

I X. I N H A M I

THE RECEPTION

To the east of Miao-erh-ku we had already crossed the frontier into Sinkiang. Now we were approaching the first town in the territory of this immense province. We were met by a dark troop of horsemen, covered in dust. In front was a fat and authoritative *bek*, who now rode alongside our cart and discussed with us conditions in Hami. Presently we entered an avenue of ancient, gnarled willows, flanked by canals. We were soon driving along streets between yellow-grey walls and over bridges with carved balustrades. We rolled in through the double town-gates of the Chinese town and soon arrived at the *yamen* of the commandant. In an outer courtyard we were received by Brigadier-General LIU's guard. In the barely furnished reception-room several officials, the burgo-master, and the mighty YOLBARS KHAN were all waiting.

While tea was being served General LIU made his appearance, pale and thin and with all the marks of an inveterate opium-smoker. As interpreter we had the English-speaking postmaster CHEN, a friendly and polite little man. LIU asked us questions about our journey and our hardships, the routes we had taken and the camels we had lost, about my illness in the desert and a number of other matters. In reply to my question as to when we might continue to Urumchi he answered that we could set off whenever we liked. I had hoped to be allowed to send NORIN and BERGMAN direct to Lop-nor, but LIU regretted that only Governor-General YANG could decide this, adding that he would immediately send off a telegram about the matter. He told me that he was acquainted with my former journeys, and assured me that I should find travelling in Sinkiang much safer now than then.

Presently, he began to speak of YANG's three conditions for our journey in Sinkiang, namely, the giving up of our weapons, examination of our baggage, and discharging of our Mongols. He apologized for these measures, explaining that for the past three years a state of war had been declared in the province. I reassured LIU by informing him that our Mongols would in any case have been sent home, as they were foreigners here and did not understand the language. Our baggage was to be unloaded in the courtyard of the *yamen*.