L. ZAISAN
Kobdo
OUTER MONGOLIA
L. BALKHASH
R.
Tarbagatai
R. IRTYSH
ALTAI
DZUNGARIA
BAITIK BOGDO
Manass
Kuldja
ILI R.
Urumchi
Kucheng
Barkul
MTS
GOBI DESERT
Hami
Turfan
Karashahr
THIRSTY MTS.
KANSU
Aksu
TARIM
LOP NOR
Ansi
Tunghuang
Kashgar
NANSHAN
TAGH
Yarkand
Charchan
Timurlik
GEZ KUL (9000')
Makai
KOKO NOR
ALTYN
Khotan
TSAIDAM
KARAKORAM MTS.
KUNLUN MTS.
ULUGH MUSTAGH 25,000'
CHINGHAI
INDUS R.
KASHMIR
Srinagar
Leh
Rudok
TIBETAN PLATEAU
(12,000' – 20,000')
PAK-ISTAN
NANGA PARBAT

Ali Beg.

KAZAK EXODUS

by

GODFREY LIAS

LONDON

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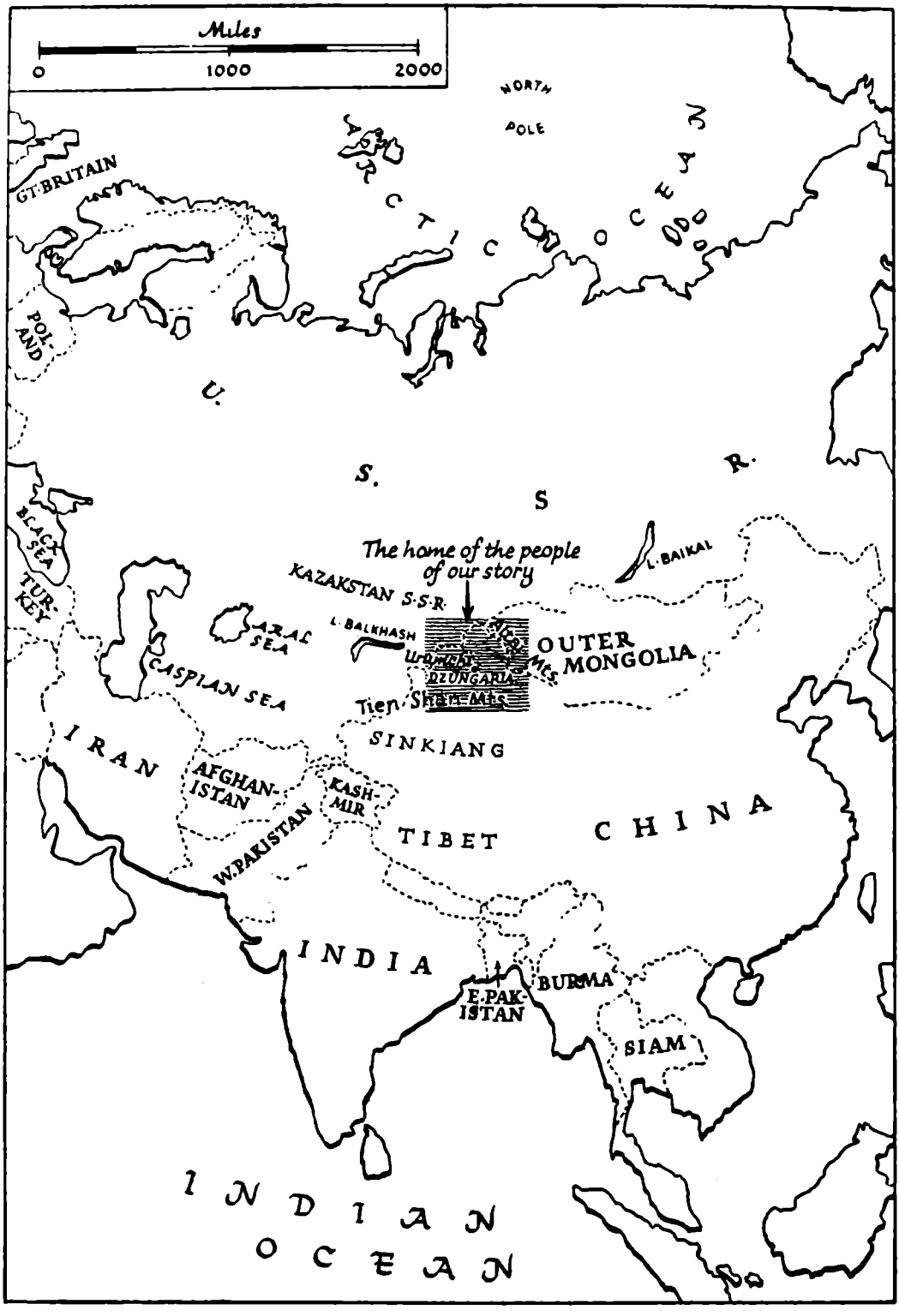
FOREWORD

The People in the Story

MIDWAY between the Arctic and Indian Oceans, the Mediterranean and the Sea of Japan, stands a range of mountains called the Altai. From its lush valleys and grassy uplands have sprung races and leaders who have spread far and wide across Asia—to Peking, Delhi, Samarkand —and even to the very heart of Europe. Many of them are names which, according to the point of view, strike terror and contempt, admiration and pride. Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, the Moghul Emperors, even Attila are among those the Kazaks and Mongols of the Altai claim as their ancestors.

Those who followed such leaders were, like the leaders themselves, hardy, confident, ambitious, ruthless, hospitable men, and so, today, are their descendants. Ready to ride forth, even to the ends of the earth, to win renown in the service of a man of action; equally happy to ride recklessly, hawk on wrist, through their own beloved mountains, moving their felted tents up or down the alpine valleys each spring and autumn and caring for their innumerable flocks and herds, heedless of the world outside, even of the Great Silk Road between China and the West along which Marco Polo rode five hundred years ago almost past their very tent doors.

But the world has grown smaller in the centuries which have ridden past the Altai since Marco Polo's day, though the Altai folk knew and cared little about this contraction till the outside world gradually began to hem them in towards the end of the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, they themselves had grown and multiplied, expanding instead of contracting, and their belled flocks and herds of two-humped camels, fat-tailed sheep, goats, cattle and their beloved horses had done likewise. The Mongols spread mainly eastward. Most of the Kazaks went westward into what is now Soviet Kazakstan—an area almost as big as the whole of Europe the right side of the Iron



The traditional home of the Kazaks

Sinkiang was re-named The Autonomous Uighur Republic in August, 1955

Curtain—but some turned southward over what is called Dzungaria and up into the huge mountain chain known as the Tien Shan, or Celestial Mountains.

This true story is mainly about the southern group of Kazaks whose traditional home happens to be in an area over which the Russian and Chinese imperialisms have been quarrelling for centuries. By the beginning of this century, the dividing line between them ran along the Altai Mountains and to the north of the Tien Shan. But neither the Russians nor the Chinese were content to leave it there. On both sides of this still debated frontier, across which the Kazaks once roamed freely and as the rightful owners, lie rich deposits of gold, wolfram, coal, copper and other metals, probably including uranium. Moreover, both the Altai and the Tien Shan and their subsidiary ranges support very many cattle and sheep.

In the past, the Kazaks used to play off one greedy set of imperialists against the other. The system worked well at first but when the Bolshevik tyranny usurped the functions of the Tsarist one, it began to break down. In less than fifteen years after the establishment of the Communist régime in Russia, the Communists gained economic, and then political, control of the Chinese province of Sinkiang in which the 800,000 Kazaks of our story were living. With only a brief interval they have been in control ever since.

So, for the past quarter of a century, the Kazaks of the Altai and Tien Shan have been fighting a gallant but hopeless battle. Instead of meekly submitting when the intruders came into their homeland, they took up arms and tried to drive them out. Fighting, of course, is in the Kazaks' blood, and there is no gainsaying the fact that they love it. But this time they were fighting not for gain or glory, but for their way of life. And when they could fight no longer, many of the survivors braved known and unknown terrors in the arid deserts and stark mountains of the Takla Makan and Tibet rather than submit. Many perished on the way. But some, not more than about 2,000, won through to Kashmir and in due course were invited to make new homes in Turkey. It was there that they told me their story. Indeed, I went specially to try to persuade them to tell it to me because it is one which, while it was happening,

the Communists managed to conceal from the outside world. I soon began to understand why they wished to do so.

As I listened to what the Kazaks had to tell, I found my thoughts continually harking back to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses; to David and Jonathan; to Elisha, Jeremiah and other familiar Biblical characters. There is—or was—a very great similarity between the Kazak way of life and that of the ancient Hebrews, although the Kazaks are Moslems, like the Turks, and have been since before the fourteenth century. They also claim to be of common origin with the Turks, and some of them certainly look Turkish, but most of them are nearer to Mongols in appearance. Their way of life, however, has been handed down from the days when nomads all over Asia moulded their lives on one common pattern so that it has much in common with the life of the Old Testament patriarchs and the Bedouin tribes of the present day as well as with the Mongols and with the Goths and Huns who swept through Europe in the so-called Dark Ages the name of which always makes me wonder what our own age will be called when it has passed into history.

So far as I know, the Kazak version of nomad life has never been described for English readers and I have therefore tried to write the epic story of their adventures and sufferings, not as an outside observer, but from their own standpoint: to show, before their way of life is forgotten, what manner of men they were—and still are at heart—and what kind of lives they used to lead until the blight of Communism fell upon them. When they were treated as an inferior colonial race, they resisted, as we ourselves did when Hitler tried to treat us in much the same fashion. So, of the 800,000 Kazaks who lived in the Chinese Province of Sinkiang—or East Turkistan, as the non-Chinese inhabitants prefer to call it—at least 100,000 are now dead.

The meagre accounts of the great Kazak epic which were reported when the survivors of their final exodus reached Kashmir betokened an unusual steadfastness of moral purpose and defiance of odds comparable in their own different fashion with the determination shown by the Pilgrim Fathers when they decided to leave England and build a new society across

the Atlantic, and with the stubborn courage of the Children of Israel when they defied Pharaoh and journeyed forth into the wilderness under Moses, and also with the gallant Ten Thousand Greeks whose escape from another part of Asia was immortalised by Xenophon. When I learned that the Kazaks did not feel they could settle happily in Kashmir and were about to move to Turkey at the invitation of the Turkish Government, I decided to go to Turkey myself to learn why they staked their lives on such a desperate venture and what had befallen them during their 2,000-mile journey to freedom.

The story really begins at the close of the nineteenth century, in 1899, the year in which Osman Batur, Osman the Hero, was born; the Year of the Boar according to the day of reckoning the Kazaks borrowed from the Chinese. In those days, the Kazak tribesmen were still living very much as they had always done, not merely since the days of Genghis Khan, but since the time of Abraham and Isaac. Abram, as he then called himself, agreed with Lot whether their tents should be pitched to the right hand or to the left, in the plains or in the mountains of Judaea. The Kazaks similarly divided among themselves, and with their Mongol neighbours, the Altai and the Tien Shan Mountains and the habitable parts of the low-lying land of Dzungaria between these mountain ranges even though, as in the time of the Hebrew patriarchs, there were other folk living on the same land and cultivating parts of it. And, still like the Hebrew Patriarchs, the Kazaks moved their tents according to the season.

They journeyed up into the hills—much higher ones than those of Judaea—during the spring and summer, when the mountain pastures were green and succulent to the very snow line, ten to twelve thousand feet above sea level. They came down again to the more sheltered camping grounds on the edge of the vast steppes and deserts of Central Asia when the cold winds of autumn brought fresh snow. Beholden thus only to God, and to their flocks, for their daily food, and even for their dwellings and clothing, the Kazaks roamed the countryside as they pleased, often with hawks on their wrists, like our own ancestors in feudal days. And as they rode, they sang haunting, many-versed melodies each stanza usually ending

with one prolonged note which echoed back and forth between the hills like the swell of an organ.

Most of the Kazak refugees who are now in Turkey, but not all, belong to the Kirei tribe of Kazaks which sports a little cluster of owl's feathers in its tumak, or hat, to distinguish it from other Kazak tribes. The whole Kirei tribe is numbered in hundreds of thousands, but mostly it used to live in small units or clans, until the Communists decreed otherwise. Each of the little groups numbering, say, a hundred families—three or four hundred people—had its own chieftain. For the most part they were rich in animals if not money, and a group of that size frequently owned, partly as individuals and partly in common, as many as ten thousand sheep, two thousand cattle, two thousand horses and a thousand camels. So the air round a Kazak encampment was filled with sound: the bleating of countless sheep and lambs, the lowing of cattle, the belly-grunts of camels. Mingled with these pastoral noises were the clangings of deep-toned camel bells, the coppery clash of cowbells and the tinny tinkle of the little sheep bells.

When the Kazaks broke camp, every healthy adult animal was pressed into service to carry the group's multifarious belongings, including the babies till they were old enough to straddle, first a sheep, then a cow, and finally, a horse. Thus at an early age every Kazak boy and girl became a skilled rider. Many of the boys fought their first fight against Chinese or Communists before they were ten, although the most famous of all the modern Kazak leaders, Osman Batur, whose name has already been mentioned, did not go into action for the first time till he was twelve.

Osman Batur's teacher in the art of fighting was a guerilla leader named Boko Batur, whose name is as familiar to the Kazaks as Robin Hood's is to us, though few outside East Turkistan have ever heard of him. In Boko Batur's time in the days of the Manchu Empire, the Kazaks fought against the encroachments of the Chinese tax-gatherers who seized their beasts and called it taxation, and against the Chinese immigrant farmers who sought to drive them off the land which had always been theirs and farm it. Later the fight developed into a struggle against the attempts of Chinese and

Russian Communists who tried to order Kazak lives on Marxist lines, herding them into collective farms or taking them as fodder for the wheels of industry in Soviet-owned mines and factories.

When I asked Hussein Tajji, one of the chieftains now living near Develi in Turkey, why he had left his homeland, he replied:

"It is better to die than to live as an animal. An animal looks to man as though he were God. It is not right that a man should look to other men in such a fashion."

Nearly a century earlier, another Kazak leader, Kine Sari, used much the same words when the Russians bribed a Kazak to try to trick him into accepting terms of peace.

The envoy, as the story goes, said:

"Can the horned ram, even though he be the leader of a mighty herd, defeat the lion?"

Kine Sari answered:

"He who sets a snare for an evil purpose, leaves his manhood therein. Is it not better to die in battle, or perish in the waterless desert, than to accept dishonour and live as a slave?"

In this faith, the Kazaks of our own time girded their sword-belts and hand grenades round their waists, slung their rifles and machine guns—when they had them—over their shoulders and mounted their horses to give battle. They were no longer intent to conquer Asia and beyond as in the days of Genghis Khan and Attila and Tamerlane; they were putting up a last fight to save their cherished way of life from being destroyed by the two most powerful imperialisms Asia has ever known—more powerful than Genghis Khan himself and more ruthless—the Soviet Union and China. The fact that the Kazaks stood no chance whatever of succeeding against such foes did not deter them for one moment. They felt, like Hussein Tajji and Kine Sari, that it was better to die than to live as animals.

What began as a battle against Chinese nationalism and turned into a battle against Communism, Chinese and Russian combined, went on spasmodically and with growing bitterness in the years between 1930 and 1951. In the latter year came the climax: the exodus to Kashmir across the grim

Takla Makan desert and the inhospitable mountains of North Tibet. The final phase, so far as we are concerned here, followed fifteen months later, in 1953-4: the journey by air, land and sea from Kashmir to Turkey. There, thanks to the generosity of the Turkish Government, the Kazak refugees now have roofs over their heads, though I suspect they would rather have tents.

Before I tell the Kazak story, it is necessary to introduce some of the principal characters from whom I learned it. First, there is Ali Beg. In his native land Ali Beg was a chief. Turkish law does not recognise such a rank, holding that all men, except perhaps officials, are equal. Ali Beg, however, cannot help being one of those individuals who is more equal than others. Anyone who has visited Ali Beg at his home in Salihli can see for himself that he is still the head of the little Kazak community of some three hundred families. Living near him is his war-time colleague and assistant, Hamza. Between them, Ali Beg and Hamza provided most of the information in this book about the Kazaks' long struggle against the Communists, in which they have played a leading part during most of their lives. I offer them my grateful thanks and my profound admiration as well as my sincere apologies if I have misunderstood them, or inadvertently misrepresented their views. And may I, at this point, also pay tribute to the English friend who accompanied me to Turkey and who acted as an interpreter in more ways than one, and to Douglas Carruthers, Gold Medallist of the Royal Geographical Society, who so generously placed his unrivalled geographical knowledge of Central Asia and his unique collection of photographs at my disposal. Finally, thanks are due to Hassan, Ali Beg's son for much useful work as a translator.

Ali Beg, in the days of his prosperity, had three large tents, one for each of his wives. All were made of the felted hair of his own sheep and, because he was chief, they were white instead of black or brown or grey like those of most of his followers. When he moved from his winter to his summer quarters and back again in the autumn, each tent was taken apart and each section, weighing well over a hundredweight, was rolled round its wooden framework and laid on the back

of a camel or an ox. There were ten or twelve sections to each tent and, when all the sections were laced together with broad embroidered strips of webbing, the circular space they enclosed measured some thirty feet across. In the middle, under the round aperture through which the smoke escaped, was a great iron pot which five or even six men could only just hoist on to the back of Ali Beg's strongest camel. In those days, Ali Beg was a "ming-bashi," or ruler of a thousand families, and the tally of his own personal flocks and herds ran into five figures. The group of which he was the head, owned and tended about three hundred thousand sheep, fourteen to fifteen thousand mixed cattle, nine to ten thousand milch cows and, perhaps, a thousand camels besides horses enough and to spare for every man and woman, boy and girl.

Ali Beg and Hamza were near neighbours in their original homes. Seeing Hamza for the first time, one would not think that he is a veteran of no less than a hundred and sixteen hand-to-hand battles against his people's enemies. He is still only thirty-three but first went to war at the age of ten, by the side of his eldest brother, Yunus Hajji, who was more than twenty years his senior. Physically, he is a little smaller than Ali Beg but mentally he is alert enough to have reached the equivalent rank of Colonel by the time he was twenty.

In their own land of East Turkistan, Ali Beg, Hamza and their followers ate mostly curds and cheese during the summer and flesh during the winter, as well as bread throughout the year. Kazak housewives pride themselves on their skill in preparing milk products of which they know at least twenty-six varieties, from the hard, almost stone-like, sheep's cheeses which they chew as appetisers before a feast, to the "koumiss," or fermented whey, skinfuls of which are carried on a journey and also drunk on festive occasions.

Koumiss is most prized when made from mares' milk. But usually it is prepared from the milk of any animals that happen to be able to supply it when it is needed. In pre-Communist days, it would have been a very poor Kazak family which did not have at least one skinful of koumiss hanging on a hand-embroidered strip of webbing inside the tent. A stick, shaped like a small paddle, protruded from the mouth of the

skin, and every time a member of the household passed, she or he moved the paddle vigorously up and down to promote proper fermentation.

Another of the refugees in Turkey who deserves special mention is the man who first told me about Osman Batur of the Altai Mountains. His comrades call him Karamullah—Karamullah the Bard. Just before I met him, Karamullah composed an epic poem in honour of Osman the Hero and we invited him to record it on our little portable tape-recorder in a hotel dormitory-bedroom at Develi, the small market town in the very heart of Turkey—four hundred miles from the settlement at Salihli—where there is another batch of Kazak refugees, totalling altogether some seven to eight hundred people.

Karamullah sang part of his saga, intoned part and spoke the rest. The setting in which he did so was about as incongruous as it could possibly be. At home in East Turkistan, Karamullah would have been seated in the place of honour in the chieftain's tent with the great cooking-pot simmering gently on the cow-dung or wood fire and the acrid smoke swirling gently towards the top of the felted tent before escaping into the keen night air through the aperture at the top. Every now and again, the tent flap would have been lifted and men and women, boys and girls, would have slipped in, each to the humbler or grander place appropriate to their social position and each leaving their outer shoes, which they call caloshes, just inside the threshold. Then they would have seated themselves to listen cross-legged, silent and wide-eyed on the cushions and mats and lovely home-woven carpets which lay on the felt-covered earth all round the central fire.

Karamullah's audience at Develi consisted of half a dozen Kazaks, refugees like himself and clad, like him, in shapeless and nondescript European clothes, the gift of Turkish sympathisers. In addition, there were a Turkish doctor of philosophy, a Turkish lady professor of linguistics, her husband who is a lecturer at the same university as his wife, their joint assistant, my Kazak-speaking colleague from England who was operating the recorder, and myself. Instead of the silent tent-flap there was a wooden door which creaked raspingly on

its hinges as people came in or went out. Every now and then a lorry snorted noisily past the window, or a cock started to crow, and we heard all these extraneous noises reproduced much too faithfully when we played the tape back for Karamullah and his friends to hear.

In their summer homes in East Turkistan, the Kazak encampments were too far away from the roads to be plagued by back-firing lorries, though in later days these contraptions often passed their winter quarters. Generally they were Russian Communist ones filled with loot from East Turkistan—or tribute, if you prefer: live animals and wheat requisitioned from the owners without payment, or, perhaps, gold and wolfram won by forced labourers from the bountiful deposits in the Altai.

The song that Karamullah sang about Osman Batur was filled—like all Kazak poetry—with incomprehensible allusions to ancient history and legend which the rest of us could not understand. There was one line, for example, about "He who wears the Golden Caftan" over which I pondered for a long while. Then, a few weeks later, when I was visiting a museum at Konya containing relics of the Moslem sect known as the Whirling Dervishes, near which another group of Kazak refugees was to settle shortly, I noticed that the founder of the sect six or seven hundred years ago used to wear a Caftan, or special shirt, over his cuirass, which was supposed to protect him from the weapons of his enemies. Unfortunately Osman's caftan, if he ever wore one, did not possess that virtue. He certainly bore a charmed life for many years. But the Communists captured him in the end and he is dead.

Though it is only five years since Osman Batur died, legends about him are already current among the Kazaks and we may be sure they are being told secretly today in many Kazak households behind the Iron Curtain. His admirers have even named an era for him, speaking of "the 40th year of Osman Batur," as we would say, A.D. 1939, the year the second World War started. Nevertheless, some of the refugees chaffed Karamullah about his saga, accusing him of having credited the Hero with feats of arms and of courage which were really performed by others. Some of these feats appear in this story

and, if I have mistakenly attributed them to the wrong man, there is nevertheless, ample testimony that they were actually performed. They do, therefore, rightly belong to the great Kazak epic which is a much bigger thing than the exploits of any single individual because it is the story of a whole nation.

When a bard sang his songs, he sometimes accompanied himself on the dumbri, which is a long wooden instrument rather like a guitar but with only two strings. Plucked by the fingers of a master, like Karamullah, each string of a dumbri often seems, though I cannot understand how, to be producing two notes at once, and in such hands each note always sings on sturdily till the next plucking of the string. I heard it played a number of times at Develi, sometimes very well and sometimes indifferently. There was one particularly enchanting little air which Karamullah played—plaintive and sweet and nostalgic. He said it came from the Altai but he did not tell me its name.

Most Kazaks can play the dumbri and most of those we met in Turkey could not only sing but write their own words to the music. We brought back recordings of several newly composed songs of this type, set to traditional airs which date back many hundreds of years. But more often than not the words were written by those who sang to us—men like Karamullah; two of Ali Beg's three wives; boys and girls from fifteen to seventeen years old. We also brought one air from Salihli played on a curious instrument known as the Sibizka, a plain hollow pipe with three holes in it. The player inserted his tongue into the top of the pipe to form a kind of mouthpiece and while playing the air at one side of his mouth, droned out a bagpipe-like accompaniment from the other. In this mysterious fashion he produced a perfectly lovely and most unusual melody which represented the flowing of the Kara—Black—Irtysh, the great river which rises in the Altai Mountains and flows right across the wide steppes of Soviet Kazakstan and Siberia where it joins the river Ob on its way to the Arctic.

So far as I know, all the Kazak music recorded for us in Develi and Salihli is new to the free world except possibly one song which the Russian Army used as a marching song during

the war. Among the others is one called *The Flight of the Heron,* which was sung by Kadisha and Mulia, two of Ali Beg's wives. Herons are birds of doom to the Kazaks so the song is a sad one. So, unhappily, is the *Lament* sung for us by a little girl of ten or thereabouts to commemorate her father who had just died. *Yerim Tau—The Mountains of my Country*—is a nostalgic composition which brings in the Kazak names of all the loved peaks of East Turkistan. Another song which Mulia sang into the microphone is called *Gone with the Wind,* but of course it has no connection with the book of that name. Karamullah and some of his friends rendered the *Schoolboys' Song,* which begins with the line: "In the name of God I bring you learning." The airs of the songs called *This Changing World* and *O World,* were probably composed about the time of Henry VIII but the words were written specially for our benefit. I must confess that I am rather sorry the Kazaks are so fond of writing new words or verses for their traditional music. No doubt it is good for their imagination. But it means that the old ballads based on the exploits of their past heroes tend only too often to disappear.

After Karamullah the Bard had recorded his saga, I asked him to write it down in the Arabic script which the Kazaks normally use and then invited him and his friends to lunch. If I had been his guest in his tent in the Altai Mountains we would all have dipped the fingers of our right hands into the dish—and burnt them in the process if we were unused to eating Kazak fashion. But at Develi we all used knives and forks and the Turkish restaurant proprietor brought us the food plateful by plateful. When we had finished, Hussein Tajji who was sitting on one side of Karamullah—I was on the other—began to poke fun at the Bard. Karamullah bore it silently, evidently enjoying it as much as anybody, till we rallied him for not answering back. Then he said quietly:

"I would pay him three times over if only he would lend me his hat."

This was a huge cowboy's ten-galloner which sat strangely on Hussein Tajji's thin mongol-type face with its grey-blue eyes and its short sparse dark beard which is still without a white hair though he is over sixty.

Karamullah is a younger man than Hussein Tajji by at least ten years. But, unlike his friend, he has lost all his front teeth as a result of his privations. No doubt his real name is not Karamullah, which means Black Priest, but Kerim-ullah, Bounty of God. Whether he got his nickname because of his unusually swarthy complexion or because, being really a mullah, he is reputed to have a knowledge of the black arts, I cannot say. But, being a sincere Moslem, he would certainly not wish to be regarded as a dabbler in necromancy though some Kazak pseudo-mullahs used to practise it, in emulation, no doubt, of the Mongol priests who, being of another faith, have no such qualms.

Hussein Tajji, as we shall see in due course, left his original home at Barkul under Communist pressure more than twenty years ago and settled near a lake called Gezkul which he pronounces: Gaz-cool. The second syllable actually means "lake," and the first represents the distance from the fingertips to the forearm, and also a ruler. So every Kazak, without seeing it, would know that Gezkul is a long, narrow, straight stretch of water shaped like a ruler. Most Kazak names are descriptive and self-explanatory to those who understand their tongue. The one I like best is Twittering Bird Valley. But such names have one big disadvantage. They tend to recur in all sorts of different localities many miles apart causing confusion in these days of rapid travel though mattering less to nomads who normally revolve in a small orbit.

When Hussein Tajji was living in his felted tents in Barkul and Gezkul with his wives and children and retainers, he had a friend who lived near him named Sultan Sherif. I met Sultan Sherif while he was still in the "hospitality centre" near Istanbul where the Turkish Government houses the Kazak refugees before settling them on the land.

I was introduced to him by another refugee from East Turkistan, Mohammed Emin Bugra, who now has a lovely house of his own on the Asiatic side of the Bosphorus opposite Istanbul. Mohammed Emin is not a Kazak but a Turki, most of whom are farmers or merchants who have lived in East Turkistan as long as the Kazaks and are far more numerous. But Mohammed Emin's father was Emir or Prince, of Khotan,

and he himself was at one time Deputy Chairman of the provincial Government of Sinkiang as the Chinese call East Turkistan. He managed to escape to Kashmir just before the Communists regained control of the Government of the Province in 1949. He knows, to his cost, the political intrigues which led to their doing so, and which play their part in the story of Kazak resistance.

Ali Beg, Hamza, Karamullah, Hussein Tajji, Sultan Sherif and Mohammed Emin are still alive. The rest of those who took a leading part in the struggle to save East Turkistan and whose names and actions are written in this book, and in the hearts of their compatriots are, almost without exception, dead.

CHAPTER I

Birth of a Hero

BIRTH and death happen too frequently in and all around the Kazak felted tents to call for either comment or the making of a written record. It is in the nature of things that lambs, calves, camel colts, and the foals of mares should arrive punctually, time after time, in their proper season. Children arrive just as naturally and almost as punctually, though at any season of the year. For a while the children, like the young animals, are the objects of special parental care and loving devotion. But parents have much work to do in a pastoral community. So the young are left more and more to their own devices and soon launch out into a succession of experiments in which frequent errors yield unforgettable lessons and instil in the young a healthy and watchful attention to the behaviour of their elders.

Thus it is that in the Kazak tents, a record is kept of annual festivals and fasts, such as Courban Id and Ramadan, but not often of such commonplace events as birthdays. So there was no one among the Kazak refugees in Turkey who could tell me on what day, or even in which month, Osman Batur was born, though all of them knew the year. His father and mother are long dead. His three brothers and his sister—if any of them are still alive, which is unlikely—would not know, for he was the firstborn. His friends declare that he never talked about the matter himself and the event was not recorded in a registry of births for there were no such things in this distant part of the Chinese Empire. All we know is that he was born in 1899, the year the Boer War started.

Osman's father, Islam Bai, was not merely a herder and breeder of animals but also, and rather exceptionally, a "dry" farmer who lived in the Kuk Togai district of the Altai not far from where the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian juris-

dictions meet. As a "dry" farmer, Islam Bai was free to go where he listed while the crop was growing instead of being tied to his plot by the need of irrigating it like the "wet" farmers in the plains who depended on irrigation.

So, each spring, Islam Bai broadcast ears of wheat over the land after he had scratched its surface with an iron-tipped plough drawn by a team of his own cattle. Then he betook himself with his family and felted tents, his flock and his herds and his servants up into the alpine pastures of the Altai, leaving the seed to the winds and rain and sun and the will of God to fructify and ripen against the time when he would return to see what there was to harvest.

In 1899, therefore, he and his wives, one of them being great with child, pitched their tents as usual in the Altai Mountains as Abram did in the hills which afterwards became the hills of Judaea. We do not know exactly where their encampment was but it may well have been in the Tokuz Tarau—the Valley of the Nine-Toothed Comb—a meeting place of streamlets bubbling down from nine clefts in the towering hills and bringing ice-cold water from the upper Altai into the broad valleys of mingled forest land and pastures where Islam Bai's group of about one hundred families lived throughout each summer.

There are many valleys named Tokuz Tarau in East Turkistan just as there are many lakes called Kuk Su or Blue Sea, and Kizil Uzun or Red Stream. There is also one Pass of the Venerable Wind—which the Chinese call Lao Feng-kou. The Pass of the Venerable Wind carries one of the three main roads from Soviet Kazakstan to Urumchi the capital of the Chinese province of Sinkiang. In the days of the first pro-Soviet Governor of the province, Chin Shu-jen, a lorry carrying Chinese soldiers broke down at the top of the Pass and, while the driver was trying to find the cause of the trouble, the Venerable Wind piled snow upon him and upon the lorry and its occupants and froze all to death. The bodies were not recovered till the snows melted several months later. Legend says that the Pass of the Venerable Wind has often done worse things than that and declares it to be capable of such feats as blowing whole caravans into the lake which lies below it.

Presently the time came for Islam Bai's wife to be delivered. When her pains began, she sent a servant with a message to her mother, who rode over from her encampment in a nearby valley, stretched a rope tautly across the inside of Islam Bai's tent, which she called an "aool," and told her daughter to kneel in front of it, putting her two arms over the rope up to the armpits, and then to relax and press forward alternatively with her body. As the pains grew more intense, the mother fetched a lambskin bottle and gave it to her daughter to hold, telling her to blow into it strongly each time she pressed forward. Finally, when the mother saw that the time was near, she asked Islam Bai to give her some pieces of rough felt and placed them under her daughter as the girl half-rose from her knees while pressing on the rope. After he had brought them, the mother told Islam Bai he was no longer wanted and beckoned him to leave the tent till the child was born.

So Islam Bai waited outside until a tiny shrill cry mingled with the murmuring of the north wind in the forest trees; drowned the chattering of the stream as it gossiped with the pebbles, and finally faded away amid the bleatings and lowings and the bells of his animals. When Islam Bai heard it, he lifted the flap of his tent, tapping each of the heels of his caloshes off in turn against the toe of the other foot in order that he should not soil the carpets of his aool when he entered. As he went in, he stooped low lest he should bring ill-luck upon his household by touching the wooden frame of the opening, and he stepped wide and high for the same reason lest he should stumble over the threshold.

Inside, Islam Bai looked inquiringly at his mother-in-law who nodded her head to show that all was well. Then he said to his wife:

"How shall we name the child? Shall we leave the decision to God and name him after the first living creature, whatsoever it be, that my eyes light upon when I go outside the tent? Or shall we choose a name for him ourselves out of the Holy Koran?"

Islam Bai's wife knew what to answer for she and her husband had discussed the matter very often in the days before her time came. She chose the second method and the child was called Osman. The other name by which his fellow-country-

men came to know his Batur—Hero—did not become his till 1942 when they awarded it to him by acclamation and gave him the Liberation Medal at the same time. Nevertheless, in his infancy, his mother often used to gather him in her arms and say to him after he had fallen and hurt himself: "There! There! Batur! Batur! Don't cry! Be a hero!"

As soon as Osman had received his name, Islam Bai, in accordance with custom, went outside his tent again and killed a sheep. He first took the entrails to his wife's mother who seethed them in milk to make a thick broth with which to nourish her daughter's body and fill her breasts with milk. Afterwards, when he had skinned the carcase, his mother-in-law cut it up and simmered it in the great iron pot which stood over the fire in the centre of the tent. Until his wife had consumed the whole carcase her sole duty in the tent was to nurse her baby.

After Osman's grandmother had washed the little boy all over in warm water from the great copper kettle which took its turn with the seething pot on the iron tripod over the fire, she dried him with a cotton cloth and then encased his tiny body in a single garment of thickly-wadded cotton quilting which had a wide open slit up the back. She then placed him in a wooden rocking cot with pieces of soft felt under him which were afterwards either washed or burnt as was appropriate. Except when he was being nursed, Osman lay in his rocking cot all the time until he was big enough to learn to crawl. And long after he had reached the crawling stage, his arms were always bound to his side when he was lying in his cot. If you had asked his mother why she did not want him to suck his thumb, or lie with his arms over his head, she would have replied, rather pityingly, that it was well known that a child slept more peacefully with its hands by its side and that putting its hands over its head was liable to cause convulsions. And if you had suggested to her that it might like a dummy, she would have been really horrified.

Whether she was right or wrong about such matters, Osman grew and flourished. His mother's milk was ample so that he did not have to be held between the hind legs of a nanny goat to supplement it. Indeed, his mother went on suckling him for

more than two years believing, though mistakenly as it turned out, that she would not conceive again while she was doing so. As soon as his first teeth showed through his gums, she gave him a mutton bone to gnaw and he had a crust of bread as soon as his fingers were able to close round it. As he grew older, he drank cows' milk and goats' milk from his eating bowl which his mother held to his lips as he sat on her lap. Sometimes his mother, but more often his father, gave him a piece of sugar broken off with a knife from the great cone-shaped loaf which Islam Bai had bought from an itinerant Chinese merchant, but which actually came from Tsarist Russia.

When Osman started to crawl, he was left just as much to his own devices as when he had been lying in his cot. His mother was too busy doing her share of the household chores to watch over him, and his father spent most of his days out of doors, generally with his animals, but sometimes hunting either with his shotgun or, more often, especially in winter, with his hunting eagle. Occasionally he went away for two or three days. So Osman, like all Kazak children, had to fend for himself, getting into, and out of, mischief and danger as best he could. Perhaps his parents believed that the amulet which the Mullah placed round his neck soon after he was born would protect him. The amulet was made of two pieces of cloth sewn together and contained his name and a verse from the Koran. It was tied on with string and Osman wore it all his life. It would normally have been buried with him, but the Communists who killed him severed his head from his body and did not bury either part.

While teaching himself to stand upright and walk, Osman's greatest danger was from the open fire which burnt continuously in the centre of the aool, and from the iron cauldron, or the kettle, hanging over it. If his unsteady footsteps had made him lurch against the tripod, or seek to save himself from falling by grasping the vessel on the fire, he might have been scalded or burnt, even to death, as indeed happened to some of the other children of Islam Bai's group. But the amulet, or Providence, though not his parents who were too busy, watched over him.

One other precaution Osman's mother took as soon as he

could walk beyond the tent door. That was to tuck a crust of bread securely into his coat in front of his heart so that he would not starve to death if he wandered beyond the encampment and could not find his way back. For the same reason, his sister had a little tied-on bag filled with parched corn. Even in Turkey today, the Kazak mothers observe this ancient custom. Parched corn has been the nomad's "iron ration" at least since the days when Jesse sent David with an ephah of parched corn for his three brothers who were fighting in Saul's army against the Philistines, and ten cheeses for the captain of their thousand.

The first thing that Osman did as soon as he could toddle out of his mother's tent was to make friends with the dogs which slept under its lee and gave warning when a stranger was approaching. I think his father and mother would have stopped him if they had noticed. Dogs, according to the Moslem law, are unclean, and for good reason in that part of the world seeing that for countless generations they have been the only disposers of camp refuse and ordure. But Osman's parents had their work to do, so they were generally not there to see the dogs, having finished scavenging, come and lick Osman's face when he held out his arms to them.

Soon Osman was wandering further afield to where some of his father's lambs and sheep were tethered. Sometimes he went simply to play with them. Sometimes his parents sent him to take them their food. Before long, he was climbing on to their backs. If he fell off, he laughed or cried and climbed up again.

However, long before Osman was able to do such things as these, summer was beginning to wane and it was time for Islam Bai to leave the Valley of the Nine-Toothed Comb to see whether God had caused his crops in the Kara Irtysh valley to prosper during the sower's absence. In a good year, Islam Bai could expect to harvest one-hundred-fold, and more, from the short stocky Altai wheat, though its straw is seldom more than a foot high. In a bad year, he would have to sell animals in the market and buy grain from the millers in the towns to whom he generally took his grain to be ground into

flour unless, as is possible, he owned one of the rare water-mills which Kazaks have erected in some places.

Eager, no doubt, to see what God had provided in that first year of Osman Batur, Islam Bai and his wives and their servants took down the felted tents, slipping the simple knots in the strips of webbing which held the felt taut against the trellised wooden framework. Then they removed the upper poles from their niches in the trellis beneath and the circular frames which held the poles together, rolling the half-inch-thick pieces of felt round the trellis and tying them into neat bundles with the webbing. Meanwhile, the women were making sure that the great metal-bound wooden chests in which the nomad families carried their bedding, their carpets, their ceremonial clothes, their documents and their books, among which was a copy of the Koran, were securely fastened and made as waterproof as possible in case they should fall into the water when the animals which carried them were crossing a stream. The cauldron, too, which weighed the best part of a hundred and fifty pounds, had to be hoisted on to the camel which Islam Bai himself had carefully chosen as the fittest to bear such a burden. Finally, Osman's cot, with Osman himself securely strapped inside it, was lashed between the humps of another camel, though sometimes his mother carried him in a cloth sling on her breast.

The rest of the family's belongings were divided between the other animals: camels, cattle, sheep, goats, and horses, each being laden according to its strength. Then, when everything had been done—and it generally took about one hour to break camp when there was no need for haste—Islam Bai, his wives and servants mounted their riding horses and the cavalcade started. How many of the other families in Islam Bai's group accompanied them, I cannot say; none unless they, too, were "dry" farmers. Those whose sole occupation was to tend their flocks stayed in the Valley of the Nine-Toothed Comb till the winds of late autumn and the early prospect of frost and snow told them it was time to follow Islam Bai to their usual winter quarters.

No doubt, some of Islam Bai's personal followers and servants also stayed in the upper valley to care for the beasts he

left behind. When his herdsmen brought their charges down in due time, Islam Bai, following the ancient Kazak custom, did not count them; he asked instead:

"Where is the black ewe with the white forehoof? And the dun cow with the up-pointed right horn? And the ring-streaked and spotted she-goat?"

His servants replied:

"The ewe was taken by a wolf and the cow put her left forehoof into a cleft between two rocks, breaking the bone so that we had to slay her. As for the ring-streaked and spotted she-goat, she was a grisly animal so, when we needed meat, we chose her for the slaying."

If Islam Bai believed what his servants told him, he answered:

"It is the will of God!" But if he did not, he said: "We will go into that later." Then there might be a quarrel and blows and perhaps the dispute came in the end before the Kazi, or judge, of the group for settlement.

As Osman grew bigger, his wanderings became correspondingly more adventurous. He had few toys and maybe none at all, except a knife, which was much more to him than a toy. But he was soon galloping around the encampment, riding a stick. Sometimes he linked his arms round a playmate's middle and they galloped together. Such games generally ended with a bout of wrestling, half of it fun and the other half a trial of strength and skill by which the boys established their standing among themselves. Osman, whose father was a Djuz-bashi, or ruler of a hundred families, had also a certain position by virtue of ancestry. But Osman's main claim to obedience and respect, especially after he reached his 'teens, lay in his own personality. It is said of him in this connection that from his early youth, he was universally regarded as exceptional.

Like all Kazak children, Osman was brought up the hard way. In his father's tent where he ate and spent much time—he slept in the tent which belonged to his mother—he had few rights except to listen and obey instantly if his father gave him an order. If he ever forgot himself when excited and let his tongue betray him into speaking without being spoken to, his

father might reach for his riding whip which hung with the family's bridles and saddles on the left side of the tent door.

More often, however, he called to the boy's mother and said:

"Woman! It seems that a pig, or maybe a dog, was hanging round my aool while I was out tending my flocks about nine months before this thy son was born. Otherwise, whence can have come his beastly manners, speaking when he has not received permission?"

