

and the Foreign Minister LO WEN-KAN, had failed in their missions; and it had been made clear that their rôle of mediator and »peace commissioner» was neither desired nor necessary. And what could be more natural than to suspect that we, the third set of emissaries, had been charged with a secret political mission under the guise of road-making? Our position was thus extremely delicate from the outset, and we had to behave with the utmost tact and shrewdness. Our tactics were very simple. YEW and I were in agreement on all points — our policy was complete honesty; we had nothing to conceal; anyone who liked could spy on us as he pleased.

After two hours' conversation with Mr APRESOV we drove to the post office. HARALD KIERKEGAARD, the postal commissioner, was no stranger to me, nor I to him. We had often corresponded during the main expedition, and he had helped us in hard times, not least during the period when AMBOLT had disappeared.

KIERKEGAARD was a man of forty-eight — white-haired, lively, jolly and genial, like most Danes. In a few minutes I discovered the cause of the irrepressible joy which was evident in all he said and did. He had completed his service, and was to leave Urumchi for ever in a week. Wherever he went, it would be paradise compared to that pestilential hole.

We made the acquaintance of his countryman Mr EGTORP, an engineer who had come to Urumchi to found a chemical factory. He had been promised heaven and earth, but after waiting vainly for six months he considered the position hopeless, and had already decided to accompany KIERKEGAARD home to Copenhagen.

We also made the acquaintance of Mr CHEN, KIERKEGAARD's assistant, who had been appointed to succeed him. The postal service in Sinkiang had for years been managed by Europeans. Now, however, SHENG TUPAN was going to put an end to this custom. CHEN was a good fellow, quiet, honest and reliable. Our acquaintance with him was very soon to be intimate.

We heard hair-raising accounts of events in Urumchi, Kashgar and other places. The Russian Tartar GMIRKIN, whose acquaintance we had made in 1928, who had been head of the garage and had later risen higher and higher in rank, had been executed! His successor was an old acquaintance of ours, IVANOV, whose position was considered to be strong. KIERKEGAARD gave us this golden advice: never talk to anybody; let the others do the talking; listen, but appear indifferent; believe no-one — they are all liars, spies, informers and traitors! Anyone may disappear at any time, and it is best not to ask where he has gone.

MEETING SHENG TUPAN

Some hours later we betook ourselves to SHENG SHIH-TS'AI's yamen. SHENG TUPAN was a man of prepossessing appearance. He had searching eyes, which, however, avoided ours. He began by asking us what sort of journey we had had.