare has left its deep furrows, and here brittle and withered reeds lie in strips and belts a foot high. The guide remarks that we are riding over an old