

and all the channels which enter it are, without exception, quite dry; it is really a hydrographic system of beds without water. But though the land now lies dry and lifeless, and though one listens in vain for the sound of purling water, yet there is water beneath the dry dark crust, and turbid flood streams foam along the furrows after heavy rain. It is a rare occurrence, and the beds dry up again after the rain has ceased, wind and weather begin again to do their part, and after the next rain all the fine material is washed down into the Kevir and helps to fill up the depression. In the region where I now first made acquaintance with a true *kevir*, its surface is as level as a lake—on the whole, of course, without reference to small inequalities. It may then be concluded that these low regions are a bed of mud, a viscous mass with a surface which, like that of other fluids, assumes a horizontal position. When fresh mud is swept into the Kevir it forms no elevations but spreads out evenly and horizontally. It may also be taken for granted that the yellow belts which seem to be firm and more dried up are but ephemeral phenomena, which change their appearance and consistency after heavy rain. And sometimes we pass over belts as to which it is difficult to decide whether they belong to the Kevir or to the firm dry steppe land, as, for example, when the yellow soil has been superficially covered with fine pebbles by a heavy flood. Only when steppe plants grow among such gravel can we say for certain that we are on solid steppe land.

The shore, or the flat strip of steppe, is usually 100, seldom 200, yards broad, and we have the front of the hills on the right hand and the Kevir on our left.

We had twice heard of a path which ran from the south to the spring of Mulkabad, and this path, if it were not quite obliterated in the insecure ground, was our hope. Should we find it we should be able to cross the Kevir, but, if not, then we might be forced to travel westwards to the neighbourhood of Kum; and I had also pondered if it were not wiser to start from Hauz-i-sultan, Kum, or Kashan. But now we had come straight to the Kevir, and we must work our way through it somehow.