

the altimeter showed 1,280 m. Once more the road descended, and the valley widened into a plain in the heart of the mountains.

Presently we drove right into a party of young Turkis on foot, the same who had left Hami a few days before. They were on their way to General MA's army to be slaughtered in the war. They carried red and blue Kuomintang flags and had donkeys, horses, camels and carts for the transport of their kit and provisions. Their leader, NIAZ BEG, YOLBARS KHAN's eldest son, came up to my car and asked for a lift, as he was suffering from some skin disease. He was given a seat on a lorry. It was sad and touching to see the young men who were to be sacrificed to 'Big Horse's' ambition with a *morituri te salutant*. They themselves desired only peace.

We were now 950 m above sea-level. At one o'clock we reached Ch'i-chio-ching-tze («The Heptagonal Well»). The few houses were surrounded by a high, newly built wall which had two gates. There was quite a strong military post here, for at this point the road bifurcates, and branches run off to Ku-ch'eng-tze and Pichan.

A Chinese temple and a pagoda stood outside the village. Dead horses and rags marked the scene of recent fighting. The commander of our escort told us that the Kirghiz in the neighbouring mountains had attacked the place not long before, murdering people and looting houses. He therefore considered it necessary to place two extra soldiers on each lorry, who were to accompany us for about 20 li, or to the end of the danger zone.

On reaching Tung-yen-chih, or «Eastern Salt Marsh», we stopped for a short rest and dropped the superfluous Tungan soldiers. On resuming our journey we found ourselves driving right into the mountains, with high ranges on each side. From time to time we passed riders and ox-carts. The road in the narrow valley, where the Hui-ching-tze spring lies, was not bad. The sun was hidden by the higher peaks, but lit up the eastern side-valleys gloriously.

It was five o'clock when we reached the crest of the pass, where the altimeters showed a height of 1,630 m. On the western side of the pass the road ran straight down towards the sun, and the valley grew wider. The slope was fairly steep.

At the western end of Hsi-yen-chih («Western Salt Marsh») lies a caravan-serai. Here MA had ordered four fresh soldiers to meet us and help us on our way to Turfan. They had been waiting for us for three days.

The sun was setting and twilight was falling as we emerged from the T'ien-shan mountains; and presently we were driving in pitch darkness over plains of grass and reeds with a soft, dusty soil. Here we met a few carts drawn by oxen and horses, twenty donkeys and a camel caravan, carrying bales of cotton to Hami. From there they were to be taken on across the desert to Kuei-hua.

We had covered 190 km — pretty good going for Asiatic roads — when at a quarter to ten we reached the village of Chiqtam, our camp No. 37, 400 m above the sea. This village, that had formerly comprised only a dozen families, now