

CHAPTER XXIX

WAITING IN VAIN

OUR four camels were reluctant. They knew that the path we followed led to the desert, and that in a few days they would be put on short commons. But they soon submitted to their fate, and marched steadily and quietly after the man who led the first. I was myself carried by an *arvane*, a mare, with such a smooth and easy action that I believed I could hold out a long time on its back. On the left ran a large erosion furrow, in which another caravan from Yezd was encamped. The men lay looking at the desert, and wondering if they would be caught in rain from a sky that looked far from promising. When they saw us going in the direction of the desert two of the men asked if we had any particular reason for expecting good weather, but we replied that we wished to be near the margin in case the weather cleared.

Low mounds are seen on both sides of our route, becoming flatter and lower towards the north, and finally passing into perfectly level ground, and the path we follow, now between scattered shrubs and now over sterile soil, also descends slowly towards the Kevir depression. In some small hollows we have already a foretaste of the desert, the ground being loose, soft, lumpy, and sprinkled with white salt. Far to the east we can catch just a glimpse of the hills rising above Khur-i-gez and Aruzun, the locality where we shall "land" after having twice crossed the desert sea. Our guide is very talkative, and beguiles the hours of march by relating all he knows. He says that the eastern route is the more dangerous; on the