On such occasions, Osman went to bed without his supper as, indeed, other little boys used to do nearly fifty years ago whose homes were built of bricks and mortar instead of felt, and who slept on iron bedsteads with mattresses instead of on three or four layers of quilt laid on the bare earth in the humblest place in the tent nearest the door.

In spite of such corrections, we are told that Osman loved and respected his father who taught him many things as they rode or walked together in the mountains. On such occasions Osman could ask freely whatever questions he liked. Most of them, naturally, were about animals. He soon learned to recognise all the wild beasts with which the Kazaks shared the unenclosed land, as our own ancestors shared theirs before the village common land became private property.

When Osman was nine or seven or five—we know for certain only that it was not when he was eight or six or four—the Mullah was asked to come and circumcise him. Afterwards there was a great feast to celebrate the passing of this first milestone in the child's life. Another milestone was reached when he was eight and his father sent him to the Kazak tent school. Like the tent in which Osman lived, the school tent was called simply "Aool." So, to distinguish the one from the other I shall spell the school tent with a capital A though there are no capital letters in the Arabic script, which the Kazaks normally used.

The Aool which Osman attended was the usual communal affair maintained by the group of which Islam Bai was the head. It had no furniture except some mats on the ground and there was a bare minimum of equipment. Almost every Kazak encampment had one lest the children should have to go to a

school maintained by the Chinese, where the teaching would be in the Chinese tongue and the teachers themselves would not be Moslems. This attitude was shared not only by the Kazaks but by all the other racial groups in East Turkistan—Turkis, Mongols, Kirghiz, Tartars, Uzbeks—from whom the Kazaks have generally held aloof, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century.

So Osman, at the age of eight, went to the Aool where the Mullah who had circumcised him, and who combined the offices of priest and schoolmaster, taught him first to repeat verses from the Koran, which is in Arabic, and then how to understand, read and write them. Later, the children learned other things: the history of Genghis Khan and Attila and other more recent Kazak heroes such as Boko Batur who was still very much alive. Then there was arithmetic, geography and, most important of all, how to write poetry and recite it. Many of the old songs and poems in which the history of the past was enshrined had innumerable verses and Osman and his fellow-pupils often used to be made to repeat alternate ones in their tents in the evening while their parents listened, prompted perhaps and, finally, applauded the one who was able to go on the longest. Girls were often better than boys at memorising, but Osman almost always out-remembered even the girls.

Almost from the beginning of their schooling, the children learned to set their own words to the old music the Kazaks love. The new verses are always full of allusions to older ones and to the customs of a bygone age which makes them hard to understand. But while I listened to Kazak boys and girls in Turkey singing songs with words they had written themselves, I often found myself wondering how boys and girls at home would get on if they were called upon to do the same thing with, let us say, Elizabethan music; or any music, if it comes to that.

One of the first songs Osman and his fellow students learnt was the Schoolboys' Song in which the scholars declare:

> "In the name of God, we greet you, O Doctor,
> Not one wrong word is found in your teaching,
> Not one wrong word in your students' mouths."

The Mullah who taught Osman was a stern task-master but Osman himself was an eager pupil. Soon he could sing a song, and write a poem, as well as ride a horse, better than anyone else—adult or adolescent—in the little group of families which voluntarily accepted Islam Bai's leadership. His fame in these directions was spread to other Kazak communities in the Altai by wandering bards, like Karamullah, and by the frequent guests to whom Islam Bai dispensed hospitality. Before long, he became known throughout the region as a "spiritual" boy, an unusual description in the mouths of tent-dwellers whose lives were spent in animal husbandry and who had no knowledge of, nor interest in, metaphysics except insofar as their innate and unspoken determination to preserve their traditional way of life had a metaphysical foundation. But the word, spiritual, was used deliberately by almost all Osman's former comrades in Turkey. I think that when they used it, they were referring to such things as his love for the Kazak way of life, his respectful devotion to his parents, his protective care for his own family and those dependent upon him, and also his capacity to inspire confidence among his followers. Perhaps, too, they included the ruthless hatred he felt for his people's enemies—first, in point of time, the Chinese but first in point of intensity, the Communists, whether Chinese or Russian, who did not merely seek to milk them like cows and sheep as the Chinese nationalists had done, but to kill their individuality.

But, in his youth, Osman's hatred was only for the Chinese because there were no Communists in those days. He used to listen eagerly to the tales of Kazak heroes who had fought the Chinese in the past and, as is always the way with patriotic songs and stories, defeated them. I am sure that Osman used to dream of emulating these heroes.

One day when Osman was eleven or twelve, there was a stir outside his father's tent and one of Osman's younger brothers, knowing that for once he could interrupt his elders without risking reproof, rushed in shouting: "Boko Batur is coming! Boko Batur is coming!"

"How knowest thou that it is Boko Batur, noisy one, having never seen him?" asked Islam Bai.

"It is his horse—the one of which we have heard tell at story time—jet black without a white hair on its body. And the rider is wearing Boko Batur's plum-coloured tumak on his head with the Kirei owl's feather floating in the air above it. And there are a score of armed men riding behind him. Who but Boko Batur would come thus attended, yet in peace?"

The tent watchdogs were barking loudly by this time, so Islam Bai rose to his feet while his wives rummaged hastily in the metal-bound wooden chests for their husband's ceremonial tumak and long embroidered brocade gown and for their own best head-dresses.

As soon as Islam Bai was suitably arrayed, he strode to the tent door and held the flap wide open, saying as he did so:

"Enter, O welcome one. Thy coming strengthens us."

Then he waited for Boko Batur to dismount.

CHAPTER II

Osman leaves Home

WHEN a guest arrived at a Kazak tent forty years ago, and, indeed, until the Communists decided that the past was only fit to be destroyed, he was always accorded the traditional reception which still remained much the same as in the days before history began and exactly the same as it has been since the Kazaks were converted to Islam between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries. Consequently, though there is no actual record of Boko Batur's entertainment in the tent of Islam Bai, we can reconstruct the scene without difficulty.

"Salaam aleikum—Peace be with you," said Boko Batur, as he stooped to enter the tent, lifting his feet carefully to avoid touching the threshold and taking care that his long coat should not brush against the doorposts as he stepped inside. Then he tapped off his caloshes, one foot against the other, leaving them by the door before entering the main part of the tent.

"And on you peace," Islam Bai answered, taking Boko Batur's out-stretched hand, first in his right hand and then in both. After that, the two men touched their own foreheads, lips and breasts with their right hands before sitting down together facing the door. Altogether, sixteen conventional greetings were exchanged and when host and guest had finished exchanging them with one another and their respective male personal attendants, all squatted down in a circle around the fire in the correct order of precedence, after which each one placed his two hands together, palms upward, and muttered a prayer from the Koran. Finally all repeated together the words: "Allahu akbar!—God is great!" As they spoke them, they raised their hands with a sweeping movement which ended with stroking their beards.

"The presence of such a guest gives us courage," Islam Bai

remarked when they had finished. "Here, imp of Satan," he went on in a different tone, turning to Osman who was standing just behind him. "The lad has no manners or he would know that a son greets his father's guests as befits them."

Osman did know. He also knew that his father's reproof was no more than a figure of speech. But he came forward rather timidly all the same for Boko Batur was a famous figure of whose deeds he had heard almost every day since he could understand what was said around him. Nevertheless, he looked Boko Batur in the eyes without blinking and greeted the guest in the same way that his father had done though when he said: "Allahu akbar!" his voice was almost inaudible.

"This, no doubt, is the lad of whom I have heard speak in the tents of my friends," said Boko Batur, keeping hold of Osman's left hand and pulling him forward so that he could look at him. "It is said of him that he has strength and wisdom far beyond his years and that he is destined for a great future."

"The boy is a fool," replied his father. "A good-for-nothing, a scamp. Run away, idiot, and see to our guest's horse."

"Is not such a guest," Osman boldly pleaded, "of much more importance than even the horse of such a one? May I not stay and see that the stallion's master lacks nothing?"

"O my life!" boomed Boko Batur. "Didst hear what the lad said? Wai! Wai! And he is not yet a stripling!"

"Guests are in the care of fathers," Islam Bai declared. "Little lads, like this saucy one, have lowlier tasks. And it is meet that they should do as they are bid."

So Osman, knowing that his father's apparent chiding hid approval, and well-pleased with Boko Batur's exclamations, ran out of the tent to take charge of the big black stallion.

He found that one of Boko Batur's servants was leading it up and down in accordance with the invariable Kazak custom, in case its legs should stiffen after it had been ridden for a long period. So Osman took the reins from the servant and then, greatly daring, climbed up into the saddle.

"Wa yapramai!" ejaculated the groom who was standing nearby. "It is a miracle! The master's beast throws him not. Never before have I seen it brook another rider. Verily the lad

is destined to be a leader of men as well as a rider of proud horses."

Hearing his servant's exclamation from within the tent, Boko Batur came to the tent door.

"Ah ha!" he called. "So thou wouldst ride mine own beast, audacious one."

"I thought but to cool him down before watering and feeding him," said Osman timidly.

"It is well that he did not bite thy backside when thy foot touched the stirrup," laughed Boko Batur. "That he did not, is a sign that I did right to come."

"May I ride him now to the watering and feeding?" asked Osman a little more boldly.

"Verily, nay," replied Boko Batur loudly, with perhaps a covert glance over his shoulder to make sure that his host was listening. "Water him not and feed him not, for I must be away before nightfall."

"Nay! Nay!" expostulated Islam Bai in a horrified voice. "To depart so soon would shame my hospitality. . . Wife!" he called over his shoulder: "Bring swiftly the tea and bread, for our guest is discomfited by its being delayed. Bring it, I say, lest we be shamed by his departure."

So Islam Bai's Baibicha, or Chief Wife, brought copper bowls filled with salted tea and slices of the traditional salted bread, in a cloth knotted at the four corners, like the cloth filled with all manner of beasts for food which Peter saw in his vision being let down to him from Heaven. And, seeing it, Boko Batur suffered himself to be led back into the tent where he sat down again in his appointed place of honour and made ready to eat, protesting as he did so that he was not worthy. But he took the bowl of tea from the hands of Islam Bai's wife and drank it, sucking the liquid in noisily through his teeth and, between gulps, soaking pieces of the hard bread before putting it into his mouth.

"May I now bid Osman water and feed the stallion?" Islam Bai asked when Boko Batur had broken bread and drunk tea as custom prescribed. "For it is ordained that when a horse's labours for the day are ended, he shall be watered and then

fed so that his strength shall return for the tasks of the following day."

"The bounty of such a host is beyond praise," murmured Boko Batur.

"And if it be convenient, let the flock now be inspected so that a beast may be slain and my women make ready the evening meal," Islam Bai went on.

"Naught should be killed for this wanderer," protested Boko Batur. "Did I not say that I must be away before nightfall?"

"And did I not reply that so swift a departure would shame my hospitality?" Islam Bai reminded him. "And it is known that a horse should not be worked after it is watered and fed."

"To shame such a host is to injure oneself," declared Boko Batur, ignoring the remark about his horse. "Be it therefore as is most convenient to the host."

"Boy!" shouted Islam Bai, striding to the tent door. "Give the black stallion water and food seeing that his owner abides here this night. Fetch grain from the sack but lead the beast first to the river so that it may drink fresh water. And while the stallion is being watered and fed, let the pick of the yearling ewe lambs be brought to the door of the tent so that the guest may choose which he shall eat this night."

So Osman took the black stallion to the river, riding it there proudly instead of leading it as his father had said. And Boko Batur's servants marvelled, for the beast had never let them mount it. Nor would they have dared to try. None had been on its back before save Boko Batur only.

Back in the tent, emptied now of Boko Batur's retinue, the guerilla chieftain was still protesting.

"Wa yapramai!" he declared roundly. "No animal should be killed for me. Did not I and my bodyguard eat our fill before I left my encampment at dawn this very day to visit the tent of my friend?"

"Food is for the eating," maintained Islam Bai doggedly. "And the belly for filling. He who fills not the belly when there is opportunity, hungers the more in the days when he must fast."

"Yet it is unworthy in a guest to cause toil to his host's household," Boko Batur replied.

"Better the work," interposed Islam Bai's chief wife, "Better by far than the tears we women would shed if a guest, and one such as this one, should depart with his belly empty or even if it were filled with food which is unworthy of him."

So, finally, Boko Batur suffered himself to be led to the tent door where the sound of many bleatings showed that the yearlings were already assembled.

"Choosing is for the guest," declared Islam Bai. "But Hatanum—my wife—has spoken truly. If a guest in his modesty choose a beast which is not worthy either of himself or his host, then the host is bound to keep his eyes closed until a better choice has been made."

"With such a host," said Boko Batur, not without a glint of satisfaction, "What can a guest do but choose the flower of the flock?"

So saying, he placed his hand on the head of a well-grown ewe lamb which was at once led away to be slaughtered and made ready for the evening meal.

"Choose also for those who came with thee," said Islam Bai. So, because these numbered twenty, Boko Batur placed his hand on three more ewes and, when Islam Bai protested that this was not enough, on the heads of three more. And when the day ended, there was not much left of all the six, for the Kazaks are very hearty eaters.

The changeless laws of hospitality having thus been observed on both sides, Islam Bai led his guest back into the tent and the two men seated themselves again side by side on their cushions on the gaily-coloured home-woven and home-dyed carpets opposite the tent door while the women cut up the yearling and placed it piece by piece to simmer in the great cauldron, keeping the head to be roasted and eaten with rice after the carcase of the beast had been disposed of. Presently Osman came silently in, having finished his task of seeing to the stallion. He seated himself as unobtrusively as possible near the tent door on the other side of the fire but where he could both see and hear his elders without attracting their attention. But he had not been there long before he realised suddenly that he himself was the subject of their conversation.

"There is a boy by the tent door," he heard Boko Batur say. "I would learn what manner of lad he is."

"He is more foolish than most," Osman's father answered. "There are few in this valley who exceed him in folly whether it be playing tricks on horseback, climbing out of the saddle and under the horse's belly and so up again into the saddle on the other side while the beast is at full gallop; or whether it be in swimming across a flooded stream or composing ridiculous verses behind the Mullah's back in the Aool."

"Wai! Wai! All that is foolishness indeed," laughed Boko Batur. "There be many who can climb under a horse's belly at full gallop and some who can snatch a grown sheep from the ground as they ride past it and many who swim and many who write verses. Yet there are few who can do all these things well. . . Come hither, Osman, and seat thyself by me. Now, tell me, what else canst thou do? Canst shoot yet with a gun? Canst strike off the head of a sheep with a single stroke of a sword? How many rings canst thou discern around Saturn or the moons circling Jupiter? . . . Nay, friend," he ended, seeing that Islam Bai was about to answer. "Let the lad speak for himself. Then I shall know whether the tales I have heard about him are truth."

"Such things are better done than spoken of," said Osman. "And how can a boy do them as he should until he has the right teacher?"

"Ya Allah! Though I say it to his father's face, and his own, his like will never be born hereafter. Rumour for once speaks the truth. I would talk more of this matter after we have eaten."

To put these words into Boko Batur's mouth at such an early stage in his friendship with Osman is perhaps to draw a bow at a venture. But it is not a very long bow for it is on record that he used them about Osman on a number of occasions. We also do not know exactly at which of Boko Batur's visits to Islam Bai he made the proposal which follows, though it is quite certain that he made it.

But it is never the Kazak habit to talk of serious matters before dinner, so that after Boko Batur had intimated he had something serious he wished to speak about, the conversation

drifted to lighter topics, and Osman, realising that he was no longer wanted, crept silently back to his lowly place by the door. There he sat, trying to listen attentively while his elders, ignoring him completely, talked about their flocks, the hunting, the coming harvest, the affairs of their followers, the news about the inconvenient outside world which was beginning to hem them in. This last topic inevitably turned the conversation round to the Chinese.

"Is it true that the Kitai have put a price on the head of Boko Batur?" Islam Bai asked, taking care to avoid his guest's eyes.

"So I have been told," Boko Batur answered carelessly. "If it be true, it is good. Threatened men always live long."

"How much?"

"I have heard that it is ten thousand taels."

That was about £2,500 at the rates current in 1911, when a horse could be bought in East Turkistan for as little as ten taels.

"It is a lot of money. Has he no fear that someone might betray him for so great a sum?"

Boko Batur laughed.

"My own men would not. They know that the Kitai would pay the money into their hand to fulfil their promise, and then slip a rope round their necks before they reached the door. And no other man, or woman, will have the opportunity to earn the blood money—or, if they have it, will dare to use it."

"How many know where he spends this night?"

Boko Batur looked round carefully before replying in a lowered tone:

"Only those who saw him enter the tent of his blood-brother."

"Hush!" said Islam Bai, looking round in his turn. "It would be an evil day for both of us if an eavesdropper heard us speak of a bond that is secret between our two selves and besides us known only to the Mullah who mingled our bloods in the bowl as we swore the covenant with one another."

"There is one whom I would wish should know of it; and it shall be explained why I wish it later."

"Who is that?"

"The lad who is straining both his ears to hear us, over by the tent door. But let us not speak more of it till we have eaten. When the belly is full, the heart is contented. That is the time to speak to a friend what is in the heart. Words are ever big and boastful when there is overmuch room for them to puff themselves out with wind in the stomach."

Again, the story goes beyond what is actually recorded. But it is unlikely that there would be a definite record that any two men were actually joined in this most sacred of human relationships for, if there were, its usefulness would be destroyed. So far as Boko Batur and Islam Bai are concerned it would have been inconceivable that each did not have a blood-brother. And it is highly unlikely that Boko Batur would have treated Osman in the way he did unless he had stood in that relationship with Osman's father.

Blood-brotherhood is the closest bond between two individuals in the Kazak scheme of things; closer than being born of the same womb; closer far than that of husband to wife which, under Islamic law, can be dissolved by either the man or the woman repeating thrice in the hearing of others, the three simple words: I divorce thee. It is as close, in fact, and very like, the covenant which knit the soul of Jonathan to the soul of David so that Jonathan loved David as his own soul—a threefold bond binding bodies in service one to the other and souls which the Kazaks as Moslems believe will meet in paradise when their bodies are dead and, finally, knitting together the portions God has bestowed upon them of His Spirit which, according to Moslem belief, returns at death to God who gave it.

So we may picture the two men as blood-brothers falling silent while the womenfolk continued their preparations for the meal and letting their thoughts drift back to their youth when the Mullah brought the bowl, made an incision in their two wrists and then bade them repeat after him the words of their covenant. A young cockerel, pinned by the skin of its throat, squawked lustily but without struggling, as the two young men did so, but no-one outside the tent thought anything of it because cockerels often played a similar part when the inmates were reciting the Koran or saying their prayers.

Finally, when the blood-brothers had dipped their thumbs in the bowl and embraced one another, one of them released the cockerel which scuttled away as soon as the tent flap was thrown back and the two men went about their business as though nothing had happened. But from that moment, each could demand of the other shelter for a night when pursued by his enemies and the best horse to escape on the next day, as well as succour, whatever the risk, when in danger during a battle. And each could also expect the other to tell him the truth without prevarication or holding back, provided no one else was present when the question was asked.

If such were their dreams, there is no doubt that both Boko Batur and his host came out of them when the womenfolk brought steaming bowls filled with the broth and flesh of the yearling and gave it first to Boko and then to Islam Bai. Before they started eating, however, warm water was poured over their hands at the door of the tent, after which all murmured the meal-time prayer. Then huge pieces of flat bread were handed round after which all dipped their right hands into the great dish when they needed more meat and sucked the unseasoned broth from the bowls through their teeth to wash the meat down just as Boko Batur had washed down his bread with the tea when he first arrived. After they had eaten their fill they again washed their hands in water poured over them by one of Islam Bai's servants and wiped them dry on the long cotton towel Islam Bai had spread across their knees before they started to eat. Finally, the servants cleared the remnants of the meal away and took it outside to finish in company with Islam Bai's children, while the women brought in fresh bowls of tea flavoured this time with cinnamon and sugar as well as with salt. As they noisily drew the hot liquid in, they emitted the other more staccato punctuations which Kazak good manners shared with those of Dr. Johnson and his contemporaries as proof that the meal has been both ample and delicious.

"Bring firewood, lazy one," commanded Islam Bai to Osman as the elders settled themselves down on their cushions to relax. "Have I ever to bid thee build up the fire and blow it into flame with the bellows so that we may see? Even a wild

beast would know that the evening is upon us and that it grows dark."

So Osman whispered to his brothers and they fetched armsful of firewood from the pile behind the tent. While one of them laid it carefully on the cow-dung embers above which the yearling's flesh had been cooked, another blew it vigorously with the bellows till the tent was filled with flickering tongues of flame from which long, fantastic shadows leapt unceasingly, like streaks of darkened lightning, and dashed themselves noiselessly to pieces against the thick felt walls.

Presently Islam Bai considered that the flames were high enough so he called to Osman to cease from feeding them. Boko Batur then called Osman to him and when Osman obeyed and stood respectfully before him he said:

"Sit down here, by my side."

So Osman sat down and waited and there was a long silence. At last Boko Batur placed his hand on the boy's head and said:

"There was talk before we ate that a price has been put on my head: is it not so, O my brother?" he added, turning to Islam Bai.

"There was such talk," Islam Bai agreed.

"Those who are theatened live long, as I have said already, because God causes them to walk warily. But death comes to all when God wills."

"May God forbid that death should come to those who are now with us in this tent," said Islam Bai, "and may none of them die before he be full of years."

And his wives echoed: "May God forbid it."

"It is in the hands of God," Boko Batur commented. "But a wise man, especially if he be the leader of thousands as I am, looks forward and makes his plans lest the day should come unawares when his followers are without a leader. Is not that so, O my brother?"

"It is so."

"Leadership," Boko Batur continued, "is from God and not from man. Nor does it always bless the fruit of a leader's loins. A man's son, and likewise his daughter, may lead his father's clan, and it may be the whole tribe, in times of peace. But to

trust the fortunes of war to him unless he be fitted is an offence to God."

"It is God who teaches the mettled stallion to stand before his flock of mares and their foals when danger approaches in the mountains," said Islam Bai.

"It is well said," agreed Boko Batur. "I have no such stallion who would care for my flock if I were taken from it," he went on, turning Osman's face towards him. "Is this lad a stallion of such mettle? What thinkest thou, O father of Osman?"

Islam Bai grinned suddenly and unexpectedly, mischievously even.

"That he is not a gelding I know," he answered. "More than that, it is not for me, his father, to say. Besides, his years are no more than twelve."

"He is old enough to come with me so that I may find out," said Boko Batur.

"What sayest thou, boy?" asked his father.

"If it be my father's will, and Boko Batur's, I will go gladly."

"Listen to what I have to say to thee, for it is not a little thing that we are discussing," said Boko Batur. "Thy father knows well that since the days of Genghis Khan, nay, since the beginning, we Kazaks have roamed these mountains, paying tribute to none and owing allegiance to none, save to God and to our chosen chieftains. Then, from beyond the Gobi desert, came foreign infidels seeking to enslave us. Thy father knows, and our enemies know even better, that I have been fighting a Jehad—Holy War—against the Kitai these twenty years and rousing our people to fight them likewise. One day, we shall drive them back into the desert where they belong and we shall destroy them there though they be as many as the sands of the Takla Makan."

Boko Batur paused for a moment and then went on:

"Thy father, O Osman, is a man of peace and I am one who lives by fighting and who loves it. But we both love our nation, he in his way and I in mine. And more than he loves peace and I, war, we love one another, even since we were lads, like thee. Last night, it came to me as I slept that there

was one in this tent who possessed his father's skill in the ways of peace, yet to whom I might teach my skill in the paths of war. Then, when I am gone, the fight could continue under one head instead of two, or many more than two as our way has ever been. And when I awoke, the day was breaking and it was my fancy to come here to see and I came."

Again there was silence for a time and it was Osman's mother who broke it.

"In the days that are to come, they shall call my son 'Batur,' as today another is called by that name. Take him and teach him, and if he be not worthy let him return to his father's tent."

"If I am not found worthy, I shall never return," said Osman. "I would rather die."

The grown-ups talked far into the night after it was decided that Boko Batur should take Osman with him to be trained as a guerilla leader. Osman, meanwhile, returned modestly to his place among his brothers, replenishing the fire when it needed it, but taking no further part in the conversation. All the pros and cons had to be weighed: especially how to prevent suspicion falling on Islam Bai that his son was fighting the Chinese; how to prevent the Chinese from seizing Islam Bai and torturing him to make him say where Boko Batur was hiding.

Osman listened eagerly and in silence. He heard Boko Batur, and by no means for the last time, voice his searing hatred of the Chinese officials; their exactions, their greed for the gold and other mineral wealth lying beneath the surface of the Kazak homeland, their cruelties to those who fell into their clutches unless such people were rich enough to buy their freedom. Then Boko Batur turned to denounce the extortionate prices charged by the Chinese merchants, the way Chinese immigrants stole the Altai land so that its rightful owners were cooped within ever narrowing boundaries instead of being able to roam freely where they would, none gainsaying them, as their forebears had done since time began.

As Osman listened his heart burned within him. Under Boko Batur's influence he grew to hate the Chinese with a bitterness which deepened as the years passed. When the Chinese danger began to merge into the wider menace of

communism in the 1930's, Osman's distrust of Chinese nationalism made him hesitate to ally himself with the nationalists against the Russian and Chinese Communists. From his point of view, the one was as great a danger to the Kazak way of life as the other.

It is hard to criticise him. The Chinese held out no future for their subject races, except to become Chinese. Even forty years later, in June 1952, Dr. Chu Chia-hua, a former Vice-Premier of China could still write from exile in Formosa to the Turki leader, Mohammed Emin Bugra, who by then was a refugee in Istanbul:

> "Not only Sinkiang (the Western Dominion) itself lies in China but even much territory beyond once formed part of the Chinese Empire. That is why all the Chinese people consider it as a sacred inheritance. . . The Chinese blood is a mixture of many stocks. . . The concept of One-Family-Under-Heaven is not a mere rhetorical flourish. . . but serves as a criterion of our daily conduct.
>
> "In the Lives of Eminent Monks, there is an interesting account of how Jumolosh, a Sinkiang monk, went to the Court of one of the short-lived kingdoms in the age of the Barbarian invasions and how the king of that period presented him with ten beautiful Chinese maidens in order to perpetuate the best qualities of his mind through their descendants. . . Jumolosh's descendants, if any, by his pretty wives must have been absorbed into Chinese society and formed part of the Chinese stock. . .
>
> "The modern Chinese race is the offspring of many racial elements which accounts for the brilliance of the Chinese civilisation and the continued vigour of the Chinese people. . ."

Mohammed Emin Bugra replied that "the language, religion, script and other characteristics of the Turkic, Mongolian and Tibetan nations now under Chinese domination have nothing in common with the Chinese. . . Turkistan lies beyond the natural boundary of China in a distinct geographical area with ninety-six per cent of its population Turkic.

Consequently it should be independent. . . There are more than eight million Turks made up of Turkis, Kazaks, etc. . . And there are more than ten free nations in the world with less than one million inhabitants and twenty with a population less than that of Turkistan."

That, in brief, is why Osman Batur hated and fought the Chinese. And it is why he, Ali Beg, Hamza and the rest subsequently fought against the Russian and Chinese Communists who sought to destroy their Kazak individuality.

The morning after Boko Batur offered to train Osman as his successor in the holy war, Islam Bai and his family and their guest rose as usual at daybreak for the first prayer of the day, and, an hour or so later, Osman with his sleeping kit tied across his saddle, rode out of the encampment with his new guardian and teacher. He had finished with the Aool and was to learn henceforth in the school of practical experience.

It is not difficult to imagine his feelings. Ever since he could understand grown-up language, he had been hearing about Boko Batur's exploits. The guerilla leader had been the favourite topic of conversation whenever a visitor was entertained in Islam Bai's tent. Wandering bards had sung long ballads they had written in his honour and Osman's schoolmaster, the camp Mullah, had taught Osman himself to write them and then sing them using the same music as the bards, the beloved melodies of the long-distant past.

So, in Osman's eyes, there must have been almost a visible halo round Boko Batur's head, and the sweet savour of dedication to a holy cause in his own nostrils, as they rode together towards the upper Altai valleys. Though we do not know exactly when this was, or where they went, I believe it was already late autumn and that the snow-line was beginning to descend towards the place in which Islam Bai had his winter encampment. But, whenever it was, and wherever they went, it was towards the snow-line, for Boko Batur always chose hiding places deep in the mountains which his enemies would have difficulty in finding.

Soon, therefore, they were riding towards the snow-line, Boko Batur in front, turning their horses' heads this way and

that by pressing with the knee and lifting the beasts' heads gently with the slender reins which bear eloquent testimony to the way in which the Kazaks regard their horses. They have a proverb: "A good horse needs not the whip."

The way led them across browning meadows and among trees where it seemed at times that no path existed. Boko Batur, looking back once to see how Osman was faring, grinned and said:

"Thinkest thou canst find the way back?"

"Nay, sir. But my horse could."

"Good!" said Boko Batur briefly. But a few moments later he turned again and added:

"Trust the horse on a road he knows. But a day comes when a new road must be found or an old road shown to a new horse. He who follows in my footsteps must learn how to find it and teach others, as well as his horse, how to find it."

Osman did learn. When he grew to manhood and the mantle of Boko Batur had fallen on his shoulders, it was his boast that after a battle he could slip away into one of his secret hiding places and all the Chinese troops in the three provinces of Sinkiang, Chinghai and Kansu could not find him though sometimes they came within earshot, and also gunshot, of him. But times changed by degrees and before the end his enemies started to hunt him with aeroplanes from which it was less easy to hide, though sometimes even the planes failed to spot him. But aeroplanes were rare till the second World War.

As Osman rode on, sometimes by Boko Batur's side now, but more often in his wake, his keen eyes noticed the almost imperceptible signs which showed they were approaching an encampment: pieces of rock worn smooth by the passage of many animals, small strands of wool caught on a bush, sheep's droppings.

"Hast been here before?" Boko Batur asked.

"Never."

"Thy father has."

And Osman understood for the first time why his father had left the encampment sometimes in the early morning and not returned till the following day, or even the day after that. It was a lesson to him to keep his own counsel lest a friend or

relation should inadvertently betray a secret. Secretiveness is a typical Kazak trait, made necessary by the conditions in which they lived. But it also made it hard for others to co-operate with them and even for them to co-operate with one another. In Osman's case, the difficulty was enhanced because he preferred to remain silent rather than tell a lie, which was by no means true of all his compatriots.

During the eighteen months which followed, Boko Batur took Osman on many forays and taught him many things a guerilla leader should know: how to shoot first hares, and then men, firing from the hip at full gallop; how to sit loose-legged and relaxed on horseback for twenty hours at a stretch and be off again on the same horse for another twenty hours after only four hours rest. In later years, Osman thought nothing of riding 300 miles at the head of his bodyguard within the space of one week.

Besides instilling courage and endurance into him, Boko Batur taught him how to lead a successful foray, by curbing his followers' excitement and letting the main body of the enemy go past unsuspecting then dashing out to cut off the rearguard and racing back into the shelter of the friendly Altai before the main body could turn. In the hills themselves, wherever the passes were narrow enough, Boko Batur used to block the road in front of a column or a caravan and then roll rocks on it from above till it turned and fled, only to find that the road had been blocked behind it after it had passed.

"It is a good life, Osman, my son," Boko Batur told him often. "O my life!" he used to add with a great belly laugh which nearly rolled him out of his saddle. "To steal up unawares behind the enemy and steal the ammunition he meant to pump into your vitals; then gallop off and be out of sight before he has had time to load his rifle. Thou wilt enjoy it, Osman."

Boko Batur's own zest for the thrilling excitements of guerilla life stands out like a beacon from the legends and stories which have sprung up round his memory. When he took Osman to be his pupil he had been ranging far and wide across Chinese Turkistan and beyond for many years seizing every opportunity he could to twist Manchu pig-tails and pull their legs,

too. He is reputed to have been immensely strong and, though the Chinese captured him several times, they never succeeded in holding him for long. Sometimes they fettered him and put iron handcuffs round his wrists, but he snapped the iron, and his fingers, and was away before his captors or gaolers could pick up their rifles. It is said that once they tied him up, manacled and fettered as usual, in the skin of a freshly-killed bull and it took them some time to find an animal that was big enough. Boko Batur lay trussed in these unsavoury surroundings for a considerable time: one account says for six months. But one morning when his gaolers went to feed him, only the skin was there.

We can picture Boko Batur telling Osman about such escapades as they sat together in the firelight of the aool before they went to sleep. Osman listened enthralled. But instead of teaching Osman to emulate them, Boko Batur's puckish and foolhardy feats showed him that the struggle for independence called for caution as well as courage. He learned the paramount importance of not letting his tongue run him into unnecessary danger and the sad necessity of being always on the watch for traitors. The fact that Boko Batur's incarceration in the bull's skin was due to his having been betrayed by a Turki renegade named Ismail counted more in Osman's eyes than the strength which enabled him to regain his freedom in the end. Strength, in Osman's eyes, is the gift of God and so is wisdom, and it is the duty of him who possesses them to make sure that he uses them both well. And God protects those who do so.

Besides learning Boko Batur's way of making war, Osman also learnt how to cross the Chinese frontier into what in those days was still Tsarist Russia—or "Rassi" as Boko Batur called it—without being challenged by the Chinese frontier guards. Once across, they could journey without fear, for Boko Batur had many friends among the Russian officials. Sometimes they went north into the reindeer districts of southern Siberia. On at least one occasion they went as far as Alma Ata, the lovely capital of what is now the Soviet Republic of Kazakstan, where the orchards and climate are renowned

throughout Asia. When they went back to the Altai, they took with them a long string of newly-acquired camels laden with weapons and ammunition which the Russians gave them. Then, as also later when the Reds took over from the Whites, it was Russian policy to make as much trouble as they could for the Chinese in Sinkiang because they coveted the province —and still do. There is a strip two hundred miles wide along this frontier to which Moscow has never abandoned the claim originally made by the Tsars. The Soviet Government occupied part of this strip in 1946-7 and still holds it. The Soviet claim to the other parts has not been officially withdrawn, though at the moment it is in abeyance. There is gold in this region, and wolfram, and, if the Kazak refugees in Turkey are right, uranium. Some of them add that the Russians want to erect an atomic plant there, and others that they have already done so.

With the aid of the weapons the Russians gave him, Boko Batur suddenly launched a full-scale insurrection against the Chinese. He first called a "Hur Altai," which has been the Kazak name for a Council of War since the days of Genghis Khan. To it he summoned all the captains of thousands and of tens of thousand of the Kirei Kazaks in the Altai, Tien Shan and Barkul. Many of those summoned did not come, either from jealousy or apathy or because the hand of the Chinese tax gatherer had not yet fallen heavily on them and they had still no fear that they would be assimilated into the One-Family-Under-Heaven. Nevertheless, Boko Batur was able to muster a force of nearly ten thousand.

The campaign which followed was a disaster. There was a battle near Kukuluk on the southern slopes of the Tien Shan Mountains, the precursor of another similar encounter about which we shall hear in its proper place. Then at Karashahr, before setting forth on the perilous crossing of the Thirsty Mountains, Boko Batur called his fourteen-year-old disciple to him and said:

"Turn back now, I pray thee, and leave me, for thou art needed among thy people."

And Osman, almost like Elisha, said:

"As God liveth, and while my soul is in my body upon earth, I will never leave thee."

And Boko Batur, loving him, replied:

"Nay, but thy people need thee, for, as I have prophesied: After thee shall none be born like thee and if thou wert to die, thy people would be like sheep lacking a shepherd."

"Then return with me, O my father," Osman pleaded. "For I will never leave thee."

"Nay, my son. My work is finished. I go now to spy out the land so that if at any time a trap begins to close on thee at home, there shall be a place of refuge for thee. I brought thee thus far but to show thee the way."

After the leader and his disciple had parted Boko Batur retreated across the dreaded Thirsty Mountains, to Gezkul, the lake which is straight and narrow like a ruler. His last battle was fought on the shores of another lake nearby, the name of which is Achik-kul. His irregulars were no match for the Chinese regulars when it came to a pitched battle and the end of the fray saw the Kazaks scattered beyond hope of recovery. Among the dead were Boko Batur's first wife and his youngest brother, Shuko Batur, who were buried close to the scene of the battle. Their friends and Boko Batur set memorial stones over their graves which were still there in 1950. If they have not been removed since, any nomad Kazaks who are still in this neighbourhood would no doubt show a visitor from the West these monuments, for the memory of Boko Batur and his family is still held in very great honour. But it is probable that the graves have been obliterated by the Communists with the object of obliterating the memory of those who were laid to rest in them.

After the battle, Boko Batur gathered together five thousand of his people with their flocks and herds and families and led them into the wilderness to seek new homes beyond the reach of the Chinese Central Government. They set forth, not all together as the Children of Israel did, but in small groups organised, however, just as the Children of Israel were after Jethro, the priest of Midian, had told Moses, his son-in-law, how to organise his followers, namely in thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens.

So Osman returned to his father's tent in the Valley of the

Nine-Toothed Comb and Boko Batur journeyed on with his followers towards the south, across the wilderness of the vast Takla Makan desert as well as the forbidding Thirsty Mountains whose name speaks for itself. Many fell. But the majority, and Boko Batur among them, struggled through over the desert, to Achik-kul first and then, after the battle, over the mighty Kunlun Mountains to Tibet. They thus blazed a trail which Kazaks have followed at least three times since, in spite of the sufferings they endured on each occasion.

It was Boko Batur's intention to go to Turkey, but when he reached Lhasa, the claws of the Chinese dragon reached out and caught him. His head was severed from his body and exposed many days later on a long pole at one of the gates of Urumchi, the capital of Sinkiang, more than a thousand miles from where it had been cut off. It remained there while kites tore away the last vestiges of its flesh and the sun and wind shrivelled it and there was nothing left but a skull. Then the authorities threw it away and placed another skull in its stead.

And of the people who were with Boko Batur, some remained in Tibet and took wives among the people of the country and reared families which are still living there. A few crossed the Himalayas into India, but the majority trickled back to their own homes.

CHAPTER III

Osman Batur Grows Up

THOUGH he was only fourteen years old, Osman Batur went back to his father's tents in the Valley of the Nine-Toothed Comb, not merely as a seasoned guerilla, but as the prospective successor to the most renowned guerilla leader of the time. During the eighteen months of Boko Batur's tutelage, he had learnt the tingling thrill of galloping madly into battle, rifle at his hip, using his hands to fire and reload while he controlled his horse with his body and legs—even, somehow, when he turned round in his saddle to fire at his pursuers as he galloped away after the quick raid was over and the signal had been given to scatter and withdraw. More than once, he had been put in charge of a ten, and even of a fifty. But more often he had simply kept as close as he could to Boko Batur's coal black stallion so that he could learn how Boko Batur led his men and controlled them during the battle.

Strategically, Boko Batur's favourite policy was to harry; to strike a swift blow and get away into the mountains so as to strike another in some far distant spot where the Chinese were least expecting him. On such occasions his fighting men were unaccompanied by their families and flocks. And being without baggage except for the ammunition they could carry on led horses, they could, when pressed, travel a hundred miles in a day if necessary whereas the Chinese thought they were doing well when they covered thirty. But in the end, probably at Russian instigation, Boko Batur had tried to mount an offensive for which he had neither the weapons, the transport nor the right men. In their native mountains, the Kazak horsemen were a formidable foe: mobile, daring, agile, and able to use their knowledge of the ground to the best advantage. But it was they who were at a disadvantage in a pitched battle and they were quite unable to undertake a siege of a walled town; and there are many such in East Turkistan.

That was why, in 1913, it was not long before Boko Batur found himself faced with the grim alternatives of surrender, which inevitably meant death, or flight. For his men the choice lay between slipping away into hiding until the Chinese forgot about them or following their leader wheresoever he might go. That has always been the Kazak way. And it was a free choice, made individually by each fighting man who knew that if he chose the second alternative it would mean plucking up his tents and his roots and going with his whole family, his wives, his children, his flocks and his herds on a journey of not less than a thousand miles during which they would be in peril the whole way, sometimes from the Chinese and Tibetans, but much more often from the desert wastes and mountains through which their path lay.

Boko Batur was unlucky to have reached Lhasa at one of the comparatively rare periods in Tibetan history when Chinese influence was strong. I think he must have sensed that there was danger when he ordered Osman to return to the Altai. Otherwise he would surely have taken the boy right to the promised land instead of sending him home.

Osman started on his homeward journey from near Karashahr, a walled city by a lake on the southern fringes of the Tien Shan Mountains. Karashahr is about three hundred miles from where Osman lived, and we are told that the journey on horseback took him a week. On his way he passed the famous city of Turfan which lies in a depression nine hundred and sixty feet below sea level. It is so hot in Turfan that men and women can only cultivate their fields at night. But Turfan's grapes are nearly two inches long and have the reputation of being the sweetest and juiciest in all Asia. So have its melons.

The track, such as it was, lay partly through cultivated land and partly through open steppes and deserts. In places, the going was over stony ground where the track was hard to pick out though it was marked at intervals by skeletons of camels, horses and other animals which had fallen down and died—to the delight of kites and jackals which were constantly on the watch for such happenings. Sometimes there was a heap of stones by the side of the path, betokening that a human traveller had also fallen by the wayside and been buried. Any

lone voyager, even an experienced one, had to have his wits about him when journeying along such a road and, for the fourteen-year-old Osman it was doubly necessary. He already had a reputation and if some inquisitive Chinese official or soldier had seen him and asked him to explain what he, a very young Kazak, was doing all alone so far from home, he might have found it difficult to answer. So it must have been with some trepidation that he visited a walled town and the markets in order to buy food for himself and his horse. No doubt, his anxiety diminished as he went on day after day without getting into trouble.

No fatted calf was killed for him when he reached his father's tents because that is not the Kazak way. Nor did his father congratulate him on his skill in finding the road and avoiding his enemies—indeed, Islam Bai would have thought him a fool if he had not been able to do so. Besides, Islam Bai had to be careful not to arouse speculation about his son's absence lest a traitor, or even a mere idle gossiper, should give the secret away to the Chinese.

