

CHAPTER XXV

THE PATHS OF THE SANDY DESERT

THE Persians took it into their heads to hold a grand kettledrum in consequence of the abundant water-supply, and it was near midnight before the noise and the bubbling of pipes came to an end. But at eight o'clock on January 21 we were on the way again, and the day was gloomy and dark, and heavy threatening clouds hung down from heaven. It blew and whistled among the rugged hills as we marched on through the valley shut in by low heights of porphyry. It expanded, receiving several tributary valleys from the sides, but its drainage-channel was not excavated to any great depth. After an hour we came to the well. Gulam Hussein had traversed this stretch of road five times, but he was still just as alert and lively as usual.

The water stands in the solidly walled well at a depth of 3 feet below the ground, and therefore it has to be hauled up in buckets and poured into a gutter or trough paved with stones, from which the animals drink. Camel and sheep dung is very plentiful, and several pen-folds are seen on the hillocks around, simply consisting of enclosures of stone. A little to the south-east also some temporary cabins have been erected, where the herdsmen shelter when they visit the place for water. Diabase, hornstone, with a considerable mixture of sand and reddish quartzite, occur *in situ*.

Just at the well the valley opens out and leaves room for a very extensive view to the east and north-east over the boundless desert. To the south-east is seen a snowy