

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 guided us over many a mile of that desert. The Milky Way, too, was so bright that it looked like a phosphorescent cloud, or as a light cloud with the moon behind it. This clearness of the atmosphere was probably due to its remarkable dryness. 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 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 month was over, that coat was in shreds. From the extreme dryness it got brittle, and wherever creases were formed, it broke in long rents.