

rial was larger, and the pentagons buckled up on the edges and became saucer-shaped. By countless repetitions of this process, or of something analogous to it, the entire lake-bed became a mass of pentagons with ragged, blistered edges.

Twice we encountered faint, broad hollows, where for a mile or two the plain was damp and comparatively smooth. Traveling in such places was much easier than elsewhere, but, remembering the Chinese tale of muck which swallows horse and rider, we avoided them as far as possible. It was well that we did so. Nothing could be more dangerous than these smooth, soft places which felt so comfortable to our weary feet. A few days later, beyond the main body of the lake-bed, we came upon a small, isolated salt plain which, as we progressed, assumed a fresher, whiter appearance and began to look slightly damp. I was riding the biggest of the camels, whose load of wood and ice had now been partly used. Suddenly I found myself turning a somersault backward off the animal. His hind legs had broken through the saline crust, and had plunged a yard deep into soft, oozy muck. As he struggled ponderously to extricate himself, his front legs also sank in; and oily water came bubbling up in muddy pools about the prostrate creature's belly. Two other camels fell into the mire at the same time. In the haste with which we began to tear off their loads I forgot to investigate whether my neck was broken. Relieved of their burdens, the two smaller camels extricated themselves. My big, heavy animal, however, was so completely mired that we had to put ropes around his legs and pull his feet out on to felts, which we had spread on the soft mud to keep him from sinking in again. It was a grim jest on the part of nature to lead