

Now we understood the reason for General LI's exaggerated politeness to us at Turfan, and his repeatedly expressed wish that we should start for Korla and Kucha as quickly as possible. It was the result of special orders from MA CHUNG-YING, who perfectly well understood that he would need cars for his flight, and that meantime it might be a good thing to have one or two at hand for the rapid conveyance of orders to the officer in command at Kucha. The talk of the road between Turfan and Qara-shahr having to be cleared of robbers before we could travel was thus probably genuine enough. MA CHUNG-YING wanted to make sure that the cars would be at his disposal whenever he might need them.

At half-past six two officers came and asked for a final answer. They requested on CHANG's behalf that he might have a car that same evening. I replied briefly that as we had been sent on a special mission by the Central Government in Nanking, we had no right to lend cars that did not belong to us. They rose, saluted, and went out.

GEORG opined that we should take no orders from such rabble, but reply that we intended to proceed when it suited us, and that they might then accompany us to Kucha or Aqsu, according to the Turfan agreement.

### A GHASTLY NIGHT

At about half-past eight YEW entered, saying that two soldiers had come with a message that I was wanted on the telephone at the commandant's, where important news for me had arrived from Qara-shahr. Objections were raised; it might be a trick. I took YEW and GEORG with me as interpreters, and EFFE to drive the small car. The two soldiers stood on the running-board, directing EFFE not to the commandant's yamen, where the telephone was, but to the house where CHANG and the rest of the escort were quartered, and where we had supped the previous evening.

Even now the room was lit by a single candle. Tea, sugar and cigarettes were set before us on the table. Half a dozen soldiers armed with rifles and pistols stood at the door; another half dozen were in the room itself, while in the yard, illuminated only by the faint light flung through the window, were another twenty or thirty armed men.

CHANG now repeated his demand. A telephone message had arrived from MA CHUNG-YING at Davan-ch'eng, and written orders had been sent by courier to Qara-shahr. These orders were explicit. He *must* have a motor-lorry that same evening.

I replied firmly, emphasizing each word:

»We are in the service of the Central Government. I am responsible for the execution of the Government's orders. The motor-cars are not ours and none of them can be lent.»