

The small village, a St. Helena in the desert sea (3113 feet), is said to be only ten years old, and has only fifteen inhabitants, who, poor and cut off from all the through routes, struggle for a living on this little desolate spot of earth. Their cabins are, as mentioned, built in a row, each dwelling with its cupola roof and its separate entrance. The courtyard in front is their daily resort. There sits a woman twisting thread over a wheel something like a spinning-wheel. There are only three women and a girl now in Alem, the rest being men and boys. The elder of the village, the village's factotum, Haji Hassan, owns twenty-five camels, which are grazing in the sandy desert 4 farsakh off to the north.

The sandy belt stretches from the west up to the skirts of the village, which, however, is separated from it by a muddy channel which is said to start from Kuh-i-sefid-ab in the south. Usually the stream dries up half a farsakh to the south of the village, but occasionally it flows on past the village and comes to an end at the foot of the higher dunes. Then the driftsand is washed far down and threatens the small quadrangular fields with their low banks of earth. Our friend Haji Hassan affirmed that the sandy belt stretches 7 farsakh northwards, where it runs out into the Kevir and is lost. To the north-west it continues for 9 farsakh, and ends in the neighbourhood of Kafir-kuh ("hill of unbelievers") beyond Kuh-i-busurgi. From one of the highest dunes near the village no limit could be seen to the driftsand belt northwards, but to the north-west the dunes seemed to be lower, and here and there even to be separated by strips of bare ground. In the same direction also appeared a southern offshoot of the Kevir, which probably is not far removed from the small flats of sandy desert we saw at the foot of Kuh-i-busurgi. At the place where the mud channel ends, the dunes get the upper hand, and are piled up on one another to a greater height than elsewhere; they also mount up the western slopes of the Alem hill, just as I have seen them do before in one or two places in the innermost parts of Asia. Probably the hill causes a more abundant accumulation of sand in this district, standing in the way of the