

CHAPTER LIV

A LAKE VOYAGE

ON April 8 I was awakened with the news that the wind was still blowing hard, but the air was clear, and the sunshine played on the glittering surface of the swamp. It was cool after a minimum of only 41.2° in the night, and I had still cause for astonishment that the summer heat delayed its coming.

Now a whole flotilla of new solid tutins had been procured, and the ridiculous vessels lay moored a short way from the shore, made fast to their punting-poles. A score of men carried our things to the water's edge, where the fragile boxes were tied up in matting and wrappers and carefully conveyed on board. They were distributed, a box or package on each tutin, the most valuable box on my own tutin, while Abbas Kuli Bek and Mirza were responsible for the other two. We required fourteen vessels, each manned by a steersman. On the flagship of this frail and comical flotilla, that is, my own tutin, the commander also, the *tutindar*, took his seat. We tramped out barefooted for 200 yards from the shore, where the boats lay, and could be laden without coming into contact with the bottom. We purposely kept them as light as possible to avoid grounding on the way.

My tutin was the largest of the lot, nearly 20 feet long, and amidships, where it was broadest, it measured nearly 4 feet. Seen from above, it had the appearance of a pinnace or gig, but all the material consisted of long dry handfuls of soft yellow rushes (*tut*), which were bound together in very stout bundles. To give the vessel sufficient buoyancy