

stars show caravans the way ; when the heat of the sand raises up vapour which envelops the sun in a dense veil, this is the work of the evil spirits which dwell there ; nay, even the storm is a *div* which fights against the trees created by God. The contrast between desert and fruitful land is repeated throughout Iran ; numerous rivers, flowing through extensive lands with their beneficent water, are suddenly lost in the sand ; fruitful land is often closely bounded by arid tracts, and irrigation works lose their effect through the encroachment of the sandy sea."¹

Such a clearly pronounced struggle between life and death, between good and evil spirits, for the dominion of the earth could scarcely have been conceived unless the natural conditions in ancient Iran had given grounds for it. H. Kiepert expresses similar views : " The effect which the nature of the country exercised on the minds of its inhabitants finds expression in the old Iranian belief in a beneficent creative power, and one hostile to mankind (Ormuzd and Ahriman) ; as creations of the latter are regarded the hot sandstorms, mirage in the desert, the cold of winter, miasma, noxious insects and snakes, etc. ; hence the practical religious precepts ascribed to Zoroaster, the extermination of these creatures, the planting of trees, the construction of water-conduits, the sinking of wells, etc."²

Kiepert also points out that the great desert regions in the midst of Iran are responsible for the absence of a general name for this part of the country, as well as for the weakness of the State institutions which have been established in this country since the most ancient times. " Only for short periods have powerful rulers or dynasties, such as the first Achaemenids, Alexander, and the first Seleucids . . . been able to keep it all together ; during much longer intervals at least two kingdoms have, as a rule, existed side by side, separated by the great desert, the Medo-Persian, Bactrian, etc." When Kiepert also shows that the small cultivated strip along the southern foot of Elburz has been from the earliest ages the only practicable route between the west and east for large masses of troops,

¹ *Geschichte der alten Persiens*, p. 70, *et seq.*

² *Lehrbuch der alten Geographie*, vol. i. p. 52.