So Osman took his place again in his father's tents as though nothing out of the usual had been happening to him during the preceding twenty months. Every now and again after he got back, strangers rode up to the encampment whom he recognised but without saying so. His father entertained them with traditional Kazak hospitality and they rode away again the next morning having said nothing during their visit which might give the impression that they and Osman had ever met before, yet leaving with him the knowledge that when the day came they would rally to his side and resume the fight against the Chinese. Osman stored up their names and usual whereabouts in his memory where it was safe from prying eyes, and did not write them down on paper. He distrusted paper.

It was from one such traveller that Osman first heard that his beloved teacher had been beheaded. It is told of him, though on what authority I cannot say, that when he heard the news, he swore an oath to revenge Boko Batur's death a thousand-fold. Certainly he made it his policy in later years to root the Chinese out utterly from the land of East Turkistan and to show no mercy to them regardless of sex or age and

making no covenant with them: treating them in fact as Moses instructed the Children of Israel to treat the inhabitants when they invaded the land of Canaan. Whether Osman adopted the policy first, or the Chinese, is doubtful. But it was one which both sides found it hard to abandon even after 1944 when East Turkistan, like China itself for that matter, was making its hopeless bid for independence against the combined forces of the Chinese and Russian Communists.

For the first few years after his return, Osman lived the ordinary life of a young Kazak lad, helping his father, joining in the games and contests with other lads of his age, rounding up the semi-wild horses in the hills and branding them with the mark which had been issued by, and was registered with, the local Chinese government officials. He also learnt how to train the hunting eagles his family kept to catch the Altai foxes they needed for the skins with which they lined their clothes. He used to shear his father's sheep, too, not as we do in this country once a year when the wool is at its best, but when the price was high in the local bazaars or when the family needed felt. On such occasions, Osman used to get one of the servants to catch and hold a sheep which had not been clipped for a long while and then cut its fleece off as best he could with the primitive shears which were rather like the simple spring clippers gardeners sometimes use on small patches of grass. It was a slow business and not exactly economic from our point of view for it seldom took Osman less than an hour to "shear" a single animal. But time and money are not synonymous in the Kazak way of life, as the proverb says they are in ours.

When Osman was about sixteen—as with his birth there is no record of it—his father told him it was time to think of marriage.

"I, myself," Islam Bai said, "and, as is meet, thy mother also, have given much thought to the matter. It is right that thou, our firstborn, shouldst wed when thou art of an age to raise up seed so that our line dies not out."

"Is there a suitable maiden?" Osman asked.

"Not in our encampment as thou thyself well knowest," Islam Bai answered. "But there is one who is of good report, the daughter of Bai Mullah who is of our tribe but not of our

clan. She is also one of many daughters so that her father will not demand a big marriage payment for her."

"Is not Kaini within the prohibited degrees?" Osman asked. "For it would be a sin to marry such a one. Is it not written that he who marries one of common ancestry with himself commits adultery?"

"In our tribe, as thou knowest, if there be no common ancestor within four generations, it is lawful," Islam Bai replied. "And what says the proverb: 'He who cannot name his ancestors to the seventh generation is an apostate.' Up to eight generations Bai Mullah and I have no common ancestor, not one."

"Then let an honest man be chosen to act as intermediary," said Osman. "For it is also written that it is for the parents to choose a bride and for the son to obey."

"When I married thy father," interposed Osman's mother, who had been listening without joining in the conversation, "I worked as serving maid in his mother's tent for a whole year before the marriage. Thus, when the Mullah asked us two whether we believed we could be happy together, both could truly answer 'Yes'."

"It shall be the same for thy son Osman, O my Baibicha," Islam Bai promised. "The girl shall be serving maid in thy tent until the marriage. But see that there is no foolishness between them lest I should have to pay the marriage price for one who knoweth not her duty. For if she should not please, she shall return a virgin to her mother and there will be no ill-feeling on either side. And if she finds favour, let them be married."

So a suitable man was sought out to act as marriage broker. He spoke first long and meticulously with Islam Bai and then went to the tent of the girl's father to learn how much he wanted in camels, cattle, sheep or horses for his daughter's hand. Bai Mullah lived some thirty miles away and each visit required much tact and skill on the part of the negotiator for the seller was determined not to be caught, like Laban, accepting feeble cattle for his daughter's dowry. So the bargaining was rather a slow affair. But it was finished in the end, though only tentatively, because Kazak custom allows either party to

withdraw if the prospective bride and bridegroom dislike one another or the girl is no longer a virgin when the day for the marriage comes. In that case, whoever has seduced her is expected to marry her.

Kaini, however, found favour from the start, not only with Osman himself but with all in his father's tents. She could read and write and compose poems as well as sing them. Besides, she was industrious and clever not only with her fingers but also with the rather battered old Singer sewing machine which some Kazak patriarchs acquired for the use of their wives even as long as forty years ago.

We do not know how old Osman's first wife was when he married her nor how many other wives he had before he died. It is certain that he never had more than four at any one time, for that would have been a breach of the Islamic law to which he adhered strictly throughout his life. But his religion permitted him, like Jacob, to have concubines as well, and his wives would have seen no harm in it if he had. One of his wives was his chief wife who lived with him in his principal tent. Each of the other wives, but not their handmaids, the concubines, had her own tent and both Osman and they would have thought it shameful if two of the wives had to share a tent.

From the moment of her arrival, Kaini began to busy herself with making the sleeping quilts, the carpets, the embroidered webbing and the ceremonial clothes she would need after marriage. Meanwhile Osman's father and mother and the servants were making ready the things which custom required that the bridegroom's parents should supply. They sheared many sheep, cleaned the wool by washing it in the stream near which their tents were pitched, and then laid it on the ground so that they could tread it into felt of the right thickness—about three-quarters of an inch—for Osman's new tent. Each section of the tent was made separately, the wool for it being first arranged in the required shape, but larger than the required size to allow for shrinkage. Then the wool was sprinkled liberally with water after which the men trod it patiently with their bare feet for hour after hour and day after day, adding more wool when necessary until it was thick

and compact enough to be impervious to wind and rain. Osman, being a chief's son, and then a chief in his own right, always lived in a white tent. Those of lesser rank lived in black or grey ones.

When the marriage day arrived, the Mullah asked the groom and the bride whether they would be happy with one another and both answering "yes," he pronounced them man and wife. That night, after a feast attended by the bride's family, as well as Islam Bai's, and no doubt the Mullah, the newly-married couple slept in a tent of their own for the first time. And, from the next morning, Islam Bai's personal servants and retainers took no orders from Osman until Islam Bai was dead, nor did Osman give them any.

Osman had only been married a few months when what seemed nothing but a tiny cloud appeared on the passes through the Altai mountains. It sprang from an explosion four or five thousand miles away which destroyed the Tsarist tyranny and put a more sinister one in its place. Not long after the so-called October Revolution in 1917, which really took place in November according to our calendar, a thin trickle of Naiman Kazaks from Kazakstan began to flow over the Russo-Chinese border. The refugees came in small groups bringing their flocks and herds with them. Some toiled over the border at Kuldja far to the south-west of the Altai; others trekked past the Tarbagatai Mountains where the way into Dzungaria is easy; others came along the valley of the Black Irtysh; and some came over the downs and uplands of the Altai itself.

The slow infiltration went on at camel pace, which is about three miles an hour, for more than a year, and while it lasted about a hundred thousand Kazaks from what was now the Soviet Union entered East Turkistan because Communism was already threatening their traditional way of life. With them were several millions of their domestic animals: camels, cattle, sheep, goats, horses. The exodus stopped in the end because the Communists, under Lenin, suddenly began to pose as the champions of the smaller nationalities and the subject races in Central Asia. It began again ten years later when Stalin started his drive to collectivise farming and to drive unwanted

individual peasants into mines and factories. This time, not less than a quarter of a million Kazaks trekked south and east into East Turkistan with their families, their flocks and herds with disastrous results to animal husbandry in Kazakstan, which is the second largest republic of the USSR. Many families of both migrations went back to Soviet Kazakstan within a few years, especially after the Russian Communists followed them into East Turkistan during the governorship of Sheng Shih-ts'ai, which began in 1933. But some remained. Some also went on to Tibet and India though without anyone opposing them. Those who went to India found the climate too much for them and many died.

Beyond doubt, Osman saw many of these exiles trekking into Chinese territory in the vain hope of saving their way of life from Communist tyranny. But their arrival, and the reason for it, did not make much impression on him; nor, indeed, on any of the Kazaks who had been brought up under the other tyranny which was Chinese. In Osman's eyes, and in the eyes of most of his associates, the Chinese whom they had always had with them, were still the enemy, and the Russians, friends. What sort of friends, they only learnt later.

CHAPTER IV

Early Life of Ali Beg and Hamza

SOME two hundred and fifty miles south of Osman's birthplace in the Altai mountains, there is a town called Manass where the local Kazak nomads and the Turki and other farmers, go to buy and sell. It used to have about forty thousand inhabitants before it was hit by civil war, and it lies about fifty miles west of Urumchi, the provincial capital, along the road to the Soviet border which forks into three just beyond it.

Manass is also the capital of the district to which it gives its name. Running through it, is a river, also called Manass, which rises in the great mountain chain of the Tien Shan to the north of which Manass town is situated. After teeming down the precipitous upper reaches of the mountains in a thousand glacier-fed torrents, the river emerges from the hills only a few miles from Manass town and spreads itself out in a broad bed spanned now by a long wooden-topped bridge of no less than nine arches. In the course of only a few miles among the mountains it descends more than ten thousand feet, for Manass town is only about two thousand three hundred feet above sea level, seven hundred feet lower than Urumchi which stands at three thousand feet. Behind both places tower the great peaks and serrated ridges of virgin snow of the Tien Shan, or Celestial Mountains, culminating south east of Urumchi in Bogdo Ula, the Mount of God.

In spite of its size, the Manass river never reaches the sea but soon peters out in marshes and vast expanses of reeds which grow twenty feet high and provide shelter where a man must walk warily lest he should be mauled by a wild boar, or, if he is unlucky, by a tiger anxious about her mate or her litter. But by way of compensation, the reeds also provide ideal cover for men on the run from the claws of authority as well as for ambushes when those same men on the run wish to retaliate; as


SIBERIA
KAZAKSTAN S.S.R
ALTAI MTS
IRTYSH
TARBAGATAI MTS
Tarbagatai
DZUNGARIA
MARSHES
Manass
Urumchi
Turfan
Kuldja
ILI GAP
TIEN SHAN MTS
KIRGIZ S.S.R
TARIM
Miles
0 100 200 300
Direction of Kazak migration from Kazakstan

indeed they have been doing at frequent intervals all through the fifty years which this chronicle tells.

At the moment, however, we are concerned, not with the lower part of the Manass river but with one of its main tributaries, the Kizil Uzun, which is formed right against the hoary chest of the mountains by the confluence of a dozen or more minor streamlets, each some twenty to thirty feet across but only about four feet deep. The sources of the Kizil Uzun are in the great glaciers of three giant sister peaks which lie close together at a height of some twenty thousand feet overlooking the northern plain on which Manass itself lies, sixteen thousand feet below them though they are less than fifty miles away.

Normally the waters of the Kizil Uzun, being glacier-fed, run crystal clear. But after rain, its various component parts turn, symbolically, blood red from the colour of the laterite on the hillsides which feed them. Hence the name, Kizil Uzun, the Red Stream.

The valley of the Kizil Uzun is rich with an abundance of high, sweet grass and there, except when Chinese soldiers drove them away, as they did from time to time, Kazak nomads pastured their flocks, migrating during the summer months to the upper part of the valley and then back to the lower reaches for the winter, just as their kinsfolk in the Altai used to do. And here, on the banks of the Kizil Uzun, was born in 1908, Ali Beg and, in 1922, Hamza, two of the leaders who, later on fought by Osman Batur's side for Kazak independence.

Ali Beg's early years were comparatively peaceful. His father, Rahim Beg, was a tribal official whose business was not to fight the Chinese but to argue with them, and perhaps bribe them to abate their demands for taxes. He brought his sons up in the traditional Kazak manner and Ali Beg therefore went to the tent school kept by the Mullah at the age of ten. He had been set to mind his father's sheep even earlier and went on doing so till, like Joseph, he was at least seventeen.

Hamza's early upbringing was very different. His father died when he was seven leaving him to the care of an elder brother, Yunus Hajji, who had been captain of a thousand

under the great Boko Batur and who, in consequence, was in close touch with Osman of the Altai.

Yunus Hajji did not follow Boko Batur to Tibet; perhaps because the lure of guerilla warfare remained too strong within him and he preferred its blood-stirring thrills to the more humdrum pleasures of a problematical earthly paradise beyond the deserts and mountains where he could tend his flocks in an atmosphere of perpetual peace. So Hamza's early days and, indeed, the first thirty years of his life, were passed in an atmosphere of almost continuous upheaval. Though he went to the tent school the year his father died, he had to leave it within three years for, when he was ten, in 1932, his brother joined the mixed groups of local Moslems which were in revolt against the Chinese provincial Government. Guerilla warfare, as practised by the nomad Kazaks, involved not only the fighting men, but also the women and children, the greater part of their flocks and herds and even their homes, which they carried with them wherever the course of the campaign took them.

So, for two years, from the age of ten till he was twelve, Hamza was constantly on the move. And sometimes, like his brother, he armed himself with a captured rifle, or a revolver, or even a sword and joined in the fighting himself. Equally important, he learnt how the great felt tents could be dismantled and loaded with all their contents on to the backs of camels and cattle in less than fifteen minutes when there was need for haste to avoid falling into the hands of the enemy. He also learnt to keep his rifle, ammunition and sword, as well as his bridle and saddle, within reach of his hand wherever he slept.

How successful little Hamza was as a guerilla, in spite of his tender years, may be judged from the fact that he earned for himself the nick-name, Ushar, which means literally, Intelligent Fly-er, in other words: Quick off the mark, as a fly is.

Hamza told the story, as he remembered it, of why his brother took up arms on this occasion. The Chinese Governor of Sinkiang, Yang Tseng-hsin, against whom Boko Batur fought in vain, was murdered in 1928 by Chinese rivals. He had been regarded by the Kazaks, much as Tom Brown regarded his headmaster—as "a beast, but a just beast"—or if not quite that, as a beast whom it was advisable to treat with

respect. But the régime which was established after his death soon began to oppress the Kazaks and other local Moslems, such as the Turkis and also the Tungans who were not Turkic but Chinese. There was trouble, too, in the other north-western provinces of China bordering on Sinkiang, where a Tungan general, Ma Chung-yin, raised the standard of revolt in 1929 with such success that at one time he actually proclaimed an independent republic of East Turkistan and asked the Great Powers to recognise it. Before long, his troops were at the gates of Urumchi, though they failed to capture it.

Yunus Hajji was close enough to the scene of action to be able to feel the pulse of war drumming against the thick felt of his tents on the bank of the Kizil Uzun. And the idea of independence fired his hot blood. General Ma was a Tungan, which meant that, though Chinese, he was also a Moslem. Yunus Hajji felt that, from the Kazak standpoint, a Chinese Moslem was better than a mere Kitai. So he gathered his followers, his family, Hamza included, and his flocks and set out to join in the fight for independence, alongside rather than under General Ma Chung-yin.

The name "Ma" which means "horse" is found chiefly among the Chinese Moslems, and there will be other generals called Ma this or that in the course of our story. This particular General Ma was also known as "Big Horse," and his exploits were important enough to leap the desert and mountain barriers around this part of China and penetrate to the outside world. But mostly they lie outside the scope of this book, which is only concerned with them insofar as they affect the Kazak fight for independence.

When Yunus Hajji joined the insurgents in 1932 he sent messages to urge Osman of the Altai to do the same. Osman was now thirty-three, some years younger than Yunus Hajji, but much further away from the fighting, so that the sound of the guns did not reach him to stir his fighting spirit. Consequently, he was able to weigh the pros and cons in an atmosphere of detachment. He therefore saw General Ma in exactly the opposite light to Yunus Hajji. To Osman the important factor was that General Ma, though a Moslem, was a Kitai. Osman could not bring himself at this stage to accept Chinese help,

much less leadership, in the Kazak fight for independence. I am not sure that he ever quite accepted it. Nor, in a sense, did Yunus Hajji, who fought his own fight against the Chinese Government without very much regard for what Big Horse Ma was doing.

This particular rebellion is noteworthy for being the first in which the hand of the Soviet Government can be plainly traced though, of course, it was very far from being the first which the Russians had instigated on Chinese territory. In this respect, Red Moscow inherited and built upon the policy of White St. Petersburg and only its methods were new. Many Russian Whites fled into the Chinese province of Sinkiang to escape from the Reds when the Tsarist régime collapsed. Very soon they found themselves torn between their love of Russia and their hatred of Bolshevism because Moscow's policy was an ingenious mixture of the two. So the presence of the White Russians sometimes helped the Soviet Government in its plans to get control of the province and hindered it at others. This fact needs to be mentioned here because it helps to form the background against which the Kazak story was enacted. By 1934, that is to say, within two years of Yunus Hajji's taking the field to strike a blow for Kazak independence, Apresov, the Soviet Consul General in Urumchi, was the most powerful man in the province. The man who organised the secret police with which the Chinese Governor terrorised the country was a Russian named Pogodin. Under these two men, there came into being a whole network of Communistic institutions under Russian "advisers," some of whom had come over the Chinese border as Whites, and quite simply as "experts" lent by Moscow. None of course described themselves as "Reds."

Big Horse Ma was driven back from the gates of Urumchi in 1932 because the murdered Governor Yang's successor, General Chin Shu-jen, without telling the Chinese Government, made a secret agreement with the Soviet Government under which he received arms in exchange for permission to install "advisers" in various branches of the provincial government and for the grant of special trading concessions to the Russians. Thus the many White Russian soldiers who were fighting on General Chin's side against Big Horse Ma were

actually armed by Red Russia. Before very long they were controlled by Red Russians, too.

But at the very same time, the Soviet Government was also secretly supplying arms to Big Horse Ma and doing its best to build up the national consciousness of the Kazaks, Turkis, Mongols and other East Turkistani races into a political as well as military weapon to be used against the Chinese. Just as Tsarist Russia supplied arms to Boko Batur, so Communist Russia was now supplying them to Yunus Hajji and Osman.

The secret agreement with General Chin evidently did not give the Soviet Government as much as it wanted, for he was overthrown in his turn on April 12, 1933. In the following year, Big Horse Ma was encouraged by Moscow to renew his siege of Urumchi whereupon the new Chinese Governor, Sheng Shih-ts'ai, hastily followed his predecessor's example and asked Moscow, not his own Government, for help. The Soviet Government opened its mouth much wider this time and an agreement was signed which virtually turned the Chinese province of Sinkiang into a Soviet colony. At the same time, Sheng made a proclamation to the local races promising to remedy their grievances.

But the Kazaks soon found their grievances multiplying instead of diminishing. Thirteen thousand Chinese "volunteers," fugitives from Manchuria who had fled into Siberia to escape the Japanese, crossed the Soviet-Chinese frontier into the Altai and other northern districts where most of the Kazaks lived and began to "pacify" them in the name of Governor Sheng whom the Kazaks blamed for their behaviour, although they had been trained and armed by the Russians. And while this was happening in the out-lying parts of the province, the provincial government itself was rapidly coming under complete Russian control so that the Kazaks, who are the most individualistic race on earth, suddenly found themselves face to face with Communism foisted on them by Communist advisers of a Governor who spoke in the name of the Chinese Kuomintang which was anti-Communist. It is not surprising that they felt bewildered and did not at first realise what was happening.

It was, in fact, several years before the Kazaks began to see

that the Russians were speaking with "two mouths," as the Kazak phrase goes, and that each mouth had an entirely different language. One spoke through "advisers" in Urumchi in the name of the Chinese Governor, Sheng, and gradually changed the administration of the province into a Communist one. The other mouth secretly whispered rebellion against the provincial authorities into the willing ears of the local races through traders and Russian agents who promised help in driving the hated Chinese out.

Osman, Yunus Hajji and other Kazak leaders were fighting-men, not politicians. But it gradually dawned on them that they were being deceived and that the Soviet Government was simply using them as pawns in a policy of bedevilment designed to create such chaos that the Russians would be justified in taking possession of the whole of East Turkistan and its riches in the name of law and order. In other words, the Soviet pose of friendship towards the local races was a callous fraud perpetrated with the sole object of promoting Communism.

Yunus Hajji and little Hamza fought against the Chinese on the side of Big Horse Ma, though independently, for two years: from 1932-4. During this period, Yunus remembered how Boko Batur's guerillas had failed to stand up against regular soldiers in a pitched battle and began to drill his followers on the Chinese pattern. I think what reminded him was the way General Ma's troops, who were mostly regulars, set about besieging a town. So Yunus tried to organise his own followers to fight in formation and thus give a good account of themselves against the Russian-trained "volunteers" employed by Governor Sheng. But the free Kazaks never mastered this type of fighting, though the levies raised later on by the Soviet Government in Kazakstan did and so did the other Kazak levies recruited by Moscow agents in the Kuldja district of Sinkiang which is close to the Soviet border. In its proper sequence, we shall hear how the Soviet Government trained enslaved Kazaks to fight against the free Kazaks on what, legally speaking, was Chinese territory. It is a story which throws much light on the way Communism has been built up in Asia.

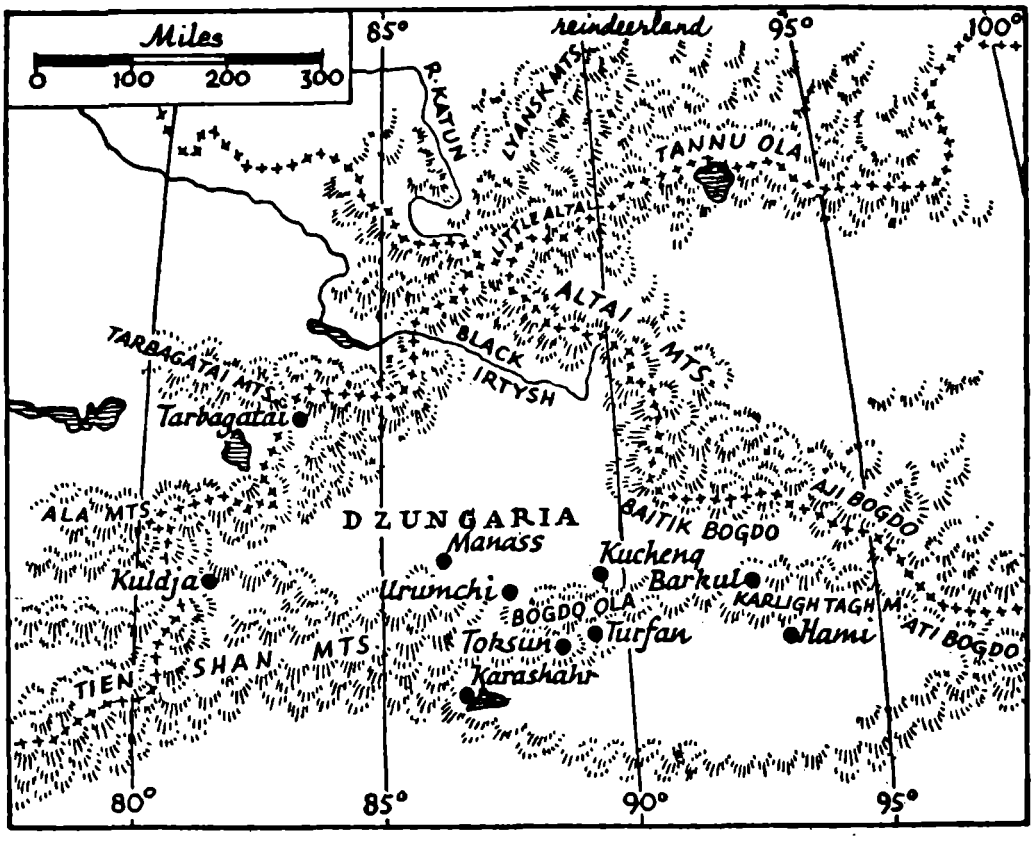
By the end of 1934, the Chinese provincial Government

under Governor Sheng had broken the back of General Ma's rebellion, thanks to the arms, "volunteers" and "advice" fraternally offered to Sheng by the Soviet Government. General Ma himself, in spite of the way he was defeated, sought refuge in Soviet Turkistan. After that, he disappears from the scene. Some of the Kazak refugees in Turkey say that he became an officer in the Russian Army, but we do not know this for certain, though it is quite likely.

When the revolt collapsed, Yunus Hajji and Hamza, who was now twelve, returned to the Kizil Uzun and Hamza went back to the tent school. Most of the other Kazak malcontents followed their example. But two of them decided after a while that their old homes were becoming too uncomfortable. So, in 1936, they plucked up their tents, mustered their flocks and herds as Boko Batur had done before them, and set forth from their homes on the plain and mountains of Barkul in the eastern Tien Shan Mountains to seek fresh pastures where they could live in peace. Their names are Hussein Tajji and Sultan Sherif, and we have already met them in Turkey. But when their migration started neither they nor most of their followers, who numbered perhaps fifteen thousand, thought they would go further than to the boundary of Sinkiang, or perhaps to Tibet.

Hussein Tajji and Sultan Sherif travelled almost due south, past the town of Hami which is also called Kumul and is the first town in Sinkiang after crossing the great Gobi desert from China. Then they traversed the great Takla Makan desert which is by no means all sand, though most of it is barren today with dead cities dotted about to show that it was not always thus. Like Boko Batur, they came eventually, as we know, to the lake of ill-omen called Gezkul, because it is long and straight like a ruler. There they found good pasture, though not so good as at Barkul, over a wide area round the lake both in the Timurlik district which lies north and west of the lake and the Khan Ambal Mountains in the province of Chinghai to the east. Moreover, they found that the market town called Tung-huang, where are the far-famed Caves of the Thousand Buddhas to which pilgrims go from many parts of China, lay just across the border in the province of Kansu.

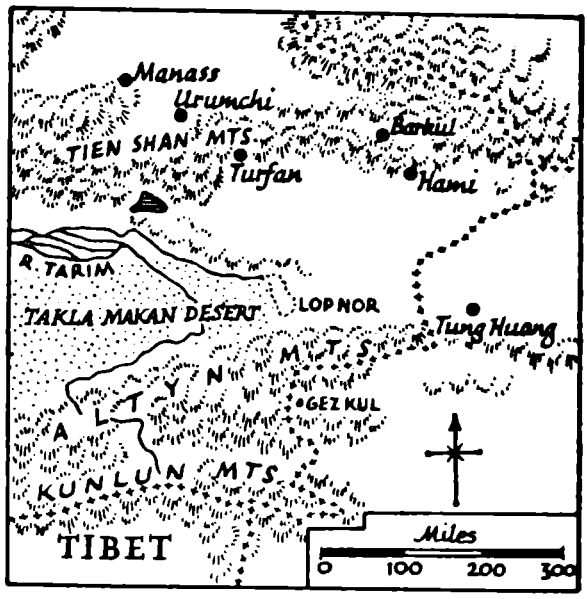
So the Kazaks, being nomads, had three provinces to choose from—Sinkiang, Kansu and Chinghai—whenever the Chinese authorities in one of the three became too insistent about such matters as, for instance, payment of taxes. On such occasions the Kazaks could betake themselves with their tents and beasts into the jurisdiction of one of the other provinces whose officials had nothing to do with those whose attentions were



unwanted. Hussein Tajji and Sultan Sherif lost most of their beasts either in fighting near Barkul or while crossing the Takla Makan, but they soon grew rich again in camels, sheep and horses, much richer than when they had lived in Barkul. The City of the Caves of the Thousand Buddhas, Tung-huang, though more than seventy miles distant across the mountains, was a convenient market where they could sell and buy all that they needed, being a place of pilgrimage though it was also more than seventy miles from the nearest main road.

Of the fifteen thousand Kazaks who accompanied Hussein

Tajji and Sultan Sherif from Barkul, some five thousand left Gezkul later in small groups intending to go to India, but I do not know how many got there nor which way they went; possibly across Tibet and Nepal via Lhasa and Khatmandu, but more probably via Khotan, Yarkand and Kashgar and the Karakoram Mountains.



Of those who remained near Gezkul some grew restless and went back home again; others went back and forth to visit friends who in turn visited them. Thus there was contact, though not very close, between the Kazaks in Gezkul and those far to the north in the Altai Mountains and the Tien Shan. Karamullah the Bard was one who went to Gezkul and who also went as far as India. But he told me he did not like India, which was damp as well as hot, so that many of his compatriots died there of malaria, typhoid and cholera. He therefore returned to East Turkistan and remained there till 1950 when the march of events forced him to choose between going back once more to India or accepting Communism. It did not take him long to make up his mind. Hussein Tajji and Sultan Sherif had made up their minds in 1936 without realising that the enemy was Communism. Then they found themselves faced with the same alternatives as Karamullah fifteen years after making their first decision. As soon as they understood clearly what effect Communism would have on their way of life, they at once came to the same conclusion as Karamullah.

Another thirteen years must pass, however, along the old Silk Road across the Takla Makan before Gezkul, Timurlik, the Khan Ambal Mountains and Tung-huang have a part to play in the developing Kazak drama, though when the time does come, the part they play is a decisive one. But we

go back now to 1934 and to the Kizil Uzun, seven hundred miles from Gezkul, to see Hamza, the Quick-Witted, being a seasoned guerilla fighter of twelve years old, pleading with his brother Yunus Hajji, to send him to a more go-ahead school than the Aool run by the Mullah in the mosque tent in their own encampment. Eventually Yunus Hajji agrees and sends Hamza to Manass where a Kazak teacher named Abdul Latif has a tent on the bank of the Manass river and gives pupils instruction "in the name of God" as enjoined in the Kazak Schoolboy Song. Hamza is a sincere Moslem but his heart has begun to yearn for something wider than a purely theological approach to history, geography, mathematics, and learning generally. So, presently, he moves again: this time to a school in Manass town run by Abdul Aziz, who was not a Kazak but a Turki.

Abdul Aziz's nationality was a sign that the two-mouthed Communist policy was not working exactly according to plan. The policy was still completely successful in turning the local races against the Chinese. But it was also turning them towards one another, making them realise that all the non-Chinese inhabitants of East Turkistan, who numbered more than ninety-five per cent of the total population, must pull together if they were to gain their independence. This was not at all what the Soviet secret agents meant when they urged the local races to build up their national consciousness, so they began to try to foment discord between the various national groups themselves as well as between the groups as a whole and the Chinese. Moscow knew that the more the Turkis, Kazaks, Mongols, Uzbeks and others learnt to co-operate with one another, the more difficult it would be for the Russian Communists to swallow them after the Chinese régime had been eliminated.

Abdul Aziz not only taught the Islamic religion to his pupils but gave them secular instruction as well. After the agreement which Governor Sheng concluded with the Soviet Government in 1934 the schools were no longer allowed to teach English as they had been doing, and new vernacular textbooks were also introduced throughout the province. All of them were of Soviet origin although the Sheng-Soviet agreement

was scarcely a year old. In other words, the Soviet Government had worked out its policy for communising the Chinese province of Sinkiang long before the Sheng-Soviet agreement was signed.

The new textbooks were carefully edited so as not to offend the susceptibilities of Kazak, Turki, and Mongol teachers and parents by inculcating Communism openly. But they never missed an opportunity of contrasting the benefits of the Soviet system with the evils of the capitalistic system under which the inhabitants of East Turkistan were now given to understand that they were living.

For example, the text books told twelve-year-old Hamza and his fellow pupils the story of the sinking of the *Titanic* more or less as follows:

"Once upon a time there was a great ship, the greatest that the world had ever seen. It belonged to some English capitalists and they had put a band on board the ship so that there should be very much joy and laughter among the passengers. With the passengers thinking of nothing but pleasure, the crew, too, became careless of its duties and grew lax, living only for enjoyment instead of carrying out its duties.

"Then, suddenly, in the middle of the night, the great ship ran into an iceberg. The band quickly stopped playing wild dance tunes and started to play religious music instead. But it was no use appealing to God. The ship went down to the bottom of the ocean in a few minutes and only a few of the richer capitalists on board managed to buy seats in the boats and save their lives. The rest of the passengers and crew were all drowned.

"Their sad fate should be a great warning to us not to accept capitalism. No Soviet captain and crew would have been guilty of the errors which took the *Titanic* to the bottom of the ocean with the loss of so many precious lives."

Cautionary tales of this calibre were mixed with accurate scientific teaching. Thus Hamza learned for the first time from Abdul Aziz's Soviet textbooks that the world is round. At first he was incredulous and went to consult the Mullah who gave him religious instruction. The Mullah warned him earnestly

against accepting such a theory which he declared was sacrilegious.

"Go out into the plain," he told Hamza, "and look for yourself. You will see with your own eyes that the earth is flat. He who walks far enough will, after many days, reach the edge and if he does not turn back quickly he will fall off."

Controversy on the subject waxed hot and furious not only among Abdul Aziz's pupils but among their elders as well. At that time, 1935, there were still some West Europeans and Indians living in East Turkistan. One of them happened to be in Manass, so his Kazak and Turki friends asked him for his opinion. He told them that people he knew had sailed in ships right round the globe and come back safely to their starting point, so the local Moslems decided that the textbooks were telling the strict truth and their belief in Soviet infallibility in other directions was thereby strengthened.

Hamza stayed at school in Manass for two years, till 1936, the year Hussein Tajji and Sultan Sherif went forth from Barkul and pitched their tents by the lake which is like a ruler. In that year the Kazaks of the Tien Shan again rebelled and Hamza soon found himself in the thick of the fighting once more. This time Ali Beg, who had hitherto been an official in charge of the tax problems of his group, threw in his lot with the insurgents and became deputy leader of ten thousand under Yunus Hajji himself. Governor Sheng, when he heard it, fined Ali Beg one million taels, a sum which represented perhaps five thousand horses, or two thousand camels, or four thousand cattle or thirty thousand sheep. Naturally he could not pay it. But the Moslems of Manass, Turkis as well as Kazaks, sympathised with the insurgents, so they collected the money between them and paid on Ali Beg's behalf.

Egged on secretly by the Russians, the revolt spread far and wide and, this time, Osman of the Altai joined in too. One of the focal points of the revolt, however, was in Manass, where three men directed operations: one a Kazak named Baimullah, (not Osman's father-in-law), the second a Mongol named Gegen a "Living Buddha" from the Altai Mountains; and the third a Turki farmer named Ismail Hajji, whose "chuang-tsu," or

big farm, lay athwart the roads to and from Soviet Kazakstan which met, and separated, near the great Manass Bridge.

Ismail Hajji's house overlooked the main road junction and enabled him to watch all the comings and goings between Urumchi, fifty miles to the south-east and the Soviet border two hundred miles to the west and north-west. Moreover there were those tall beds of reeds nearby so that if danger threatened, Ismail Hajji and his two fellow-conspirators could slip away into safety—barring the presence of a wild boar—in a matter of minutes. So, although Governor Sheng's soldiers often came and went within sight of the rebels' headquarters, they did not succeed in catching the leaders. Indeed, they do not seem to have known that the leaders were there.

Ismail Hajji himself was an oldish man, rather short, with a narrow chest and not much flesh on his rather frail bones. His thin, ascetic face was fringed with a short, black beard. But though he looked a weakling, he was an ardent nationalist and a kindly, cultured man to whom no fellow-Moslem of whatever race appealed for help in vain. Yet he was not a fanatic, as his friendship with the Mongol, Gegen, proved. So, here again was evidence that Soviet propaganda was overreaching itself. The third member of the triumvirate, Baimullah, was further evidence in the same direction for he was a Kazak, the acknowledged political head of the Altai and Tien Shan Kazaks at that time.

Ismail Hajji, besides being a farmer who cultivated his own land, was also the owner of some twelve thousand sheep, most of which he rented out to others to care for on the usual basis: that is to say, he expected the renter at the end of the year to return double the number he had originally taken over, keeping the wool and cheese, and any extra animals which had been born during the period. Some three thousand of Ismail Hajji's sheep were rented in this way to Ali Beg and Yunus Hajji's group of Kazaks in the Kizil Uzun, thus providing excellent and legitimate "cover" for the triumvirate's other activities.

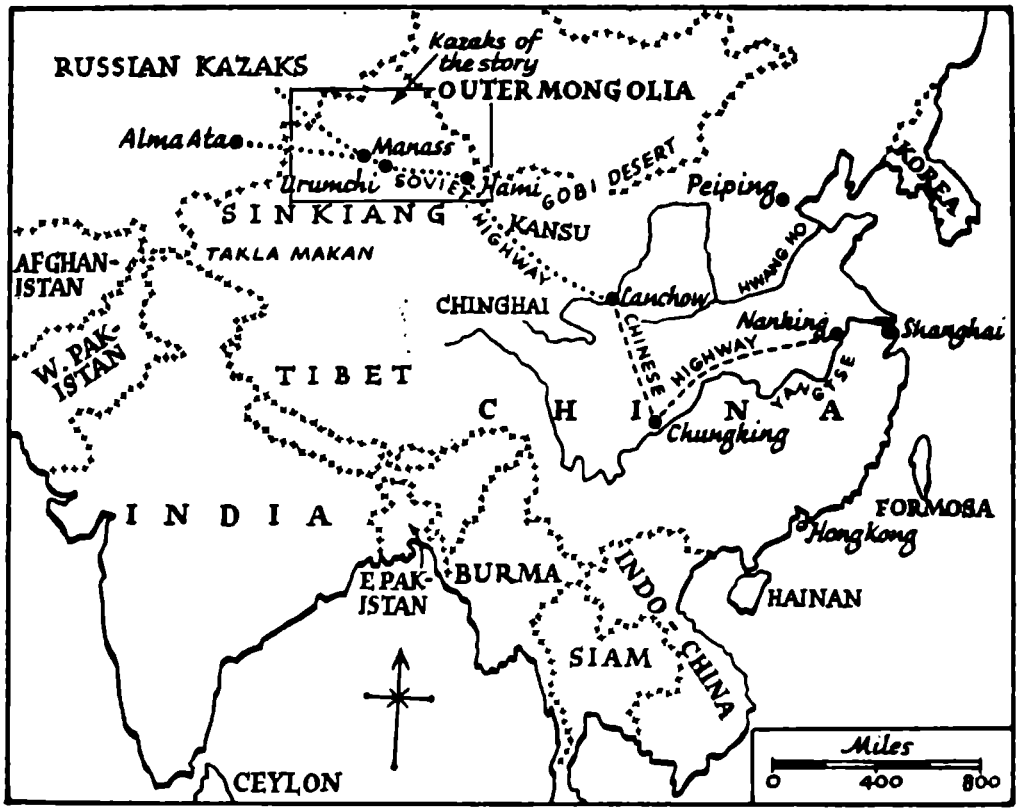
All the time the three leaders were conferring, lorries, many containing Chinese soldiers, were passing close to the house en route to and from Urumchi. Generally the lorries were Rus-

sian ones carrying, among other things, arms for the Chinese and also for the insurgents. More often, perhaps, they were filled with Russian technicians and equipment for the construction of the great new through road from the Soviet frontier to Lanchow which lies across the Gobi desert and nearly fifteen hundred miles away. From Lanchow it continued to Chungking, the one-time capital of China. The sector which concerns us, the one as far as Lanchow, was finished in 1938 and was built and also maintained and controlled by the Soviet Government, not the Chinese Government. Lanchow, the capital of the province of Kansu, at which this sector ended, is on the second greatest Chinese river, Hwangho, which empties itself into the Yellow Sea, south of Peking. Lanchow itself is almost two-thirds of the way from the Soviet border to the Pacific Ocean. So, already in 1938, Soviet influence was firmly established in the heart of the Chinese Republic.

Over a hundred thousand Kazaks, Turkis, Mongols and other Turkistanis were conscripted to build the new highway which, however, is not a highway in our sense of the word. Indeed, its principal difference from the old caravan trail which it replaced was that it followed a permanent track instead of petering out at frequent intervals. Also it crossed streams, and dry watercourses which suddenly turned into torrents after a storm, by bridges instead of fords. When it was finished, although unmetalled, it soon carried hundreds of lorries and motor cars each week along a route which previously had been a perilous adventure, and it shortened the normal time needed to reach the Soviet border from Chungking, Nanking and Peking by several weeks. Before the road was opened, it was quicker to go to Urumchi from Peking via the Trans-Siberian and Turk-Sib railways of the USSR than across the Gobi desert.

But if the new Russian-built road brought China proper closer to the outlying Chinese provinces, it also brought the interior of China that much nearer to the USSR. And it brought the westernmost province of all, Sinkiang, with all its vast undeveloped resources, within a hairsbreadth of becoming part

of the Soviet Empire. Even today, in spite of the outward friendliness of the Chinese and Russian régimes, both know that there is still that strip some two hundred miles wide between Kuldja and Tarbagatai along Sinkiang's northern frontier where it has so far been impossible to delimit the border



because both China and the Soviet Union claim the whole area.

But, in 1936, the road was not yet finished, and Russian designs on Sinkiang had not yet become clear. So, the keen-eyed watchers who were ostensibly minding sheep outside Ismail Hajji's farm, hailed the Russian lorries and their occupants as friends. In addition to the lorries, there were long strings of camels laden with wheat, tea, salt and probably opium either on their way to market at Manass or bound for some more distant destination. Going towards the Soviet frontier, either at Tarbagatai which is also called Chuguchak, or at Kuldja, also called Ili, were similar caravans mostly laden with wool. Sometimes long straggling droves of cattle and

sheep went in the same direction, for the Soviet policy of collectivisation had decimated the animal population of the USSR, and the Government was already taking immense quantities of livestock from the population of East Turkistan, mostly as payment for helping the Chinese Governor, Sheng, suppress the rebellion which the Soviet Government had fostered.

Inside Ismail Hajji's house, the three leaders were generally discussing the problem of the "Red Beards," the remnants of the Chinese forces which the Japanese had driven out of Manchuria and which had recently entered East Turkistan from Soviet territory via the Altai, Kuldja and Tarbagatai which is between the two. Ali Beg and Hamza are now convinced that the Red Beards were specially trained by the Soviet authorities for subsequent employment in East Turkistan, some in the use of military weapons suitable for mountain warfare against the Kazaks and others in the more subtle weapon of propaganda. Actually, the brutalities committed by the Red Beard soldiers neutralised the effectiveness of the propagandists.

