

CHAPTER XXII

STOPPED BY THE GREAT SALT DESERT

DURING the day of rest the camels looked after themselves and tried the scanty pasturage in the valley, but they found their own way back to camp in good time, for they knew that they would get better fodder. For myself I took a good rest, drew a panorama of the country, and calculated the distance we had traversed, only 93 miles from Veramin; but we had no reason to hurry, and we were dependent on springs.

Now we had to decide which way we should go. We were at the western margin of the great Kevir; should we travel to the north or the south of the salt desert? The northern route would take us along its northern edge to Reshm and then right through the desert by a way Gulam Hussein knew. But the other way seemed more attractive to me, for, following the western and southern skirts of the desert, we could direct our course to Jandak, a convenient place of sojourn and a centre whence with experienced guides and hired camels I could make an excursion into the heart of the desert. Jandak is surrounded by deserts on all sides, and its inhabitants must have all possible knowledge of the country.

We held a consultation about our plans, and Avul Kasim announced that the store of meat was certainly coming to an end; but that there were rice, flour, and roghan to last more than twenty days, and before all was consumed we should have opportunities of buying more. There were straw and cottonseed for the camels for ten days. But water was the most important article, and we