

No one, indeed, who has been alone with Nature in her purest aspects, and seen her in so many different forms, can help pondering over her meanings; and though, in the strain and stress of travel, her deepest messages may not have reached my ear, now, in the after-calm, when I have all the varied scenes as vividly before me as on the day I saw them, and have, moreover, leisure to appreciate them and feel their fullest influence, I can realize something of her grandeur, the mighty scale on which she works, and the infinite beauty of all she does. These impressions, as I stand now at the close of my narrative, with the many scenes which the writing of it has brought back to my mind full before my eyes, crowd upon me, and I long to be able to record them as clearly as I feel them, for the benefit of those who have not had the leisure or the opportunity to visit the jealously guarded regions of the earth where Nature reveals herself most clearly.

Upon no occasion were the wonders of the universe more impressively brought before my mind than in the long, lonely marches in the Gobi Desert. For seventy days I was travelling across the desert, and, knowing that the marches would be made mostly by night, I had brought with me one of those popular books on astronomy which put so clearly before the reader the main principles of the working of the stellar universe. I used to read it by day, and in the long hours of the night march ponder over the meaning of what I had read. There, far away in the desert, there was little to disturb the outward flow of feeling towards Nature. There, before me, was nothing *but* Nature. The boundless plain beneath, and the starry skies above. And skies, too, such as are not to be seen in the murky atmospheres of the less pure regions of the earth, but clear and bright as they can only be in the far, original depths of Nature. In those pure skies the stars shone out in unrivalled brilliancy, and hour after hour, through the long nights, I would watch them in their courses over the heavens, and think