

news from the garrison at Kucha of crushing defeat and headlong flight that they forgot both me and the lorry, and thought of nothing else than saving their lives by bolting — anywhere on earth only not eastward, where they would meet MA in all his fury . . .

»When I woke up this morning everything was quiet. I started early, reaching the outskirts of Chompaq about three. There I had lunch. The innkeeper told me that four cars had arrived in the country about Yangi-hissar the evening before. So I was certainly less surprised than you at our meeting here.»

GEORG had finished his story. He was the hero of the day as he stood there quietly smiling and smoking a cigarette.

I was disappointed not to be able to go on to Kucha, Aqsu and Kashgar, and dispose of this part of our programme now that we were so far on the way. But according to GEORG this would have meant captivity or even death.

From the 'Tungans' conversation and from other informants he had learned that Ili and Kulja had been taken by SHENG SHIH-TS'AI's White Russians, and that the military governor of Ili, General CHANG P'EI-YUAN, had committed suicide. We had heard that he had been killed. General CHANG's troops, however, had gone southward and reached the road between Aqsu and Kucha in the neighbourhood of Bai, whence they might possibly advance towards Kucha and farther east. In Kucha fresh slaughter was expected.

GEORG hoped that we should sooner or later get to Kucha, which was a fascinating town with picturesque streets and pleasant houses, bridges and gardens. On the other hand, however, he had heard that there was not a drop of petrol in the place. All the promises that had been given us of repayment of the petrol we had lent were thus sheer humbug. For that matter, we had never expected anything else.

GEORG had also received the definite impression that MA's situation was hopeless, and that he would probably be taken between two fires. In such an event, would he retreat via Hami or Lop-nor to Anhsi?

### TURNING BACK

Here, in the Chompaq oasis, we stood as it were at the parting of the ways. If we proceeded westward we should have to cross a front at Bai. If we turned eastward, on the other hand, to Korla, we should in all probability meet MA CHUNG-YING with his staff and his army fleeing in wild disorder. It would be more dangerous for us and our convoy of cars, now once more complete, to fall into the hands of a beaten than of a victorious army. We were indeed between two fires; and it was not easy to guess in which flames we should be done the brownest.

For the moment we were surrounded by an ominous calm. Countrymen and carts passed to and fro on the roads as in times of the most profound peace. But there