CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

DIZFUL TO BURUJIRD

At the end of August I set out again, this time to travel up to Khurramabad by the route taken by most of the caravan traffic and then, if circumstances allowed, go on to Tehran in order to report to H.M. Minister at first hand on the situation in Khuzistan. The tribes established astride the route, with which the usual arrangements for escorts, hostages and eventual remuneration and rewards had to be made, were Dirakvand of the Mir-Abbas-Khani branch, and the Judaki. On this occasion, however, there was no question of the escorting chiefs being responsible for our entertainment. My self-sufficient party consisted of Ruhullah Khan with his savars, the four Kurds, Qurban Ali, Mashhadi Riza with two ‘orphans’ in charge of the mules, and a venerable Indian cook named Muhammad Vali, of whose previous history I never learned anything and who seldom opened his mouth except to say ‘All right, Sahib’. Abbud, my faithful Arab gondolier, very understandably, did not wish to venture again among a foreign and barbarous people, so in his place I promoted a young Shushtari named Yahya, who was anxious to see the world and begged to be allowed to come. In all the six and a half months that elapsed before we saw Dizful again, however trying the circumstances, I never heard a word of complaint nor saw a look of dissatisfaction from any one of them.

Both the tribes named had grown rich on the profits, legitimate and illegitimate, of the caravan business. They were, in consequence, better mounted and better armed with modern rifles (a large proportion of these captured from Nizam as-Saltana and the gendarmes) than the Mirs of Mungara. But that did not prevent them from being equally quarrelsome and far more avaricious, paying little heed, once we were on the road, to the terms of the agreement solemnly entered into.

Of the chiefs who accompanied us I need introduce only two by name. Mir Haji, one of my earliest Lur visitors in Dizful, had accompanied the Durands and never tired of telling stories of the British Minister and his Lady. Among other things he described, exactly as Lady Durand has recorded in her book, the method she devised for carrying her little Yorkshire terrier while in the saddle, and was delighted at
recognizing himself in one of the photographs.¹ Mir Rustam, the head of a rival branch, was a cheerful little rogue with a not unpleasant voice, who generally took the lead in beguiling the tedium of the earlier night marches with the song of Qadam Khayr and other ditties. As in the case of the Dirakvand, the Judaki Khans had been repudiated by their ryots and were divided into two groups at enmity with each other. Too weak to stand on their own in the hurly-burly of Bala Gariva politics, each group had attached itself to a faction of the Mirs.

I have described elsewhere² the geography of the country we traversed, and I need not repeat here the details of the eight marches in nine days (including the first short ‘shifting of place’, again to Darab Khan’s, and one day of rest) to Khurramabad. For the first four days we were in the plain or among the foot-hills, and my routine was much the same as it had been on the Mungara tour, marching in the late evening and after sunset and again in the early morning, with a siesta and a bathe in the afternoon. In the evening of the fourth day Mir Rustam and his party came with their Judaki allies to ask permission to go on by another route owing to their feud with Mir Haji, through whose territory we were about to pass. The feud, they said in reply to my question, was “nothing much, just the usual sulks between brothers”; I gathered, however, that Mir Haji was the creditor in the account of mutual homicide and robbery, but that the initiative in seeking a settlement would have to come from the blood-debtors.

After leaving the foothills we had four major passes to cross on the way to Khurramabad: Kiyalan, Dalich, Chimishk and Na’lshikan. As we reached the top of each I climbed to an eminence on the shoulder in order to take bearings, to add as much as I could to the maps, and to enjoy the views of the magnificent mountain scenery. From the top of the first pass, I took Mir Haji, Ruhullah and one of the Kurds to climb to the summit of Kiyalan. The ascent took about an hour and though steep was not difficult, there being good rock footholds everywhere, and the rag soles of my givas giving an excellent grip on the smooth limestone. A delightful cool breeze from the north came to cheer us with the assurance that the heat of Khuzistan had now been left behind. It was a particular joy to pick out from this new angle old friends of the Mungara region to the east. To the west and south there

¹ [The journey was in 1899. See E. R. Durand, An Autumn Tour in Western Persia, Westminster, Archibald Constable, 1902.]