

finding our way by the aid of the stars alone, and marking each as it sank below the horizon, indicating how far the night was advanced. At length the guide would give the signal to halt, and the camels, with an unmistakable sigh of relief, would sink to the ground; their loads would quickly be taken off; before long camp would be pitched, and we would turn in to enjoy a well-earned sleep, with the satisfaction of having accomplished one more march on that long desert journey.

Camp was astir again, however, early in the morning, and by eight I used to get up, and after breakfast stroll about to see what was to be seen, then write up my diary, plot out the map, have dinner at one or two, and then prepare for the next march. And so the days wore on with monotonous regularity for ten whole weeks.

But though these marches were very monotonous, yet the nights were often extremely beautiful, for the stars shone out with a magnificence I have never seen equalled even in the heights of the Himalayas. Venus was a resplendent object, and it guided us over many a mile of that desert. The Milky Way, too, was so bright that it looked like a bright phosphorescent cloud, or as a light cloud with the moon behind it. This clearness of the atmosphere was probably due to its being so remarkably dry. Everything became parched up, and so charged with electricity, that in opening out a sheepskin coat or a blanket a loud cracking noise would be given out, accompanied by a sheet of fire. A very peculiar and unlooked-for result of this remarkable dryness of the atmosphere was the destruction of a highly cherished coat of mine which Sir John Walsham had given me just before I left Peking, saying that it would last me for ever; and so it would have done anywhere else but in the Gobi Desert. It was made of a very closely woven canvas material, and to all appearance was indestructible, but it is a fact that before a