

CHAPTER XL

MARCO POLO

IN Sir Henry Yule's admirable work on the journey of the Venetian, which in 1903 was published in a third edition by Henri Cordier, is found a map of Western Asia, on which Marco Polo's route is marked. It traverses the whole of Eastern Persia from Hormuz straight northwards through Kerman, Cobinan, and Tebbes to the country between Sebsevar and Shahrud, whence the route turns at right angles to the east through Sebsevar and Meshed into Central Asia.

Marco Polo gives the following accurate and succinct description of the Persian desert:¹—"On departing from the city of Kerman you find the road for seven days most wearisome; and I will tell you how this is. The first three days you meet with no water, or next to none. And what little you do meet with is bitter green stuff, so salt that no one can drink it. . . . It is the same with the salt which is made from those streams; no one dares to make use of it. . . . Hence it is necessary to carry water for the people to last these three days; as for the cattle, they must needs drink of the bad water I have mentioned, as there is no help for it, and their great thirst makes them do so. But it scours them to such a degree that sometimes they die of it. In all those three days you meet with no human habitation; it is all desert, and the extremity of drought. Even of wild beasts there are none, for there is nothing for them to eat. After those three days of desert you arrive at a stream of fresh water running underground, but along

¹ Yule's *Marco Polo* (1874), vol. i. pp. 126 *et seq.*