The Kazaks immediately came into conflict with the Red Beard soldiers because they, almost alone among the East Turkistanis, always gave back blow for blow and had weapons with which to do so. By degrees the Kazaks came to regard the Red Beards as the agents of Communism and to hate them for that reason as well as for their cruelty. Yunus Hajji was one of the first Kazaks to see their political significance, but not for some years, nor in its relation to the Soviet Union, but simply in regard to the brand of Chinese Communism represented by Sheng. And by that time Communism was firmly entrenched in East Turkistan.

(Left) A Kazak "falconer" with his eagle

(Right) Typical Kirei Kazaks

The mountains and plain of Barkul

Camels on the march

CHAPTER V

The Kazak Way of War

THE arrival of the Red Beards from the USSR was a very different matter from the long, slow processions of migrating Kazak tribesmen coming from the Soviet Union with their top-heavy unwieldy camels laden with tents and chests, their countless cattle, sheep and goats, their droves of shaggy horses seeking only unoccupied pasture land. The Red Beards came as soldiers organised and trained, wearing Soviet-made uniforms and carrying Soviet-type rifles and machine guns. Even so, it was years before the local population began to blame the Soviet Government for their presence. The Red Beards were, after all, Chinese and they were in the service of the Governor who was also Chinese even if he did have Russian "advisers" working for him. So the Kazaks fought against the Red Beards at the beginning simply as the worst type of bandits the Chinese Government had ever sent to their country: brutes who shot down without mercy not only those who resisted them but also many other hapless people just for the fun of seeing them die.

"They stole our beasts and raped our wives and daughters before slaying them," said one of the Kazak refugees in Turkey. "Nor could even the local Chinese understand what they said because they came from Manchuria where men speak an uncouth dialect. They were murderers and cut-throats as well as thieves. And if a man, smiling at them, showed but a single gold tooth, they slew him for the gold that was in it."

As Ismail Hajji, Gegen and Baimullah sat smoking their long, cardboard-ended Russian cigarettes and drank cup after cup of brick-tea, they talked long and earnestly about the problem of exterminating the Red Beards against whom the whole country was seething—to Governor Sheng's dismay and the secret delight of his Russian advisers. The triumvirate came to the conclusion, regretfully, that they could not match

the Red Beards in the field. So the conspirators made other plans, and circulated them secretly to the Altai, to Kuldja, to Tarbagatai, to Turfan, and even to Hussein Tajji and Sultan Sherif at Gezkul, which the Red Beards apparently did not visit. Whenever a party of Red Beards left its barracks, its route was to be notified with all speed to the secret leaders of the revolt so that it could be ambushed. Whenever a Red Beard walked through an inhabited place by himself or with one or two companions, he was to be shadowed and stabbed from behind, or stoned from above, as opportunity suggested.

Such tactics had their effect but brought reprisals. So the trouble spread, and before long the peaceful Chinese merchants and farmers who had lived among the inhabitants of East Turkistan for many years—even, in some cases, for generations—found themselves involved in the blood feud against the Red Beards.

In the measure that relations between the Chinese and the subject races grew ever worse, Russian hopes of gaining control of East Turkistan increased. By 1939 they had established garrisons in various places especially along the new highway as, for example, at Hami, which is on the south side of the long Tien Shan range and more than seven hundred miles as the crow flies from the Soviet frontier. In March of the same year a few months before the World War started, the Russians instructed the Chinese provincial Government to issue edicts ordering all foreigners except, of course, Russians, to leave East Turkistan. Practically all to whom the edicts applied were either British or Indians. So, in early spring, 1939, thirty-three hapless traders, nearly all of them Indians, and among them nine women and twelve children, were forced to trek across the sixteen thousand feet passes of the Pamirs at the coldest season of the year. They arrived at Gilgit, said *The Times,* frost-bitten and destitute.

But in 1936, Russian or Soviet intentions were still a secret and the East Turkistanis, especially the Kazaks, had their attention fully occupied with the Red Beard menace. To the Kazaks who lived in the countryside fell the chief burden of setting ambushes to catch the Red Beards on the march. I have no account of an actual ambush at this time, but Hamza

explained how his brother, Yunus Hajji, taught him this branch of Kazak fighting. Yunus learnt it from Boko Batur who also taught it to Osman. Osman's son, Sherdirman, was still using it against Soviet and Chinese Communists in 1953 and there is some reason to believe he may even be doing so as I write in 1955.

Hamza recorded his account of Kazak ambush tactics on our tape "Reporter" and what follows is a shortened version of what he said:—

"We always chose our tactics according to the ground. In the open we broke cover on horseback galloping into the enemy from the rear if possible and firing from the saddle as we went. In the mountains, we left our horses with the women and children while we hid behind rocks and bushes. I never used any but picked men to make the actual attack and I chose their horses too. The men were always told to shoot to kill—not the horses but the riders if they were mounted and the drivers, not the occupants, of lorries. We never took prisoners because, being always on the move, we had nowhere we could keep them.

"In the hills, we aimed with the help of the two long prongs which we always fasten to our rifles. In the open we fired from the saddle. Though we tried to make our first attack from the rear, we also followed this by sending in riders from as many other directions as possible. They all had orders to get to close quarters if they could and finish the engagement off with swords. In the later stages of the campaign, swords became scarce and we were obliged to use wooden clubs with nails in them. They were nearly as deadly as swords when one learnt how to swing them.

"In the mountains, our object was always to attack in a narrow gorge—there are plenty of these both in the Altai and Tien Shan—and we invariably blocked the escape route with a small mobile force of five or six men after the enemy had passed. In the open, we sometimes used to send out small groups on horseback with orders to turn and gallop away—in the direction of our ambush—as soon as the enemy started to pursue them. If the enemy fell into the trap we let them go right past and then fired into their backs and charged from the

rear. Another favourite ruse was to set fire to a Chinese farm, evacuate the neighbourhood immediately we knew that the local Chinese garrison was on its way to catch us, and then ambush the column as it was going home after failing to find us."

According to Hamza, the Kazaks' greatest problem was always shortage of weapons and ammunition. "Naturally we carried away every usable weapon we could lay our hands on," he said. "But even so, we often had to use home-made guns, made out of pieces of iron piping we bought in the bazaars. Many of our bullets were home-made, too. There was a good deal of lead to be had and we used to melt it down over our fires. Such bullets carried pretty true up to a hundred and fifty yards or so, which was generally all we needed. But our home-made guns sometimes burst, killing those who were using them."

Hamza said: "When ambushing lorries, I never used more than one man to each lorry. The party was under strict orders not to fire till I did and, as I have mentioned already, we only shot the drivers, not the occupants. We used to lie alongside the road so that we could scarcely miss even though we only made attacks of this kind at night-time. When the driver was hit, the truck generally went careering on out of control and ended by overturning. This either killed or disabled most of the occupants, but if there were any able-bodied ones still left, we picked them off one by one and let the rest go. We seldom suffered any casualties in such attacks. If there were more arms than we could carry away with us, we buried them and smashed or set fire to what we did not want, big guns and heavy mortars and things like that which are quite useless without wheeled transport, and we would not have been able to get carts along the mountain tracks even if we had had them."

Every ambush was prepared with the utmost care. First the Kazaks watched the enemy for days to ascertain his habits. They often staged a feint attack fifty miles away on the previous day and then rode all night to mount the real one. Cases are on record when a Kazak guerilla has ridden the same horse

over a thousand miles in less than four weeks when the need arose.

The importance of careful reconnoitring was greatly stressed several times in Hamza's account. Knowing how the enemy is likely to act is, in his opinion, much more than half the battle.

"That is how we hunt wild animals," he concluded; "and that is just about what our enemies were."

Perhaps it is not quite so simple as that. Hunting wild animals is a sport and every Kazak loves it. In the past, he regarded war as a sport, too—a thrilling contest of wits and skill between individuals. But the Chinese, especially the Communists, introduced a different kind of warfare, one based on propaganda and torture, on taking innocent hostages to compel brave men to surrender, on poisoning water wells so that the beasts and human beings who drank there died in agony, or were faced with the dreadful choice of perishing miserably of thirst or surrendering and being executed.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt in my mind that Hamza and Ali Beg and Yunus Hajji and Osman enjoyed many of their battles at least as much as they enjoyed hunting. This is why the Communists found them such formidable opponents. Hamza himself had fought no less than a hundred and sixteen engagements by the time he reached Kashmir in 1951 at the age of twenty-nine. Most of them ended with hand-to-hand encounters in which swords were of more use than rifles or automatics for the simple reason that there was no time to reload.

Most loved of all sports was hawking, though the birds the Kazaks use are neither hawks nor falcons but eagles standing two to three feet high and often with a wing-spread of over six feet. Well-to-do Kazaks, and many who were less well-to-do, used to carry a hooded eagle on their gauntleted wrists which they supported on a stick stuck into a special hole in the saddle.

Hawking, however, was not a sport to be enjoyed alone and friends were generally invited to share in the fun. The Kazak story would not be complete without a description of a hawk-

ing party, partly because it was a feature of their way of life and partly because it epitomises and illustrates Kazak guerilla tactics in battle. So let us join Ali Beg, Yunus Hajji and young Hamza on a hawking expedition in the Tien Shan and see for ourselves what happens.

The sun has just risen as the little cavalcade sets forth laughing and joking in a ragged line behind the eagle-owner. There are white clouds round the waists of the Three Sisters whose white-capped heads tower invisibly right above them. Maybe it will rain later in the day—it usually does on the northern slopes of the Tien Shan where there are very many thunderstorms in the summer, and days of steady snow in the winter, although on the other side of the range, scarcely a hundred and fifty miles away to the south, are the terrible Thirsty Mountains where rain practically never falls at all.

As the horses bear their riders up the twisting tracks over the hillside, someone starts to sing. The eagle stirs a little uneasily on its master's wrist at the first notes, but its eyes are hooded so that it cannot see to fly away. Besides, by now it has been long enough in captivity to know and trust its master. So it simply digs its talons a little deeper into the leather gauntlet on which it is sitting and gives its undivided attention to the task of not letting its balance be upset by the movement of the horse.

As befits a happy occasion, the song is generally a gay love song or a ballad and soon everyone is joining in. But sometimes, the singer sings a song he has composed himself—the words, not the music—in which case everyone listens for the joke which is almost bound to come in each verse and then joins heartily in the chorus:

Kai-li-li-leh
Wai-dun-ya-a-a-a

which goes rolling across the great moraines and woods on the other side of the narrowing valley and is tossed back and forth till the echoes are drowned in another stanza.

"How much farther are you going to take us?" shouts someone from the rear, when the party has had its fill of sing-

ing. "My horse is not shod for riding over glaciers—not at this time of year."

"Don't you see," suggests another. "His eagle has had so many failures lower down, he has to take us where the hares and foxes haven't met it before. Otherwise the bird wouldn't dare show its beak."

"You've got it wrong," says a third. "He wants to get us up in the clouds so we won't see the poor thing miss."

The eagle owner smiles but does not answer. For the whole of the preceding week, the keen eyes of his retainers have been reconnoitring the mountain valleys, first marking down in their minds likely spots in which a fox, or maybe a wolf, might be found in the open at the right time of day.

When they think they have found one, they report back:

"Up in Twittering Bird Valley beyond the open meadow by the side of the little blue lake, a vixen leads her cubs to the waterside each morning two hours after sunrise."

"In the Vale of Ravens where there is a tall pine tree with an open space round it, a lone wolf basks in the sun till an hour before noon."

"How big is the wolf?" asks the eagle-owner.

"It is eight spans from the muzzle to the base of the tail—a gaunt beast and its hide is rough and scarred."

"Thinkest thou that I will fly my eagle at such a scarecrow? Or at a vixen with her cubs? Shame on ye both!" shouts the bird's owner. "Find me a worthier quarry or it shall go ill with the pair of you."

So the retainers try again. And this time one returns with the news that a full-grown wolf with no mate following behind it trots each morning across a meadow at the bottom of a valley, the narrow sides of which are covered by gaunt rocks and low bushes.

"It is good," says the owner of the eagle. "I will go and see." And, having reached the spot, he notes carefully the time at which the wolf appears and marks in his mind whence it came and where it is going. Then he seeks out a cleft in the rocks high above the meadow from which he can launch the eagle at exactly the right moment before the wolf disappears from sight behind a boulder. Finally, he finds a place in which to

leave the horses out of sight or smell of the wolf, estimates precisely the time needed to reach his vantage point from where the horses will be tethered and returns home to fix the day and time of starting and to invite his friends.

So presently the party reaches the spot the eagle-owner has pre-selected and he dismounts, whereupon if there has been singing it ceases immediately and everyone follows his example. He points out to them where the strike is to be made and then they all melt into the hillside climbing noiselessly to high vantage points overlooking the place chosen for the encounter.

For a time, there is utter silence except for the occasional shriek of a bird high above them, or the bleat of a mountain goat or the shrill, piercing whistle of a marmot. Then, suddenly, a long grey shadow appears on the green grass loping lazily down the tortuous, narrow track from the distant col at the head of the valley. "By Allah!" say the watchers to themselves. "A wolf! No cub either, but a full-grown male in the prime of life, moving without haste and not a finger's-breadth less than ten spans! A formidable beast, indeed! Will the eagle be launched at such a quarry? Which will win if it is?"

They are not left long in doubt. The eagle, unhooded suddenly, rises into the air and looks around for an instant and then sees the wolf. The great bird is ravenous after two days of fasting and does not hesitate but swoops, swoops, down, down, not like a stone or a bullet, but with silently flapping wings, remorselessly, unerringly, a winged avenger, fearless, sure-winged, implacable. As the wolf moves forward unsuspectingly, the eagle strikes its great talons deep behind the beast's head. Knocked over sideways by the force of the impact, it rolls over, gnashing and biting, trying to use claws and teeth on its assailant while the eagle strikes furiously for the wolf's eyes with its curved beak. In a matter of moments, the fight is over and the wolf is dead.

Immediately there is a wild scramble by the watchers. All leap to their feet and race for their horses—rather breathlessly, some of them, even though it is downhill, for Kazaks are always more at home on horseback than on their feet. However, in an incredibly short time they mount and gallop to the scene

of the combat where they find the owner of the bird has already re-hooded his eagle and is busy skinning the wolf. When he has finished doing so, he unhoods his bird again and lets it gorge itself to the full on the wolf's carcase.

"A fine bird," comments one. "Wai yapramai! The wolf was dead in three minutes, and slain by the eagle alone without the help of hunting dogs."

"Ay, of course it was," agrees someone else. "With such a bird and such a trainer. Nevertheless, look at the size of the wolf. See! the skin measures nine and a half spans from muzzle to the base of the tail."

"Does not the eagle measure as much and more from wing to wing?" asks another jealously, knowing that he would not dare to set his own bird at anything larger than a fox.

"More than thou dost from outstretched fingers to fingers." laughs someone. "Verily, if that eagle were matched against thee, I know which would be the winner even if thou hadst a sword in thy hand for the contest."

"That is ill-said by one who lost the joint of his first finger to the beak of an eagle," replies the other.

Though such a mishap is unusual, it is one which could easily happen through carelessness. The captured eagle respects only its own master who treats it, first with deliberate cruelty and then, when it has been trained, with the utmost care and attention. So an understanding is established between the two, and on the side of the man at least, it often develops into real affection. But the bird, even though it accepts its master, remains suspicious of all others. To them it is still wild, intractable, savage, dangerous.

The eagles are caught in the winter. The hunter first makes a snare of white string, twenty strands, each with another twenty joined to it by running knots. He lays this snare on the ground and then, when the first snow covers it completely, he ties a live chicken nearby. The chicken squawks, the eagle swoops, and, when it tries to rise again with the dead chicken in its talons, the nooses run together round its legs and it is helpless. The snare-setter rushes up, throws a cloth over the struggling bird and then, with both hands well gauntleted, fixes

a hood over the eagle's head so that it cannot see to fly away when he releases it from the cloth and the snare.

The next stage is to drive two stakes in the ground and tie a length of string between them. One end of another, shorter, piece of string is attached to the eagle's leg and its other end to one of the stakes. As the string round its leg is too short to allow the unfortunate bird to sit on the ground, it is thus forced to try to keep its balance on the first piece of string, otherwise it would soon be hanging head downwards in space. It is kept like this, hooded, for literally days and nights on end —ten is about the maximum—until the trainer is sure that it is too tired to fly away. Occasionally its captor unhoods it and gives it a mouse, or a hare, and a very little water; not enough of either food or drink to satisfy it but enough to keep it alive, and whet its appetite for more.

When its captor thinks he can safely do so, he rehoods the bird and lets it sit, still tethered, on his gauntleted wrist while he rides round the encampment. If it behaves itself, he gives it a much thicker piece of string to sit on when he goes home, then a stick, and, finally, it is promoted to the branch of a nearby tree. But he always keeps it tethered for he knows it would fly at anyone but himself—which, in general, is what he wants, for it prevents anyone trying to steal it. Moreover it must remain savage or it would not kill.

The great day comes at last when the eagle's owner takes it up into the hills to make its first strike. He does not feed it for two whole days beforehand and he is careful to fly it at a quarry which is not too far away. Thus he is able to get to the place before the bird has eaten its fill. By the time he arrives, the eagle is already tearing its prey to pieces and ravenously devouring the raw flesh. But, as it knows its owner and is busy eating, it allows him to approach without flying away. He rehoods it, quickly skins the animal—he needs the skins to line his clothes with—and then gives the carcase back to the eagle. Surprisingly soon, the bird learns that it will always be allowed to eat what it has caught and from that moment a bond is established between man and bird which lasts till one or the other dies.

CHAPTER VI

Communist Set-Back

FIGHTING against the Red Beards flickered up and down East Turkistan for several years but, by 1938, the flames had subsided sufficiently in the Tien Shan area for Hamza to be able to return to school, although in the Altai the fighting increased in intensity. Osman ranged through the mountains, hitting the Chinese whenever and wherever he could, staging ambush after ambush at the head of his picked band of guerillas till he became a veritable nightmare to his enemies. His incomparable knowledge of the numerous impregnable hiding-places in the upper Altai, where few except Kazaks and Mongols had ever been, enabled him to evade capture when the Chinese came after him in force and he inflicted heavy casualties when they were entangled in the narrow valleys and ravines and by surprise attacks in more open country. He led these himself, galloping into the enemy's ranks well in advance of his men, firing his machine-gun from the waist as he charged. He did not shoot, as one might think, at random, but actually picked off individuals with short bursts of two or three shots beginning with any officers he could see. His marksmanship was so deadly that it is now as legendary among the Kazaks in East Turkistan and Turkey as William Tell's became among the mountaineers of Switzerland. He seems to have come through these engagements without more than an occasional scratch.

Osman's men gave him the kind of devoted service the Kazaks have always given to such a leader. They regarded him as a true successor, not merely to Boko Batur, but to Genghis Khan himself. Courageous, ruthless, chivalrous, suspicious, proud, he never asked others to do anything he did not dare to do himself. His followers felt that he would never swerve from a course of action he held to be right, never spare either himself or his enemies, never compromise with an

opponent, a friend, a cause or his conscience. They did not realise that he had appeared on the stage of history half a century too late. As a cavalry leader he was unique. But in the end he had to take his horsemen into battle against armoured cars, tanks and aeroplanes. Even so he put up a good fight, as we shall see in due course.

Meanwhile, in the Tien Shan, Yunus Hajji, Baimullah, Ali Beg and other Kazak leaders were turning their thoughts to politics. At first this brought disaster. In 1939 at about the time the second World War started, Governor Sheng, acting as usual on Russian advice, suddenly relaxed his terror and offered to let the Kazaks appoint local officials so that they could manage their own affairs such as schools, taxation and the allocation of grazing lands. Many Kazaks accepted with alacrity, not realising that Governor Sheng was simply scattering offices as ground-bait in the same way as they themselves used chickens to snare eagles. When the new officials had taken up their duties, Sheng sent out his secret police and rounded them all up on the pretext that they were members of the "Halk Azad-lik Aluremo"—the People's Freedom Party—the very name of which shows that it, as well as Governor Sheng, was under Soviet influence.

The arrests had the familiar Communist ring about them. At dead of night, a party of secret police surrounded the house or tent of the man they wanted and shouted to the inmates to come out, which most of them did in their night clothes. Then the women and children were hustled back, none too gently, while the wanted man was fettered and manacled and then pitched head first into the waiting car and driven to the prison without being allowed to dress. In some cases police agents ransacked his house, not always raping the women and not always thinking it necessary to "plant" incriminating papers, though both happened sometimes. But at that time membership of PFP was not illegal—after all, it was founded under Soviet auspices—so no one had troubled to conceal the fact that he belonged to it. Evidence of treasonable activities therefore was only planted when the wanted man was considered really dangerous.

Other races besides the Kazaks were involved in the round-

up: Turkis, Mongols, Uzbeks and the rest. But there were leaders who managed to escape the snare, generally because they had carefully kept themselves in the background when less cautious folk accepted Governor Sheng's offer of jobs at its face value. Among those who remained at liberty were both Ali Beg and Yunus Hajji and also Ismail Hajji, the Turki farmer whose house had been used by the local insurgents to plot the campaign against the Red Beards. But Sheng caught Ismail Hajji in the end. He was arrested and released, then re-arrested and tortured until he died. His two confederates, Gegen the Mongol "Living Buddha" and Baimullah, the Kazak, both received a cordial invitation to go to Urumchi as Governor Sheng's guests. Like others, they went, suspecting nothing, and, in the midst of the princely festivities, apparently arranged in the guests' honour, executioners suddenly intervened and put them to death.

Baimullah's mantle was placed, secretly, on the shoulders of Ali Beg. But in 1940, about the same time as the fall of France, he too was arrested and taken to Urumchi, where he remained under house arrest for 18 months. During this time, Chinese guards accompanied him wherever he went and spent the night in the room in which he and his principal wife slept. There was a bed in the room and the guards occupied it. But Ali Beg had slept on the floor of his tent all his life, so this was the least of his trials.

Shortly before Ali Beg's arrest, Yunus Hajji went to Urumchi as a delegate to a conference called by Sheng. He took Hamza with him so that he could continue his schooling in Urumchi, and he actually stayed there two years in spite of the reign of terror which was going on all round them. There were white boxes placed invitingly at street corners and people were encouraged to put anonymous accusations into them. Sheng's secret police did not trouble to inquire whether the accusations were true or false, so no one knew from day to day, or even from hour to hour, whether the secret police would not hammer on his door and arrest him for some offence he had probably not committed. Arrest was followed by torture, during which the unfortunate victim racked his brains to think what enemy might have denounced him. Having thought

of one, he denounced him too and soon the tally mounted up with the inevitability of a chain letter till it involved many thousands of innocent persons. Ali Beg and Hamza estimate that not less than ten thousand hapless people were done to death in this way alone in each of the nine years Governor Sheng's reign of terror lasted.

In September, 1939, just before Hamza went to Urumchi, Sheng's Russian advisers decided that religious instruction should be abolished in the province. So, throughout his two years in the capital, Hamza received secular instruction only. He did not like the change, but he blamed the Chinese for it, not the Russians. But seeds of doubt about the Russians were beginning to germinate. The text-books he used were compiled under Russian auspices, and the Soviet Union was a Communist State. Some of his school-mates were now Communists, even some of the Kazaks. And when they left school, they immediately got good jobs in Sheng's provincial Government. Hamza—Uchar, the Quick-Witted—began to ask himself whether Communism was really of two different kinds: one Chinese, which was bad, while the other, Russian, was good; one which backed the local nationalities against the Chinese and the other which backed the evil tyrant Sheng, who trod on the necks of the subject races. Or was it that the Communists spoke with two mouths in public but secretly pursued only one object? And, if this was what they really were doing, which mouth was to be believed?

It was indeed difficult for anyone to know what to believe in those days. For example, had Sheng meant well or ill in August, 1939, when he invited all the different races inhabiting the province to send delegates to Urumchi to work out a new basic law whereby everyone should be justly treated? At least it was an invitation which could not be ignored because that would enable Sheng to say: "Well, I offered you freedom and you would not come to get it."

In due course, therefore, some three thousand delegates, Yunus Hajji among them, arrived in Urumchi on the appointed date and were entertained sumptuously at Governor Sheng's expense. Then, as a preliminary to the discussions, and to ensure (so he said) that they were carried on in an atmos-

phere of peace, Sheng ordered each delegate to write a letter to those who had chosen him and to say in the letter that all weapons must immediately be surrendered to the Government.

I do not know how many delegates did as Sheng bade them. I only know that very few, if any, of the Kazaks did. Nor, if they had done so, would any arms have been handed over in consequence. In any case, the three thousand delegates were still in Urumchi in the following April and they had not yet begun to consider the draft of the new basic law. Then, in April, 1940, Sheng arrested eighteen of the three thousand, including Yunus Hajji, and when the delegates were at last allowed to go home in the winter of 1940-1, the eighteen did not accompany them. Nor were they ever again seen alive.

There was one Kazak in Urumchi who might possibly have been able to say what happened to them. He was employed as a lorry-driver by Sheng's secret police and one of his jobs was to carry away the corpses of those who had been executed, generally by shooting the victim in the back of the neck, and dump them outside the city boundary. In addition to his salary, which was not large, he earned considerable sums by telling the relatives of missing people where he had deposited the bodies of their loved ones.

One hot summer's day, he happened to be transporting some of Sheng's executioners, alive, instead of the dead bodies of their victims, when his engine gave out in a desolate place, far from any habitation. While he lifted the bonnet and tinkered, which all drivers in East Turkistan love to do because it enables them to show off their skill with machinery, his nine passengers sought a cool spot in the shade and soon they were all asleep. The driver finished his repairs and then went over to the nine executioners and cut their throats one by one. Having done so, he drove back to Urumchi where he reported that the lorry had been held up in the mountains by a party of Kazak brigands who had slain his passengers with their swords but had spared him because he was a Kazak. And when his employers sent to the spot seeking confirmation, the kites and vultures and jackals had completed the work the driver began

so that it was impossible to disprove what the driver had said; and his employers believed him though no one else did.

The name of this macabre individual was Qali, and even his fellow-Kazaks find him hard to place. Some said he was a spy because he worked for Sheng for wages. Others said:

"If he was a spy because he took money from Sheng, what was he when he took money for having told us what Sheng had done to our dear ones? And for whom did he spy when he took no money at all for slaying Sheng's executioners, except what he found in their pockets after killing them, which doubtless was not much?"

We shall have another brief opportunity of weighing Qali's character later on when he suddenly appears from nowhere at a critical moment in the Kazak struggle. Whether we shall be any wiser then is another matter.

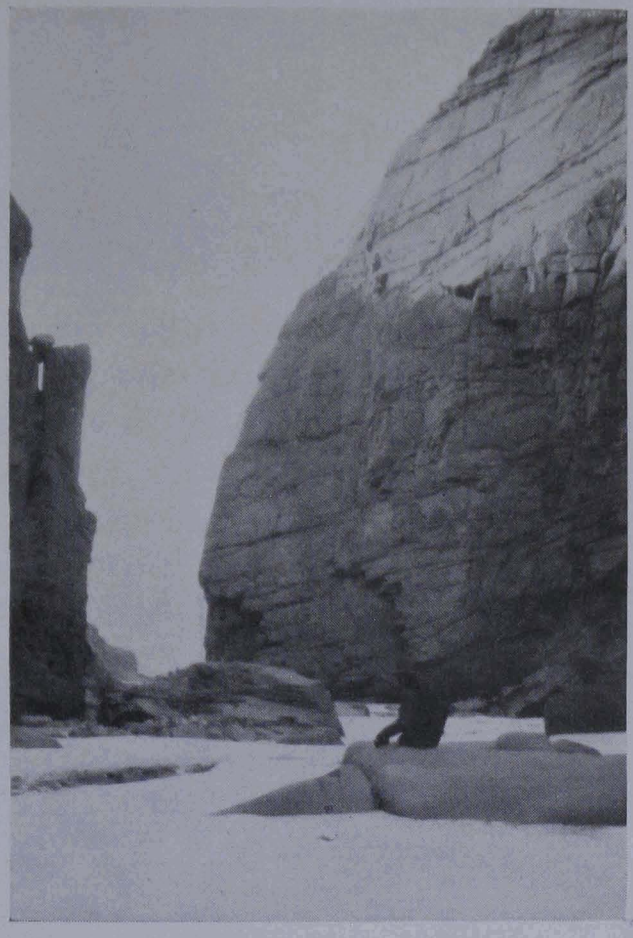
Hamza, who was at school in Urumchi when his brother was arrested, did not employ Qali's services. But, as soon as it was clear to him that Yunus Hajji was dead, he left the capital as unobtrusively as he could and made his way back to Kizil Uzun. Hamza himself was now of an age, nineteen, to have been in mortal danger if Sheng's secret police, or rather, the Russian Pogodin's, had suspected him, as is the usual way with Communist secret police, simply because they more than suspected his elder brother. But Hamza, fortunately, knew better than to speak his mind openly at school and the very fact that he was attending a Communist-controlled school, and receiving political instruction at it, told in his favour. So although he was Yunus Hajji's brother, he was not arrested and got home safely.

Instead of going straight back to Kizil Uzun, Hamza went first to take counsel of Ismail Hajji, choosing a moment when the three roads were free of traffic. The old man was still there, though weak and ill from the sufferings he had undergone at the hands of Sheng's inquisitors. He advised Hamza to keep clear of Manass where there were white boxes at street corners as in Urumchi. Hamza therefore returned after nightfall to his own tent by the banks of the Kizil Uzun where his friends immediately set a watch day and night overlooking the track

Ali Beg holding the half five-dollar bill given him by Douglas Mackiernan

A Communist delegation at Hami, November, 1949 to demand the surrender of Osman Batur (third from right)

(Left) Tien Shan glaciers



(Right) A likely spot for an ambush

(Right) The city wall of Hami (Kumul)

from Manass so that he could be warned in time if strangers were approaching. But none came.

Some time later, Ali Beg returned unexpectedly to Manass. So Hamza sent him a message to find out whether it would be safe for them to meet. The friend who took it was a little dubious when he came back.

"He has come to Manass as a Ming-Bashi, the Captain of a Thousand—in the pay of that butcher, Sheng," the friend told Hamza. "It is to fear that the Kitai have indoctrinated him after their fashion and that he is in their pay, though who could blame him if the choice were between accepting their doctrine and unutterable torture?"

"That is the gossip of the bazaars which is not worthy to be credited by true believers," said Hamza contemptuously. "Was not I in Urumchi when Sheng's torturers held him captive in a house and interrupted even his prayers lest he should be speaking, not to God, but to a confederate concealed beneath his window?"

"Wert thou not thyself learning at a Kitai school during that time?" asked the friend suspiciously. "And maybe they taught thee Kitai ways together with Kitai speech. . ."

"And maybe my brother, Yunus Hajji, was likewise in Kitai pay," Hamza interrupted. "Maybe, too, that he was arrested because of it."

"Nay," said the friend. "Of thy brother, none can hold doubts in his mind. And as for thee: art thou not his brother? But this Ali Beg: was not his father, Rahim Beg, a mediator betwixt our people and the Kitai? And did not the son succeed the father? And doth not the son now hold office under Butcher Sheng who has taken thy brother away and we know not what has become of him?"

"What thou sayest about my brother is true," Hamza agreed. "But was not Ali Beg his deputy Tumen-Bashi, or Captain of Ten Thousand, in the days of our fighting against the Red Beards before Ali Beg was taken to Urumchi a captive? And is not Ali Beg known throughout the district as a true patriot against whom Sheng set a fine of a million taels which the people paid voluntarily seeing that he was not able?

Therefore I will hear from his own lips, not thine, why he has come to Manass as envoy of Sheng the Butcher."

But Hamza did not think it wise to send to Manass again. However, in a short while the new Ming-Bashi himself sent a message asking Hamza to go to see him. Though the messenger had no word to say in explanation of the invitation, Hamza went at once. And when he and Ali Beg met, they embraced, placing their right cheeks against one another and shaking hands in the conventional manner as they did so, murmuring also the prescribed words "Allahu akbar! God is great!" and touching forehead, lips and breast with their right hands after the salutation, as is the way between those who follow Islam. Both were still young men; Hamza nineteen and Ali Beg thirty-four. From that time on, their fortunes were inextricably intertwined.

Making sure that there were no eaves-droppers—the concealed microphone had not yet come on the scene in that distant part of the world—Ali Beg told Hamza his plans. He emphasised that he had to walk very warily. During the eighteen months he had spent under house arrest in Urumchi, he had been "indoctrinated" by day and much of the night. Except that in his case there was no actual physical violence —evidently Sheng put his potential value too high for that sort of persuasion—the method was exactly the same as has now become only too familiar to us through what was done to our own soldiers who were unfortunate enough to be taken prisoner in Korea. Lectures, essays, the learning by heart of long statements of Communist policy, answering a ceaseless fire of questions on Communist theory and practice, forced "confessions" of past errors: such things, and others like them, had gone on for hours, days, weeks, eighteen months on end. Blessed with a splendid memory, like most Kazaks, and a "poker" face, Ali Beg ultimately convinced his mentors that he had swallowed all they told him.

But by this time, Sheng was getting worried because of what was happening thousands of miles away from East Turkistan. It was October, 1941, and the Soviet armies in Europe were in headlong flight before the victorious Germans. Hundreds of thousands of disillusioned Russians were eagerly surrendering,

hoping that Hitler would free them from the Communist terror. Sheng saw that Hitler's forces were daily getting nearer to Asia and that the whole Soviet system appeared to be crumbling.

Before long, he decided to change sides. This involved adopting a new policy towards the local races on the one hand and towards Nationalist China on the other. One of his first moves, therefore, was to send for Ali Beg, who went to the meeting expecting that he would not return alive, for he remembered what happened to Baimullah and Gegen when Sheng appeared to show them favour, and what had happened later to Yunus Hajji. But, instead of receiving the usual bullet fired without warning into the back of his neck, he heard Sheng offer him the post of Ming-Bashi—equivalent to local governor —over the Manass district in which he was born. Scarcely daring to believe his ears, and wondering whether the offer was a trap, he asked what his duties would be. Sheng answered that he would have a free hand to appease the local inhabitants and make them contented with the régime. Ali Beg knew that it was an impossible task, but it was a better life than house arrest and indoctrination in Urumchi and would give him an opportunity to organise opposition to Sheng. So he accepted.

Sheng's efforts to set himself right with the Chinese Nationalists whose authority he had flouted consistently for seven years were also successful and Madame Chiang Kai-shek herself actually flew to Urumchi to attend the celebrations Sheng arranged in honour of the reunification of the province with China. In fact, Communism in the Province of Sinkiang was now in full retreat. Soviet influence retreated too, though nothing like so far.

The local population was slower than the Kuomintang to accept Sheng's recantation. One day, Ali Beg sent an urgent message to Hamza to come to see him. Ali Beg was living in a house at Manass at this time, and when Hamza arrived he carefully closed the door and windows after they had embraced and exchanged the conventional Moslem greetings.

Hamza waited, as was right and proper, for the elder man to speak first.

"Sheng's brother is dead," Ali Beg told him. "He was found strangled. Sheng's wife also."

"It is the will of God," said Hamza. "And on Him be praise. But how did Sheng himself escape? Are not his crimes greater far than those of the brother, and the woman?"

"That is indeed truth," Ali Beg agreed. "Maybe he was too well guarded."

"May God bring the day of his retribution nearer," Hamza declared devoutly. "He is a murderer of hundreds of thousands. On such God doth not shower mercy for ever."

The brother of the Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse-tung himself was an official under Sheng at this time and died in the same way in 1942. Sheng himself stayed on as Governor for another year. Then he was invited to return to Chungking so that he might become Minister of Agriculture in the Central Government. Neither Ali Beg nor Hamza could tell me how long he held this position. They say that, after a while, he "disappeared." This is not Sheng's story so we may leave it at that.

During the two years Ali Beg nominally served Sheng as Ming-bashi of Manass, he was secretly devoting all his energies to building up the Kazak national movement and making friends, regardless of nationality, with Turkis, Mongols and others who were doing likewise. His aim, at that time, and theirs, was to win independence for East Turkistan through political co-operation from which even the Chinese were not barred if they were ready to support the idea of local self-government. Osman Batur in the Altai, on the other hand, was rapidly carving his way to freedom by force of arms, not caring in the least whether the Chinese he was fighting were Communist or Nationalist so long as they were Chinese. Nevertheless, he and Ali Beg were in constant touch with one another, mostly through Hamza, although their paths at this time were by no means parallel.

And, in the background, the Soviet Government still found time and means, in spite of Hitler, to egg the Kazaks, Turkis and Mongols on against the Chinese, and the Chinese against the local inhabitants. But it was steadily losing ground in both directions and continued to do so even after Stalin's "crowning

mercy" at Stalingrad turned the tide of war away from Russia's Asiatic empire. In 1943, the Anti-Imperialist League which Sheng had established on Moscow's orders to undermine British influence was dissolved and, for the first time in history, British and American Consulates were opened in Urumchi, at the request of the Chinese Government.

Many Kazaks did not know at first what to make of the decline in Russian influence. For years, they had counted on Russian support for their national movement against the Chinese, including the brand of Communism which the Chinese Sheng tried to force down their throats. They had been carefully taught by Russian agents to regard the Russians as friends. It was from the Soviet Union that they received, though mostly through Chinese merchants, such things as tea, sugar, tobacco in exchange for their surplus livestock, wool and hides. The Kazaks, like the other local races, were on friendly terms with the Russian lorry drivers and engineers who used and maintained the roads. And they very much preferred the Russian garrisons which had unostentatiously been established in many towns to the Chinese Red Beards. When the Russian garrisons moved out in 1943, many people feared that their departure would mean another reign of Red Beard terror. It was three more years before they understood that the reason the Russians came in the first place was to enable the Communist yoke to be clamped over their shoulders and that Communism and Red Beardism were one and the same thing.

So, in 1943, when Sheng's successor, Wu Chung-hsin, arrived from Chungking, most of the Kazaks received him coldly, though he came laden with promises of better treatment and reform. Sheng's title was Tupan or Military Governor. Wu Chung-hsin was styled, simply, Provincial Chairman. He had had an English education and is often known as Chaucer Wu. He announced at once that he had come to give local independence to everyone, Kazaks, Turkis, Mongols, Uzbeks, under officials of their own choosing. Hamza was one of those who took his proclamations seriously. He had just published a pamphlet inveighing against Communism. Full of hope and enthusiasm, he sought office at once. As one of the few Kazaks

who could speak and write Chinese fluently, he was, or should have been, indispensable to both sides.

Hamza was inspired by burning indignation at the crimes committed by the Chinese Communists, especially the Red Beards, against the people of East Turkistan. He denounced them for abusing the ancient and unwritten laws of hospitality by murdering guests who had just been given food and drink and by murdering the hosts to whom they themselves had gone as guests. He accused them of stealing under the pretext of levying taxes; of waylaying travellers and killing them simply for petty gain; of subjecting people to revolting and indescribable tortures with the object of extracting money or information; of accepting and manufacturing false witness against innocent people. He concluded by calling on his countrymen to wipe every Chinese Communist off the face of the earth.

Hamza's pamphlet, in fact, was a vigorous call to action against Communism in practice. He was not concerned with Communist theory which he judged by its fruits. And he did not yet realise that in spite of Governor Sheng's nine years' reign of terror, the fruits of Communism were still far from ripe.

Other Kazaks besides Hamza ranged themselves behind Chairman Wu in the hope of building East Turkistani freedom by stages in peace. New and strange names begin to come into our story in consequence. As most of them are quite unknown outside Central Asia, I shall try not to bring in more than are absolutely necessary. Yet the newcomers are not unimportant for they held in their hands the fate of a country as large as Great Britain, France and Germany together, though its inhabitants numbered at most 8,000,000. Perhaps that is not quite accurate. The fate of East Turkistan was ultimately settled in Moscow and Nanking. But the people of East Turkistan came within a measurable distance of becoming the arbiters of it themselves.

While the politicians, especially the Chinese, talked in Urumchi, Osman went on fighting. His exploits in saving his people from the Red Beards had earned him the title of Batur which was now universally bestowed on him. Thanks entirely to his efforts, the Altai was practically cleared of Chinese, and

on June 22, 1943, the people of the Altai, Mongols as well as Kazaks, acclaimed Osman their Khan, or Prince, thus establishing him as the legitimate successor of Genghis Khan the Great and apparently fulfilling Boko Batur's prophecy that he was the chosen one of God to lead his people to freedom.

Osman Batur accepted the title of Khan at a special ceremony at Bulghun, a meeting place of three roads coming to the Altai from the USSR, Mongolia and Urumchi. A river runs through it to a near-by lake on the shores of which there is good pasture for nomad flocks and herds. No doubt the place was chosen because delegates attended not from East Turkistan only, but also from the USSR and Mongolia.

The Mongol representative was Marshal Choi Balsan, head of the Communist republic of Outer Mongolia. The two representatives from the USSR were Kazak chieftains from Kazakstan. All three were accompanied by imposing bodyguards clearly designed to impress Osman Batur with the might, and generosity, of the Soviet Union.

Choi Balsan was described to me as a round-faced, rather rotund man of medium height, clean-shaven and wearing, not his usual marshal's uniform, but a long orange robe of silk which stretched from his neck almost to his ankles and which was held close to his ample middle by a cloth girdle. As was still normal for Mongol notables in those days, he wore on his head a peculiar kind of high homburg, made in England and exported to Central Asia via the bazaars of Calcutta. Indian merchants took camel loads of them mostly to Lhasa across Nepal and then on to the Tibetan-Sinkiang frontier, where local merchants bought them. Formerly this transaction took place at Khotan and other East Turkistani cities, but the Communists closed the frontier in 1939. The merchants who bought the hats from the Indians carried them, again on camels, to Mongolia.

