

»We have been anxious lest our drivers, if they get away from MA alive and are able to return here from Kucha, should meet MA's beaten army on the road and be robbed of their lorries again. If they manage to escape the mobs of fleeing soldiers they will come up against your men in pursuit, and the lorries may be taken for a third time.»

»No, you needn't worry about us. We don't want them. We have lorries enough of our own. And if MA has not destroyed them we can get them back for you.»

He did not ask about passports, but as I had taken these with me I laid them on the table before him.

»May I keep them till to-morrow, so that I can take copies and send them to General SHENG SHIH-TS'AI? I shall have them translated into Russian for myself.»

»There are four things we want before we leave Korla to go to Urumchi — to get back our drivers and lorries; to be allowed to go to the new lake Lop-nor and wait there till things grow quieter; to be able to carry out our road programme and go first to Kashgar, then to Ili and Chuguchaq; and lastly, to get our telegrams and letters sent off.»

»I shall tell General SHENG SHIH-TS'AI at once of the information you have given and what you wish to do.»

After a conversation of an hour and a half I rose and went back along the main street, which was still crowded with soldiers. I talked with some of them; others came up to me and asked who I was. One came up behind me and asked:

»Do you live here?«

Another, in answer to my questioning, said:

»We have been coming here from Qara-shahr all day, troop after troop. Two thousand Russians arrived to-day, half White, half Red. There are a thousand Torguts here; and two thousand troops of all arms have gone straight on to Kucha to attack MA CHUNG-YING without touching Korla. Most of the two thousand who are in Korla now will continue westward to-morrow. We were five thousand strong when we started from Urumchi.»

The speaker was a White Russian. He was pleased to find someone who listened to him with interest. He bragged a good deal about the northern army's achievements. Some of his statements may have been true enough; but when he said that the northern army had two hundred lorries, a hundred of which had now been employed to carry each from ten to thirty soldiers in full marching order, he was drawing a long bow. Only a few lorries were sent to Kucha and Kashgar during the campaign.

On my return to our quarters I heard that the Russians had cleared the town of Tungan soldiers, capturing fifty with the first sweep of the net. They were sent back to their native districts; none was killed.

The news that pleasant people inhabited our quarters must have spread among the newcomers, for one Russian soldier after another came in to sit down and