

CHAPTER XX

DESERT MIST

A MIST, denser than before, lies spread over the desert on the morning of January 10, and not the slightest gleam of the sun is able to penetrate the thick layer. Murkiness prevails during the greater part of the day, and all objects 200 yards away are invisible. Of Elburz, Siah-kuh, and the other smaller heights in the fringe of rocks between which we steer out to the open sea of the desert, we have not a glimpse, and of course I am unable to take bearings of their summits for my map. The weather is agreeable for travelling, and dark glasses are not necessary; at present the path is excellent, and only here and there is a patch of snow left in sheltered places. All the shrubs and stalks, however, are decked, after 9.2° of frost in the night, with innumerably long crystals of hoar-frost, which make the ground look as though it were sprinkled with white. At two o'clock a change in the weather sets in; it begins to blow from the north, the mist thins and disappears entirely at four o'clock, and finally only a few clouds hover over the horizon, obstinately hiding Elburz and Siah-kuh, and the pretty rime evaporates and melts away before the beams of the sun.

The loading of the camels is accomplished more quickly this day, and we set out in good time for a march of 15 miles in a direction S. 65° E. Immediately beyond the camp the snow still remains for some reason, and the hoar-frost falls from the shrubs like fine down as the camels brush against them. The caravan moves at a quicker pace than usual, as may be known from the loud, hurried