

feeding here. We still ascend very slowly, and still the outline of Kuh-i-busurgi hides the lower parts of the more distant summits which rise above it, and as obstinately the crown of the slopes conceals the country where we expect to see the town of Ashin, the first since Kerim Khan, the first oasis, where we intend to repair and complete our equipment and replenish our supplies. One, two, and three o'clock comes, but there is not the slightest sign of the town; here there is nothing to indicate the proximity of a settled population, no flocks grazing on the steppe, no smoke rising into the air. The steppe stretches out its flat surface among the hills, silent, empty, and mysterious, and the route we follow is equally incomprehensible; where does it lead to? can it really go to Ashin? I suspect that we are too much to the north and that the hill resembling the box of a hearse is too much to the right. I impart my apprehensions to Gulam Hussein, but he thinks that it was another hill the herdsman alluded to. "Beyond that dark ridge yonder to the south lies Ashin," I say, but Gulam answers, "It is not likely that the town lies hemmed in by hills; probably we shall soon see it on the level plain."

And so we continue on our way through the never-ending longitudinal valley, between the hills of Busurgi and Ashin. A caravan has recently encamped beside the way, and we can see in the sand that the camels were laden. Here a cairn is erected and a handful of fuel still lies at the camp. We ask ourselves whence this caravan came and where was its destination? Possibly it was travelling between Ispahan and Jandak; but why has it encamped on the waterless steppe if the town Ashin is near? It is evident that we have gone astray, and our wisest plan will be to follow the path, for sooner or later it will guide us to some spring or well. It is clear that we have quite lost the direction of Ashin; it was only 2 farsakh thither, and we ought to have been there when the sun was at its highest. We have no more water than the dregs left in our clay jugs, and therefore we must trust to the unknown path. It takes us by degrees in a curve to east, north-east, and north-north-east, up among the foothills of Busurgi, and soon enters a well-marked dell.