

Their horses stood packed closely side by side as far as the eye could reach, with their heads inside the bazaar shops and their tails turned towards the street. The street itself was so narrow that there was not much space between the horses' tails. The Russian Cossacks sat on the low, terrace-like projections in front of the shops, or stood in groups, smoking cigarettes and talking.

The men looked well and burnt. They were clearly in good spirits; they nodded, laughed and replied politely when I spoke to them. But how dusty they and their horses were! A layer of light grey dust covered their faces and their fair hair. It really mattered little what colour their uniforms were — the dust of the high road had coloured them field-grey anyhow.

### CROSS-EXAMINED BY THE RUSSIANS

We had now arrived at a Chinese house, with a narrow entrance from the street. I was told that General VOLGIN was expecting me, and was asked to go to his room.

The General surveyed me with a faint smile, as if he were thinking, »This fellow can't be a spy!« He asked me why we had come to Sinkiang and what was our business at Korla. I told him about our task and our journey, and how we had been well and hospitably received, on General MA CHUNG-YING's own orders, the whole way from Hami.

»Have you met General MA yourself?«

»No, I'm sorry to say not. He left here three days ago, taking our four lorries and four drivers against our will.«

»Why didn't you go to Urumchi?«

»I asked if we might go there from Turfan, but got the reply that the Davanch'eng region was dangerous because of the front line, and that the road was almost impossible for motor-cars.«

»But why didn't you go by Ch'i-chio-ching-tze and Ku-ch'eng-tze?«

»We asked if we might take that road, but again they said no. And for that matter, it was blocked by snow at that time.«

General VOLGIN realized that we had not come to Korla for a pleasure trip when I told him how four of us had come within an ace of being shot.

»General MA is hated and abused everywhere,« he said, »and he has turned Sinkiang into a desert. But he is brave and energetic and sticks at nothing. He isn't afraid of anything, whether aeroplanes or superior numbers. But now a new era has begun for Sinkiang. Now there is to be order, peace and security in this province. General SHENG SHIH-TS'AI is going to organize the administration and put everything on its legs again.«

I expressed my satisfaction at this prospect, but added: