

After a time the messenger returned, to say that we might drive into the town. A crowd of soldiers clambered aboard the lorries, while others stood on the running-board of the small car. We drove slowly into the dark street, lit only here and there by the flickering of an oil-lamp in a shop. The cars stopped in front of YOLBARS' house. There stood the general himself, the all-powerful ruler of Hami, surrounded by his bodyguard of thirty soldiers. I greeted him; and after a little colloquy I invited him to enter my car. He declined, however, as he must first pay an official visit to the house he had prepared for us.

We drove to the same house in which we had stayed in February. The two buses, that had left Urumchi at the same time as ourselves, were already standing in the little courtyard.

It was decided that we should breakfast with YOLBARS next morning, and continue our journey at noon. The road to Anhsi was safe. The robber-bands that had infested the country round Hsing-hsing-hsia had been driven away. The commandant at Anshi had asked to be informed by telephone of the time of our arrival. He had been instructed by the Government in Nanking to give us the best possible reception.

BÖKENKAMP, whom we last met in Kuei-hua, had been sent to Sinkiang by Frau HANNEKEN to look for her son, who had disappeared in the T'ien-shan between Hami and Ku-ch'eng-tze. BÖKENKAMP had stayed in Hami for three months, but had left the town the day before our arrival, evidently on the road to Anhsi. His departure had resembled a flight; and he had left at his lodgings two boxes full of rubbish to delay a possible pursuit. But YOLBARS did not seem to have any interest in pursuing him. When I asked whether he thought there was any hope of tracing young HANNEKEN, he replied diplomatically:

»I have not seen his body, and so cannot swear that he is dead. But I don't *think* he is alive; and I feel that there is no hope for him.»

When we left Urumchi, fourteen persons had asked to be allowed to travel in our cars; and several of them had offered to pay handsomely for the lift. But they had all met with a hard-hearted refusal, for it was laid down in our official instructions that we had not the right to take passengers. One of them was GUSTAF SÖDERBOM, who afterwards left Urumchi on the pretext of going to Manas with his two camels. But he turned and cut back to Hami, reaching that town at the same time as ourselves. At the west gate of Hami he joined a caravan which made a detour outside the town, encamping in the desert to the east. If he had kept himself hidden, and gone on eastward with his new travelling companions, he would probably have reached Kuei-hua. But he was rash enough to visit the bazaar at Hami to make some purchases. As, after our departure, he was the only European in Hami, he did not escape the notice of the Cheka police, and was arrested and imprisoned. He was then taken back to Urumchi, where he had to stay until he was freed by diplomatic intervention.