

country to the district between Sebsevar and Meshed, and considers that for at least the first days' marches beyond Nishapur Marco Polo's description agrees admirably with that given by Fraser and Ferrier.

I travelled between Sebsevar and Meshed in the autumn of 1890, and I cannot perceive that Marco Polo's description is applicable to the country. He speaks of six days' journey through beautiful valleys and pretty hill-sides. To the east of Sebsevar you come out into desert country, which, however, passes into fertile country with many villages.¹ Then there comes a boundless dreary steppe to the south. At the village Seng-i-kal-i-deh you enter an undulating country with immense flocks of sheep. "The first stretch of the road between Shurab and Nishapur led us through perfect desert . . . ; but the landscape soon changed its aspect; the desert passed by degrees into cultivated lands, and we rode past several villages surrounded by fields and gardens. . . . We here entered the most fertile and densely peopled region in Khorasan, in the midst of which the town of Nishapur is situated." Of the tract to the east of Nishapur I say: "Here are found innumerable villages. The plain and slopes are dotted with them. This district is extraordinarily densely inhabited and well cultivated." But then all this magnificence comes to an end, and of the last day's journey between Kademgah and Meshed I write: "The country rose and we entered a maze of low intricate hillocks. . . . The country was exceedingly dreary and bare. Some flocks of sheep were seen, however, but what the fat and sleek sheep lived on was a puzzle to me. . . . The dismal landscape was more and more enlivened by travellers. . . . To the east stretched an undulating steppe up to the frontier of Afghanistan."

The road between Sebsevar and Meshed is, in short, of such a character that it can hardly fit in with Marco Polo's enthusiastic description of the six days. And as these came just before Sapurgan, one cannot either identify the desert regions named with the deserts about the middle course of the Murgab which extend between

¹ *Genom Khorasan och Turkestan*, vol. i. pp. 123 et seq.