

marshes. On one side, behold a cone of black naphtha looking like a mountain of pitch; on another, a hill of fuller's earth, through which, as through an artificial tube, nature forces up the clay in one huge cylinder, which, when it attains a certain height in the air, bursts by its own weight, and falls in a shower over the hill, the height of which is thus incessantly augmented. Down yonder, in a spacious depression in the plain, you observe an expanse of whitish sand, interspersed with heaps of grey ashes, and here and there tall bright flames, like immense gas jets, surging upwards everlastingly, sometimes with a low crackling sound, but generally in profound silence. About these fires, men, more or less in number, are congregated day and night, some for secular purposes, others with motives of devotion. The industrial divisions of the crowd are cooks and lime-burners, the former repairing thither from all the neighboring villages to roast and boil, and prepare pilafs for the wealthier children of El Islam; while the latter stack up over the flaming fissures heaps of stone, which, when they have been converted into lime, they bear down to the coast, to be shipped for Russia, Daghestan, and the country of the Usbek Tartars.

Near the largest of the salt-lakes stands a village, which, like many of the temples and cities of the ancient world, enjoys the privilege of sanctuary. Formerly, they say, while the califs of the race of Omar reigned at Bagdad, a prince of rare sanctity, but who entertained opinions somewhat different from those of the Commanders of the Faithful, fled from persecution, and took refuge beyond Kat in the burning peninsula of Baku. Here, in a castle on the top of a rock, and surrounded by his attached followers, he lived to extreme old age; and when he died, was interred among the flags on the edge of the lake. Presently, an arched tomb, like those in which the traveller sits at night on the brink of the Upper Nile; rose over his remains, and by degrees a village was built about the tomb, with wall, and moat, and gates. Public opinion attached the idea of sanctity to this place, so that to pursue any one who took refuge in it was deemed an inexcusable offence. Nothing was required of the fugitive but to stoop and

kiss the threshold of the gate, or to press his lips against the links of an iron chain which hung suspended from the archway within reach, and in time was almost worn away by the grasp and kisses of the pious refugees, aided perhaps a little by the action of rust. Once within the walls, he might taste of the sweet waters, which, through respect for the holiness of the dead saint, Heaven had bestowed upon the village. The good people of Okesra, little versed in geography, could account no otherwise than by miracle for the existence of a well of fresh water in the midst of salt pools and springs, fountains of naphtha, black and white, rocks dripping with bitumen, and veins of fiery gases bursting forth on all sides through cracks in the soil.

Persons of cool northern temperaments find it difficult to comprehend the state of mind which induces men to travel from the plains of Multan or the fertile valleys of Guzerat, expending large sums of money by the way, merely to sit down for weeks or months by an opening in the rock, through which a clear white flame, from fifteen to twenty feet in height, ascends into the atmosphere. Here, however, their ancestors in the remotest ages did the same, taught, it is said, so to act by that mighty legislator and philosopher, whose Oriental name of Zerdusht was transformed by the Greeks into Zoroaster. But the Parsees, wherever they reside, are only exiles in India; they may be beloved and honored for their charity, or knighted by the Queen of Great Britain for their wealth and enterprise, but the home of their spirit lies westward beyond the Sulimani range, beyond the Desert of Khorasan, beyond the peaks and forests of the Elburz, in the land of figs and pomegranates, of grapes and roses, of naphtha-springs and eternal fires. To them, the followers of Mohammed are either sanguinary conquerors or base renegades, who may indeed be sufficiently powerful to keep them, the true rulers and owners of Persia, far away from their ancestral possessions, but who are dogs and infidels nevertheless, over whom they seem to triumph, hewing their way through their catul multitudes by the force of gold, they come back to the everlasting dwelling-place of fire, and bow and worship with