

appear to contradict the fact that the climate is becoming drier. For, if the Kevir is drying up as a whole, the ways in use 200 years ago ought to be still more practicable now. But this circumstance also is connected with the exceeding evenness of the Kevir and the consequent transitoriness of the collections of water. The depression which originally existed here, and was at one time filled with water has been gradually silted up and almost entirely obliterated by exceedingly finely divided particles of solid matter washed down by water from all the high country around. But though the Kevir may seem to the eye a perfectly level sea surface, there is no reason why it should not be covered with very flat undulations. To begin with, it is very likely that cavities are formed in its central parts which are farthest removed from the margin where rivers and brooks deposit their mud. The Persians have a clear perception of the existence of a rise of level caused by fresh deposits. Thus, for example, to my question whether any traces or marks of the old road to Cheshme-kerim were left, they replied, "*Ne kheir sa'ab kevir bala shud est*" ("No, sir, the salt desert has risen"), that is to say, a new layer of mud has been deposited on the old, obliterating all traces of the old road.

However, I should now have myself an opportunity of seeing this misunderstood and ill-famed Kevir, and I also had a feeling that I was staying and waiting at the coast of a dangerous sea, which had to be crossed in fragile boats. So much was quite evident, that the only danger we ran was due to rain. To us there was a double risk, for if we succeeded in crossing to the north, we might be prevented from returning and have to wait on the northern margin for weeks before we could join our men again. In any case I should obtain exact values for the breadth of the desert along two directions, and I should be able to follow and set down its coast and contours over a long extent. With the help of the observations of other travellers in or around the Kevir, I should be able to draw a very accurate map of the limits of the salt desert.

While waiting for the new ships of the desert, I had nothing else to do but sit and talk with the townsmen,