

self. If one does — in the sight of the mountain — one loses camels or horses, loses one's way, gets a headache or meets with stormy weather.

At the foot of this mountain grows a bush called *shara-burgas*, from whose twigs the Mongols and Chinese cut the pegs with which the noses of the camels are pierced. Caravans stop there to obtain a supply.

In some places the road was firm, in others it ran through sand and gravel. At the next spring a caravan was resting; it was carrying tobacco, tea, flour and other things to the Edsen-gol district.

A little farther on we were checked by a small black ridge that sloped steeply to a pass deep in sand. On the farther side of it extended a broad plain, among whose saxaules we collected a supply of wood for our camping-place at Kuku-to-logoi.

On the morning of Christmas Eve we were roused earlier than usual by the doctor, who was hurrying on ahead with the small car and TSERAT's lorry to choose a pleasant spot for the Christmas camp and to start the preparations for the Christmas festival. As the sun rose, shifting shades of dark grey and yellow passed over the desert.

All went well to begin with, but the soil became softer, and each of our four lorries carried at least $2\frac{1}{2}$ tons. One or two of them stuck in sandy ground, and the canvas or rope-mats had to be produced. Sand was the most serious obstacle to a motor-road to the Edsen-gol; and yet we had avoided all dune-covered regions.

Moon-landscape; black ridges; sharp-cut rocks with paler heaps of gravel around. Between the hills extended dark gravel-plains, over which the caravan track wound like a yellowish grey ribbon. The ridges were seldom more than ten or twenty meters high, and the space between them scarcely a hundred meters. There was not a scrap of vegetation.

Just after midday we crossed the boundary between Alakshan and the Edsen-gol region. This important spot was marked by an obo. The road wound through a labyrinth of low hills. Between the farthest of them we descried the poplar wood along the Edsen-gol — a glorious and refreshing sight.