

5 farsakh off, but if you will have them they shall be here in the morning. I can accompany you through the desert, if you like."

"How much do you ask for the hire?" I asked. "We shall go the direct way to Husseinan, and then from Turut back to Khur."

"Thirty tuman," replied the man, and I was astonished at the reasonableness of the demand, and so much the more as he was to take a fourth camel with him for his own riding, and for which I was not to pay anything.

"How long will this ride through the desert take?"

"That depends entirely on the endurance of the sa'ab and on the weather. If it rains when we are on the margin of the Kevir we must wait; if we are overtaken by rain in the middle of the salt desert the camels cannot take a step, and we must stop and wait until the surface dries again. But if the weather is favourable the journey can be accomplished in ten days, including a day's rest at Husseinan and another at Turut."

We did not carry our discussion further this evening, but the more we talked about it the more eager I became for a forced march through the desert. Now I had no longer any doubts; I would willingly spare the ten days and the little comforts in my tent warmed by the fire of the mangal; now at last I would, whatever it cost me, see the desert close at hand. Of my own men, only Gulam Hussein was to go with me. He was a native of Khur, and had been in the Kevir before. There was no need of tent and bed, only warm clothing and provisions for a few days.

Hitherto my journey had been monotonous and safe; now, at any rate, we should run some risk, and have a change in our old humdrum existence; and then, if it really were so exhausting as it was said to be, it would be a welcome and delightful rest to return to the peaceful life in our own caravan. I could scarcely hope to acquire any valuable geographical discoveries, for a few Europeans had crossed the great Kevir before; but at any rate I should obtain a thorough and varied insight into it by crossing the desert along two different lines.

At seven o'clock in the evening was heard the heavy