The two Kazaks, whose names were Kassin and Sultan, were dressed much as Osman Batur himself except that the soft puce velvet "tumaks" on their heads had no jaunty little cockade of owls' feathers sticking out from the top because this was not the badge of the Naiman tribe of Kazaks to which they belonged. And there was a wider brim of soft fox fur round

them. But all three fur-lined ear flaps were tied under the chin in just the same way and there was not much difference between the long fur-lined coats of flowered silk brocade ornamented with gay embroidery. The three Kazaks wore narrow black leather sword belts with long curved swords in them—treasured weapons handed down from generations of ancestors and made of fine steel inlaid with silver and gold, like the swords of Damascus, but the work of Kazak smiths who from time immemorial have wandered from encampment to encampment plying their trade with primitive implements and superb skill. The Kazak chiefs wore loose caloshes over their knee-high leather boots. This made them walk in what seemed rather a slip-shod fashion. But they did not look slip-shod when they arrived on horseback at the head of their bodyguard of some fifty to sixty armed men, all dressed much as the chiefs were but with less magnificence.

The ceremonial greeting between the four notables and their respective retinues, was a lengthy affair, complicated by the fact that Choi Balsan was not a Moslem. He had been brought up a Buddhist, so the three Kazaks could not greet him as they would normally greet one another, with the traditional greeting: "Salaam aleikum—Peace be with you!" and receive the reply: "Wa aleikum es salaam—And with you peace!" The other sixteen conventional phrases of greeting were also based on the Kazak Islamic heritage. They therefore had to say to Choi Balsan something courteous but non-committal, such as: "Have you come peacefully?" and "Is your health good?" When they had done so, Osman Batur motioned Choi Balsan to enter the vast ceremonial tent in which their conference, and the feast after it, were to be held.

"It is for the chief guest to enter first," he said politely. "Be pleased to enter."

"Nay! Nay!" protested Choi Balsan vigorously. "These two are more worthy than I. I may not precede them."

"Nay, it cannot be that I should be the first to enter," replied Kassin as the senior of the two Kazak visitors. His companion, Sultan, echoed the words a moment later.

But after more parley, Choi Balsan at length suffered the two Kazaks to take an arm each and usher him with smiles

into the tent. Fortunately, the tent door was amply wide or they might have had difficulty in not touching the sides which would have brought ill-luck to the deliberations. Or, maybe they did touch the sides on this occasion.

Armed men guarded the tent while the four chieftains conferred together. But, before the parleys actually began, Osman Batur's servants offered the traditional tea and salted bread. And as all noisily drank the strange compound of tea, milk, salt and butter, they held pieces of sugar Russian-fashion at the side of their mouths, and let the liquid absorb sweetness from them before they swallowed it. And each of them gave the business ends of their funnel-mouth-pieced Russian cigarettes a twist before lighting them, lest the dry tobacco should slide out.

No official communiqué was issued to the press about what went on behind the thick felted walls of Osman Batur's tent at Bulghun. Indeed, this is the first time an account of the proceedings has been published. Choi Balsan, who was a Communist by profession though not necessarily by conviction, started by warmly congratulating his host on his success in freeing their Altai—the Kazaks' and Mongols'—from the Chinese. He blandly ignored the fact that the Chinese whom Osman Batur had expelled were in the service of the Communist provincial governor, Sheng, a puppet of the Soviet Government. Choi Balsan then went on to suggest that Osman should not stop at the virtual independence he had achieved but should set the seal on it by proclaiming an independent Republic of the Altai with himself as its first President. He hinted, very cautiously, that the Soviet Government might possibly be ready to let him incorporate the Altai province of Siberia in the new state, adding that it would certainly give Osman all the weapons and other help he might need to make the new Republic secure against any "aggression" on the part of the Chinese Nationalists. The Mongol subtly added that, when the Altai was independent, its vast resources could be used exclusively for the benefit of the people of the Altai, of whom Kazaks and Mongols formed the great majority. He did not think it necessary to point out that, as the new republic would be entirely land-locked, its trade

would be at the mercy of the rulers of the Soviet Union seeing that China would naturally refuse to acknowledge the Altai's right to independence and would do all in its power to strangle its trade with the outside world.

Osman Batur stroked his beard but did not commit himself to a definite answer at this stage of the proceedings. But it was clear that the idea attracted him. It was true that he had driven the Chinese out. It must have been pleasant to feel that the homeland of Genghis Khan was now his to do what he liked with, and whether his title was President, Khan or Emperor signified little. Had not Genghis Khan conquered half the known world after making himself master of the Altai which, now as then, was the central hub round which the world revolved—whether on its axis or as a flat spinning top made no difference?

If Genghis Khan had done these things, why not Osman? And had not Boko Batur prophesied it?

At this culminating point in his career, Osman Batur looked remarkably like Holbein's famous picture of Henry VIII, though his face lacked Bluff King Hal's arrogance and signs of good-living. Standing just over six feet in height, broad in proportion, short-necked and dark-skinned, with deep furrows between his eyes which were generally half-closed, he carried his character in his face: a man of action and decision, not to be trifled with, suspicious, opinionated, ruthless and without fear; a man to be trusted both by foe and friend; a man with a mission yet without personal ambition beyond his stern determination to fulfil his life's purpose.

Such a man was by nature more cautious when battling with words than with weapons of war. So, when Choi Balsan ended his glowing picture of what the future held for him if he trusted it to the generosity of Stalin, he still gave no definite answer. Choi Balsan therefore went on to describe the huge quantities of consumer goods which, he said, the Soviet Union was holding on the other side of the frontier so that they could be exchanged against the hides, wool, livestock and mineral wealth of the Altai as soon as it was certain that the benefits of the exchange would go only to the people of the Altai and not to the Chinese imperialists. He added

that the elimination of Chinese influence would enable the Kazaks and Mongols of the Altai to regulate their own affairs without Chinese interference. This was a shrewd argument: there were constant disputes between the two nomad races about grazing rights.

Osman may have reflected that Kassin and Sultan, being from Soviet Kazakstan, were the right people to speak about the consumer goods said to be available in their country. But they held their peace and, when Choi Balsan appealed to them for confirmation of his remarks about the USSR, as he did sometimes, they mostly nodded their heads in agreement.

But that night, after the feasting was over, Kassin murmured to his host beneath his breath as the guests were taking their leave that he would fain have speech with him privately after Choi Balsan was safely out of the way.

If only for religious reasons, the tents occupied by the Mongols were at some distance from those of the Moslems so that there was no difficulty in arranging for Kassin to visit Osman secretly during the hours of darkness. When the two men met, it was obvious that Kassin was embarrassed. Like Choi Balsan, he had received his instructions from the Soviet Government before he was sent to visit Osman Batur officially outside Soviet territory. But he was a Kazak, and not only that; he was actually the grandson of the Kazak hero, Ablai Khan, who had fought against the Russians in the early nineteenth century and had resisted them successfully for many years before they were able to defeat him. So Kassin was secretly determined to make Osman Batur understand what lay beneath the surface of the fair words Choi Balsan had spoken.

As the two men sat and talked, very quietly lest their words should penetrate through the thick felted walls, Kassin unfolded the sorry and shameful tale of broken Soviet promises to the 3,500,000 Kazaks of Kazakstan: how, when the Reds were fighting the Whites in the early days of the Russian Revolution, they posed as champions of the smaller nationalities, like the Kazaks, but they went back on their word the moment the Tsarist danger was overcome, and started to Russianize the Kazaks and other Asiatic races in the Soviet Empire. Next he told how Kazak hopes were raised again

when Lenin introduced the New Economic Policy in 1923 because it offered security not only to small farmers but also to the nomads engaged in animal husbandry. Once again, and only five years later, the nomads had found that the Russians had lied, for they took away the animals despite their previous promises and even forced the people to languish in collective farms and in mines underground instead of letting them roam as free men in the fresh air of heaven. About this time, too, the Soviet Government had begun to deny Moslems the right to teach and learn their religion, trying to turn the children into godless talebearers who would inform against their parents if they continued to pray in the manner of their forefathers; trying, also, to destroy the Kazak language and the age-old way of life the Kazaks had inherited from their remote ancestors including Genghis Khan himself.

Kassin concluded by telling Osman that the Kazaks under Soviet rule had never seen the vast quantities of consumer goods Choi Balsan had said were waiting to flow into the Altai. Indeed, far from being richer, they were much poorer because the Soviet Government had taken their livestock, and their livelihood, from them, calling them kulaks, or rich peasants, though they had no wish to be peasants but desired to keep to their nomad ways as herdsmen and shepherds.

Osman Batur as usual said little. And when Kassin ended, there was a silence, after which Osman said:

"Verily I have heard today the words of a scion of his ancestors. But if the Russians remember thy lineage, it may be ill with thee when thou goest back. There is enough here, and to spare, for both if thou wishest to remain."

"It is on the knees of God whether a man lives or dies," Kassin answered. "And am I not the servant of my people as well as their chief? Who am I to stay in safety and leave them when times are evil? Yet God rewards those whose thoughts deserve it, and He will reward thee."

A little while after, Kassin rose to go and when Osman bade his visitor depart in peace, Kassin went back to his tent rejoicing.

The next day Choi Balsan pressed Osman Batur to give a

favourable ear to his suggestions, but Osman refrained from doing so and the talks ended inconclusively.

After the talks there were sports. Individual champions of the two races challenged one another to wrestling matches. The contestants stripped to the waist round which each bound a "belbagh" or strip of cloth, which his adversary then grasped with both hands while pushing or pulling his opponent and trying to trip him. Or else they gripped one another's shoulders while bending forward at right angles from the waist. The winner was the one who forced his opponent to break his hold on the belbagh or the shoulders, regardless of whether his shoulders touched the ground or not. The match was judged by the onlookers who rushed to and fro and round and round in their excitement, yelling advice, cautions, encouragement and rebukes to the wrestlers. But though the onlooking was almost as strenuous as the wrestling, the judgments were generally fair, for the rules were simple.

Sometimes the wrestling was on horseback. But the rules were much the same. He who first was forced to break his hold, lost. In such contests, a good horse was essential seeing that the rider had his two hands busy with more important things than the reins. But Kazak horses, and Mongol ones, have an almost uncanny way of anticipating their master's movements and, if they feel he is toppling to one side, they immediately try to save him.

The horse-racing aroused even more excitement than the wrestling. A race attracted some thirty to forty competitors, each one of whom had put his horse on short—or even no—commons for three days before the race. The starting point was in a grassy valley, free from loose stones, and the "course" ran up the valley, quite steeply at times, for a distance of about five miles. The spectators were on horseback themselves and they all assembled at the starting point. As soon as the race started, they dashed off in hot pursuit of the competitors and it has been known for some of the spectators to reach the finishing point before them. The prize was a silver "yambu" or "shoe," a coin in great demand by the maidens who use them to sew on to the shawls which cover their heads and shoulders after they are married.

As a light interlude to the more serious sports, a girl and a boy were chosen and each set upon a horse. The girl was given a whip and the boy a few yards' start. At a word from Osman, the boy galloped off with the girl after him. In such contests the girl's mount is generally a little the fleeter of the two so the boy can only escape her whip by superior horsemanship and cunning. He constantly makes sudden, unexpected turns trying to hoodwink the girl into thinking he is going one way and then dashing off in the other. Or he pulls up suddenly, slipping sideways almost under the horse's belly as he does so, in the hope that her whip will not be able to reach him as she flashes past.

In these contests there are no prizes. The girl knows that if she succeeds in laying her whip roundly about the boy's shoulders, she will have achieved a success that rarely comes. And the boy knows that the spectators will jeer at him if he fails to escape: indeed, his comrades will twit him with it almost daily till the day of his death unless in the meantime he has wiped out the disgrace by some unusual feat of courage or strength.

Dancing was another attraction. With scarcely an exception —at any rate so far as the Moslems were concerned—all those present would have regarded any woman who danced in public as immoral and, in fact, the traditional Kazak dances are performed by men. Generally they tell a story as, for example, the birth and growing up of an animal. But the *pièce de resistance* on this occasion was undoubtedly the Dance of the Roebuck. The solo dancer who performs it must dance all the time on his head and only use his hands to balance himself. He twists and bends his body and legs in time to the music but he also contracts his neck muscles and his shoulders to lift head and hands from the ground as the rhythm demands. One of the Kazak refugees in Turkey danced the Dance of the Roebuck for me at Develi while Karamullah accompanied him on the dumbri. The dancer on that occasion was an oldish man and the strength of his neck muscles had departed so that his head never left the ground. But he was still fully equal to the Dance of the Black Stallion which is a similar dance performed on the feet.

After the sports there was more feasting and the following day, Choi Balsan, Kassin and Sultan went their respective ways. Soon after Kassin and Sultan reached their homes in Soviet Kazakstan, Beria's secret police arrested them. Not many months later, Kassin was executed, but Sultan was released.

CHAPTER VII

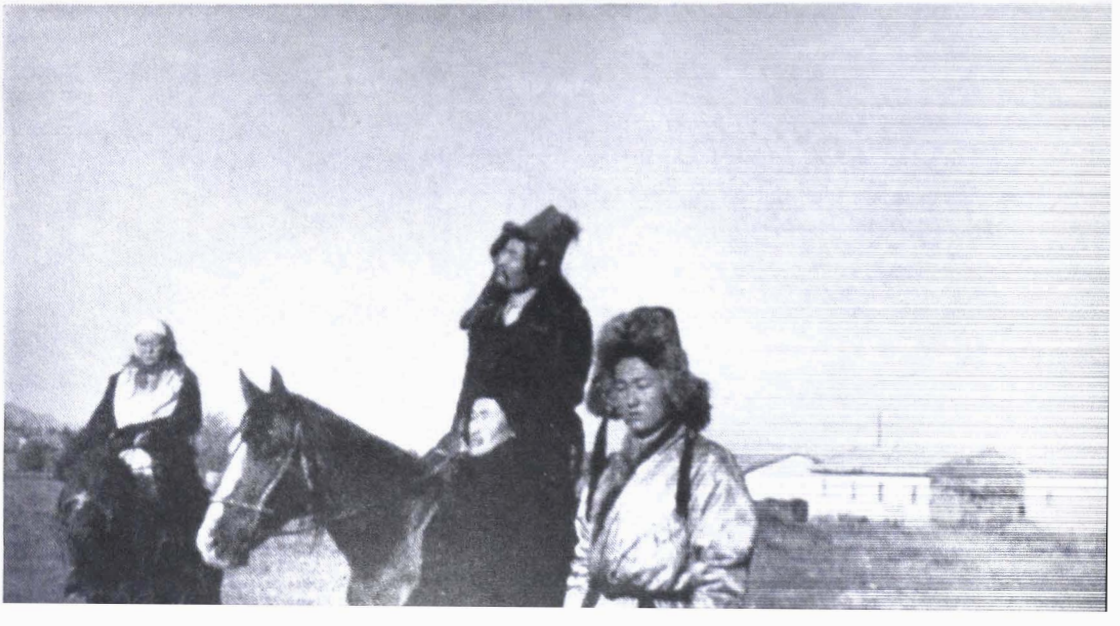
Opened Eyes

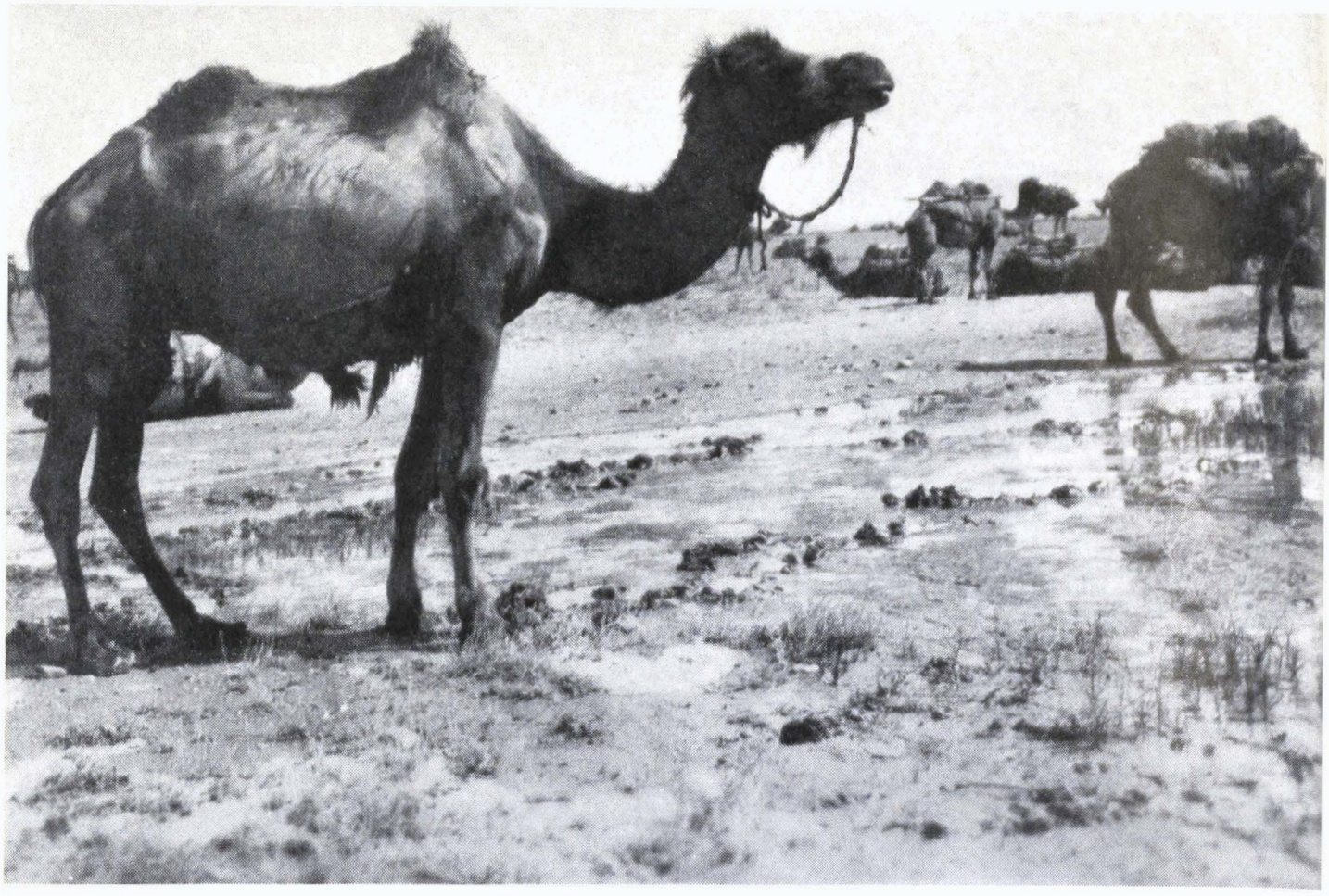
THE Soviet Government did not immediately challenge Osman Batur's rebuff to their emissary. Its hands were still too full with the Germans to use force against him. So the Russians turned their attention to other parts of the province and concentrated once more on secretly promoting resistance to the Chinese provincial Government. This was not difficult seeing that Chairman Wu's promises of local autonomy had not been carried out. Soon, therefore, the whole of East Turkistan was again seething with unrest as in the days of Butcher Sheng.

The smoke burst into flame in November, 1944, when there was a sudden flare-up among the Kazaks in the Kuldja region. Kuldja itself is about fifty miles from the Soviet frontier on the road between Urumchi and Alma Ata, capital of the Soviet Republic of Kazakstan. Many Kazaks lived there, and they listened eagerly to Russian agents who promised Soviet aid to make them independent of China. Kuldja is the centre of a well-populated area containing perhaps as many as 160,000 inhabitants. The Kuldja district is also called Ili and sometimes Ining, and first one of these names and then the other crops up in the record with disconcerting irregularity. It is a convenient place for conferences and not less than four Ili agreements were concluded during the fifty years of this chronicle and perhaps there were others which Ali Beg and Hamza did not mention. Generally, the talks at Ili were between the Chinese provincial Government and the Russian Central Government as, for example, when Governor Sheng handed over control of the province to the Russians in 1934. But there was one Ili agreement, fraught with great and unexpected consequences, which the Chinese authorities negotiated with the local races of East Turkistan as a direct

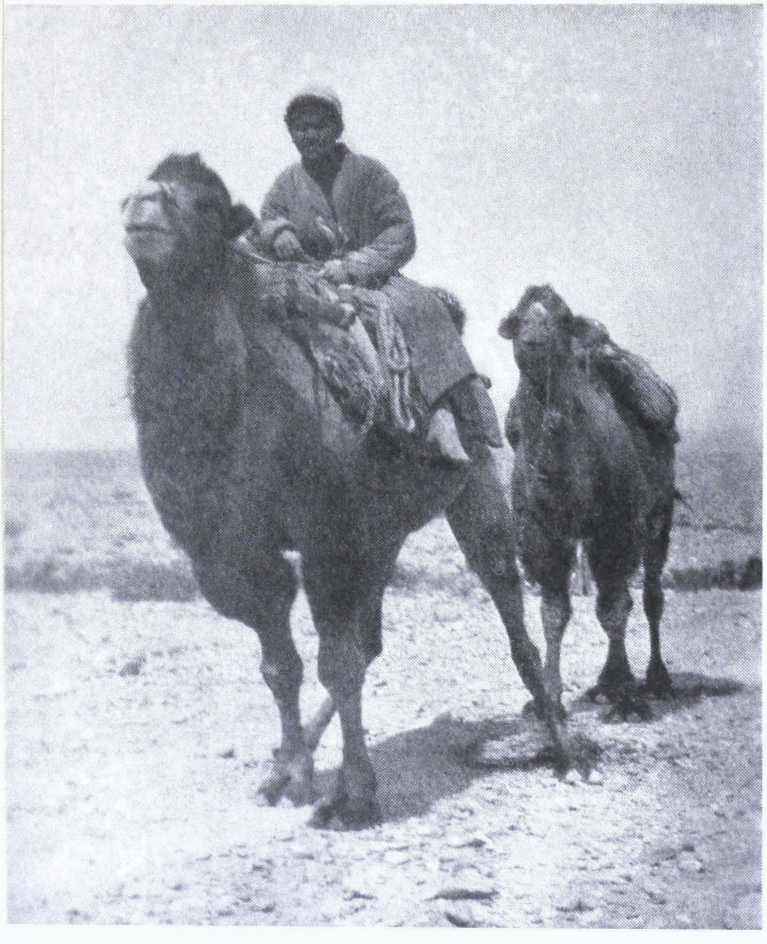
Osman Batur

Mulia and Ali Beg (on horseback) with Hamza and Hassan





Kazak camels in summer



(Left) Kazak camels with their fully-grown winter "coats"

consequence of the Russian-sponsored revolt which began in November, 1944.

The leader of the revolt was a man named Ali Han Ture, who managed, with Russian help, to collect as many as twenty-five thousand followers. Most of them were Kazaks though Ali Han Ture himself was not. Prompted by Moscow, he proclaimed the independence of the Kuldja district and the district of Tarbagatai, which is between Kuldja and the Altai. Then he sent messengers far and wide, to Osman Batur, to Ali Beg in Manass, and other Kazak leaders as far afield as Hussein Tajji at Gezkul, calling on them to follow his example.

Within a few months the whole of East Turkistan north of the Tien Shan Mountains was in revolt and the Chinese were hard put to it to retain their hold even on the walled towns. Osman Batur, of course, had already made the Altai virtually independent. But the Kuldja revolt seemed to open up the prospect of freeing the whole of East Turkistan, which was a very much greater matter.

Ali Beg waited for awhile after receiving Ali Han Ture's proposals. But on May 19, 1945, just two weeks after the war ended in Europe, he too raised the standard of revolt, having first consulted Osman Batur on the subject. Hamza immediately left his post in the Chinese administration and joined him. Ali Beg sent him post haste to Kuldja to discuss future plans with Ali Han Ture. It took Hamza nearly four weeks to get there though the distance is under three hundred miles. The whole of the intervening country was in a state of turmoil with desultory fighting in progress everywhere, though much of the area was both barren and uninviting. The first stretch of road lay through a vast marsh and the next through a belt of mountains, after which Hamza came to the Ili river, which runs past Kuldja and empties itself into Lake Balkash in Soviet Kazakstan.

Hamza's deliberations with Ali Han Ture centred round one simple question: How can we wipe out the Chinese? The two men tacitly accepted, without needing to discuss it, the basic proposition that there was no discernible difference between Chinese Communist and Chinese Nationalist. Both were

the enemies of the peoples of East Turkistan and both must be eliminated.

Ali Han Ture, who was many years Hamza's senior, was the nominee of the Russians. So there can be no doubt that the Russians knew of and approved the policy of exterminating the Chinese though they did not necessarily originate it. But the bitter hatred aroused among the Kazaks by the atrocities of the Chinese Communist, Sheng, was certainly Russian-inspired in two senses: firstly because Sheng, though nominally acting in the name of the Nationalist Government of China, was actually controlled by the Soviet Consul General in Urumchi, Apresov: secondly, because the Russians were continually egging the local races on to destroy the Chinese root and branch from 1934 onwards, and perhaps earlier.

It needs to be added that, while the Soviet Government was helping Ali Han Ture and the Kazaks to revolt against the Chinese Government, it was actually negotiating the Sino-Soviet Pact of August, 1945, with Chiang Kai-shek. The Soviet representatives admitted during the discussions that the province of Sinkiang was part of China.

The massacre of the Chinese began at Kuldja on July 3, 1945, almost immediately after Hamza returned to Manass from his talks with Ali Han Ture and five weeks before the signature of the Sino-Soviet Pact. In a few days not one of the hated Kitai remained alive in the whole triangle between Kuldja, Tarbagatai and Manass. Every Chinese soldier and civilian, farmer and official, trader and craftsman, man, woman and child was marked down for slaughter and hardly any escaped.

Manass town itself was held by Chinese troops, and the Kazaks, with Ali Beg and Hamza, were on the western side of the river. Indeed, apart from the Chinese garrison, the town was practically empty, almost all the inhabitants being Moslems who had fled to avoid reprisals by the Chinese. The Kazak insurgents did not feel strong enough to force the great Manass Bridge to capture the town. Indeed, they feared that the Chinese might cross the bridge to attack them. The Chinese, likewise, did not dare cross the bridge and feared lest the Kazaks should do so.

It happened that Qali, the self-appointed executioner of executioners, was in Manass at the time. He was still employed by the Chinese police although the Russian head, Pogodin, had gone and his Soviet-modelled Pao-An-Chu, or secret police force, was now impeccably nationalist. So Qali had been ordered to take his lorry, filled beyond its capacity with drums of Russian petrol, to replenish the supplies of the Chinese garrison in Manass town.

When Qali heard that the Chinese commander was fearful lest the Kazaks should cross the bridge, he went to him and said that he was ready to burn it, or rather the baulks of timber which formed the roadway over it, not the great piers, which were of dressed stone. But the commander must give orders to the soldiers not to shoot while he was making his preparations. The commander was pleased that a Kazak should make such a proposal and, when the troops had been ordered not to fire, Qali drove his lorry across the bridge to the Kazak side of the river. The Kazaks, seeing that he was alone and that his lorry was filled with petrol drums, not soldiers, let him come on and did not fire at him.

As soon as Qali was across, he stopped his engine, climbed down from the driver's seat, and asked to see the Kazak commander at the bridge.

"If it be thy wish, and with the help of God and these drums of petrol," he said, "I will burn the bridge so that the Chinese cannot cross it. Then shall the Kazak armies feel safe and I shall have merit in their eyes. And, moreover, the Chinese will not have the petrol, which is Russian."

"Let the bridge be burnt," said the Kazak commander at the bridge. I do not know his name.

So Qali went back to his lorry, drove it off the bridge, turned it round and then drove it back towards the Chinese end of the bridge, stopping every few yards to broach a drum and pour the fifty gallons of petrol it contained over the timbers of the bridge. And when he reached the Chinese end of the bridge all the drums were empty except one. Qali used this to soak rags which he lit with a match and threw on to the bridge. The wind did the rest, to the great satisfaction of both sides and the pride of Qali.

That is the last we shall hear of Qali except that when the Communists regained power in Urumchi in 1949, he went back to their service.

In September, 1945, Osman Batur followed the Kuldja example and carried out a "purification" of the Altai. But this operation was on a much smaller scale because most of the Chinese who lived there had already been wiped out during the campaign against the Red Beards. But there may have been some new arrivals who suffered for their optimism. After Governor Sheng returned to the Kuomintang fold, and then to the Chinese capital in 1943, many Chinese refugees from the famine area in Honan and other refugees who had fled from the Japanese in 1938 made their way across the Gobi Desert along the new Soviet-made highway on foot, on camel-back, on rikshas and carts hoping to people China's western-most province, as the Americans peopled the Middle West during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Chinese authorities in Urumchi gave them land and money, obtaining both from the local population which was not consulted. We do not need to ask what the local population, which demanded independence, thought of this new influx of the hated Kitai. Indeed, the new arrivals were one of the main reasons for the immediate success which attended Ali Han Ture's rebellion.

But there were plenty of other reasons, the offspring mostly of the previous decade: Sheng's white boxes for denunciations; his introduction of the corvée system to build the Soviet highway; so-called public works which served Communist interests but were disliked by the local inhabitants who constructed and paid for them; wholesale arrests; unfulfilled promises of local self-government and, above all, the crimes committed by the Red Beards.

Ali Beg and Hamza told me of some of the atrocities they saw with their own eyes. For example, when Chinese settlers aided by Red Beards raided the Moslem quarter of Manass, they killed all the men, and broke the legs of the women and children to prevent them running away to give the alarm. Then they raped the helpless victims regardless of the screams from the pain of broken limbs. Finally they ransacked the houses and made off.

While the Red Beards roamed the country wiping out Kazak and Mongol encampments and Turki villages in this fashion, Sheng's Russian-trained secret police combed the towns for victims and did at least a hundred thousand of them to death, torturing even more, and extorting bribes and ransom money from the relatives. The rebellions which followed these deeds took even greater toll of the civilian population. Whole regions were devastated and tens of thousands died miserably of starvation and disease. Such was the terrible background against which the massacre of the Chinese by the Kazaks in the summer of 1945 has to be evaluated.

Hamza's brief discussions with Ali Han Ture had other consequences besides fixing the date for exterminating the Chinese. Ali Han Ture told him frankly that the Russians were helping him, and no doubt he believed that Hamza would feel reassured at hearing it. Hamza did not undeceive him. But he and Ali Beg, and probably Osman Batur too, in his own fashion, were now working to establish a free, democratic and united republic of all the indigenous races of East Turkistan. This involved cutting loose from the Russians as well as from the Chinese. The Kazak leaders were counting on the war having left both States too weak to interfere. But if Ali Han Ture had rebelled simply because the Russians had ordered him to do so, it looked as if the Russians thought themselves strong enough to recover the hold on the province which had slipped from them in Sheng's time when Hitler attacked them. If that were really so, East Turkistan's chances of gaining independence were not bright.

On his way back to Manass from Kuldja, Hamza pondered the matter deeply. Could the free world help them? American and British Consulates had been established in Urumchi. But both countries were a very long way off, across the highest mountains in the world, or across the vast Gobi Desert, whereas the Soviet Union was less than fifty miles from where he and Ali Han Ture had been conferring. He remembered that the Russians actually occupied Kuldja for a while during General Big Horse Ma's rebellion, though later they had handed it back to the Communist Sheng.

The area liberated from the Chinese by the July massacres

consisted of three districts which, together, covered an area almost as large as England, Wales and Scotland. Everywhere from Kuldja to the Altai the news was received with delight and anticipation as being a decisive step in the direction of independence. Town after town struck its own Liberation Medal on which were emblazoned the five stars and crescent of the Republic of East Turkistan which was to be brought into existence. Ali Han Ture presented a special medal to Ali Beg, who at once returned the compliment. Manass, Tarbagatai and other towns distributed similar emblems to Ali Beg, Hamza and Ali Han Ture.

In September, while Osmàn Batur was purging the Altai, Hamza attended a conference on the one topic which was uppermost; how to eliminate the Chinese from the other parts of East Turkistan? Ali Han Ture was represented by his brother, but Osman Batur seems to have held aloof. After four days the delegates came reluctantly to the conclusion that the time for action was not yet ripe. By now, there were ten thousand Chinese regulars in the province and they were reasonably well armed, which was more than could be said for the Kazak irregulars who constituted about three-quarters of the whole force at the rebels' disposal. Modern weapons were scarce except among Ali Han Ture's troops, no doubt because the Russians were not quite certain that such arms would not be used against themselves. So the Kazaks were armed with bits and pieces captured, stolen, bought from any source which presented itself. Some carried home-made guns made from pieces of piping. Home-made ammunition was even more common. Most of the Kazaks had hand-grenades and swords, or billets of wood studded with nails instead. But none had uniforms. None were paid. They lived, in fact, as they did in peacetime on the increase of their flocks and herds which often moved from place to place in the wake of the fighting men or, if left behind, provided the cheese and curds, and also the clothing, which the fighting men carried with them and wore while campaigning.

One positive decision was reached besides the negative decision to postpone the attack on the Chinese: it was agreed that Osman Batur should be invited to become Commander-

-in-Chief of all the Kazak forces. What Ali Han Ture thought of this is not known, seeing that he had some twenty-five thousand men under him which was at least twice as many as Osman Batur. But he accepted the decision and soon the two men met to discuss how their forces should be disposed to safeguard the newly-liberated districts and the Altai until the Kazak forces were ready to take the offensive.

The two men disliked one another at sight. Osman Batur was a devoted patriot, intensely religious, and he regarded himself as having a divine mission to drive the Kitai out of his country. Ali Han Ture was not a Kazak nor did he consider himself as having any mission in life other than his own advancement. Seeing no hope of preferment by joining the Chinese and becoming a member of their One-Family-under-Heaven, he was trying to get himself chosen as Chairman, or at least deputy Chairman, of the province of Sinkiang by using Russian shoulders to boost him upwards. Osman Batur, thanks to what Kassin told him at Bulghun, suspected Russian motives. But he still thought the Russians might be made use of in his war against the Chinese. So the common ground between Osman and Ali Han Ture was extremely small.

Nevertheless, they managed to agree on the immediate military dispositions to be taken. They would avoid pitched battles, harry the enemy when and where they could, and establish strong points to keep the Chinese out of the three liberated districts. Hamza, who was acceptable to both of them, was promoted colonel and put in charge of the sector between Manass and the Yulduz Mountains, where he also acted as political officer. Ali Beg was made prefect of Sha-wan, or Sandy Bend, which lies to the north-west of Manass on the road to the Altai.

To everyone's surprise, however, the Chinese, instead of trying to exact retribution for the massacres, invited the East Turkistanis to a conference at Ili. Whatever the individual Kazak leaders thought about it, they had no option but to accept because all the other local races at once agreed to send delegates. Provisional agreement with the Chinese was reached on January 2, 1946. But it had to be referred to the Chinese Central Government for ratification so that it was not until

June 6, that the eleven-point Ili agreement was actually signed. Then, suddenly, the local races found themselves in charge—at any rate, on paper—of their own local affairs. The provincial chairman was still Chinese, but of the Ministers and their deputies, eighteen were to be of local nationality and only twelve Chinese. There was also to be a provincial Assembly to which the various local races were to send delegates. In due course, they actually did. With the new provincial Constitution they also got a new Chinese Chairman, General Chang Chih-shung, in place of Chaucer Wu. And they were granted the right to raise a local "army" of six regiments, most of whom were Kazaks.

It sounded almost too good to be true, and it was. On August 16, four Soviet officers from the border town of Khorgos came across the frontier in uniform and paid a polite call on Ali Han Ture at his home in Kuldja. At the end of their visit, they cordially invited him to lunch with them at Khorgos. Ali Han Ture accepted and drove off with the officers in their car. He never returned.

The Kazak refugees in Turkey could not tell me what happened to him. They knew that he was accused of "pan-Turanism," the cause for which the Turkish general, Enver Pasha, laid down his life in Soviet Caucasus after the first World War. But they could not say whether he was convicted; nor whether he is alive today or dead.

It is, of course, quite true that well over ninety per cent of the inhabitants of East Turkistan, which forms part of the Chinese Empire, speak a Turkic language just as not far short of ninety per cent of the people who live on the northern shores of the Mediterranean speak a Latin language. About ninety per cent of the peoples of West Turkistan, which is part of the Soviet Union, are also of Turkic origin. But the Kazaks are sure there is not a shred of evidence that Ali Han Ture was plotting to liberate the Turkic peoples under Soviet rule. He was simply trying to free those under Chinese rule and he was doing this at the suggestion and with the help of the Soviet Government itself. But his successes had brought the East Turkistanis—Turkis, Mongols, Uzbeks, as well as Kazaks —nearer to gaining independence than the Soviet Government

found convenient. This not only made the races less dependent on the Soviet Government but might awaken ambitions and dormant longings in the hearts of the colonial races under Soviet domination in the Caucasus and Soviet Kazakstan.

Ali Han Ture's growing independence also interfered with the policy of elevating another Chinese puppet of the type of Sheng to rule the province of Sinkiang, thus paving the way for the return of Soviet advisers, textbooks, secret police, and monopoly of foreign trade, so that the province could either be absorbed into the Soviet colonial empire or formed into a puppet State like Outer Mongolia under Choi Balsan. Ali Han Ture, instead of promoting such a policy, had helped to negotiate an agreement which set East Turkistan far on the road to independence under the aegis of Nationalist China. So he was eliminated.

Ali Han Ture was abducted just two and a half months after the Ili Agreement between the Chinese and the Turkistanis was signed. Scarcely two weeks later Russian and Mongol troops invaded the Altai. So far as the Mongols were concerned there was, perhaps, a plausible excuse: the Altai district was part of Outer Mongolia until 1922 when the Mongols finally separated from China. Many Mongols still lived there—and, for that matter in other parts of Sinkiang too. But the Soviet Government had voluntarily admitted that the province was part of China when negotiating the Sino-Soviet Pact of August, 1945, which was signed less than a year before the invasion of the Altai began. The Chinese, and the Turkistanis, naturally assumed that the Soviet declaration referred to the province as it existed in 1945. Certainly the Soviet negotiators did not trouble to undeceive them and it soon became apparent that Moscow had its own ideas about where the frontiers of Sinkiang should be, and not only in respect of the Altai.

Characteristically, the arrival of the Russian and Mongolian troops in the Altai was preceded by the advent of some five hundred Russian lorries which began to come across the frontier daily to collect wolfram, without permission, though quite peacefully. The local Kazak tribesmen who were pasturing their flocks in the neighbourhood noticed one morning

that the lorries were disembarking soldiers instead of workmen. The tribesmen hastily rounded up their beasts and drove them back to their encampment where they hurriedly dismantled the felted tents, loaded them and their other belongings on to the backs of camels and cattle, and made their way southwards, sending swift messengers on horseback to warn Osman Batur of the invasion. They themselves, and thousands more, made their way to join the eastern branch of the Kirei Kazaks in the range called Baitik Bogdo, where there are many wild sheep as big as donkeys and with huge, coiling horns which are sometimes nearly a foot in diameter at the base. The northern slopes of the Baitik Bogdo are well-wooded and watered and with good pasture, though the southern slopes are almost waterless and barren.

The invasion of the Altai on September 7, 1946, and the abduction of Ali Han Ture, opened the eyes of all the Kazak leaders, and indeed of all Turkistan, to Soviet intentions. The result was that, for the first time in history, the Kazaks and other local inhabitants were ready to make common cause with the Chinese authorities and fight as the allies of China against the machinations of the Soviet Government and Choi Balsan's puppet State of Outer Mongolia. No longer did the Kazaks wish to prevent Chinese soldiers from crossing the Manass river, and both sides were suddenly eager to repair the burnt bridge.

But the Chinese themselves were not united. Many of the officials still thought of the Kazaks as mere bandits and horse-thieves with whom no decent person should associate. Some local officials actually joined the Communists rather than do so. Others refused to honour the Ili agreement which their Government had signed. Only a handful were loyal to it. By this time, too, the star of the Chinese Communists was rising steadily—and not only in the north-western province of Sinkiang—thanks to increasingly open help from the Soviet Union given in spite of the signature of the Sino-Soviet Pact only a year earlier.

So, the next phase in the Kazak story begins. From fighting the Chinese, they have temporarily faced about and are now convinced that their enemy is Communism; and whether it is

Chinese or Russian Communism is henceforward as immaterial to them as in the days when they regarded Chinese Nationalists and Chinese Communists as equally their enemies. From 1946 onwards we shall see them trying desperately to defend their way of life, first against attacks from the north and west, instead of from the east, and then, as Communism

sweeps over China, from the east as well. Their forces never number more than about thirty thousand men and, for the most part, it is a running fight which involves the women and children and beasts as well as the menfolk because it is impossible for nomads to leave them behind. For arms, as we have seen, they have some rifles, some machine guns, and a considerable number of hand grenades, but never enough of anything for everybody. The rest have swords or pieces of wood

with nails in them. The Communists have artillery, armoured cars, tanks and aeroplanes. But the Kazaks go on fighting.

Osman Batur hurried north at once to try to stem the Soviet-Mongol invasion of his beloved Altai, about which the Chinese authorities in Urumchi seem to have done precisely nothing. But Osman's guerillas, who had coped successfully with Sheng's Red Beards, found the new enemy a very different proposition. Before long, the Kazak fighting men were forced to withdraw to the Baitik Bogdo Mountains, like the Kazak tribesmen who had observed Russian soldiers coming to mine wolfram. There Osman stood at bay, with snowy mountains thirteen to fourteen thousand feet high towering behind him as he guarded the roads by which the enemy could approach. He drove them back in disorder several times, but when he tried to pursue them they were too strong for him and the affair rested thus for over a year.

Meanwhile, at Kuldja, the Russians were using subtler methods. Almost before the news of Ali Han Ture's abduction became known, a number of Russian officers and N.C.O.'s crossed the border and assumed control of his army, though they left it under the command of a Kazak named Ishak Beg, who was in their pay. In a matter of days, they had started to purge the "unreliable" elements and indoctrinate those who were left. They also promised to issue uniforms, pay and rations which the Kazak soldiers had never received before. At first the promises were received with incredulity. But when they were kept, there was corresponding elation. Within a year, Ali Han Ture's very irregular and nondescript Kazak guerillas had been transformed into a disciplined force to which the Russian High Command felt justified in issuing, even at that early stage, a modest quantity of modern weapons.

