

Away across the plains we had seen some black spots with faint columns of blue smoke rising from them in the morning air. These were the yurts, or felt tents, of the Mongols, towards which we were making. On reaching them I found them to be very much what books of travel had led me to expect—dome-shaped, with a hole in the roof, made of a framework of lattice, with felt bound round on the outside. The inhabitants of one of them made room for me. A felt was spread out to lie on, and a couple of small tables placed by my side. All round the sides of the tent boxes and cupboards were neatly arranged, and at one end were some vases and images of Buddha. In the centre was the fireplace, situated directly beneath the hole in the roof. I was charmed with the comfort of the place. The Chinese inns, at which I had so far had to put up, were cold and draughty. Here the sun came streaming in through the hole in the top, and there were no draughts whatever. There was no dust either; and this being the tent of a well-to-do Mongol, it was clean and neatly arranged.

The whole family collected to see my things, and pulled my kit to pieces. The sponge was a great source of wonder; but what attracted them most of all was a concave shaving-mirror, which magnified and contorted the face in a marvellous way. They shrieked with laughter at it, and made the young girls look at their faces in it, telling them they need not be proud of their good looks, as that was what they were really like.

It was a pleasure getting among these jolly, round-faced, ruddy-cheeked Mongols, after living amongst the unhealthy-looking Chinese of the country we had been travelling through lately, who showed little friendliness or good-humour, and always seemed to cause a bad taste in the mouth. These first Mongols whom I met happened to be an unusually attractive lot. They were, of course, better off than those whom