

galloping over the plain to know if we had anything for sale, and to beg some tobacco of us. The Chinese guide would never give them any, although he had plenty; but poor Ma-te-la always used to give them a pinch or two, or, at any rate, a piece of brown paper—which he would produce from his boot, and which was probably a relic of something I had thrown away. Liu-san never smoked or drank—he said he was a teetotaller, and was afraid even of my lime-juice.

The ponies about here are very good, stout, sturdy little animals, up to any amount of work, but more fit for riding purposes than the miniature cart-horses which we had seen in the extreme eastern end of Mongolia, on the steppes near Tsi-tsi-har in Manchuria. Those were wonderful little animals, and were always used by the Chinese carters to put in the shafts, although they were never more than thirteen hands high—while the cart used to carry a load of sometimes two tons, being dragged along by six or seven animals (ponies and mules) in front, but with only this one sturdy little animal in the shafts.

On June 3, just as we were preparing to start, we saw a great dark cloud away in the distance over the plain. It was a dust storm coming towards us. Where we were it was quite still, and the sky was bright overhead, and perfectly clear, but away to the west we saw the dark clouds—as black as night. Gradually they overspread the whole sky, and as the storm came nearer we heard a rumbling sound, and then it burst upon us with terrific force, so that we were obliged to lie at full length on the ground behind our baggage. There was fortunately no sand about—we were on a gravel plain—but the small pebbles were being driven before the wind with great velocity, and hurt us considerably. The storm lasted for half an hour, and it was then as calm and bright as before, and much cooler.

We still marched over this steppe country. There are