While these steps were being taken, the Russians made use of the Ili Agreement itself to extend their influence in other parts of the province. The provincial Assembly for which the Agreement provided was now actually in being. So the Russians sent hand-picked representatives from Kuldja with instructions to throw sand into the new political machine in the manner which Communist members of legislatures elsewhere have made distastefully familiar, though in Urumchi their oppor-

tunities were far greater, because the adbuction of Ali Han Ture had changed nothing in the legal relationship between the Kuldja district and the rest of the province. It had simply given the Communists a legal means to manipulate the set-up in an attempt to compass the destruction of the existing régime.

However, the fact that Kuldja, though now under Soviet domination, remained part of the Chinese province of Sinkiang, also allowed the Kazaks who lived there to keep in touch with their kinsfolk elsewhere. Hamza, therefore, was able to come and go more or less as he pleased, so long as the Russians did not regard his visits as dangerous. No doubt they knew he had received a Communist education and perhaps this fact made them imagine that he would go over to their side. If so, they were wrong. His schooling had precisely the opposite effect. And, as he went backwards and forwards between his post in the Yulduz Mountains where his men now faced westwards towards the Russians instead of eastwards towards the Chinese, he used his opportunity to observe what the Russians were doing to Ali Han Ture's army. His brother, Yunus Hajji, had tried to train Kazak tribesmen to fight in formation instead of as a bunch of individuals and had not had much success. Would the Russians succeed where his brother failed? After a time Hamza had to admit that it looked as if they would. He found this extremely disturbing. His own men were loyal but they had practically no modern arms, no pay and no uniforms. The Russian-trained Kazaks had all three, and, only too evidently, liked them.

If the Russians had discovered why Hamza continued to visit Kuldja they certainly would not have left him at liberty. After the abduction of Ali Han Ture, Ali Beg called a secret meeting of Kazak leaders in the mountains above Manass to consider how to combat the growing menace of Communism. The delegates assembled on October 21, 1946, and agreed, firstly, that they must co-operate fully with the Chinese Nationalists—if the Nationalists let them—and, secondly, that they must organise anti-communist propaganda among the Kazaks who were subject to Russian influence.

Negotiations on the first point were entrusted to Janim

Khan, a Kazak chieftain of whom we shall hear again. By the end of February, 1947, Janim Khan succeeded in persuading the commander of the Chinese forces in Urumchi, General Sung Hsi-lien, to make the Kazaks a present of five hundred rifles, four machine guns, forty thousand rounds of ammunition, two thousand hand grenades, and one wireless set. When telling Hamza about this gift, Ali Beg added with a grin that, in handing over the wireless set, General Sung stipulated that a Chinese operator went with it.

Hamza pointed out to Ali Beg that all Ishak Beg's men now had rifles and he did not know how many machine guns in addition. He added that Ishak Beg had at least twenty-five thousand men under his command, most of them being Kazaks: some of them from East Turkistan and the rest from Soviet Kazakstan which lay just across the frontier.

So far as the disparity of arms was concerned, there was nothing the Kazaks could do about it. General Sung was doubtless in the same position as they were. American arms were pouring into China at this time and some actually went by air through Urumchi. But their allocation was under the control of the Chinese Central Government and its American advisers in Nanking, several thousand miles away from Urumchi. Moreover, most Chinese officials did not trust the Kazaks. So General Sung literally took his courage, and his future, in both hands when he gave arms to people whom his colleagues thought of as brigands.

In the propaganda field, Ali Beg and his friends considered themselves fortunate in managing to produce successive numbers of a clandestine "Review" which they multigraphed and distributed with the utmost secrecy especially in the area controlled by Ishak Beg's forces. Hamza was responsible for the Kuldja area and another Kazak, Kainesh, in the Tarbagatai area. It was a very dangerous assignment for both of them, for obvious reasons. But neither was caught.

In March, 1947, Hamza left his sector in the Yulduz Mountains to attend the installation of a new provincial Chairman in Urumchi. Ali Beg and Janim Khan were there too, but not Osman Batur, who was too busy trying to cope with the Soviet-Mongol invasion about which the Chinese Military authorities

still took no notice. The new head of the provincial Government was not Chinese but a representative of the local races. He was a Turki named Mahsud Sabri, a merchant well-liked and respected by all sections of the community. Another Turki, Mohammed Emin Bugra, whose name we have heard before, became Deputy Secretary General. Two Kazaks—Saalis, whose name is new to us, and Janim Khan were respectively Secretary General and Minister of Finance. None of the other Ministers come into our story. Altogether there were now twenty-five Ministers and Deputy Ministers: fifteen local men and ten Chinese. Both Ali Beg and Hamza are convinced that some of both groups were in Russian pay but they did not name anyone. To get the new Ministry off to a good start, all political prisoners were set free and it was announced that the Chinese military forces would be available henceforth to help in the suppression of what were euphemistically called "borders incidents," meaning, no doubt, such intrusions as the Soviet-Mongol invasion of the Altai.

Perhaps the best comment on the second announcement is the fact that the outgoing Chinese Chairman, General Chang, was now elevated to the lofty post of Director of the Generalissimo's Pacification Headquarters for North-West China. The Generalissimo in question was actually Chiang Kai-shek, though one might be forgiven for thinking from the title that it was Stalin. In the end, it was. Meanwhile, the emphasis was all on pacification.

Pacification Director Chang made his headquarters at Lanchow, capital of the neighbouring province of Kansu, to which the Russians and Sheng built their highway across the Gobi Desert in 1938. Lanchow was thus on the only direct line of communication between Urumchi and the Chinese capital which by now was at Nanking. Before long, the Kazaks had reason to believe that Chang was keeping a watchful eye on intending visitors to and from the province of Sinkiang in order to ascertain which brand of pacification they stood for. Before very long, but not yet, Chang refused to allow those who stood for co-operation between the Turkistanis and the Chinese to pass Lanchow—in either direction. When he did

so, the province of Sinkiang was entirely cut off from the rest of China, but not from the Soviet Union.

As soon as the new Ministry had been installed, Ali Beg and Hamza hurried back to their posts and a few days later Hamza paid another visit to Kuldja, where he found the Russians and their employees still outwardly friendly although they were engaged in bitter fighting with Osman Batur only some two hundred miles away. But Hamza was convinced that the Russians intended to launch an attack in the Manass area before long. However, the free Kazaks could only wait and hope that before the attack came the Chinese would provide them with enough arms to repel it.

A few days after Hamza's return from Kuldja, he and Ali Beg were in Urumchi again to discuss the question of arms with General Sung and the two Kazak Ministers, Saalis and Janim Khan. The Kazaks asked General Sung, whom they trusted in spite of the incident of the wireless operator, to incorporate the Kazak irregulars in the Chinese regular army, thus solving at one stroke the problems of arms, uniforms and even pay—for which Janim Khan as Finance Minister was ready to supply the funds. General Sung was sympathetic and no doubt knew that the suggestion was sound. But such a radical departure from precedent was beyond his competence. He could only agree to refer it to Nanking with his recommendation and request that a favourable answer should be returned before it was too late.

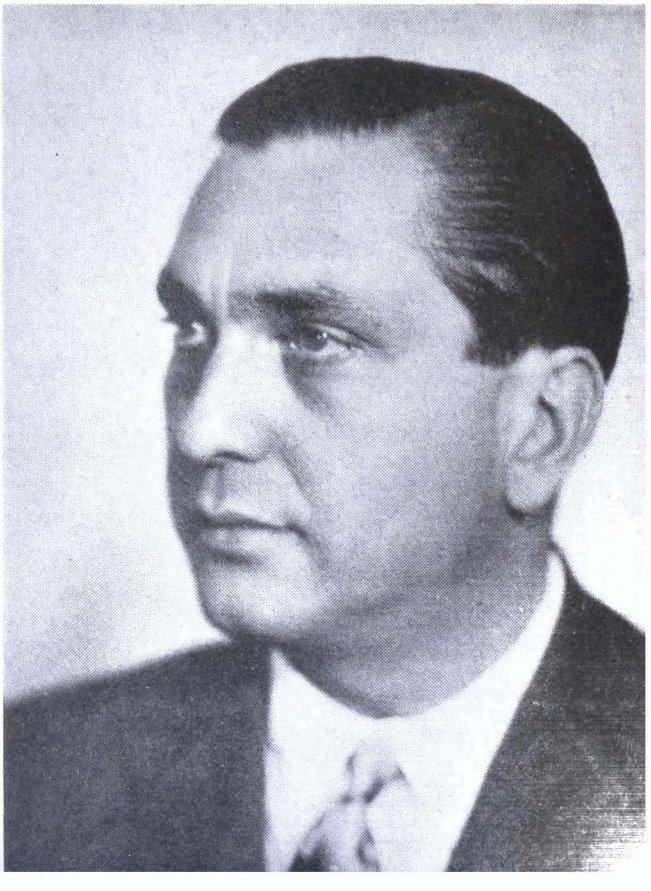
So Ali Beg and Hamza had to return to their respective stations uneasily conscious that if the Russians ordered their indoctrinated Kazaks to attack there was nothing to stop them getting to Urumchi itself if they wished unless the rank and file refused to fight against their fellow-countrymen. Both felt that this was unlikely. Disciplined troops do not readily disobey orders. Indeed, it might happen instead that some of the free Kazaks would refuse to fight against their own kith and kin, especially when the latter were well armed and they themselves were not.

Matters were made worse by the news from Osman Batur. Tired of abortive attack and counter-attack between the Altai and Baitik Bogdo, the Russians built a road from Mongolia

A group of Kazak women and children in Turkey

The President of Turkey, Celal Bayar

(Right) The Turkish Minister of State in charge of Refugees, Osman Kapani Devlet Vekili



across the wild country on Osman's western flank, and their men were now threatening to cut him off from his friends in Manass and Urumchi. There was nothing to do but evacuate the Baitik Bogdo as he had evacuated the Altai. So once again, the Kazak nomads drove their beasts southward—this time to the main Tien Shan range. Osman made his headquarters at a place called Kizil Chala Bel, the Red Waist, near Kucheng. But mostly this region is a place of sand-dunes where there is only water in winter when the sand is covered with snow.

And so we have reached another stage, Hussein Tajji's move from Barkul to Gezkul being the first, in the great Kazak retreat. Though some of the tribesmen may have returned to their traditional homes in the Altai after their leaders were killed, most of them have now been permanently displaced by Mongols who have accepted the régime imposed by Choi Balsan and his like. Most of the Kazaks are out of the Baitik Bogdo Mountains too. And, without doubt, the Mongolian and Soviet frontiers in these parts have moved south at China's expense, though how far it is impossible to say because even the fact that they have moved at all has never been publicly stated—at least, not to Ali Beg's or Hamza's knowledge. The frontiers moved in fact, but not in law, when Osman Batur, incongruously fighting China's battles as well as his own, evacuated the Altai in September, 1946. At that time, the Russian-sponsored drive of the Chinese Communists against the Chinese Nationalists in other parts of China had not developed. Osman Batur was driven out not by Chinese Communists but by Soviet and Mongolian regular troops who took forcible possession of Chinese territory in the Altai and elsewhere, with air support, less than thirteen months after the Sino-Soviet Pact of Friendship was signed and without either side denouncing it. So far as Ali Beg and Hamza could tell me, the Chinese Nationalists did not even try to keep the Russians and Mongolians out, and the only opposition at that time came from Osman Batur and his Kazak guerillas.

In December, 1947, the long-awaited clash between free and indoctrinated Kazaks took place not far from Manass. But it did not quite follow the expected course. The material benefits with which the Communists hoped to bribe the Kazak

levies into accepting indoctrination failed to wean a surprising number from their innate love for the Kazak way of life. Stimulated, too, by the little multigraphed "Review" distributed by Hamza and Kainesh, no less than eight thousand of the "indoctrinated" Kazaks—three regiments out of nine—suddenly mutinied rather than attack their free kinsfolk and betook themselves, with their arms, to the other side. Hamza received them joyfully and led them across the Manass river where they helped to repel a surprise attack launched on Ali Beg's forces by the other six regiments. Fighting went on for several days before the attackers were finally driven off, and there were very many casualties on both sides.

It is hard for us to realise, used as we are to a tidier form of warfare, that both the free and the indoctrinated Kazaks were at the time, and remained afterwards, in normal relations with the provincial Government. Kuldja did not cease sending its hand-picked representatives to the provincial Assembly at Urumchi, although the effective frontier between China and the Soviet Union had moved forward so that the area they represented was virtually no longer in China. In some places the effective frontier jumped as much as two hundred and fifty miles. It remained there after the Chinese Communists drove the Nationalist leaders to Formosa and, for all Ali Beg and Hamza know, it is still there.

Meanwhile, however, the Kuldja delegates were as assiduous as ever in their attendance at the provincial Assembly at Urumchi. They came to be known as the "Ili rebels." It was not yet thought desirable for them to call themselves Communists, but already they were more than fellow-travellers.

Not all the Kazak inhabitants moved out of the Kuldja and Tarbagatai districts when these events happened, though some did. The free Kazaks still held the northern slopes of the Tien Shan Mountains and they could still communicate freely with Osman Batur in his new headquarters at Kizil Chala Bel. But the whole of the Altai was now denied them and they could not venture out of the northern foothills of the Tien Shan except to the east of the Manass river. Many Kazaks had camping grounds in this region, so its loss was a very serious matter.

In spite of the fact that their living space was shrinking, all the free Kazaks remained full of optimism. This was partly because permission had at last been received from Nanking to integrate the Kazak troops into the Chinese regular army. The Kazak contingent was placed under the command of Osman Batur who at once summoned Hamza to join him with the three regiments which had come over from the Russians. Hamza himself now acquired the rank of Colonel in the Chinese regular army at the age of twenty-five.

Thus reinforced, Osman Batur felt strong enough to make another attempt to drive the Russian and Mongolian invaders out of the Baitik Bogdo and Altai. It was winter and the Kazaks, including the ex-indoctrinated ones, were accustomed to moving about the country on their horses whatever the weather, so Osman decided to send his men forward to gain as much ground as they could. Moreover, he knew that his followers would need the uplands when summer returned, for they could only pasture their stocks in the lowlands during the winter.

For once, he does not seem to have led his men into battle himself and they were under the command of his son, Sherdirman. On December 7, 1947, while they were attacking a position eight days' riding away, a small detachment of about a hundred enemy cavalry surprised Osman himself near Kucheng.

The story has become a Kazak saga. Osman Batur was not at that time living in his felted tent but in a house. It was a one-storey building surrounded by a mud wall over a yard thick which had one heavily-barred gate in it to give access to the house. Osman, happening to look through a window about nine o'clock one morning, saw armed men trying to open the gate. Till that moment, he had no idea that the enemy was in the neighbourhood and, indeed, it turned out afterwards that, except for this raiding party, the whole area was clear. But Osman himself had so often staged just this kind of attack that he was never far from his rifle. Two of the would-be intruders fell, both shot through the head before they had time to run. The others scattered quickly.

With Osman in the house were his wife, their six-year-old

daughter and a servant who was also a trained machine-gunner and who, fortunately, had his machine-gun with him. The house was in a lonely spot and the chances of anyone coming to the rescue were practically nil. Osman's wife had an automatic pistol. He himself had his rifle and there was plenty of ammunition. During daylight it was unlikely that the enemy could get over the wall or through the gate. After dark it would be a different matter.

Bullets could not pierce the mud wall so the three adults and the little girl patrolled round it poking their heads over it at intervals to make sure that the enemy was not preparing to scale it or tunnel through. Each time the defenders showed themselves they were fired at, and two unlucky shots severely wounded the machine-gunner and killed the little girl. They were able to bury her, but not deeply because of the frost, and they propped the wounded machine-gunner up in a place from which he could still fire at anyone who tried to force the gate. Meanwhile Osman and his wife managed to re-shoe two horses with the spiked nails which enable them to keep their footing on ice and frozen snow. At intervals Osman looked over the wall and took quick shots at anyone who showed himself. His followers say that he was never known to miss and we may at least assume he did not often do so on this occasion.

As soon as Osman and his wife judged that it was dark enough, they bade farewell to the machine-gunner who was too badly wounded to be moved, saddled their horses and, suddenly throwing open the gate, galloped away across the snow which covered the ground. A few of the enemy tried to follow them. But Osman, turning in his saddle, brought several of them down with his rifle, and the rest gave it up. Looking back when they were out of range they saw that the house was already in flames.

When Osman returned, a few days later, he found nothing but a charred ruin under which was the body of the machine-gunner. But for some unaccountable reason the enemy patrol was still in the neighbourhood, so Osman Batur's bodyguard pursued it and killed several. Some were Mongols, some Kazaks in Russian uniforms, and some just Russians.

Though the attempt to kill, or more probably, kidnap, the Kazak leader failed, the attack sent his men scurrying back from the Altai to protect him. There is reason to believe the attack was planned by pro-Russian elements in Urumchi where it was announced that Osman Batur had been killed on the very day the attack took place. In the ordinary course of events the news could not possibly have reached the capital for several days. The episode at least shows, fairly conclusively, that the Communist spies were well-informed. Ali Beg was finding the same thing near Manass and both he and Osman Batur very soon had good reason to believe that there were a number of spies among the three regiments which had come over to the free Kazak side.

The method the Kazaks contrived for dealing with such people takes us back once more to Old Testament times and specifically to the treatment meted out by the King of Babylon's army to Jeremiah whom they took and cast into the dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech. The Biblical record goes on:

"And they let Jeremiah down with cords. And in the dungeon there was no water but mire so Jeremiah sank into the mire."

The Kazaks made those whom they suspected of Communist leanings dig pits, as dungeons, for themselves. There was, therefore, no need to let them down with cords. But I think cords were necessary to pull the suspects up again when they had spent long enough, handcuffed, in the mire to make them ready to confess their errors and name their accomplices. It was no doubt a rough and ready, as well as a primitive, way of correction, liable at times to trap the innocent as well as the guilty. But in both respects it compares favourably with the methods used by their adversaries, the Communists, which included mental, as well as physical, tortures. Moreover, the usual Communist way was to shoot a victim finally in the back of the neck whether he confessed or not, and whether he was guilty or innocent. Dead men cannot talk. The Kazaks executed some of those committed to the pit-dungeons and some whom they caught in the act and they did not trouble to bring

such to trial. The rest were set free. People in desperate straits, and the Kazaks knew what faced them if they surrendered, are forced to adopt desperate remedies. The Kazaks knew that Communist spies jeopardised their way of life. They uncovered a good many but not enough.

CHAPTER VIII

Coup d'état

IN April, 1948, Hamza was chosen, together with Osman Batur's son, Sherdirman, to represent the Kazaks at the celebrations in Nanking in honour of the re-appointment of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek as head of the Chinese State. Hamza was now twenty-six, and Sherdirman a year or two his senior. Hamza spoke Chinese fluently, but not Sherdirman.

When it was possible to get away from the festivities, Sherdirman and Hamza spent much of their time in Nanking conferring with General Pai Chung-hsi, the Chinese Minister of War, who had a plan to unite all the Moslems in China—particularly the non-Chinese Kazaks and Turkis with the Chinese Tungans—and organise them as the western flank of a combined offensive against the Communists, who were daily gaining strength, owing partly to the active help of the Soviet Government and partly to divided counsels in Nanking. All the Moslem delegates from the north-western provinces strongly supported General Pai and pledged the full co-operation of their peoples. But they soon realised that General Pai was steadily losing favour in the councils of the Kuomintang, whereas a group round the Generalissimo which favoured "co-existence" with the Communists was rapidly growing more influential. The Moslems from the north-western provinces, especially those from Sinkiang, did their best to explain what co-existence had meant in their own case: Sheng's secret police; Red Beard atrocities; enslavement; virtual surrender of the province to the Soviet Government; the abduction of leaders who would not co-operate in such a policy; religious persecution; the destruction of family life.

A grey-beard once explained the matter to me in a parable, saying:

"Co-existence is like unto a cuckoo which claims the right

for her egg to lie peacefully beside those of another bird in the nest of that other one. Then, when the cuckoo's chick is hatched and is of an age, it shouldereth out of the nest the other bird's chicks with which it hath co-existed till its strength sufficed and they fall to the ground and are killed. So the young nestlings are at peace, being dead, and there is peace again in the nest."

But in Nanking, according to Hamza, the talk was all of political combinations, not of resolute action such as the Kazaks understood. So, when Sherdirman and Hamza returned to Urumchi after two wasted months in the Chinese capital, they reported to their leaders that there was nothing to hope for from the Kuomintang.

"They chaffer and bargain, one with other, and love talking like merchants in a bazaar. Most are for sale themselves if the offer be high enough. If they, and some of their American advisers likewise, had lived under Sheng for nine years, as we did, they would know that the Communists bid high but take back all when they are ready and when the bribe hath served its purpose. But in Nanking they would not heed when we told them of such things."

The first blow fell when the two young Kazaks had scarcely been back home a week. Orders came from Nanking recalling General Sung Hsi-lien and appointing General Tao Tzu-yo to command the Chinese garrison in his place. Hamza and Sherdirman interpreted this as meaning that General Pai, the Minister of War, had lost in the battle of words which passed for action among the Kuomintang politicians and that the policy of joint action against "border incidents" inaugurated under General Sung was to be replaced in East Turkistan by one of appeasement, although this was precisely the part of China where the Soviet Government could—and did—help the Communists most easily.

"What may we expect from this Tao?" Ali Beg asked Hamza. "General Sung we know, and he hath dealt well with our people giving us arms, though not many because he had few, and trusting us. But what will this Tao do?"

"Bid us give the arms back again," Hamza replied bitterly.

"And then maybe give them to the Communists lest they be angry at our having possessed them."

"If he asks, I shall know what to answer," said Ali Beg.

General Tao did, indeed, do exactly what Hamza predicted. He explained that the order under which the Kazaks had been admitted into the Chinese regular Army had been misunderstood by his predecessor, General Sung. The Ili Agreement, General Tao went on, gave the local races the right to recruit their own local army. It did not say this local army was to be part of the Chinese Army. That being so, the arms must be returned. And the uniforms. If the Kazaks needed such things, they should get them from the provincial Government. But, he pointed out, a peaceful settlement of the differences between the Communists and the Kuomintang was in sight so that the arms were not really necessary.

It may be added at this point that General Tao remained in Urumchi when the Communists assumed power and that he was given a high office by them.

At the time of Tao's arrival in Urumchi, fighting was still going on between Osman Batur's Kazak regiments of the Chinese Army and the Soviet and Mongolian invaders. Osman Batur was in fact leading the Chinese Government's forces in the field against the invasion with General Tao as his commander-in-chief. Moreover, at the moment when Tao said that the Kazaks were no longer part of the Chinese regular forces, the Soviet Government had just cordoned off the Altai district with its rich deposits of minerals and sealed the border lest prying eyes should learn too much about Soviet mining enterprises on Chinese territory.

According to Ali Beg and Hamza, the Soviet Government is still occupying the Altai (which it has incorporated in the Altai province of Siberia), and most of the Kuldja and Tarbagatai regions too, in spite of the fact that Chiang Kai-shek has been driven out of China and the Communist Mao Tse-tung rules there in his stead.

General Tao's behaviour soon convinced all the local races of East Turkistan that they could no longer count on the Kuomintang Government and they began to draw closer to each other in consequence. So it is worth recording that in August,

1948, Ali Beg presented the Ablai Khan Medal to Mahsud Sabri, the Turki Chairman of the provincial Government, who was the first non-Kazak recipient of such an honour. But even more significant is the fact that the medal he received was not, as in 1945, called simply a Liberation Medal, but was named after Ablai Khan, famous in Kazak history for his fight against the Russians in the early nineteenth century.

Three months after Mahsud Sabri got his medal from the Kazaks, the Chinese co-existers engineered his removal from the post of Chairman. Henceforward, for all practical purposes, the province of Sinkiang was no longer under the control of the Central Government. The arbiter of its fate was now General Chang, Director of the Generalissimo's Pacification Headquarters for North-West China. General Chang himself, like General Tao, was evidently convinced that the Communists would soon be in control. Both made their arrangements accordingly. Indeed, Ali Beg says he is convinced that General Chang asked that General Tao should be appointed to Urumchi because "he got on well with the Russians."

Mahsud Sabri's successor as Chairman was Burhan Shahedi, of whom no more need be said than that, like Generals Tao and Chang, he remained in office when the Communists occupied Urumchi and openly took over the government. Almost the first action taken by Burhan Shahedi as head of the province, was to declare both Osman Batur and Ali Beg to be enemies of the State. But apparently he was not yet strong enough to act in the manner that such a declaration implied and the representatives of both men came and went in Urumchi without interference and were in close touch with those Moslem members of the provincial Government who were loyal to the cause of Turkistani independence. Among these the most prominent were the Kazak chieftains, Saalis, the Secretary General, and Janim Khan, the Finance Minister, whose names are greatly honoured by the Kazaks for reasons which will appear in due course.

With the advent of General Tao and Burhan Shahedi in November, 1948, the shadow of what was coming lay plain across the future. The year, 1948, was an eventful one in other places, far removed from East Turkistan, for it was in 1948 that

the Soviet Government engineered the Communist *coup d'état* in Prague and allowed the Communist Parties in Hungary, Roumania, Bulgaria and Poland to throw off the incubus of non-Communist parties with which they had been co-operating since the Germans were driven out. In short, while the Communists in Europe were ending the era of co-existence by either swallowing their fellow nestlings, or pushing them out of the nest, the Communists of China were making ready to do the same.

By March, 1949, the Communist menace to Kazak and Turki freedom was a shadow no longer but a swiftly approaching reality. Ali Beg therefore decided once more to try to establish a common anti-Communist front among the Turkistani Moslems including the Tungan regiments which were still part of the Chinese regular army. Their commander, General Ma Cheng-hsiang, welcomed the idea but said that now General Pai was out of favour in Nanking, it would be necessary to move cautiously. He confirmed what the Kazaks already suspected, that the Chinese Pacification Director, General Chang, whose headquarters were in Lanchow, was preventing anti-pacification officers from passing through Lanchow in either direction lest they should tell the truth to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek in Nanking or undermine the authority of General Tao in Urumchi. Thus, Urumchi was to all intents and purposes cut off from the rest of China by land and air. No-one whose views on co-existence differed from General Chang's and General Tao's could hope to get past the invisible curtain.

General Tao's spies soon heard of the talks between the Kazaks and the Tungans, and General Ma was immediately given peremptory orders to break off relations with the Kazak brigands who had been declared enemies of the State.

General Ma, being Tao's subordinate, was obliged to do as he was bid. However, during the nights which followed, many Tungan rifles and machine guns as well as ammunition and hand-grenades found their way somehow into sacks of wheat which were afterwards loaded openly on to the backs of camels and carried past Tao's sentries at the city gates in broad daylight. The drivers took the road to Manass, but before the

beasts reached the town, which was controlled by Tao's forces, the leading camel was turned aside on to a track which led up into the mountains and the other beasts, being tied to their leader by a string as the nomad custom is, followed where their leader took them. The other strings of camels followed the first, and their drivers let them for all the drivers were Moslems, though mostly not Kazaks, and hated the Communists. But most of them were also simple men ready to bow their necks to whatever yoke was put on them. When the illicit cargoes had been extracted by Ali Beg's men, the wheat was poured back into the sacks and the caravan returned to the main road.

Meanwhile, General Ma's emissaries journeyed secretly to Ali Beg's headquarters in the mountains to discuss how to repel the expected Communist advance. Turki representatives were there too, and the discussions went on for many hours. There was snow on the ground for it was still only March. But inside the felted tents it was warm and there were yearling lambs in plenty for all to eat. Yet there was an atmosphere of constraint. Each one present was wondering within himself whether his neighbour could be trusted or whether he was secretly a Communist or whether, what was even worse, he would go back to Urumchi and reveal what the council of war had decided in the hope that, if the Communists won, he would save his own skin by doing so.

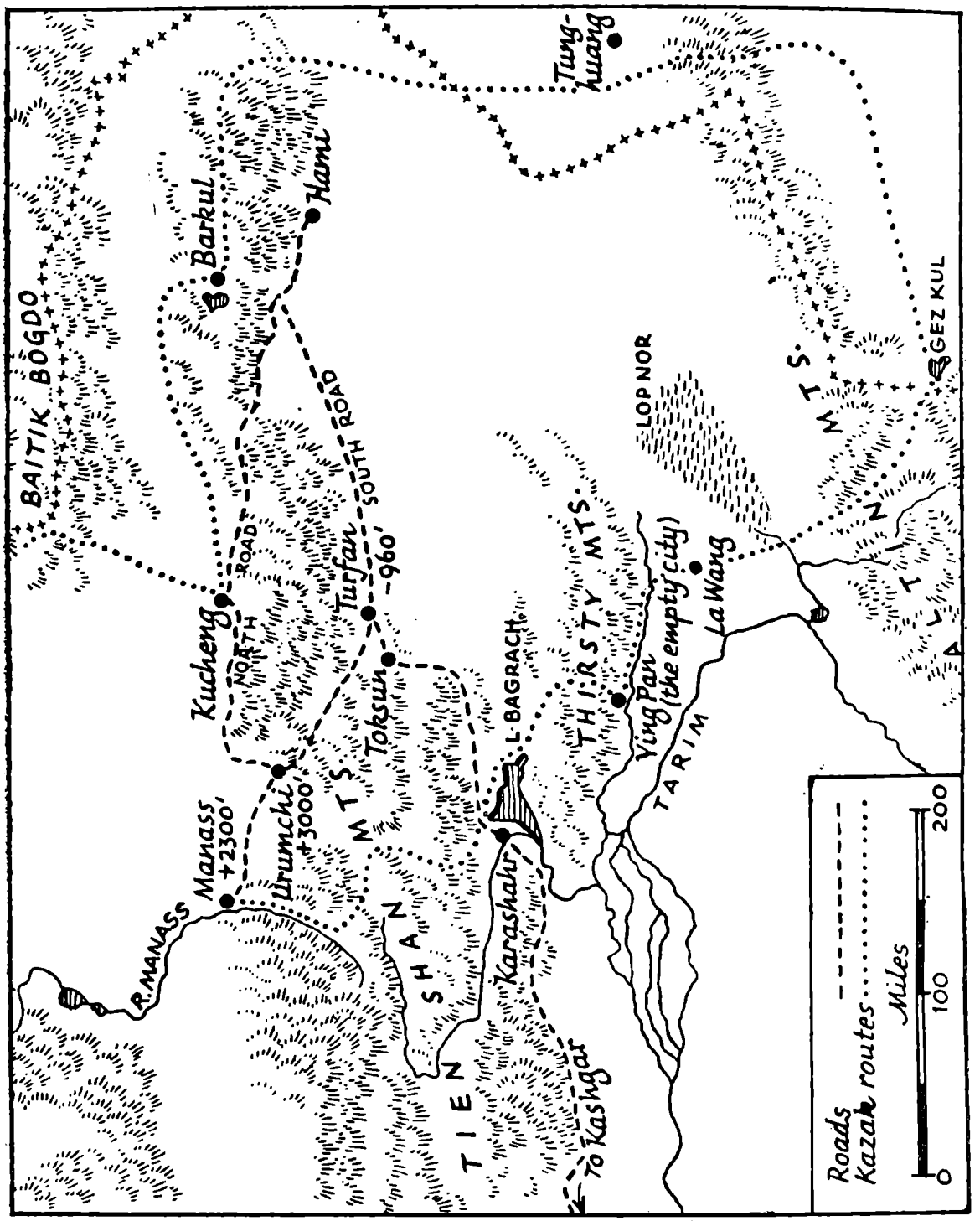
After much thought and argument, the joint Kazak-Turki-Tungan council of war agreed that their forces should be concentrated between Karashahr and Toksun, which are on the southern slopes of the Tien Shan Mountains facing distant Lanchow and the expected route of the Communist advance. For the Tungans this was easy because most of their armed men were in Urumchi and there was a road. For the Turkis, too, it meant little because they had few fighting men anyway. But for Ali Beg and the Kazaks under his leadership it meant leaving their traditional homes which were on the northern side of the Tien Shan. It was true that Ali Beg and Hamza had already moved away from the valley of the Kizil Uzun when the battle of Manass was fought between the Kazaks and the Chinese during the revolt of 1944. But they had

remained on the northern slopes of the mountains and had been able to return. Now they must cross to the other side of the range and seek entirely new homes and pastures for their flocks and herds in a district where the rainfall was much less than on their own side of the mountains. And who, this time, except God, knew when they would return?

Ali Beg drew a rough map of the route they followed in this first stage of the long exodus which, though they knew it not, was about to begin. His son, Hassan, who speaks and writes English—he learnt it in Kashmir—wrote in the names in Latin characters at his father's direction. The trek started in mid-April when the snow had melted sufficiently to let the Kazaks drive their heavily-laden beasts over the formidable watershed, which runs like a wall 15,000 feet high for 150 miles, with scarcely a break in it through which they could pass. To the east as they journeyed, were those three giant snow peaks rising to twenty-one thousand feet above sea level which had watched over them and their flocks, and their hawking parties, ever since they could remember.

For much of the way there was no road and it was hard going for the beasts with all the tents and household possessions, including Ali Beg's great cooking pot of iron which as we know, required six strong men to hoist it on to the back of a camel. On their way, they passed through the Karatau—Black Mountains—which are part of the Tien Shan range, Zorimti, Usti, Ush Tasir Kai and Kukuluk, of which, so far as I know, only Kukuluk is marked on the maps. It was at Kukuluk that Boko Batur fought his last battle but one against the Chinese. Its name means the Place of Grass and it is in the Kuk Tau or Blue Mountains. Near Kukuluk they came to the road which runs from Urumchi to Turfan which claims to be the lowest inhabited city in the world, being nearly a thousand feet below sea level.

Ali Beg had scarcely reached Kukuluk when news was brought to him that two of the most important Turki leaders, Isa Beg and Mohammed Emin Bugra, respectively Minister of Reconstruction and Deputy Secretary General, had fled from Urumchi in secret believing the situation to be hopeless. Both men had been expected to join the common front against Com-


BAITIK BOGDO
Barkul
Hami
Tung-kwang
Kucheng
NORTH ROAD
Turfan
-960'
SOUTH ROAD
LOP NOR
ALTIN MTS.
GEZ KUL
L. BAGRACH
THIRSTY MTS.
Ying Pan (the empty city)
La Wang
TARIM
Toksun
Urumchi +3000'
Manass +2300'
R. MANASS
MTS.
TIEN SHAN
Karashahr
To Kashgar
Roads
Kazak routes
Miles
0
100
200

munism so their departure was a serious blow. With them went about four hundred other Urumchi citizens and their families. The party had no arms and when a patrol of about fifteen Chinese Communist soldiers came upon them near the frontier of Kashmir, it induced most of them to turn round and go home again. Isa Beg and Mohammed Emin, however, refused to go back and were allowed to continue on their way to freedom with their families. It was still only April and the Karakoram Mountains, where the road runs over passes eighteen thousand feet above sea level, were deep in fresh snow. They got through somehow, though Mohammed Emin's daughter died of cold. He and his wife and son went first to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, where they lived for several years and then moved to Istanbul. Isa Beg ultimately went to Formosa. If you ask how it was they were unlucky enough to meet a Communist patrol nearly one thousand miles from where the nearest Chinese Communist Army was operating, the answer is that the distance to the Russian border is scarcely fifty miles.

Hopes of Turki co-operation in the common front against the Communists having faded suddenly in this way, Ali Beg called another council of war on April 15, 1949. This time it was a true "Hur Altai" after the Genghis Khan pattern, for only Kazaks were present. The Hur Altai chose Ali Beg as their leader and agreed that he should go at once to see Osman Batur at Kucheng and try to arrange joint action so that both the roads from the east to Urumchi could be blocked against the Communist Eighth Route Army, which, by now, was massing in Kansu for its advance on Sinkiang.

About this time, Tungan co-operation in the triple anti-Communist front also began to grow nebulous. Before Ali Beg left on his mission to Osman Batur, a Tungan representative came to see him saying that General Tao was threatening to disband the Tungan regiments in the Chinese Army and make them surrender their arms.

"If we let him take our arms," he declared, "tens of thousands of our people will be massacred. So we shall not obey. Let us rather join together, our people and yours, and fight. Is it not better to die fighting than crying for mercy which is not granted?"

Ali Beg agreed, but he knew the Tungans faced the alternatives of obeying Tao or mutinying, for Tao was still the official representative of the Nationalist Government of China. The Tungans were Chinese as well as Moslems. They had rebelled before in the days of General Ma Big Horse and had suffered very severely. So Ali Beg wondered, but not very hopefully, what they would do this time. They were in a very difficult position and their homes were mostly in the provinces of Chinghai and Kansu, seven to eight hundred miles away. In the end, their generals fled with their families. The junior officers and men were ultimately taken over by the Communist Eighth Route Army and, after indoctrination, employed on garrison duties. But some mutinied, burning their barracks and then going over to the Kazaks with their arms and supplies.

Thus the Kazaks alone were left of the common Moslem front. Their numbers had dwindled by this time from about forty thousand at the time of the Kuldja revolt to perhaps fifteen thousand fighting men, certainly not more, and against them was the steadily growing strength of the Chinese Communist Party, represented by the famous Eighth Route Army, armed and backed by the Soviet Union. There was also the indoctrinated Kuldja Kazak Army of about fifteen thousand which was under direct Russian control. Finally, there were the Chinese troops under General Tao who appear to have numbered about ten thousand, most of whom were prepared to fight on whichever side their officers bade them. But in spite of such odds, and uncertainties, the free Kazaks did not flinch.

By the time Ali Beg went to visit Osman Batur in his tent near Kucheng in May, 1949, it was already clear to both leaders that they could rely on none but their own Kazaks, seeing that General Tao's intention to side with the Communists was now perfectly plain. So they agreed that Osman Batur should also move from Kucheng to the Karashahr-Toksun region where there was summer grazing and they could retreat still deeper into the Tien Shan Mountains if heavily attacked and, judging from past experience, hold out there till their enemies were tired of looking for them.

But when Osman Batur tried to move south-westwards to-

wards Karashahr he found that General Tao's forces barred his way. Rather than fight a running battle in open country where many of his flocks and herds would have been lost, he decided to turn south-eastwards and go to Barkul, which means "the Lake of Leopards" where there is a sheltered basin amid the mountains at the eastern end of the long Tien Shan range and where Hussein Tajji and Sultan Sherif had lived before they migrated to Gezkul in 1936. Barkul lies to the north of the walled town called Hami, or Kumul, from which the Russian garrison was withdrawn in 1943. Hami is not far from the frontier of the province of Kansu in which the Eighth Route Army was making ready for its advance into Sinkiang. Barkul is actually close to one of the two roads along which the Communists could come and Karashahr is not far from the other. The mountains around Barkul rise to a height of nearly 15,000 feet and there is both summer and winter grazing among them.

While Ali Beg was conferring with Osman Batur at Kucheng, the two leaders agreed that Ali Beg on his return to Urumchi should visit the American Consul, Hall Paxton. It was a dangerous mission so far as Ali Beg was concerned because the provincial Government had declared him to be an enemy of the State. It may have been just as dangerous for Mr. Paxton's diplomatic status for him to receive such an officially disreputable character, but he agreed to do so. Ali Beg is reticent about the meeting—all the more so as Hall Paxton died soon after leaving Urumchi in the summer of 1949 shortly before the Communists took over. But it can be assumed that the Kazak leader inquired whether there was any possibility of getting from the free democracies the one thing the Kazaks felt they needed—arms. He and Osman Batur were still confident, like Sir Winston Churchill when the clouds were very black during the war, that if they received the tools they could finish the job. But it is one thing to send supplies across an ocean, even an ocean infested by submarines, and quite another to send them to the very centre of Asia two thousand miles from the nearest friendly seaport, which was Karachi, and over the highest and most intractible mountains in the world.

So the utmost that Hall Paxton could offer freely was sym-

pathy and advice. He could not even offer the money which might have enabled the Kazaks to buy arms—even perhaps from their opponents. But at that time Urumchi was already cut off from the outside world. The American, and British, representatives no longer had a courier service and the ordinary mail was subject to scrutiny by General Chang's Pacification Headquarters at Lanchow.

The advice Mr. Paxton gave Ali Beg doubtless included a strong plea that the local races should sink their differences and pool their resources, in which case they were sufficiently numerous to put up a strong resistance. But such advice came too late and was directed to the wrong address. The Turki will to resist had already collapsed when Isa Beg and Mohammed Emin Bugra left the country. One or two Turki stalwarts still remained, notably a man named Yolbars of whom we shall hear more in due course. The Tungans were rapidly approaching the same condition of impotent despair as the Turkis.

In June, 1949, not long after the secret talk with Hall Paxton, Ali Beg decided to abandon the fruitless efforts to build a united Moslem front and to approach the non-Moslem Mongols of whom there were many in the Karashahr-Toksun district where he and his people were now living. The principal Mongol leader in the neighbourhood was the Wang of Karashahr, a paramount chief of considerable local importance.

With such a man, strict observance of long-established protocol was essential. So before making a move, Ali Beg called a Hur Altai of the thirty Kazak chieftains who had accepted his personal leadership. They debated first the basic question: If we fight the Communists have we any hope of winning? This was answered in the affirmative.

The second question involved the action to be taken in the event of defeat and there was general agreement that in this case the Kazak tribesfolk should take their flocks and herds across the Takla Makan Desert and proceed to Gezkul where Boko Batur had fought his last fight and where, in 1936, Hussein Tajji and Sultan Sherif had found refuge and had remained unmolested almost ever since. The council of war felt that in this remote spot they would be too far away for the

Communists to bother about them and that, afterwards, when the tyranny had ended, as all tyrannies finally do, they would be able to return to their original homes. Such things had happened before on many occasions in the days of their ancestors. But not this time.

Having reached these general conclusions, the council of war turned to the more immediate question of seeking the Wang's co-operation. They decided to entrust the mission to Ali Beg and minute instructions were drawn up both on matters of etiquette and on practical issues. He was to take with him two of the finest horses that were available and present them to the Wang. If the Wang failed to give him two equally good ones in return, he must consider his mission at an end. If, however, these preliminaries were satisfactorily arranged, the next step must be the exchange of binding oaths. Thus, the Wang would be expected to swear with his mouth on the muzzle of a rifle and with a bullet on his head. Again, if he would not do so, Ali Beg was to make a suitable excuse and return home without divulging anything about the military disposition the Kazak leaders had in view. The council of war debated this point at length. Some thought it would be foolish in any case to tell the Wang how many men the Kazaks could put in the field and how they planned to use them against the Communists. Others argued that if they wanted the Wang to tell them how many troops he could supply and how well they were armed, they must give him similar information about their own forces. So Ali Beg was empowered to tell him.

