

CHAPTER XVI

THE START FROM TEHERAN

THE journey which I was now on the point of beginning from Teheran was by no means intended to be an exploring expedition; for the parts of Iran I proposed to cross were already well known; detailed maps had been compiled of them, especially by English and Russian travellers, nay, even in the misty ages of antiquity, world-conquerors had marched through the country with immense armies, and 600 years ago the great Marco Polo had steered his way through the desert regions of Eastern Persia. But, nevertheless, I had chosen this route to see with my own eyes districts of Persia which I did not yet know, and I looked upon the undertaking simply and solely as a lesson in geography. Far in the east, in the great deserts, I might, however, find opportunities of crossing once or twice districts which had never before been visited by Europeans.

Considering, however, the length of the route, the undertaking was no mere trifle, for the distance from Teheran to Nushki is 1490 miles, or as far as from Stockholm to Palermo, or from Warsaw to Madrid. It was therefore necessary to equip a caravan which could hold out on a long and solitary route, and make its way through the deserts without being too dependent on the villages along their margin.

Let me begin by introducing my attendants. Mirza Abdul Razul was a man of thirty-five years, who left behind a wife and two children in Teheran, and whose proper duty was to act as secretary; but as he turned out to