

CHAPTER XXXVI

CARAVAN LIFE

IT was a fine morning on February 22, with 43.2° at seven o'clock and 55° at one o'clock, and a fresh, almost strong, south-west wind had dispersed the last clouds left by the bad-i-Khorasan. Early in the morning, while darkness still lay over the earth, bells were heard and shouts in the distance, and a caravan of fifty camels passed by, carrying tobacco from Tebbes to Teheran. It marched past Cha-meji without halting, and we soon found that it had no need of water, when we came to a trench from Kuh-i-Darin in which large pools remained after the rain of the previous day.

The sand became lower, but lay still in the same knobbly flat hillocks, abundantly overgrown with a tamarisk called *eskambil*. In two places there were flocks of sheep with their shepherds; to them the rain is welcome, for they need not make long pilgrimages to wells, and the pasture is better.

At *ser-i-yek-farsakh*, or "the first farsakh," stands a cairn to give notice of the slightly saline well Cha-Abdul standing half a farsakh off to the north of the road. On the right the low hills continue, while Kuh-i-rabat-khan and Kuh-i-Darin are behind us; the tamarisks have thinned out, and in their place grass growing in tufts and clumps makes the steppe yellow. At the river bed we are now following a tobacco caravan from Tebbes is camping. The camels graze and the men sleep round their dying fire in the shelter of the piled-up tobacco bales.

Our course runs eastwards, and in front of us is seen