The Wang received Ali Beg cordially and the exchange of presents and oaths was completed to the mutual satisfaction of both sides. The Wang told how many men he could supply and Ali Beg agreed to let him know when they would be required. Until then, the Wang was to do nothing.

When the time came, he still did nothing, though not from treachery, but simply because events moved too fast.

The visit to the Wang took place on June 8, 1949, after which there was a short lull on the surface while the Communists worked out their plans for taking the province over. There was to have been another meeting with Hall Paxton

on August 5, at which all the leading Kazak chieftains were to have told him of the progress of the united resistance movement. But at the last moment Osman Batur sent word that he could not come so the meeting was postponed. Mr. Paxton left Urumchi for good shortly afterwards, leaving the Vice-Consul, Douglas Mackiernan, in charge.

Ali Beg is not certain why Osman Batur failed to attend. It is possible that he mistrusted someone who had also been invited. But it is more likely that he was unable to get through the network of guard posts and patrols established by Tao's Chinese troops. The pacification forces stopped whom they would and let co-existers past. They captured at least one of the messengers Ali Beg sent to tell Osman Batur about the plans of the Karashahr group. How much the poor wretch disclosed under torture is not known. But it is certain that the Communists had a very efficient spy service and were always well-informed about Kazak intentions and movements.

When August, 1949, came at last to an end, only the date on which the Chinese Nationalist régime in Urumchi would be suppressed remained uncertain. Burhan Shahedi, the provincial Chairman, and the other secret Communists in the provincial Government had thrown their masks aside and were openly preparing for the arrival of the Eighth Route Army. All anti-Communists who could afford to do so had fled or were on the point of leaving. Those who had decided to remain woke each morning with fear in their hearts about what the day would bring. Many shops were closed. Many houses were empty. More would have been if their owners had known which way to go.

Of the Kazak Ministers, Janim Khan and his son, Dalil, chose to join Osman Batur at Barkul but did not tell even their friends that they were leaving. Somehow they succeeded in getting there safely with a small band of armed retainers. Osman Batur found another ally in Yolbars, the doughty Turki who had gathered round him a mixed band of anti-Communists, some Turkis like himself, but mostly Chinese soldiers who deserted from Tao's pacification forces rather than accept Communism. Yolbars himself was over seventy

but his age had certainly not impaired either his vigour or his determination.

With the exception of Janim Khan, most of the Kazak notables remained in Urumchi which was conveniently close to the Tien Shan Mountains in which they had decided to seek shelter when the Communists seized power.

Tension in the city mounted steadily as the early days of September went slowly by. Why did the Eighth Route Army delay its coming? When it did arrive would it act like Sheng and his Red Beards? Would it bring back with it Sheng's Russian-trained and Russian-controlled secret police with the white boxes for anonymous denunciations? What would happen to private trade and private property which Sheng had not dared to suppress? What would happen to private people, those who had never taken part in politics as well as those who had? Would the new masters re-introduce forced labour for public works which had caused such resentment in Sheng's day?

In other words, for a considerable time before the Communists actually came, all hope of keeping them at bay had left the people of Urumchi. It was only the Kazaks in the mountains outside who still had the will to resist. And many of the Kazaks now thought chiefly of making such a nuisance of themselves that the Communists would finally decide to come to terms with them instead of insisting on unconditional surrender.

The Communists' first move was one nobody anticipated. Proclamations were suddenly posted throughout the city ordering every inhabitant to go out along the main road on the following day to greet the Eight Route Army on its arrival at the Russian Airport. Anyone found in the streets, or at home, after 10 a.m. without a special police permit would be summarily shot without trial.

At that time there were three airports at Urumchi, named respectively: Chinese, American, and Russian. The Russian airport lay to the north-west at a distance of over six miles from the city gates. The normal population of the capital was about a hundred and fifty thousand, and though those who feared for their lives had mostly gone, probably a hundred and thirty thousand still remained. So, from the early hours of the

morning, the road to the airport was packed with people patiently trudging along: old and young; men and women, often carrying babies; healthy and infirm; rich and poor. It was early September and as the sun rose higher, the atmosphere, by now chokingly full of dust, became unbearable. There was no wind and the dust stirred by tens of thousands of shuffling feet hung as a heavy cloud settling on clothes, throat and lungs as the masses toiled to the airport to greet the liberators.

The crowds waited at the airport all day but the Eighth Route Army did not arrive. At last the people were allowed to go home again, and when they got there, tired and very thirsty, fresh proclamations warned them to go back to the airport on the following day, when the same thing happened again. But on the third day, the Eighth Route Army—or, rather, its advance guard—really did come. Some two hundred Russian-type Dakotas with Russian pilots maintained a shuttle service till they had disembarked four to five thousand Chinese Communist troops and their wholly Russian equipment. As each plane taxied in and disgorged its contents, the assembled masses dutifully cheered the liberators, their voices, but not their hearts, responding to the call of the official cheer-leaders. There was nothing else they could do unless they wanted to be shot. Cine cameras were busy among them, so that silent mouths and glum faces, and hands without flags, would have been spotted instantly. And three days of the human tide's ebb and flow between the city and airport had damped the ardour of the very few who might have tried to lead a hostile demonstration.

The Communists already in Urumchi had not been idle during the three days of compulsory pilgrimages. Trusted members of the Party and police had worked through the city, house by house, seeking malingerers, incriminating documents and, of course, valuables. With the information, and funds, thus obtained the Chinese Communist Party was able to take the next steps in the pacification of the province. How many unfortunate people were shot or bayoneted for having disobeyed the order to attend at the air-

port, or because incriminating material was found, or planted, in their houses, is not known.

It seems probable that whoever stage-managed the proceedings was a student of Kazak and Mongol history, for the method of forcing the inhabitants of a captured city to come out *en masse* to greet their conquerors was frequently employed by Genghis Khan. Edward III, who was Genghis Khan's contemporary, used a modification of it when he made the burghers of Calais come to sue for mercy with chains round their necks. But the Communists, in making the unfortunate masses of Urumchi show their submission three times, outdid even Genghis Khan.

News of the Eighth Route Army's arrival spread quickly through the surrounding country. Ali Beg heard of it at Cumush near Kukuluk in a matter of hours and at once sent Hamza, and his co-distributors of the anti-Communist "Review," Kainesh, with fifty horsemen to a pre-arranged rendezvous from which he was to send trusty messengers to certain Kazak leaders in Urumchi to inform them that he was waiting for them. Five of these leaders have a part to play in our story: Saalis and Janim Khan, both members of the provincial Government whom we have already met; a rich merchant named Adil, and Abdel Kerim, a historian. The name of the fifth is Khadawan, wife of an aged Kazak paramount chief who was known to everyone simply as "Khadawan's husband" because she wielded his authority over his tribe, and succeeded him when he died. Altogether there were perhaps fifteen to whom Hamza and Kainesh sent messengers. All were to bring their families with them and their armed servants and retainers and their valuables, if they had hidden them successfully from the prying eyes of the Communist searchers.

The rendezvous was at Pei Yang-kou, a pleasant little alpine resort in the mountains. Hamza did not know whether Tao's pacification army, or even the Eighth Route Army itself, might not have got wind of his presence and come to intercept him. So he posted sentries outside the little town to watch all possible routes and then sat down to wait.

The invited refugees trickled in family by family until all were there except Janim Khan and Khadawan. Saalis brought

a number of White Russians with him—men who knew they were doomed if the Communists caught them.

After many hours news came at length that Janim Khan and his son Dalil, had gone secretly with his followers to join Osman Batur at Barkul, telling no-one that they were doing so. Hard on the heels of the messenger who brought this information came another to say that Khadawan had decided to stay in Urumchi.

"I expected as much," said Hamza. "Did we not know that someone was betraying us to the Communists? Now it is clear who the traitor was."

"Maybe it is merely that she is too fat to ride," remarked Kainesh philosophically. "Save when she rides rough-shod over her husband, which is all the time."

"Is he not too old to care or even to notice?" Hamza replied. "But we waste our time talking of them. Let us be gone before the enemy come upon us."

"We are fifty," Kainesh said. "Enough to rout a thousand."

"True," said Hamza. "But we came not to fight. Of fighting we shall have our bellies-ful ere long."

"It is in the hands of God," declared Kainesh, as they rode away.

The party got safely back to Cumush without interference and in a few days news reached Ali Beg that Khadawan had indeed thrown in her lot with the Communists, taking not only her husband but the whole tribe of which they were joint heads into the enemy camp. It was a grievous blow, considerably reducing the number of fighting men at Ali Beg's and Osman Batur's disposal. She was the only prominent Kazak leader to submit tamely without a struggle. Maybe Kainesh's contemptuous exclamation was not far from the truth. The Kazak refugees describe her as a mountain of a woman and maybe she knew she could not have endured the strains and stresses of active campaigning. No doubt the Communists found her co-operation extremely useful for she was still alive, and apparently in a position of authority over her tribe, as late as 1953.

To my surprise, the Kazak refugees in Turkey were not prepared to criticise her.

"What a man doth, and likewise a woman," one of them explained, "is between themselves and God. Maybe, if we had been in her place, we would have done what she did. But God alone knoweth and He alone shall be her judge."

Yet, if they had defeated the Communists, the Kazaks would certainly have killed Khadawan if they had caught her.

CHAPTER IX

Fighting Retreat

HAMZA was right when he told Kainesh that they would soon have their bellies-ful of fighting. Even before the take-over in Urumchi was completed, the Chinese Communists began to assume control in the other parts of the province—those already under Soviet or Mongolian occupation excluded. As their underground elements were already firmly established, the rest of the province also fell into their hands without a fight, except where there were Kazaks.

Where fighting was needed, it soon became evident that the Eighth Route Army was almost as much out of its element in the mountains as the Red Beards had been. So the take-over, like the arrival of the Communists at the airport, soon became a combined operation with the Eighth Route Army concentrating on the walled cities and the Russian-led Kazak levies from Kuldja dealing with the countryside, especially the mountains. Ali Beg and Hamza could not tell what rôle, if any, was given to Tao's pacification troops, but it seems probable that most of them were absorbed into the Army after suitable indoctrination and, of course, when doubtful elements had been purged.

Observers who were still in Urumchi at that time say that the towns gave in without a struggle and it was only the Kazaks who put up a real fight. The fact that the task of subduing them had to be given to the Russian-led troops suggests that the Eighth Route Army was mainly concerned with indoctrination. It was also a compliment to the military ability of the Kazaks. The Chinese knew from bitter experience that in mountain warfare they were no match for the elusive nomads. Boko Batur, Yunus Hajji, Osman Batur were nearly always victorious when fighting against Chinese regulars in their native hills. It was only when the nomads

ventured, or were forced, into more open country that they were defeated.

The Communists could not afford to risk a military set-back which might have involved an irreparable loss of political face. Nor could they afford to leave the free Kazak force alone till a more convenient occasion. They felt obliged to tackle it as soon as they could and defeat it wherever it was while the Eighth Route Army continued its political campaign. So, before long, the Russians made themselves responsible for wiping out the free Kazaks, using for that purpose the Kazak levies they had first helped Ali Han Ture to raise and then taken over from him when he had exhausted his usefulness. These men, some of whom came from Soviet Kazakstan and the rest from the Kuldja and Tarbagatai districts of Sinkiang, were now a highly trained and well equipped force of some ten thousand to fifteen thousand men, thoroughly expert in mountain warfare and armed with modern weapons. They had armoured cars and tanks, mountain guns and the co-operation of a certain number of aeroplanes, mostly, if not entirely, piloted by Russians.

The first attacks on Ali Beg's forces near Kukuluk were launched in early October, 1949—about one month after the *coup d'état* in Urumchi. They took the form of a series of assaults by small bands of picked troops whose aim was to edge the free Kazaks out of the mountains and into open country. Fighting went on without cessation for more than seventy days during which attack and counter-attack followed one another in quick succession and there were a considerable number of casualties on both sides. The Kazaks had not expected, and could not have prepared in any case, for warfare of this kind, and their ammunition began to run low. As usual they tried to replenish their stocks by raiding enemy supply columns, and though they were often successful they did not find it nearly so easy as in Sheng's days.

Apart from ambushes of this kind, the fighting was all in the mountains. There were ambushes here, too, but mostly each side concentrated, not on outflanking its opponents horizontally, but on climbing ever higher and faster up the steep hillsides so as to be able to fire down on the enemy, or roll

boulders on him if there were no bullets left. So, day after day, rival groups of breathless men raced desperately upwards from vantage point to vantage point on opposite sides of the same valley, or tried to creep round the back of a hill unnoticed and get to the top of it before an opponent who was climbing it from the other side.

Sometimes these feats of mountaineering ended in a stalemate and both sides climbed down again without exchanging a single shot. The massive peaks of the Tien Shan towered above them and, so high did the free Kazaks climb on some occasions that they found themselves actually able to fire down on Soviet aeroplanes which were searching for them in the valleys beneath. On one auspicious day they brought down two planes by rifle fire from above. Most of the planes they saw appear to have been reconnaissance machines and, in time, the free Kazaks came to regard them with something near contempt, though they admitted—as Froissart said the English did of the cannons used against them at Crecy—that they were useful to frighten horses, and other animals too.

While the two sides used similar tactics, their strategic objectives were entirely different. The Communists wanted to drive the free Kazaks out of the mountains, and the Kazaks wanted to stay there. Again, Ali Beg's order was: "Shoot to kill. And if the man be mounted, see that ye kill the man and not his beast. We cannot cumber ourselves with prisoners for we are constantly on the move and where would we keep prisoners if we took them? But a man's arms and his accoutrements, yea, and his horse too if he be mounted: they are of value, for we grow short of all three."

The Communists, on the other hand, did not shoot to kill, for they did want prisoners. In particular, they wanted to capture the free Kazak leaders because they knew that the leaderless men would be like sheep without a shepherd and either surrender or make their way back to their old homes with the object of taking up their old lives as though they had never been away. Moreover, a live leader in captivity was of greater value to the Communists than one who had been killed on the field of battle. There was always hope, though it almost invariably came to nothing, that a captured leader might be

persuaded, or cajoled, or forced, to go over to the Communist side. And even if he did not, false statements could be issued in his name asserting that he had made his submission and advising his followers and friends to follow his example.

Furthermore, a prisoner, whatever the sex, was not only a potential source of information but also a hostage who could be used to try to induce relatives to surrender. So, when first captured by the Communists, a prisoner was usually well treated and given good food and decent quarters. As the prisoner's usefulness diminished, so did the standard of his comfort. If he, or she, was unco-operative, the usual Communist methods of dealing with a political opponent were employed. And, finally, when the Communists reached the conclusion that the captive was politically valueless to them, they settled whether he should be killed or sentenced to hard labour by weighing up his behaviour before he was captured, regardless of any promises of clemency they had made to him in the meantime.

To be captured is, of course, one of the hazards of war and the Kazaks so regarded it. But the Communist policy of seizing hostages, and of using prisoners as hostages, made them furiously angry. Times without number, the free Kazaks received written messages or heard distant voices calling to them saying that the family of such a man was in the hands of the Communists and that if the man named did not make his submission by a given date, his wife would first be executed and then his children one after the other, at intervals of a week. Therefore (the voice or the message told him), if he wished to save their lives, and in particular the lives of those most dear to him, he had no time to waste.

When the campaign started, the threat often worked. But soon it came to the free Kazaks' knowledge that a man who surrendered to save his relatives was first treated as an ordinary prisoner of war and then, when the Communists had extracted from him all the information they wanted or could get, they proceeded to kill him and his relatives too. The Kazaks gave no quarter after making this discovery, and the "Shoot to kill" order became a very grim reality. Nor were there any more voluntary surrenders.

Nevertheless, the Communists persisted in their efforts to secure hostages and, not long after the fighting started, the Kazaks found that their enemies were no longer directing their attacks against the fighting men, but were trying to separate the fighting men from their families and flocks. If they succeeded, they left the fighting men alone and turned to deal with the women and children, and after seizing them as hostages, drove off the fighting men's food supply. So the character of the campaign began to change. Instead of small groups of men at grips with one another and trying to outflank one another perpendicularly, the Soviet air force began to mark down the free Kazak encampments and, having done so, drove the occupants away from the men and the men from the encampments. They were not altogether successful, but they did manage to put the free Kazaks on the defensive, forcing them to stand their ground in order to protect their children, womenfolk and flocks instead of luring the enemy after them into an ambush as they had done so often and so successfully in Sheng's time.

With aeroplanes for eyes, the Communist ground forces refused to be lured away from what Fluellen at Agincourt called "the poys and the luggage." However, the Kazak women and children knew how to defend themselves better than the unfortunate "poys". The Kazak women knew how to handle firearms and so did all the children of both sexes except the very youngest.

Another dastardly aspect of the campaign in the eyes of the free Kazaks was the Communist policy of poisoning water supplies. As soon as the campaign started, indeed, possibly before, the Communists prepared lists of all known wells, springs and streams in the area occupied by the Kazaks and then garrisoned them one by one until they had no more men to spare. After that, they simply poisoned the water unless it flowed too fast for them to be able to deny its use to the nomads and their animals.

To the Kazaks, poisoning water is a sin against God as well as against man and beast. The Kazak, when he has drunk his fill at a well, lets down the bucket again and draws for whomsoever shall come after, be he friend or foe. He regards water

as the gift of God and firmly believes that evil will come to those who offend against Him by preventing even an enemy from drinking his fill when he is athirst. The wickedness of the Communists in poisoning the water so that neither friend nor enemy, man nor beast, could drink of it, strengthened the faith of the free Kazaks to endure what was to come. They were now certain beyond a peradventure that the enemy were of their father, the devil, who, as we and they both believe, hath but a short time.

By dint of hard fighting and their knowledge of the mountains, Ali Beg's forces successfully avoided major disaster during those two and a half months of furious skirmishing around Kukuluk. By then it was December, 1949, and the winter season, even more than their enemies, drove the Kazaks out of the high ground which by now was covered with deep snow. On the lower slopes they were at a disadvantage. Armoured cars could be used against them and the Communists had already occupied, or poisoned, all the chief sources of water. Soon the Kazaks found themselves forced to attack fortified positions in order to get enough water for their animals. They succeeded in capturing some but it cost them more casualties and ammunition than they could afford. The time, in fact, was at hand when they must either give in or evacuate the Tien Shan altogether.

The thought of giving in never occurred to them. But they anxiously considered the other alternative—or rather, they considered when they should adopt it, for, as you will remember, they had already decided where to go when they were discussing whether to make an alliance with the Wang of Karashahr. The moment had arrived when, under their compact with him, the Wang was bound to enter the fight against the Communists. But Karashahr town was now firmly in the hands of the Eighth Route Army and he could not do as he had promised.

So with heavy hearts, the Kazaks prepared to journey south to Gezkul. They could not go back to Manass and the much-loved Kizil Uzun because the road was blocked by snow, so that even if they had wished to take it they could not have

done so. But the road they had intended to follow to Gezkul lay across the main road from Karashahr to Turfan, both of which were now in the hands of the Eighth Route Army.

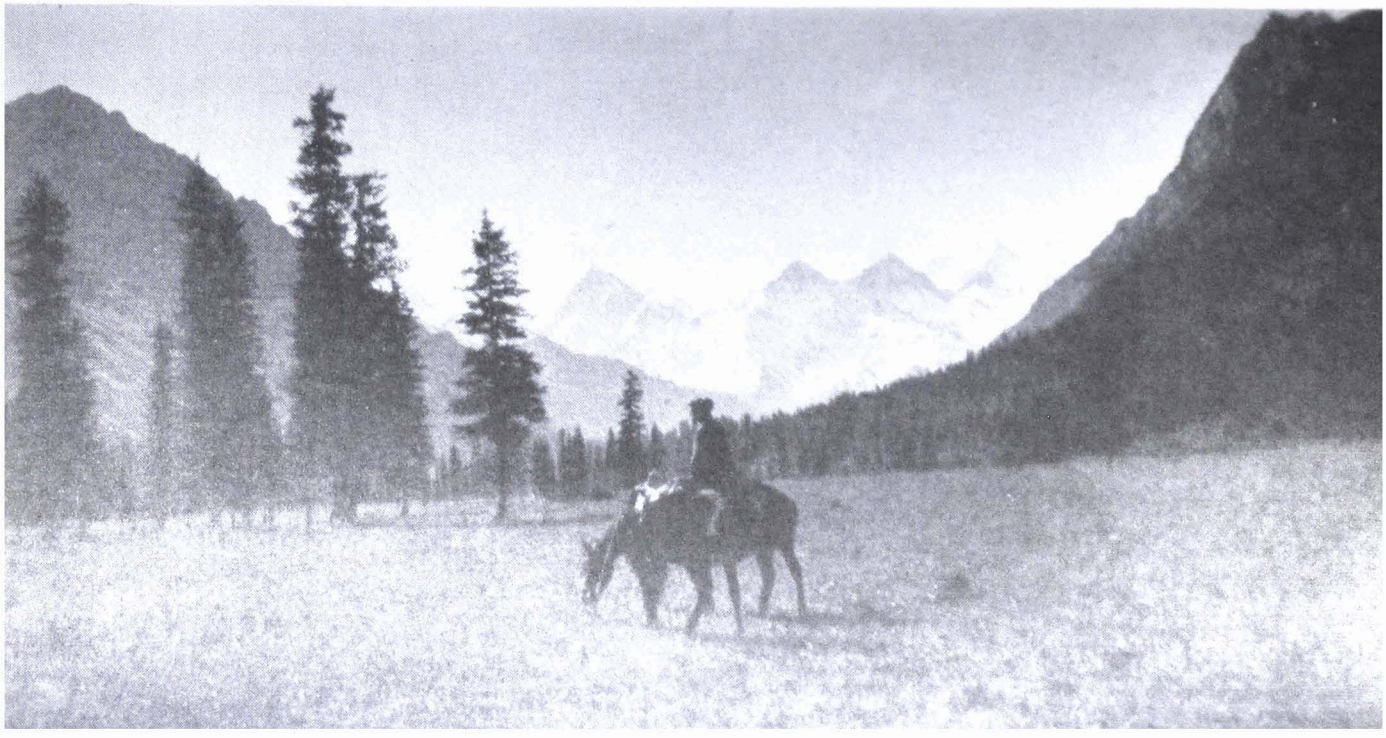
In the end, the Kazaks split up into small groups, each of which travelled by whatever route seemed best to its leader and relied on its insignificance to slip through unmolested. Any estimate of how many succeeded and how many failed would be mere guesswork. It can only be said that some of the groups got through almost intact; some did not get through at all and some suffered severe losses but nevertheless arrived in good heart.

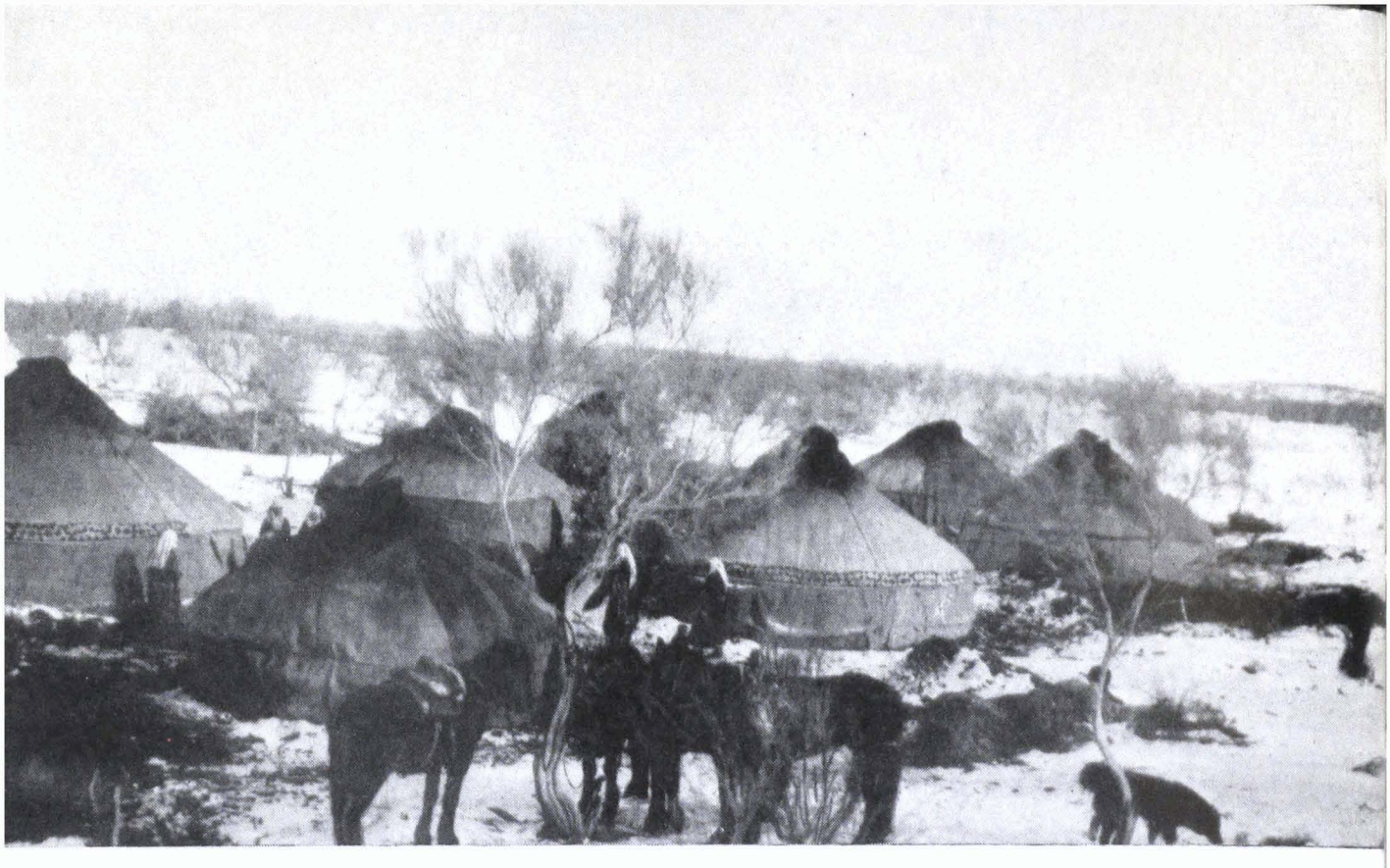
Ali Beg's personal following consisted of about four hundred. As this was much too large a number to follow any of the recognised tracks undetected, Ali Beg, like Boko Batur before him, decided to go through the dreaded Thirsty Mountains where the average rainfall is about two inches a year and there is neither food nor water for man or beast. The way to, and through, the Thirsty Mountains was known to be unguarded—probably the Communist leaders took it for granted that no one who attempted the passage would get through alive. But Ali Beg, knowing that the Communists sought him especially, believed that the most dangerous-seeming route would be safest and those who followed him did so of their own free will.

They set out on December 21, 1949, so that, mercifully, it was winter and the sun was not in his strength. Yet as they journeyed on day after day towards the south-east, the men and women and especially the children, became very thirsty and the beasts likewise because they were six days without any water at all and because of the endless salt under their feet. The salt rotted the horn of the horses' hooves so that the shoes fell away and it tore the camels' feet till they bled so that the Kazaks had to stitch great pads of horse leather on to them. The glare from the salt, and the cold salt-laden wind, inflamed the eyes of men and women, and especially the children, as well as of the beasts. Lips became cracked and bleeding though they wrapped cloths round their faces. And then there came a haze all round them making it hard to find the way. Among

A Kazak summer encampment in the Altai mountains

Tien Shan landscape





A Kazak encampment in winter

Ali Beg *(centre)* with some of his colleagues. Kainesh is sitting on his left and Hassan standing behind them. Hamza is on the extreme left

those who died was Ali Beg's eldest brother, Attel Beg Mullah. He wandered somehow from the others and though they called to him and searched for him they never found him.

It is not the Kazak way to give harrowing details at any time and their sufferings on this occasion must therefore be left to the imagination. As I write I have in front of me a letter, in English, from Kainesh, to whom I wrote asking him to send me full details about the crossing of the Thirsty Mountains. This is what his letter says:

"At the time of our crossing we have suffered much by the waterless. We have used the urine of men and women, the blood of animals instead of water. By the waterless we have lost many of our animals except camels."

Having written that much, he changed the subject.

After emerging from the Thirsty Mountains, the party came in due course to Ying-pan, the Empty City, where they rested for a while. Ying-pan was founded in 1736 by a Chinese Emperor named Chien-lung as a garrison town shortly after the New Province of Sinkiang was annexed to the Chinese Empire. But when Ali Beg went there it had long been deserted. maybe for as many as a hundred years. Yet its mud houses were almost as good as when they were built over two centuries before. A river runs near Ying-pan making it a convenient resting place for people wearied with much fighting and the hardships of the Thirsty Mountains. And as the Empty City lies many miles from any inhabited places, there was little danger of surprise.

While Ali Beg and his followers were in Ying-pan regaining strength for the journey which lay before them, his sentinels reported that a Kazak named Emin Ta Mullah had come and wished to speak with him alone. Ta means great and Emin is equivalent to our own Amen, while Mullah means Priest. Emin Ta Mullah greeted Ali Beg cordially and, when he had drunk tea and eaten the salted bread, he explained that the Communists had sent him to offer Ali Beg terms promising him good treatment and an honourable position if he joined them.

"And verily," concluded Emin Ta Mullah, "the offer is not for spurning. Is it not better to live than to die?"

I do not know whether Ali Beg remembered Kine Sari's answer to the emissary who had come from the Russians a hundred and fifty years previously to persuade him to surrender: "He who sets a snare for an evil purpose, leaves his manhood therein." But Ali Beg uttered no such rebuke to Emin Ta Mullah. Instead he reminded him of the evil deeds committed by the Communists against the Kazaks in the time of Sheng; of the treachery of the master Communists, the Russians, against Ali Han Ture; of the cruelties against innocent people when the Eighth Army vanguard arrived in Urumchi; of their hateful methods of waging war and their sin against God and man and beast when they poisoned the wells.

Ali Beg concluded:

"Is a perjurer to be believed when he swears to treat a man honourably? As I live and God liveth, I will not sell my soul for honours from murderers and thieves. Go back and tell them what seemeth good to protect the teller from harm. But though we be as thou seest: wanderers shut out from our homes and having barely saved our lives in those mountains yonder where no water is, yet while there is life in me I will not yield, nor will any that be with me."

Emin Ta Mullah nodded his head slowly but did not speak. And when the silence had lasted a long while, Ali Beg said:

"Bide with us this night if it pleaseth thee and to-morrow let each take his own way in peace."

Emin Ta Mullah answered:

"Honour and freedom are from God. Whithersoever thou goest to-morrow I will go with thee, for who am I to fight against God on the side of these Communists? Moreover, if I went back, maybe they would kill me for returning with my mission unfulfilled."

That night, a messenger came to say that Communist soldiers were on the way to intercept Ali Beg's party. So early the next morning, he and his followers, and Emin Ta Mullah, were obliged to set forth again towards the south, though both they and the beasts which remained were very weary, and were scarcely able to bear the weight of the loads which were transferred to them when one of their number collapsed from lack of food now rather than water. The horses, in particular,

suffered from eating leaves which were impregnated with salt. Their tongues became black and swollen and many died. Others were saved by having their tongues pierced with a needle which released a flow of black blood and gave instant relief so that a horse which seemed on the point of death was at once able to go forward and even carry a load, though not a rider, who now walked, staggering, by the beast's side, carrying a load himself, and the women carrying them also, in addition to their babies, so that they should not lose all their possessions. Moreover, the mist still lay over the land making it hard to find the way so that Ali Beg's party straggled hither and thither, some, including Ali Beg himself, being obliged to cross the Tarim in order to return to the right road.

The river was covered with ice when Ali Beg crossed it. But the ice was not thick and when he and his party had reached an island between two of the river's channels, they found there was open water between them and the far bank. It happened that there was much long grass on the islet but no trees.

Ali Beg ordered his followers to gather great bundles of the grass and bind it with twine and webbing into rope. The work of binding had to be done very carefully after the long grass had been laid unevenly on the ground and twisted so that the rope should not part in the middle when it took the strain of many people holding on to it when they grasped it while crossing the river.

The rope rapidly grew longer and longer till it seemed that its length would suffice.

"Will it now reach across, think ye?" Ali Beg asked the ropemakers.

"It will reach," they declared. "But where is the swimmer who can take an end of the rope to the far side? For though the distance is not great, the water is very cold."

"Maybe the bed of the river will shelve before he reaches the bank," one suggested. "Then he will be able to walk instead of swimming."

"That rests in the hands of God," said Ali Beg. "But the task of providing a rope which is long and strong enough rests on our shoulders and we have fulfilled it. So let a swimmer be found forthwith and let him start while there is still daylight."

There was no tree trunk or rock where the water shallowed on the far side of the river to which the swimmer could make the grass rope fast. So when he reached the other side he tied the rope firmly round his naked body and leaned backward to hold it taut while another man hauled himself across moving hand over hand along the rope with his legs and most of his body dangling in the water. With two strong men to hold the rope at each end, Ali Beg judged that it would be safe for the rest of his company to begin the crossing, though most of them could not swim. One by one, all the men and women and the children who were big enough, stripped off their clothes and bound them in bundles on their backs and then took their turn to grasp the grass rope which the strong men on either bank strained and strove to keep above the surface of the water. But in mid-stream the rope inevitably sagged into the water and then the crossers, some of whom had babies strapped to their breasts as well as bundles on their backs, were hard put to it to keep their heads out of the water so that they could breathe. Yet slowly and gaspingly, and with the help of God, all came eventually to safety.

The next problem was to get the animals across: the sheep, goats, camels, cattle, horses, of which there still remained many in spite of the losses in the Thirsty Mountains. But let Ali Beg tell this part of the story himself.

"We chose a man who had a very strong horse. After taking off all his clothes, he mounted his horse which was not saddled and rode forward on it into the water leading another horse behind him. The other animals, seeing the led horse enter the water with no rider on its back followed it without being driven. When they entered the water we did not know whether they could swim. But they all swam extremely well and we did not lose a single beast during the crossing nor any of our goods which were on their backs. We tied sheep's bladders filled with air on to some of the animals whose loads were heavy."

Thus, even Ali Beg's giant seething pot which weighed more than a hundredweight, survived to feed him and his family for yet other days.

Ali Beg said he crossed the Tarim not far from Lawang, which is one of the many empty cities in the Takla

Makan. La-wang is not like Ying-pan, the Empty City in which Ali Beg rested after crossing the Thirsty Mountains. He saw nothing in La-wang save its crumbling city walls and pathetic heaps which had once been houses. But there were many gaunt tree trunks, thrusting their naked branches towards the sky. He added, surprisingly, that La-wang was evacuated because the Tarim first covered it with water in the course of an unprecedented flood after which it changed its course and left the city waterless. All the other dead cities whose bones have hitherto been discovered in the Takla Makan perished simply through lack of moisture.

At one point in their journey they came near the village of Lop which gives its name to Lop Nor, the lake which, years ago, Sven Hedin described as the "wandering" lake because it changes its position every few hundred years when the Tarim which drains it grows tired of its old bed and, having silted it up, carves out a new one more to its liking so that the cities and vegetation which flourished along the old bed die of thirst. The Kazaks turned quickly away from the village of Lop because their scouts brought word that the Communists had already occupied it. And they avoided the lake because the water is too salt to drink and the shore is so spongy that a man, or beast, approaching it sinks to his belly and a man deems himself lucky if there is one nearby who can drag him out.

After they had passed Lop, the land began to tilt gradually upward as they approached the Altyn Mountains which are the northern arm of the Kunlun Mountains of Tibet. But they were glad to climb because they knew they were nearing the end of their journey across the Takla Makan desert and that soon they would reach the home of Hussein Tajji who pastured his flocks near Gezkul, the lake which is long, straight and narrow, and which stands more than 8,000 feet above the level of the sea.

Hussein Tajji received them kindly, telling them in the true Kazak way, and meaning it, that he was their host and they his guests, therefore all his possessions, his camels, cattle, horses and sheep, were at their disposal to relieve their needs. For it is the custom among the

Kazaks that if a man be poor, he may pitch his tent near one that is rich and the rich man shall place in his care, let us say, forty ewes, and at the end of a year, after the forty have lambed, the poor man shall return eighty sheep to his benefactor and keep whatever be left for his own. Ali Beg himself had brought money with him on his camels, as well as his great cooking pot, so he was able to buy outright from Hussein Tajji and his friend, Sultan Sherif, as could others of his party, like Hamza and Kainesh and Emin Ta Mullah. But those who had no money received animals without payment. The winter was nearly over and spring was at hand bringing with it the annual miracle of natural increase in new-born lambs, foals, calves and camel colts. Within two months, therefore, or maybe three, those who came destitute from the long battle at Kukuluk had beasts of their own and Hussein Tajji was certainly no poorer, though if they had not come he might have been even richer. But that was on the knees of God.

As the spring days approached, however, Ali Beg and the other newcomers grew uneasy. It seemed to them that Hussein Tajji was shutting his eyes to the dangers which surrounded them, having lived for so many years in a kind of shangri-la far from the clash of Communist ideology against the Kazak way of life. Their fears were confirmed when they heard what two of Hussein Tajji's men said after returning from Tung-huang, which was their market town and also the town near which are the famous images of the Thousand Buddhas mouldering slowly away in their caves on the perpendicular sides of a crumbling cliff. The two men told how the Communists had just come to Tung-huang and, hearing that two Kazaks from Gezkul were in the town, had sent for them and welcomed them heartily saying that the Kazaks had nothing to fear from the new régime. After feasting them, the Communists bade them return to their tents and carry with them an invitation to their chief to send delegates—the more the better—to a meeting of "people's representatives" from all parts of north-west China to be held in Lanchow, the capital of Kansu. The two men added that the Communists had told them it was quite safe for all the Kazaks to visit Tung-huang provided they wore badges and they showed

those the Communists had given them both for themselves and to hand to their friends.

Ali Beg looked at the badges and saw that they were pictures of Mao Tse-tung, the Communist leader. He went at once to Hussein Tajji and warned him that the badges were a trick and that if any man should go to the meeting of people's representatives at Lanchow he would either never return or would bring with him Communist troops to confiscate every beast that the Kazaks possessed. He reminded Hussein Tajji of the three thousand delegates who had been called to Urumchi in Sheng's time and then ordered to write letters bidding everyone surrender his arms to the Government, and when no arms were surrendered eighteen leaders among the delegates, one being Yunus Hajji, had been arrested and afterwards murdered.

Hussein Tajji, who had been untroubled by politics for more than ten years, was not wholly convinced by what Ali Beg said but agreed to call his elders together to discuss the matter. Some of the elders sided with Hussein Tajji and some with Ali Beg and, finally, it was decided to send forty armed horsemen to Tung-huang to make inquiries and bring back a report.

After the Forty had gone, Ali Beg told Hamza and Kainesh to set guards secretly on the mountain roads between Gezkul and Tung-huang and see that no one came or went through the passes without their permission. In a few days, a messenger reached the posts, coming from Tung-huang, and said that the leader of the Forty had bidden him tell Hussein Tajji that he and his men had been kindly received and that the leader of the Communists had praised them, saying that their presence showed that the Kazaks were beginning to understand the revolution. The messenger said further that the Forty had been offered lorries to take them and other delegates to the meeting of people's representatives at Lanchow because it was too far for them to go there on horseback, being about five hundred miles. He added that he had been told to warn the Kazaks around Gezkul that none would be admitted into Tung-huang unless they wore the badges containing Mao Tse-tung's portrait and that none might enter carrying arms un-

less he had a special permit from the Communist commander at Tung-huang. Anyone disobeying this order, said the messenger, would be shot on sight. He concluded by saying that as he rode towards Gezkul he found the passes near Tung-huang guarded by Communist troops.

"So they would disarm us first and enslave, or kill, us afterwards," Hamza observed to Kainesh when the messenger had ended. "Just as Sheng tried to do when he slew my brother. Henceforward, it is better that we let none past who will not tell us his business, whomsoever he may make himself out to be."

"And this one?" asked Kainesh, glancing towards the messenger. "Shall he pass or shall he remain?"

"Let him pass," said Hamza, "for he hath told truth, though not understanding it, and there is no Communist guile in him. Maybe when Hussein Tajji hears that none may bear arms, he will understand what is afoot."

The next messenger who essayed to pass was not from the leader of the Forty, nor was the next, though both purported to be. Hamza and Kainesh questioned them closely and, when they either refused to answer, or answered evasively, it became clear that they were agents of the enemy with whom Hamza and Kainesh were already at war though not yet Hussein Tajji. Both declared that the Forty had sent them to bid the Gezkul Kazaks surrender their arms because there was now peace throughout China. Hamza and Kainesh, having heard what the first messenger said about arms, were certain that both men lied. So they shot both of them as spies.

As the days passed and no more news came from the Forty, anxiety mounted among Hussein Tajji's Kazaks. Soon, the wives and families of the missing men were clamouring incessantly outside Hussein Tajji's tent saying that spies should be sent to Tung-huang to make secret inquiries about the Forty. Hussein Tajji, who knew nothing of the watch kept on the hills, took counsel with Ali Beg and, like Joshua at Shittim, they decided to send two carefully chosen men to view the land, even Tung-huang. The two Kazak spies, however, were armed with hidden automatics and wore Mao Tse-tung medallions to avert suspicion from Communist agents. Before

they started, Ali Beg gave them careful instructions so that they could avoid the Communist posts in the mountains outside Tung-huang and also warned Hamza and Kainesh to let them pass without interference.

