



Smithsonian Institution

Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery

Three Roads to Urga (circa 1920s)

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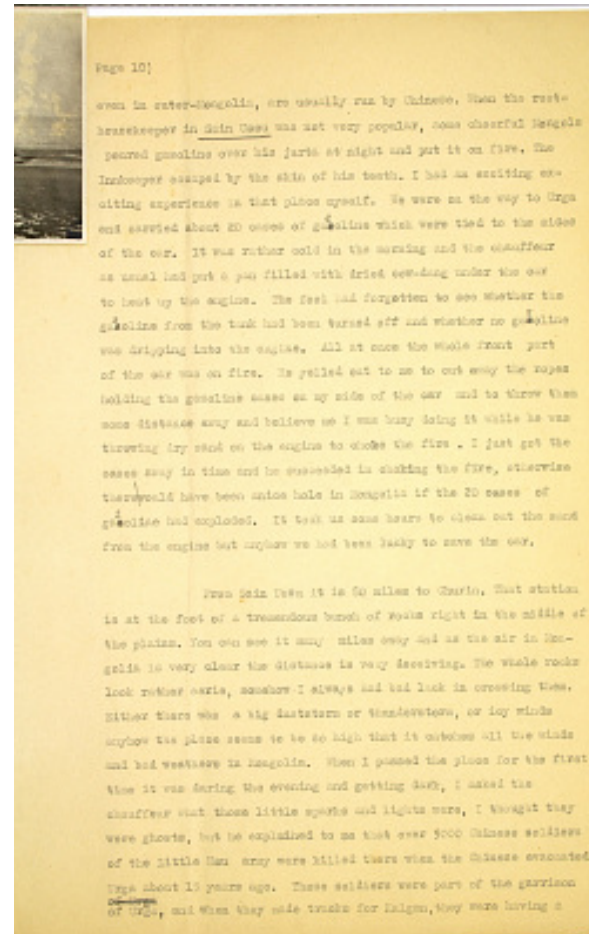
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even in outer-Mongolia, are usually run by Chinese. When the resthousekeeper in Sain Ussu was not very popular, some cheerful Mongols poured gasoline over his jurta at night and put it on fire. The Innkeeper escaped by the skin of his teeth. I had an exciting experience in that place myself. We were on the way to Urga and carried about 20 cases of gasoline which were tied to the sides of the car. It was rather cold in the morning and the chauffeur as usual had put a pan filled with dried cow-dung under the car to heat up the engine. The fool had forgotten to see whether the gasoline from the tank had been turned off and whether no gasoline was dripping into the engine. All at once the whole front part of the car was on fire. He yelled out to me to cut away the ropes holding the gasoline cases on my side of the car and to throw them some distance away and believe me I was busy doing it while he was throwing dry sand on the engine to choke the fire. I just got the cases away in time and he succeeded in choking the fire, otherwise there would have been a nice hole in Mongolia if the 20 cases of gasoline had exploded. It took us some hours to clean out the sand from the engine but anyhow we had been lucky to save the car.

From Sain Ussu it is 80 miles to Churin. That station is at the foot of a tremendous bunch of rocks right in the middle of the plains. You can see it many miles away and as the air in Mongolia is very clear the distance is very deceiving. The whole rocks look rather eerie, somehow I always had bad luck in crossing them. Either there was a big duststorm or thunderstorm, or icy winds anyhow the place seems to be so high that it catches all the winds and bad weathers in Mongolia. When I passed the place for the first time it was during the evening and getting dark, I asked the chauffeur what those little sparks and lights were, I thought they were ghosts, but he explained to me that over 5000 Chinese soldiers of the Little Hsu army were killed there when the Chinese evacuated Urga about 15 years ago. These soldiers were part of the garrison of Urga, and when they made tracks for Kalgan, they were having a



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