

CHAPTER XLII

THE BAHABAD DESERT

WE direct our steps westwards from Pervadeh. Now I wish to win a part of the Bahabad district where no European has ever set foot, except, possibly, Marco Polo. Our twenty camels tramp in a long row out of the village, and march at first over tamarisk-clothed ground just as yesterday. Numerous camel mares are grazing on the steppe with their foals. And then we come again out into the kevir, seldom wet, and usually dry and lumpy like the ground called in Eastern Turkestan *shor*, which crunches and splits under the weight of the camels. After an hour the vegetation becomes rapidly thin, and then barren country lies before us. The ground slopes towards the north-west, to the centre of the depression, and thither point the small furrows we cross, only two of which are eroded to a depth of 3 feet. The height, which at Pervadeh was 2040 feet, has sunk again to 2024. On the left lies the large expanse of driftsand we have already seen at a distance, hiding the detritus slopes of the southern hills, and only permitting the dark crest to rise above the light yellow sand.

We come to the extremely sharply limited sand-belt, and follow closely its base. The dunes are scantily overgrown, but are bound together by the little vegetation there is. Their height is only 23 or 25 feet, but farther in they certainly increase in height. On the right, to the north, lies absolutely sterile level kevir, with a surface so broad that we only just descry the dark tamarisks of yesterday. It is exactly the same country, or more