

studied in Calcutta. He was pretty tough, if what he said was true — that he could rip up his own or anyone else's belly, or cut off an arm or a leg and stick it on again in a moment.

March 3rd, our last day at Qara-shahr, was entirely devoted to mixing petrol with paraffin and taking the cars for trial trips with this inferior fuel. These and a host of other practical jobs were far from finished when the sun went down, and our mechanics and drivers worked on by lamplight and the light of the moon.

On our arrival at Qara-shahr a silver dollar had been equivalent to 30 *liang* or *sär*. By March 3rd one could get 35 *liang* and on the next day even 42 for a dollar. The dirty tattered notes printed by General MA were thus falling in value daily — a sign that his star was already in the decline.

Here our passenger Mr HUANG WEN-PI left the convoy. He borrowed 300 dollars from us and bought some camels in order to set out for the Lop-nor region. As travelling companion he got the mysterious Professor LI.

The four rascally Tungan officers whom General LI HAI-JO had given us at Turfan as an escort had a batman of the same kidney. As the fellow was suffering from syphilis the doctor did not want to have him on the lorries, lest he should infect our men. We requested that he be left behind and replaced by someone else. But the four bandits refused to consent to this. It was for them a matter of prestige not to give way to foreigners, whom they hated like poison. It would have been useless to appeal to the commandant or the general of cavalry, who had their headquarters on the other side of the river, for the four carried with them written orders from General MA CHUNG-YING to his army commanders at Kucha and Aqsu. They could therefore mount their high horse and act pretty much as they pleased. Accordingly, we agreed to compromise. The syphilitic was to be dropped at Korla. One of our Chinese servants heard the arrogant young commander say to his comrades: »When we get to Korla we'll teach these foreign devils to mend their manners!» We thus left Qara-shahr in an atmosphere of unpleasantly strained relations.

FROM QARA-SHAHR TO KORLA

Reedy plains extended on either side of the road, which was flooded in places. The road itself was sunk three feet deep in the loose earth. Danzil (»The Yurt») was a big village which we passed.

There was a good deal of traffic. We met or overtook riders, small caravans of horses and donkeys, Turki peasants with oxen or carts, soldiers or poor refugees on foot. Some way off to the right we sighted the reddish conglomerate hills where lies the ancient Buddhistic site Ming-öi, or the »Thousand Houses.» The next village, Shorchuq (»Salt-bearing») was completely devastated.