

who were handing over their arms to MA CHUNG-YING, as well as civilian inhabitants with women and children — a crowd of a thousand or so come to surrender itself to the tender mercies of the lord of Kucha — the oasis that was now actually the last scrap of territory still possessed by MA and obedient to his commands.

But MA still had his courage, his unquenchable optimism, his personal bravery and his iron will; and he laughed at his enemies' desperate efforts to lay him by the heels.

With a self-confidence worthy of a TAMERLANE he ascended a beflagged tribune on one side of the large courtyard and delivered, in a voice that never faltered, a speech that thrilled the thousand fugitives from Ili to the marrow. He was surrounded on all sides by tightly packed crowds of starving ragamuffins, listening to his glowing words and seductive promises. Big Horse spoke splendidly, and with as much certainty and conviction as if his brow were already crowned with the victor's laurel, and he had been about to conquer the last remaining fragment of Eastern Turkistan. In the course of his speech he said:

»Welcome, brothers, friends, soldiers! Welcome to my army! Together we shall beat the northern army and all our enemies who still dare to stop our victorious progress. Under the leaders of the northern army you have nothing to expect but starvation, suffering and slavery. Perhaps you have heard of *Ka ssu-ling* (the 'Little Commander') of Kansu? I am *Ka ssu-ling*! It is I who shall unite all the peoples and races in these lands into one great dominion. With your support and your help I shall work for the happiness and prosperity of the whole people. I promise to give you freedom, well-being, enough and to spare of everything. Together we shall organize this country and make it great, strong and powerful.»

For the Ili troops, who had toiled over the snow-covered passes of the Celestial Mountains in cold, storm and privation, it must have been alluring and kindling to listen to these words, and to stand face to face with so great and mighty a leader. They had had no leader of their own since General CHANG P'EI-YUAN, the governor of Ili, had committed suicide.

The speech finished, GEORG led Big Horse back to his stable. He tried to talk seriously to the young general.

»What will happen to us? What will happen to the expedition when the Urumchi troops come and take us and our cars, and perhaps shoot us? Wouldn't it be better for us to try to reach Aqsu under your protection?»

Big Horse smiled and thought the drivers need not worry.

GEORG was convinced that they were within an ace of being shot when officers of MA's staff warned him of all the information they would give the pursuing northern army about MA's strength, plans and routes — not to speak of the advantage it would be to the enemy to get three new motor-lorries. Here, too, all