

of paper was falling daily. But we did not find this out till later. On March 19th the rate of exchange was 25 liang to a dollar. We were to see the day when 400 liang could be had for the same value in silver. When SHENG SHIH-TS'AI set a price of two million liang on MA CHUNG-YING's head, this sum was equivalent to only 80,000 dollars.

### TEDIOUS DAYS

Our enforced inactivity was a sore trial to our patience. Nor could it be said that our guards did anything to cheer our existence. They might have shortened the slowly passing hours with tales of their experiences. Actually, they did not speak at all. In answer to questions they said either yes or no or nothing at all. They had been forbidden to talk to us.

Inside the wall our days passed slowly and monotonously. We had really no peace of mind for regular work. We could only kill time in one way or another. The doctor, who was very clever with his hands, made a backgammon board with paper dice and cardboard pieces; and YEW and I sat over this for many hours, while the others played bridge or patience with home-made cards.

A large, unfurnished room in the west wing was standing empty. We asked the landlord if we might lease it. But the room had no floor or windows, and it had holes in the roof. A carpenter was sent for and instructed to make the room habitable. He put down a board floor, repaired the roof and put in windows. The room was then scrubbed, tables and chairs were procured, and our mess was ready. Thereafter we took all our meals here, and used the room as well for reading, writing, playing bridge and backgammon, and receiving guests.

### FIRST SIGN OF LIFE FROM THE DRIVERS

At 2 p. m. on March 22nd the temperature rose to 15° C. Spring had come. The trees outside our wall were in bud. This day was one of the greatest and happiest of our journey.

About midday YEW and I were sitting playing backgammon when one of the *okhrana* handed in a letter. It was written in pencil on a couple of leaves from a notebook in GEORG's peculiar Swedish. It read:

Dear Chief,

After much trouble and hardship we have managed to get away from the Mohammedan soldiers — when we got to Yangi-hissar we were well received by Torgut soldiers but now we are in the soup again — TSERAT and JOMCHA have had strict orders to go east with two lorries — they don't say if it's Korla or not but we hope it is — EFFE and I have got to go west with the Russians to fight MA CHUNG-YING but they have promised we shall not go to the front.