

# Madam Marco Polo

## Sina Lichtmann, Only Woman Member of a Party of Five Who Traversed the Interior of Mongolia

By CLARENCE I. FREED

SHE impresses one as a colorful personality. Mrs. Sina Lichtmann radiates exotic charm and cultural background. She is a gifted pianist and music teacher, a member of the faculty of the Master Institute of United Arts, an educational organization located in the same building on Riverside Drive, New York, which contains the Roerich Museum and the Corona Mundi International Art Center. In this beautiful structure such fine arts as music, painting, sculpture, architecture, the dance and the drama find adequate expression. And it was in a room of the same building, the walls of which were adorned with fine paintings of Old Masters, that Mrs. Sina Lichtmann entertained the interviewer with a recital of her adventures during her recent trip abroad.

For one solid hour, which sped alas too soon, the lady traveler of artistic vision held this humble scribe spellbound as she told the story of her experiences in the course of her travels. "I undertook this journey in company with my husband, Maurice Lichtmann, in order to ascertain the whereabouts of the Roerich Expedition," she said. "We wanted to learn if the members of that expedition, headed by the world-renowned artist, Nicholas Roerich, were safe. We had not heard from them for several months. The Roerich Expedition had started out in 1923 for an extensive tour of Asia, with places like India, Thibet, Chinese Turkestan and Mongolia as their objectives. You know there are times when Asiatic travel is beset by difficulties, with all means of communication cut off. So, in company with Mr. Lichtmann, vice-president of the Roerich Museum, I started out last February to locate the expedition and to gather material of artistic and educational value in so doing."

Mrs. Lichtmann speaks with a Russian animation and vivacity that colors everything she says. She affects the Oriental, well-gowned, wearing a Grecian headband and long jasper earrings, all of which reflect a vibrant personality. The glamorous spell of the Orient seems to hover over this lady, who is a native of Odessa and obtained both her musical and scholastic education in various schools in Leipzig, Berlin and Vienna. After her graduation from the Vienna Meister Schule, where she studied under the famous Leopold Godowsky, she proceeded to this

country. For a time she did concertizing as a pianist. But her interest in educational problems prompted her to turn music teacher. At the same time, her cultural equipment is responsible for the interest she takes in all things artistic, social and educational.

BUT to return to Mrs. Lichtmann's graphic account of her travels abroad. "We took along tremendous trunks and all kinds of paraphernalia, to provide for every emergency. Our main object at first was to reach Moscow, where we could procure visas for Mongolia, a place that we were extremely anxious to visit. While in Moscow, we received word that the Roerich Expedition had established its winter quarters in Urga, otherwise known as Ulan-Bator-Khoto or the City of the Red Giant. This is the Mongolian capital. We learned that the Roerich Expedition was about to proceed further into the interior of Mongolia across the Gobi desert. So we decided to make all haste and catch a trans-Siberian train which was to carry us forward to our destination. It was a seven days'

trip through storms and blizzards. We were snowbound more than once on our way. But we finally reached the city of Verchne-Udinsk, where we stopped for a while before proceeding to Urga, the capital of Mongolia."

Mrs. Lichtmann seemed to live over again the hardships of that long journey, through Siberian snows. Arrived at Verchne-Udinsk, they succeeded in procuring several outmoded automobiles which were to carry them and their baggage to the Mongolian capital. "This trip took us between six and seven days," declared Mrs. Lichtmann. "The roads were terribly bumpy and we had to sleep in our car in the open, as the inns that we ran across on our way about once each day could offer no decent shelter. We would simply stop at these inns and ask to be given a hot samovar, boiling water that we used for tea. As food, we preferred what we brought along ourselves, which consisted chiefly of grape-nuts and corn-flakes. Often we had to cross rivers frozen over, and which seemed on the verge of breaking through. We narrowly escaped drowning,



Mrs. Sina Lichtmann is one of the directors of the Roerich Museum of New York. With Mr. Lichtmann, vice-president of the museum, Mrs. Lichtmann left America last February to ascertain the whereabouts of the Roerich expedition in Mongolia. They traveled extensively through Siberia, later making prolonged stays in Moscow and Leningrad where they studied comprehensively the artistic, educational and social conditions of Russia.

for we were the last that winter to cross those frozen rivers of ice and snow."

Mrs. Lichtmann halted her narrative to tell of an encounter with a wolf-pack. "We were stopping one night for a few hours rest and refreshment," she began. "Suddenly there appeared about 300 feet away what looked to us in the darkness like phosphorous, gleaming, electric bulbs. First one would appear, then another and another. We couldn't make out what they were until the driver told us that they were the wolves and that it was the time of year when they usually get hungry, so that they lose their fear of the human stranger whom they often attack because of their starved condition. Of course, we were startled and not a little frightened. But a Mongol soon came to our relief by making a bonfire which frightened the wolves away. We felt much better after that, very much relieved.

"AS you approach Urga," continued Mrs. Lichtmann after a slight pause, "you are going over a vast desert, with the mountains outlined in the distance. Severe winds and frosts send a chill through you and you must be very well protected by woollen things. We were the last to travel by automobile that year on that trans-Siberian road to Urga. On arriving at the Mongolian capital, we hastened at once to the house which Prof. Roerich and his associates occupied. We caught them in time, as they were soon to depart into the interior across the Gobi desert. We took the opportunity to employ those few weeks in visiting places of interest, monasteries and temples, and in meeting people of prominence. We found the Mongols kind, gentle and (Continued on page 531)



NEW YEAR'S MASQUERADORS IN URGA

From the material of the Roerich Expedition under Nicholas Roerich, renowned artist. The expedition, which is sponsored by the Roerich Museum and Corona Mundi, International Art Center, is proceeding into the heart of the Gobi Desert, where there are rumors of an ancient city never yet explored. Maurice and Sina Lichtmann recently returned from the same regions, after spending some time with the Roerich Expedition. Their many adventures include an encounter with a pack of wolves in the land of the still talked-of Genghis Khan

## MADAME MARCO POLO

(Continued from page 507)

hospitable. For the most part they still live in tents and under conditions such as existed more than 700 years ago when Genghis Khan was ruler of what was once the greatest empire in the world."

What Mrs. Lichtmann had to relate about the manners, customs and the history of the Mongols would by itself fill several chapters in a book of travels. Suffice to say that she has brought home many photographs and mementos of these strange people who are somewhat like the Chinese and yet very much different. Mongolia is now an independent and free republic. Although for centuries untouched by Western civilization, the Mongols are gradually beginning to realize how far they have lagged behind the advance in the march of human progress. And Russia is sending workers and teachers to Mongolia in an effort to awaken in them the spirit of enlightenment.

"A peculiar condition that exists in the city of Urga," declared Mrs. Lichtmann, "is the presence of huge black dogs that confront you on all sides as you walk about. What horrible creatures they are! They seem to run amuck, free and unmolested. They sun themselves and seem to have the right of way in preference to mere humans. It is as much as your life is worth to walk out after twilight, for the dogs will tear you to pieces unless you have a stout whip with which to defend yourself."

Mrs. Lichtmann seems still to be haunted by those "huge, black dogs" that caused her such terror when she first encountered them. To judge from a photographic reproduction of a whole pack, they truly appear like dogs that one would prefer to keep at a safe distance. But to return to Mrs. Lichtmann's itinerary, both she and her husband stayed in Mongolia a few weeks until the Roerich Expedition got under way. "According to a beautiful Asiatic custom," explained the lady traveler, "we accompanied the Expedition twenty-one miles out of the city limits and then returned to the city. Without much delay we engaged to get back to Verchne-Udinsk by airplane. Strange-

ly enough, the trip by airplane took us only about five hours, whereas by automobile the same distance was traversed in between six and seven days. From Verchne-Udinsk we took the trans-Siberian train back to Moscow where we stayed over a month. We studied the art and life of the Moscovites. We visited the theatres, the opera, the museums and the schools in the interest of progressive art and education. We were happy to find that the Russian system of education under the Soviet regime has undergone great changes for the better within the past few years.

Madam thereupon referred to the universities for the working-people in Russia and other innovations both in the cultural and artistic development of the Russian people. After visiting Leningrad, and studying it the same as they did Moscow, the Lichtmanns made an interesting journey through the Altai Mountains. "It appeared to us," declared Mrs. Lichtmann, "that throughout Russia educational work is being conducted along progressive lines. We found many peasants who showed an eager interest in science and in research work. Of

course, we could not help but meet many Jews in Russia; and, from what I could gather, the Jews are no longer a people set apart from the rest, but enjoy the same rights and privileges as their non-Jewish countrymen. And many of the Jews occupy important places in the Russian government."

**M**RS. SINA LICHTMANN is now safely back from her tour of Mongolia and the Russias looking as fresh and radiant as when she started on the great adventure last year in February. While she took no part in any elephant or lion hunts, she has brought home a vast store of material on the educational, artistic and economic development of those strange peoples concerning whom so little is known. Her trip across the Siberian country was not without its hardships and dangers. Nor was her journey to Mongolia free from numerous elements of peril and possible disaster. Mrs. Lichtmann evidently traveled for art's sake rather than for mere pleasure. But, whatever the reason, the outcome is all that could be desired. Few women would have the courage to follow in her footsteps.