



Fig. 9. Mongol woman at Tsondol

As the autumn advanced and the evenings grew colder, LARSON'S fires became more and more popular. They were gradually made the centre of a sort of open-air common-room or club; and the only ones who were ever missing were those who happened to be busy making observations or listening in for time-signals from Nauen. It was round the camp-fire that I had my conferences with the members of my wandering town, and it was there, too, that instructions for the next day's activities were given. Work being over for the day, some would lie on their bellies, reading, while others wrote letters or made entries in their diaries. Generally, the gramophone would be played, and now and then DETTMANN strummed on his mandolin. When BERGMAN came we also had singing with accompaniment on the guitar. The orchestra of the Mongols, comprising a flute, a stringed instrument and a singer, sometimes entertained us with quite lovely melodies, full of Asiatic atmosphere. On festive occasions, or farewell evenings for members who were about to leave camp for work in the field, speeches were given in the flickering light of this lovely camp-fire.

Whatever Fate might afterwards have in store for us, we felt, we should always cherish grateful remembrances of the carefree evenings on the bank of the Edsen-gol, the bright hours spent in the glow from the fire.

MENTU looked after the heating of my tent, so that when I left the camp-fire to return to my writing-table he had always anticipated me with a shovelful of glowing embers. When I sat up late he would return at intervals with a fresh shovelful from the fire.