

A year previous to Smith's journey, this region suffered from a famine of such frightful severity that he found skeletons of men along the road where they had died of hunger, skulls of children in the very houses, four hundred and fifty out of the six hundred shops in Nishapur closed, and others barely able to subsist. Sebzawar was reduced from a population of thirty thousand to scarcely ten thousand. Everywhere death ran riot, and frequently half the people of a village perished. The famine extended with great severity over all Persia except the northwest. For six years the rainfall was scanty, and there was much suffering. Then came a season when the crops in many places failed utterly for lack of water, and thousands of people perished in every province. In view of the periodic return of such famines, it does not seem probable that Iran is capable of supporting permanently a population much in excess of that of to-day. A diminishing supply of water appears to be the cause of the poverty, distress, and discontent of Persia, and these in turn have been potent causes of war and misgovernment.