

## CHAPTER LXXXVII

### SALT MARSH OR ICE?

It was a dismal camp. There was nothing for the camels to eat but the branches of a few old Toghraks still alive by the banks. Glad I was that the patient, hardy animals, upon the strength of which our safety depended, took kindly to the twigs I had cut for them! No doubt the sap in the latter was refreshing. Even our hard-trying ponies, which had tasted no water for three days, munched this strange fodder greedily.

The time had now come when a final effort became imperative to locate the actual river and reach water. The only safe course open was to reconnoitre straight through to the east and west, and with a view to this I made our arrangements for the next day. We should march due south for another eight miles or so, and after a sun-observation for latitude Lal Singh and myself would set out in opposite directions with food for three days and practically no kit. By hard marching we could hope to extend our reconnaissances some twenty-five miles to east and west, and return within forty-eight hours to the camp where the men and animals were to rest. Then the whole party would move to wherever we might have found water in river or well.

Three much-reduced bags and two iron tanks of ice represented our available water-supply, sufficient to see us humans through six more days if rations, as for some days back, were kept limited to about one pint per diem for each man. It was a small enough allowance, considering that food, too, had to be prepared with it. With some self-restraint it just allayed the worst of thirst. But how