

## CHAPTER XLI

### A DESERT LAKE

ON March 9 our tinkling train moves right through the village between its grey walls and fields and over the last canals, and suddenly finds itself in complete desert, true kevir, pure white as newly fallen snow from a thin layer of salt crystals, and here and there only supporting some stunted tamarisks. Our road runs due west-southwest, and we follow an erosion furrow which has lately carried water. Over the kevir to the south and southwest hovers a dense mist like rising steam, and the hills in front of us are enveloped in thick clouds which hide the view over the country.

Then follows a belt of yellow slimy clay, where footprints a foot deep have been left by the camels which went to Bahabad five days ago. But this clay, which soon changes into a belt of a darker colour, is now dry on the surface, and has split up into countless polygons slightly concave, and with deep, sharp-edged cracks between them, produced by drying and in their turn hastening the process.

We were now approaching the most dangerous part of all the road to Bahabad, a stream bed 130 feet broad and 3 feet deep, which seems here to come from N. 20° E. I sent two men to examine this nameless salt drainage channel which flows very slowly to a permanent desert lake situated farther south. Near its banks the ground was so wet and soft that it seemed absolutely impracticable for camels. The bottom of the bed would, however, bear at a certain ford, but if a camel strayed a little to one side