

are still filled with compact snow. At one o'clock, when the temperature is 35.8° , only a third of the snow sheet is left, and this snow is damp and forms puddles in the footprints of the camels. If the thaw continues at this rate it will not be long before we march over entirely bare ground. Now all Siah-kuh is visible to the south with its summits, crests, and ramifications, and it is here that the formerly mentioned mountain road runs. To the right of the mountain no inequality breaks the straight line of the horizon; the land is open as far as the eye can see towards the south-west.

We cross a track, and in the middle of it a stone cairn is erected. It is scarcely more worn than the path we are following, and it runs between Semnan and Kashan, and also touches Baba Hamet and Siah-kuh. For a distance of 5 farsakh it crosses, it seems, a belt of *kevir* or salt desert, and to prevent the animals from sinking in the ground, treacherous after rain, a causeway of stone, called Raferkh, was laid down in the time of Shah Abbas. From two small outlying hamlets, Kahek and Sennart, it is reckoned a *mensil* or day's journey to the isolated hill Eine-reshid, which shows itself to the right beyond Siah-kuh. On the way thither there is no water for 8 farsakh, and caravans usually cover this stretch at one march in the night. This desert route is much frequented at certain seasons of the year.

All the water running in the rainy seasons down the small furrows we cross collects into a bed visible to the north, which belongs to the same hydrographic system as the three following streams: Rudkhaneh-gulabad, Rudkhaneh-i-gollab, and a stream from Khar in the neighbourhood of Kishlak; they combine to form a river which flows eastwards past Kuh-i-gugird, which appears in the distance, and then continues its course to the great *kevir* or salt desert.

At two o'clock small insignificant patches of snow lay only in sheltered hollows and under bushes which now grow more sparsely than ever. The men begin to think of making a camp, and ask me where I wish to pass the night. I let the matter rest a while and order a halt in a steppe