

We follow a main valley for a long distance. Here stands a cairn. The western flanking terraces are five feet high, showing that at times very powerful floods of rain-water find their way through this drainage-channel to debouch in time into the inner, level, almost dried-up sea of the salt desert, the Kevir. The silent valley is not so entirely devoid of life as might be expected. Dry and also fresh shrubs occur in abundance, and sometimes the roots of tamarisks still seek moisture from the dry soil, and their stems are thick and strong. Once a flock of rock pigeons is frightened away by our noisy train, and spurs of camels and wild asses are seen everywhere.

Our valley became ever shallower and broader, its skirting hills lower, its pebbly bottom thinner, and the pebbles themselves smaller. A little down our route was seen a dark moving speck, and we discussed the question what it could be. We had hoped for a wild ass, but it soon turned out to be an old Persian coming slowly towards us. He was white-bearded and bent, but dignified and calm in his demeanour, and had evidently had to do with people before. He had grown old in the service of Ali Abdullah of Mehabad at the foot of Kuh-i-nakshir, and had 30 camels in his care. He had now left his charges at some distance, while he collected fuel. He had seen a large panther in a furrow the day before, possibly the same which had nearly frightened Habibullah to death.

We halted a while to extract from the old man all he knew about the geography of the district. He pointed to the direction where the Cheshme-Kerim and Cheshme-dosun springs were situated, and most certainly they come up on the eastern side of a small group of hills belonging to the same fragmentary system as Tallhe, Mulkabad, and Kuh-i-nakshir. We should not, therefore, make much progress by carefully making our way from spring to spring; it would be better to travel independently of them and march in as straight a line as possible, to get over the ground. At the southern foot of the mountain the old man knew of three springs—Cheshme-bolasun, Serdum, and Ser-i-busurgi. He would willingly have guided us for a day's journey if he had been prepared the day