

When it was lighted, the position did not look cheerful. The camels were each perched up on a little hillock, separated from each other by pools of water and slimy clay. The guide, the two Mongols, and my boy were pulling away at their nose-strings, till I thought their whole noses would be pulled off, but they would not budge. Beating them behind was next tried, but that also failed. At last they tried pulling them backwards, and this had the desired effect—they were started, and once they were in motion they were kept going, although they nearly fell or split themselves up at every step. But now the path had disappeared, it began to rain, and I thought we were in for a night on the swamp, which would probably have been our fate had not my compass shown that we were going off in the wrong direction, there being no signs of a star for the guide to follow. At last we came upon sand, found a path, and very soon after a patch of gravel, on which we pitched camp.

We had to halt the next day, because the camels would not be able to get through the wet clay soil which surrounded us, in spite of what the guide had said about their getting stiff if they halted a day. We started the next morning, and for a few days continued along the plain between the two parallel ranges, that to the north rising some one thousand five hundred feet, and the one to the south about eight hundred feet above the plain. Both ranges, like all the other hills which I saw in crossing the Gobi, were absolutely bare.

One evening Ma-te-la, the Mongol assistant, was suddenly seen to shoot ahead at a great pace, and, on asking, I found he was going home. On he went, far away over the plain, till he became a mere dot in the distance, and I could not help envying him. In the same direction, and with nothing apparently between me and it but distance, was my home, and I felt myself struggling to pierce through space, and see myself returning, like Ma-te-la, home. But the dull reality