And, by God's will, the two men entered Tung-huang at the very moment that lorries with the Forty in them were about to drive out through the gates of the town. Their arms had been taken from them and, though they were not in chains, they looked as men who were going to their execution. The lorries happened not to be moving and the two spies went close to them and called out to the Forty in the Kazak tongue, knowing that the armed guards, being Chinese, would not understand it. The leader of the Forty, answering them, said:

"They bade us send messengers to Gezkul to tell our brethren and Hussein Tajji that they should surrender their arms and come to Tung-huang to pledge fealty to the new State. And when we said that we would not, they told us that the messengers had gone already in our name and that if they did not return having obtained the surrender of the arms, our lives would be the forfeit because of the word we had pledged that the arms would be given up. But we pledged no word though the Communists told us that the messengers had orders to say that we had done so."

The two men asked whether they could do anything to save them, saying that they had automatics though it would be folly to use them inside the gates of Tung-huang.

"Nay," said the leader of the Forty. "It cannot be that they will kill us when the crime of which we are accused is one which they themselves committed, not we. But whether they kill us or no is on the knees of God and it is better that you two die not with us but go to tell our wives and our comrades what is the truth about this business."

"Go in peace," the two men called as the lorries moved off. "And return in safety. And, as for us, we will do as you have asked."

What happened to the Forty is not known. None of them returned to Gezkul nor did any news ever come of them. It is possible, therefore, that the Communists carried out their threat to execute them. It is also possible that they sentenced

them to work among the gangs of prisoners who were already engaged in building the roads and bridges and factories which are the objectives and criteria of Communist advancement. For those who love the Kazak life, such a sentence was a sentence of death.

The two men lost no time in getting back to Gezkul. When they had told what they had seen and what the leader of the Forty had told them, the wives of the missing men tore their faces with their finger nails till the blood flowed freely and rushed to Hussein Tajji's tent demanding vengeance. Their friends pacified them with difficulty. From that day, there was no doubt among Hussein Tajji's men that they must fight even as others had done in the Altai and Tien Shan, at Kukuluk and Kucheng. So the patrols and guard posts in the mountains were multiplied and before long there were a number of minor clashes with Communist patrols from Tung-huang, but nothing serious as yet.

On March 15, 1950, an unexpected visitor arrived in the Gezkul area: Douglas Mackiernan, the American Vice-Consul, who had disappeared from Urumchi mysteriously on the very day that the Eighth Route Army vanguard entered it, namely, September 11, 1949. Urumchi is, at most, fourteen days distant from Gezkul on horseback and leading camels, which is how Mackiernan was travelling, but he had been five and a half months on the journey. Where and how he spent the intervening five and a half months is not known to Ali Beg, or maybe he knows but would not tell me because he has a rule not to speak of other people's business. An American named Frank Bessac who was with Mackiernan said in an article in *Life* that they spent the winter in camp but he did not give details.

Mackiernan, who knew Ali Beg well, said that he wanted to buy beasts to carry his gear. He also asked for guides to show him the way to the Tibetan border which lay some two hundred miles to the south, as the eagle flies though not by any means as the track runs through the Altyn Mountains. Ali Beg agreed to supply both and then told Mackiernan of the fighting round Kukuluk and his journey across the Thirsty Mountains. They spoke too of what the future held in store

for the Kazaks, and I think that Ali Beg asked the Americans whether there was any prospect of help reaching them across the Himalayas. I am sure he told him that the Kazaks were determined to resist to the death, if need be.

Before his departure, Mackiernan tore a five-dollar bill in half, giving one portion to Ali Beg and keeping the other after they had put their thumb marks on both pieces. Then they wished one another God-speed and the two Americans went on their way with fifteen fresh camels, one horse and two guides provided by the Kazaks. The guides returned after one week saying that they had gone with the Americans for three days taking four to return as there was no need for haste. They had parted, they said, before reaching the Tibetan border because Mackiernan told them their services were no longer needed.

If their story is correct, Mackiernan's decision to send them back was a major disaster. The two Kazak guides had orders from Ali Beg to lead the Americans into Tibet by a route on which there were known to be no Tibetan frontier guards. On the route the Americans actually followed, there were guards and, as Ali Beg learnt much later, they shot Mackiernan dead, not having received orders sent by the Dalai Lama to admit him. They did not harm Frank Bessac.

I asked Ali Beg whether he thought Mackiernan's death was an accident or whether Communist machinations were responsible for the fact that the order did not reach the frontier post, seeing that, according to the official statement issued in Lhasa, all the frontier posts in the vicinity had received the order except the one at which Mackiernan was killed. Ali Beg was not prepared to give a definite answer. Nevertheless, he was greatly surprised at the time when the Kazak guides returned before completing their task since he and Mackiernan had agreed that the guides should lead the Americans across the frontier. Therefore he wondered whether their return had been engineered by a Communist agent among those who were with Mackiernan and Bessac. There is no doubt that there were Communist agents in Tibet itself, although at that time the country had not yet been completely occupied. But it would have been easy for Communist agents to prevent one

particular frontier post from receiving the Dalai Lama's order to let Mackiernan enter Tibet. Moreover, if the post had received no order of any kind regarding Mackiernan, why did the guards shoot only one of the two Americans and not both? The most likely explanation is that the frontier post was not expecting Bessac but had orders to kill Mackiernan because he knew too much about the affairs of Sinkiang and the way the Communists captured the province.

Before leaving Mackiernan told Ali Beg that he should keep his half of the five-dollar bill and present it to no-one but a certain American official in Delhi who would make him suitable recompense for the help he had given. But when Ali Beg heard that Mackiernan was dead, he did not wish to present his half of the note, preferring to keep it as a memento of the giver. He still has it—and not very much else except his ceremonial clothes.

It is worth noting that the place at which Ali Beg was to present his half was Delhi. That is to say, Ali Beg had already made up his mind in April, 1950, that the Kazaks should fight their way out from Central Asia unless help soon reached them from outside.

And now it is time to turn to Barkul, where Osman Batur had gone in May, 1949, when Tao's pacification troops prevented him from going to Karashahr. The Communists left him alone until they had ended the battle of Kukuluk and then they sent a force to lay siege to his encampments where were also Yolbars, the Turki, with his mixed following of Turkis and Chinese, and Janim Khan with his Kazaks and White Russians. Except that the weapons were mostly modern, there is much in the way the siege was conducted that recalls the siege of Jerusalem by Rabshakeh, the general of the Assyrian king, Sennacherib, in the days of Hezekiah. Thus, Hezekiah's general, Eliakim, was highly indignant when Rabshakeh appealed to the people of Jerusalem in their own language calling on them to surrender. The Communists hired Kazaks to appeal to the Kazaks to surrender using the Kazak tongue and calling upon individual defenders by name. Rabshakeh promised the beleaguered Jews that he would take them away to another land "like your own land, a land of

corn and wine, a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive oil and honey that ye may live and not die." The Communists promised the followers of Osman Batur, Yolbars and Janim Khan comparable material benefits under a planned Marxist economy coupling the promises, however, with sinister elaborations of the way the defenders and their relatives would die if they refused to accept what the Communists offered them.

Osman Batur and his men held out against the Communist attacks, both military and psychological, for nine months, although they were steadily pressed into a smaller and smaller space. The fighting began when the Eighth Route Army, aided by some local levies, attacked Yolbars, who was holding Ta Shih-tou, which is a pass through the mountains south-west of Barkul. The pass links the two roads known as the North and South Roads, which in turn link East Turkistan and China, meeting at Hami before crossing the Gobi Desert. The attackers were mechanised and soon drove Yolbars out. But when he joined Osman Batur in the plain of Barkul, they in their turn drove the Communists back three times with great slaughter, whereupon the Communists withdrew the ill-clad Eighth Route Army and brought up the Russian-led Kazaks, giving them aircraft with Russian pilots who bombed every Kazak encampment they saw.

The Communists then closed all the exits from the Barkul area and sent "explaining parties" under armed guard to all the encampments they could reach without coming into contact with Osman Batur's fighting men. The explaining parties escorted the peaceful inhabitants of all encampments with their families and beasts to concentration camps at Kucheng. When this became known every encampment resisted the explaining parties, whereupon it was wiped out and the "victory" over the rebels was solemnly recorded in the Communist newspapers as a major success for the patriotic forces.

Having exhausted the possibilities in this direction, the Communists made a grand sweep across the Barkul plain hoping to destroy Osman Batur's fighting forces. They failed again, and asked the Soviet Government to send trained Russian troops with tanks and heavy artillery. Even so, the defenders continued to hold out for two months. At

last, some of them melted away into the Gobi Desert and I do not know what became of them. But the rest stayed by Osman Batur who, incredibly, managed to break through the Communist cordon and take his men and those of Janim Khan and Yolbars, with their families and tents, their flocks and herds, first across the mountains and then over nearly five hundred miles of open country, past several walled towns with Communist garrisons, to Khan Ambal Tau, the mountains of Khan Ambal. They arrived early in September, 1950. None of my informants in Turkey were with Osman Batur during this feat of arms and this part of Asia is practically unexplored so I cannot describe the country. But there is no doubt that Osman Batur led his followers across it.

Shortly before he arrived in the Khan Ambal Mountains the Communists became more active round Gezkul and there was a serious battle at Mount Sadim in which many were killed on both sides, Ali Beg's brother, Zeinul Hamid, among them. But the Communists lost so heavily that they did not make another attack for five months.

When Yolbars reached Gezkul he said that he had come to the conclusion it was time to leave Turkistan and join Chiang Kai-shek who, by now, had reached Formosa. He said that with the whole mainland of China in the hands of the Communists it was foolish to remain in north-west China seeing that, all told, the Kazak fighting men around Gezkul numbered no more than four to five thousand. Ali Beg was inclined to agree with him. But Osman Batur and most of the rest preferred to remain, believing that they were so far from the other inhabited parts of north-west China that the Communists would leave them alone.

Ali Beg would not desert his comrades. Yolbars was determined to go and, as he was over seventy years old, no one thought the worse of him. Nor did they feel that his Chinese followers understood enough about Kazak ways of war to be a great loss if they went with him. Saalis, whose men were mostly White Russians, also decided to go with Yolbars. So did Adil, the rich Kazak merchant, Abdel Kerim the historian, and Emin Ta Mullah who had gone to persuade Ali Beg to sur-

render and was himself persuaded to revolt. All three were alone except for their families.

When these men departed soon after Osman Batur's arrival from Barkul, Ali Beg wished them God-speed and sent letters by Yolbars to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, and also to General Eisenhower, in which he said: "If no help reaches us, we can hold out here for one year, no longer. If no help comes, we will fight our way out."

CHAPTER X

Disaster at Gezkul

OSMAN BATUR'S fighting retreat at Gezkul ended another phase in the Kazak struggle. In the springtide of their success during 1944-5, the free Kazaks had virtually liberated the whole of the traditional Kazak pasture lands: the Altai, Tarbagatai and Kuldja, the northern slopes of the Tien Shan and the country between. With the Soviet Government's open intervention there had been a series of ebbs. First the Altai went, then in succession Tarbagatai and Kuldja, Baitik Bogdo, Kucheng, the Tien Shan, Kukuluk. Finally, with the loss of Barkul, the free Kazaks were confined to an area, far away from their traditional homes, which they had occupied for the first time, as a convenient place of refuge, only thirteen years previously. Its perimeter was a bare two hundred and fifty miles, scarcely half as big as the administrative county of London. It was bounded on three sides by arid or semi-arid deserts and a range of mountains. On the fourth stood a ruthless and implacable human enemy, knocking hungrily at the door, not daring to leave the Kazaks alone lest their freedom should contaminate the minds of the enslaved peoples around them.

There was quiet for a while in this contracted living space after Osman Batur's arrival. Occasionally aeroplanes droned overhead. More frequently, Hamza reported that his outposts had been in contact with Communist patrols which, however, retreated after exchanging a few shots and did not wait to be attacked. Sometimes, but not very often, peaceful travellers made their appearance on horseback or camel-back—or, at least, travellers who seemed to be peaceful. Such people were always closely questioned before being allowed past the outposts. But now that everyone in the Gezkul encampments was fully awake to the dangers of Communist infiltration, it

Ali Beg's map

Karamullah, Hussein Tajji and others singing the schoolboy song. "In the name of God, I bring you instruction . . ."

(Left) The Dance of the Black Stallion

(Below) The Dance of the Roebuck

seemed less important to keep Communist agents at a distance and much more important to try to learn something about what was going on outside the free Kazak perimeter.

After the incident of the Forty, it was not considered safe to visit Tung-huang. Once or twice, some of Hussein Tajji's men ventured into it but it was a hazardous undertaking and the results were not commensurate with the risk. Not only must the adventurous ones avoid the Communist outposts, which were there for the express purpose of preventing contact between the free Kazaks and other people, but it was also necessary to pass the suspicious scrutiny of armed guards at the gates of the city who were on the lookout for malcontents, arms and anyone who could not give a good, or at any rate plausible, account of himself. And when all these difficulties had been surmounted and the venturesome ones were at last inside the walled town, they must ever be on the alert for acquaintances who might denounce them in the hope of acquiring merit in the eyes of the Communists. Nor were the inhabitants anxious to give information even to friends lest it should come to the ears of the Communists that they had done so.

Beyond the grazing grounds was mostly desert, so the Kazaks, being shut off from the north by the Communists and mountains, were in a little world of their own as, indeed, they normally loved to be. But this time their world was coveted by greedy men who were plotting to take it from them.

Long months of fighting had left the free Kazaks even shorter than usual of weapons and ammunition. Hemmed in by Communist outposts, it was no longer easy for them to raid supply columns as they had so often done in the past. Once again, they were forced to fashion make-shifts in their encampment, especially the fearsome-looking round bullets, of solid lead, often half an inch or more in diameter, to fit their home-made guns. By all international rules these bullets were dum-dum and illegal. But the choice before the free Kazaks was between illegality and utter defencelessness in the face of an enemy who obeys no laws except those which serve his purpose. The Kazaks had no intention of being utterly defenceless.

With Osman Batur's arrival, command of all the Kazak forces in the field passed to him. But command of each group remained with the group leader who obeyed Osman Batur if he wished, but also felt free to act independently. Almost, possibly quite, without exception, however, the basic policy was decided by voting at the Hur Altai, or War Council, and its execution entrusted to Osman Batur whose instructions were then binding on all.

The basic issues of policy remained, as always, the question whether the free Kazaks could hope to hold out against the Communists where they were, and if not, what their next move should be. Ali Beg, relying on the reports of growing Communist strength which reached him from Hamza's outposts in the mountains, was in favour of leaving Gezkul as soon as winter was over and making their way to India across Tibet, preferably with the consent of the Dalai Lama but using force if he refused to let the people go through. Osman Batur and Janim Khan believed they could hold out indefinitely in the Gezkul area, or, if not indefinitely, at least until the general political situation changed again which, in their experience, it was certain to do before very long. They argued that the usual ebb and flow of Chinese political forces, and, still more, the familiar clash of personalities, would ultimately bring about the downfall or disruption of the Communists and enable the Kazaks to return to their own homes and resume their normal existence.

Ali Beg did not agree. He was impressed by the fact that, the Chinese and Russian Governments were actually working together. He did not—does not—believe they will always do so or even do so for long. But he told his colleagues that, while this co-operation lasted, they had no hope of resisting the combined forces of two such powerful opponents. In his view, therefore, the right course was to put themselves beyond the reach of the Communists before it was too late—as Yolbars and the others had done five months previously.

Thus, the only alternatives the free Kazaks debated were to stay where they were and fight it out and to fight their way through the hostile forces around them; natural obstacles like

the Takla Makan Desert, the Altyn and Kunlun Mountains and the trans-Himalayas; human ones, including not only the Communists but also the Tibetans if they proved unfriendly. By this time the free Kazaks numbered all told no more than three to four thousand men, women and children. Xenophon and his Ten Thousand Greeks, stranded in Asia Minor, were nearly three times as numerous and did not face a tithe of the dangers which confronted them if they decided to fight their way out in the teeth of the combined forces of the two greatest powers in Asia, and through the most formidable natural obstacles in the world.

Small wonder then that Osman Batur, Janim Khan and most of the other leaders held back from launching their followers on such an enterprise. Resistance might well seem the lesser evil, especially to Osman Batur himself, who was influenced by his belief that he was the instrument of destiny to fulfil the prophecy of Boko Batur: "One day we shall drive the infidels back into the deserts where they belong and we shall destroy them there though they may be as many as the sands of the Takla Makan."

Debates and discussion about what to do and how best to do it went on intermittently throughout the last three months of 1950 and January, 1951. Traditionally, the first day of winter in East Turkistan is on November 11, but snow sometimes comes earlier and, with its arrival, campaigning becomes more difficult. The horses have to be re-shod with special spiked shoes—like those which helped Osman Batur to escape from the ambush near Kucheng—otherwise they cannot keep their feet on the ice. The flocks and herds can no longer find enough pasture on which to graze and are fed mostly on hay carried to the winter encampments during the summer.

So, except for raiding and reconnaissance parties which carry their supplies with them, the Kazaks normally preferred to stay quietly in their tents during the winter. Nor were the Chinese usually eager to fight during that season because the snow impeded the movement of their supplies and their soldiers often had no winter uniforms. This was true of the

Communist Eighth Route Army in 1950-1 as well as of Sheng's troops between 1933 and 1943 and those of the Kuomintang. Nevertheless, Hamza's men still kept watch on the tracks across the mountains though they had been forced to withdraw from their more distant positions by a series of local attacks during the previous summer. After Osman Batur's arrival in September, 1950, the attacks gradually died down and the front was quiet throughout November, December, and January.

A Hur Altai had just begun when the Communists attacked suddenly from all sides on the morning of February 1, 1951. The chiefs in their council tent heard the staccato flurry of distant rifle shots and the tigerish purr of machine guns followed by shouts outside the tent: "The Communists are here! The Communists are here!" They seized their arms which lay by their sides and rushed out of the tent. The men too rushed to their horses and in a matter of moments chiefs and men were galloping, either to join in the battle on the spot or towards their own encampments some of which were near at hand and some fifteen to twenty miles away. The women and children, without orders, quickly dismantled the tents or rushed to round up the animals, leaving the tents till they could return—if they ever could return.

The Communists had achieved complete tactical surprise, yet every Kazak encampment was on the move, with or without the tents themselves, within ten minutes, making for the nearest mountains in spite of the snow. Round each encampment was a steadily widening screen of fighting men, sniping at the enemy cavalry and camelry, hustling their own frightened beasts back into the flocks and herds from which they were trying to stray and urging them away from enemy armoured cars. Indeed, but for the fact that the Kazak leaders happened to have been all in one place at one time instead of among their own men, the attack would almost certainly have been a complete failure. The Communist force was not a big one—the refugees in Turkey put its numbers at about three thousand of all arms, infantry, cavalry, camelry and armoured cars. But the most dangerous and mobile

part of the attacking force, the armoured cars, could only manoeuvre successfully in open country, and most of the Kazaks together with their tents and animals were already in the mountains within an hour or so after the attack was launched.

As usual, the Communists avoided getting too closely involved with the Kazak horsemen and sought to cut off the leaders, the families and the animals. They failed almost entirely to catch the families and at least fifty per cent of the animals were extricated too. But they were only too successful in trapping leaders.

Osman's seventeen-year-old daughter, Az-Apay had ridden with her father to the Hur Altai, though his son, Sherdirman, had stayed at their encampment in the Khan Ambal Mountains, many miles away. Father and daughter galloped off as soon as the alarm was given. She was about two hundred yards ahead, passing through a narrow defile, when Osman Batur saw many Communist soldiers rise out of an ambush and pull her from her horse. The Communists numbered not less than two hundred, but they turned to flee as Osman Batur galloped towards them, quite alone, firing his machine gun from the hip. How many he killed at this moment cannot be estimated, but none who was still alive waited for him. His daughter was unhurt when he reached her, though her horse was dead. As he reined in beside her, she jumped up behind him and they turned and galloped away. Soon they came to the lake, and Osman decided to ride across its frozen surface. But the ice was uneven and his horse fell on it, throwing its riders and breaking its own leg.

Osman had his machine gun and his daughter an automatic. They killed the horse and, lying on the ice behind its dead body, held the enemy at bay for hours, hoping for succour. None came, for their friends did not know where they were. The ring round them contracted slowly as the Communists crept closer, holding their fire because they had been ordered to take Osman alive. At last they were near enough to make a concerted rush from all sides, disregarding their losses, which the Kazak refugees say numbered more than two hundred

killed. But during the final rush Osman Batur and Az-Apay fired their last rounds of ammunition so that they had no option but to surrender.

They bound his hands behind his back, tying a stone weighing a hundred "chin," which is about one hundredweight and a quarter, to them. Then when they were ready to go they hoisted him on to a horse, tied his legs together under its belly and so took him to Tung-huang more than fifty miles away. There they tortured him for many days and nights and sometimes paraded him, bound, on horseback through the streets with a placard in front and behind which proclaimed: "He boasted that he would deliver Turkistan from the Chinese but he has not done so." But they had omitted to gag him so Osman shouted to the bystanders as he rode along: "I may die, but so long as the world lasts, my people will continue the struggle."

Finally, he was taken to Urumchi where, in due course, the Communists staged a carefully planned public execution to strike terror into the minds of the people. First they carried him through the main streets on a lorry with his face blackened as a mark of shame and they hung another placard round his neck bearing a new variant of the earlier accusation: "He said he would deliver Turkistan from the Chinese but in fact he sold out to the British and Americans." Then they took him to Shui Mo-kou, which means the Valley of the Water Mills, where representatives from every class had been ordered to go so that they could watch him being decapitated. Among them were children from every school, people of every trade and profession.

Shui Mo-kou is a place of hot springs and marshes in a narrow fold of rolling hills, little children of the massive mountains behind them. The springs are reputed to have healing qualities and special bath houses have been built over some of them. Others are used by local people who wash clothes in them, and a few are harnessed to grind wheat into flour for the city's daily bread. There are coal mines in the vicinity and some iron ore mines, too. After the 1948 *coup d'état,* the Soviet Government started to build three blast furnaces there,

though whether for its own use, or for the Chinese, is not yet certain. In addition, Shui Mo-kou is the site of Urumchi's main arsenal, all around which are barracks, camps, and parade grounds.

Osman Batur and his daughter were captured on February 1, 1951, and it was not until the following August that he was executed. The Communist newspapers, in describing the scene, said that the people of Urumchi attended voluntarily, in their thousands, to watch the end of the traitor who had tried to sell them to the capitalists. My informant on this matter was there at the time, and he assures me that the people went because they had no choice. He believes that the Communists staged the spectacle because they were afraid of a rising and wished to make certain that everyone should know what happened to their opponents. Consequently, not only was the place of execution thronged with special compulsory delegates but the streets with compulsory spectators. And the throngs were plentifully besprinkled with secret agents of the People's Police. My informant says that it is possible those present were overawed but he is convinced that the vast majority hated the Communists the more for their cruelty though no one dared weep lest the People's Police should arrest them.

As Osman neared the place of his execution with his blackened face and the contemptuous placard round his neck, he passed a factory at which girl political prisoners were making uniforms for Communist soldiers. One of them was his daughter, Az-Apay.

Osman Batur was not the only Kazak leader the Communists captured during their successful surprise attack at Gezkul. Another was Janim Khan, the former Finance Minister of Sinkiang. I have not been able to get any details of how he fell into Communist hands. But he was also executed after the usual period of torture during which his inquisitors tried to make him disclose information about alleged secret associates. And, as a matter of course, they did their utmost to induce him to appeal to his family and his followers to give themselves up and save all their lives. He did not do so, though I doubt if his words would have had any effect even if he had. Every Kazak, indeed every inhabitant of the province, knew

by now that the submission of a prisoner's family made no difference whatever to his own fate.

The informant who described the execution of Osman Batur told me that when Janim Khan was taken to the place of execution, he bore himself with great dignity. Unlike Osman, however, he was known personally to many in Urumchi by reason of the office he had held. His friends did not dare to stage a demonstration in the hope of saving his life, either in the city itself, or at the place of execution. But when night fell, and the daytime mists on the sides of the mountain had dissapated it was seen that they had set fire to the forests on the hills above the capital and the whole sky was wreathed in a funeral pall of dark smoke for many days till the fires finally burnt themselves out or were quenched by rain, after destroying many thousands of acres of valuable building timber. So fearful were the Communists of a rising of Kazaks still in the neighbourhood of the capital, that all roads were patrolled for several weeks afterwards.

Janim Khan's son, Daleel Khan, and Osman Batur's son, Sherdirman, both escaped when their fathers were captured at the fatal battle of Gezkul. Daleel Khan made the perilous crossing of Tibet, though I do not know by what route, and reached India safely. I believe he still is there. Sherdirman, on the other hand, stayed in East Turkistan. He, too, is still there. What is much more surprising is that he was able to go on fighting long after his father's death.

Proof of this comes from the Communists themselves. In August, 1953, eighteen months after the disaster at Gezkul, some of the Kazak refugees in Kashmir were listening to the wireless in the communal Turkistani hostel in Srinagar, when they were electrified to hear a Communist announcer in Urumchi read a news item which declared that Sherdirman and his two younger brothers had accepted the generous offer of an armistice made him by the Communists so that peace once more reigned in Sinkiang.

Till that moment, Osman Batur's friends in Kashmir had not known whether Sherdirman was alive or dead and they were greatly heartened by the announcement.

"By Allah," said one of the older listeners. "If Sherdirman is still alive, it is certain he has not submitted to his father's murderers. The announcer lied. Now we know that Sherdirman lives and the Communists have failed to subdue him because the lad is the true son of his father. Moreover, we know the Communist methods. Therefore we know they have broadcast that he has submitted in the hope that it will cause dismay among the ignorant. And why should they do such a thing unless it be that he has had many successes and they fear lest he should have even greater ones?"

"If Sherdirman is still fighting," said one of the younger men "should not we who are of an age to fight, return to join him?"

The elders nodded approvingly.

"It is well said, though without prudence, for how would ye go?" one of them replied. "The Indians have taken our arms and the people of Tibet have no love for our people. And their country is garrisoned by Communist troops. Moreover, if ye essayed another way than that we came by, the frontiers facing Pakistan, Afghanistan and Nepal are all closely guarded by Communist soldiers lest we exiles should return to stir up trouble. And the Indians guard their own frontiers with the Communists lest the Communists should accuse them of employing us to cause them trouble."

"There are few inhabitants along the road by which we came," said the eager one. "And we are strong, though few: able to cope with our foes and the tutuk-iss—the fog-swelling —and the mountains and the snow and ice along the road."

"It is not to be thought of," was the verdict of the elders. "For, if ten essayed it, one at the utmost would win through seeing that we have no arms which the Indians took from us because we came into their country as political refugees. Nay, we must bide our time. But the day of vengeance will dawn and we shall be ready for it."

The frontiers of Sinkiang, and, indeed, of the whole of China, are closely sealed today, not only against the return of the Kazak exiles, but also against free inquiry by unpre-

judiced observers from the free world. So, it is impossible to know for certain whether the refugee's surmise was correct, or whether the Chinese Communists, impressed by the difficulty of subduing the inhabitants of this distant region have actually granted autonomy to Sinkiang as they claimed in an official announcement published in August, 1955, exactly two years after the announcement that Sherdirman had accepted an armistice. The later announcement told of the establishment of an "autonomous Uighur Republic of Sinkiang" with local self-government for the various racial groups including the Kazaks. Uighur is another name for Turki so that, if the proclamation could be taken at its face value, it would mean that the local races had at least been given the right to manage their own affairs, independently of Peking—or Moscow. But if this had really happened, their first act would have been to abolish Communism so that there is not the slightest doubt that "autonomy" means nothing more than the right to do as they are told.

Be that as it may, it is clear from the radio announcements of August, 1953, that the Communists failed to catch Sherdirman in the Khan Ambal Mountains after their surprise attack on February 1, 1951. It is equally clear that he kept together a big enough following to remain a thorn in their flesh for eighteen months—a big enough thorn to make them offer a compromise—in spite of their overwhelming superiority in man-power, weapons and equipment. That, in itself, involves no mean feat of arms. Every weapon, every bullet, used by Sherdirman and his followers had either to be made at home or captured from a dead enemy or a raided convoy. Aeroplanes were constantly on the watch to see where he was hiding. He had to keep together, not merely a fighting force, but the flocks and herds and tents his men and their families needed for sustenance and shelter. He could never have a moment's respite but must be ever on guard against surprise—and against enemy agents. I think that, when better times come again, a Kazak bard will write the Saga of Sherdirman, as Karamullah, the bard now living near Develi on the central

Anatolian plain in Turkey, has written the saga of Osman Batur.

I cannot say whether the Osman Batur saga is a great poem from the Kazak standpoint and I know that some of Karamullah's own comrades say it is inaccurate. But it throws useful light on the Kazak habit of mind which upheld them through dangers such as have seldom fallen to man. It is, in a fashion Osman Batur's epitaph, And may Sherdirman's epitaph, when the time comes to write it, tell how he fulfilled the prophecy of Boko Batur, and his own father's hopes, that though the enemies of the Kazak people were as numerous as the sands of the Takla Makan, he drove them out of his beloved country into the deserts across which they came to steal it.

The battle of Gezkul which began with the capture of the free Kazak commander-in-chief and one of his principal lieutenants went on continuously for three days and nights and ended with a Communist withdrawal. The remaining leaders, especially Ali Beg with his two lieutenants, Hamza and Kainesh, galloped hither and yon, co-ordinating the efforts of the Kazak horsemen, fixing a rendezvous at which they would strive to meet in the mountains, taking succour to the hard-pressed, charging the slow-moving Communist camelry whenever they saw an opportunity, salvaging their own tents, rounding up their scattered flocks, staging ambushes.

Ali Beg's wife, Mulia, staged one ambush entirely on her own. When the Communist attack began, the women and children in her encampment had no time to dismantle the tents but only just time to make a dash, first for their children and then for their horses. As Mulia herself was about to follow the rest, she saw a young child who had been left behind. Stooping low from her saddle, she caught it up with her free hand and then made off after her companions with Communist cavalry in hot pursuit. Mercifully she was not hit, though afterwards she found several bullet holes in her clothes.

Actually the women's dash for the mountains was not the wild flight it seemed to be but a perfectly executed though unplanned retreat, for they rode by a roundabout route to where the greater part of their own flocks and herds were feeding in the mountains. By the time they got there, they had outdistanced the pursuit so Mulia and one of the herd-lads decided to see if they could get back to the encampment unobserved and salvage some of their belongings. Having reached it, they found the enemy had not yet looted the tents. They also found two machine guns and some ammunition, so they decided to stay in the camp and see if they could not pay back the enemy's surprise with interest. In due course the enemy, having missed those they pursued in the mountains, came back to loot the encampment. Mulia and the lad let them come almost up to the tents and then let fly with both machine guns, driving them back to the nearest cover in considerable confusion and inflicting a good many casualties in the process. The Communists sniped at the two impromptu machine-gunners for about five hours but made off in the end when Ali Beg returned with some of his men. Thanks to Mulia's initiative all their belongings were saved, including Ali Beg's famous cooking pot.

When the Kazaks were at last able to take stock of the situation, they found that their losses in men were not heavy. Thanks to acts of individual initiative and resourcefulness such as Mulia's, they even saved most of their tents and household possessions and at least fifteen thousand animals: camels, cattle, sheep and horses. It seems less incredible that they should have done so when we remember that even the women and young children were fighters not given to panic in any circumstances, not bucolic in temperament, even though shepherds by lineage, but quick thinkers, as well as untamable ones.

It is possible, of course, that the Communists withdrew because they believed that the Kazaks would disintegrate after the capture of two of their principal leaders. But as both of these were captured at the first surprise, not towards the end of the three-day battle, I think the obvious explanation is the true one: the Communists had had enough.

When the remaining Kazak leaders had an opportunity to

take stock, they realised at once that the only course of action was to enter Tibet and fight their way to India if the Tibetans would not let them pass. They agreed that it would be impossible to travel *en masse*—there were still nearly three thousand men, women and children and the animals and tents in addition, for they neither could, nor would, leave them behind. In the narrow valleys and ravines of the mountains through which they would have to pass, such a company would form a column many miles long with no hope of scattering if attacked by Communist aeroplanes or ambushed from the cliffs overlooking the track. Moreover, the tail of the column would have difficulty in keeping touch with the head when crossing a pass unless the whole moved very slowly. Finally, it was still only February and the worst part of the Tibetan winter was still to come. The problems of food and fodder would be bad enough at any time, even for comparatively small parties. For a large one they would be insuperable.

So the remnants of the free Kazaks banded themselves together, each man round the leader of his own choice, and set forth in small groups towards a completely unknown future rather than submit to the Communists. Hussein Tajji's simple explanation has already been quoted once but it will bear repetition: "It is better to die than to live as an animal. An animal looks to man as though he were God. It is not right that a man should look to other men in such a fashion."

So Ali Beg, Daleel Khan, Sultan Sherif and Hussein Tajji himself broke camp one after other and guided their parties and flocks due southward through the Altyn Mountains along paths they knew towards the grim and massive Kunlun Mountains which they knew not, except that on their farther side was the unknown land of Tibet across which they must pass to reach India. Each party had its own individual adventures and chose its own route. Like those who slipped through the Communist lines when leaving Kukuluk fourteen months previously, some were lucky in Tibet, getting through almost unscathed and finding both the Tibetans and their mountains not unfriendly. Others lost up to fifty per cent of their strength

in men, women and children, and almost all their animals. All hated to leave their homeland, realising that in all probability they would never return. But none dreamed for one moment of turning back.

Ali Beg's personal party consisted this time of two hundred and thirty-four people, among whom were Hamza and Kainesh with their wives and children and Ali Beg's three wives, his six children and his only surviving brother, Zeinul Hamid. Of the others, about a hundred and forty were men and the rest women and young children. With them were several thousand sheep, several hundreds each of cattle and horses, and about sixty camels, one of which carried—but you have guessed it already—Ali Beg's more than family-size cooking pot.

The party set out from the lake that is shaped like a ruler at the end of the first week in February—only four days after the battle of Gezkul ended—and took the road which Ali Beg had recommended to Douglas Mackiernan. They had their first encounter with Communist troops the day after they started and their last while they were waiting on the frontier of Kashmir for permission to enter. They reached the Indian frontier on August 18, 1951, six and a half months after they left the lake called Gezkul. During the interval, they journeyed not less than nine hundred miles over the most barren and inhospitable part of the roof of the world, fighting several battles and many skirmishes on the way and battling, too, almost all the while against natural difficulties which only those who have attempted the conquest of Himalayan peaks like Everest and Kanchenjunga have ever experienced.

CHAPTER XI

Over the Roof of the World

TO anyone who did not know them, the Kazaks setting forth from Gezkul must have looked an easy prey to a determined attack. Thousands of sheep, many of them almost ready to lamb, straggled irregularly over the countryside on either side of the path nibbling at any stray brown tuft of herbage which showed through the snow. Scattered among the sheep were oxen, cows, bulls, mostly with loads of household goods on their backs. Unladen brood mares ambled along, some with foals tagging at their heels. There were stallions too, many of them jealously watching their own flock of mares and foals. Finally there were strings of shaggy two-humped camels in their thick winter coats, tied one behind the other by their nose strings and carrying on their backs great loads of ammunition; spare weapons; sections of the familiar felted tents, each rolled carefully round its wooden framework; brass-bound wooden chests containing spare clothes, treasured papers and perhaps a book or two, especially the Koran. And there was one camel, bigger, taller and stronger than all the rest, which proudly carried Ali Beg's cooking pot and nothing else.

Controlling these many beasts were men, women and children on horseback, all except the very young, carrying hand grenades and rifle or machine gun or automatic and all skilled in the use of whichever kind of weapon it was, if he, or she, were over ten. Outside this sprawling and seemingly vulnerable heart, rode a screen of mounted men, in front, on both flanks and in the rear, all of them as far distant from the slowly moving-beasts as the nature of the ground and the depth of the snow dictated.

Ali Beg's choice of a route during this final stage of the great exodus took him deliberately away from frequented roads and inhabited places lest he should lead his followers into a Com-

munist ambush. The general direction was towards the south and through the Altyn Mountains which lead to the great Kunlun Mountains on the northern border of Tibet. He knew that behind these mountains lay the great plateau of Tibet which mostly lies at 12-15,000 feet above sea level. But from the moment he left Gezkul he was in country which has never been mapped, and very seldom traversed. Indeed, he himself says that he is sure no one even went this way before excepting only us."

It soon became evident that when the Communists withdrew after the battle of Gezkul, they left patrols to see what the Kazaks intended to do. Ali Beg's party nearly fell into an ambush laid by one of these patrols at the very outset of the journey. Fortunately, Ali Beg, scanning the hills in front through his field glasses, became suspicious of what might lie behind the rocks on either side of the path where the valley narrowed some distance ahead of them. He sent a few men forward to investigate and when they began to climb the hillside to get above the rocks, they flushed a covey of some twenty Communists who ran to their horses up the valley and made off after a few shots had been exchanged. Ali Beg did not pursue them and presently they halted, evidently intending to keep the Kazaks under observation.

After a while, however, they turned off the track into a side valley and Ali Beg was obliged to send men after them lest they should attack his party from the flank as it went past. But the Communists made no move until the Kazaks had all gone by. Then they came out of their side valley and followed them, though at a respectful distance.

The patrol hovered disturbingly in their rear for several hours as the Kazaks shepherded their heavily-laden beasts southward. Ali Beg, Hamza and Kainesh were seemingly quite unconcerned about the patrol's presence now that it was behind them and their followers were indifferent too, taking their mood from their leaders. The ground was becoming more broken again by this time and presently the sides of the column were obliged to close in on the centre as they entered a narrow valley.

"It is a good place," Ali Beg remarked.

"It is good," Hamza answered. "Perhaps too good, especially as it is the first good place we have passed. If, because they suspect, they reconnoitre, we shall have our trouble for nothing. And they will never give us another opportunity."

Ali Beg and Kainesh agreed, so the Kazaks set no ambush at this spot, nor at the next suitable one. But at the third, Ali Beg said to Hamza:

"How many men are needed?"

"Five, no more," said Hamza. "But let another five be posted on the crest of the hills on either side of the road, lest there be another way that we know not. Then if the Communists go there, suspecting the ambush, they will fall into another and go not down again."

"It is well thought of," said Ali Beg.

Hamza chose each of the fifteen men personally, and the rest of the party went forward, greatly cheered by the knowledge that something was afoot. Presently someone began to sing and the familiar long-drawn final note of a hunting song was soon bouncing back and forth from the naked rocky sides of the valley.

The singing stopped abruptly about half an hour later when there came the sound of rifle fire from the valley of the ambush. It lasted about three minutes only, perhaps even less.

"So few shots," Kainesh observed. "Either the trap failed or all fell into it and are dead."

The whole party had stopped now, as well as the singing, though without orders, and a minute or so later they saw Hamza with three of his five men galloping towards them.

"How went the hunting?" Kainesh asked as Hamza reined in his horse.

"They rode forward with two men behind and two in front who looked neither to their right nor their left," said Hamza laughing. "We let the first two go by and the main body, who were sixteen, likewise, hoping that the last two would also ride into the net. But the two in front were out of our sight and the main body already past us and the last two had lagged so far behind that I was obliged to fire before all the birds were netted. We could not miss at less than two hundred paces. Three fell at our first firing, being bunched together. The other

thirteen leapt from their horses and tried to hide in rocks by the side of the track but there was no cover and there was soon an end. The two in the rear turned their horses about at the first sound of shooting and escaped."

"And the twain in front?" Ali Beg asked.

"Nay, I know not where they can be," Hamza said, "If ye have not seen them."

"They came not this way," Kainesh told him. "Therefore must they have turned aside off the road when they heard the shooting. And whichever side it be, they will fall into good hands ere long, for have we not five good men on each flank?"

"Two of thine own men are lacking," Ali Beg said to Hamza. "Is all well with them?"

"There are sixteen horses and sixteen rifles and I could not cumber my men with bringing them lest we should meet the two Kitai," Hamza explained.

"Take six men and bring the booty," Ali Beg said to Kainesh. "The accoutrements also and the clothing if they be worth preserving. For we have draught animals enough to carry them and who knows where this business will end and what we shall have need of before it is finished?"

"To Hamza the fighting and to me the chores," Kainesh grumbled though laughing, as he rode away. "Next time let it be my turn."

A few more shots rang out a little later and soon afterwards the two hillcrest parties galloped up, one of them with two captured rifles and two horses.

"Eighteen out of twenty," commented Ali Beg to Hamza. "It is a good bag. Yet twenty would have been a thousand times better, for the two who fled will tell which way we have gone. I would that I had left ten men with thee instead of five. Then the two could have been pursued."

"It is the will of God," Hamza replied. "And He alone knows if we could have caught up with them. Moreover, ten men with ten horses are more easily detected than five men with five horses. It might have been that with ten, all our enemies would have escaped our ambush and there would have been fighting in which some of our men were slain unless God had willed it otherwise. Furthermore it is near night. The

twain will not reach their fellows till tomorrow's eve at the earliest and maybe not till the day after. So we have three days, maybe four or five, before they can catch up with us and who but God knows what will happen in even three days?"

"That is the truth," Ali Beg agreed. "And to God be the praise that we are safe for this night and tomorrow night also, unless there be other parties ahead of us and that is not likely."

As it turned out, however, they were spotted by a reconnaissance plane the next afternoon so that the escape of the two men became of no consequence. The plane dived and machine-gunned them but it happened that the ground was open so the Kazaks had spread out and the bullets did not even wound one of the animals though they scared a few. The Kazaks blazed back and some claimed to have hit the plane, but, if they did, it was not in a vital spot for presently the pilot zoomed upward and made off. Ali Beg and Hamza were relieved when they saw the direction, which was behind them, suggesting, though not proving, that there were no Communist bases on either flank nor in front of them in Tibet. But they kept careful watch, none the less, because they knew their position could be reported by wireless, enabling patrols to be sent to intercept them.

During the next ten days or so, Ali Beg's party were attacked on the average once every two days, sometimes from the ground and once from the air. They claim to have brought down one plane, losing some beasts, but no men, in exchange. The ground forces which attacked them were small, never more than twenty to thirty men apiece and, except once, they were on horseback, not in lorries or armoured cars. Also they were Kitai, not enslaved Kazak levies from the Kuldja regiments, so that they were more easily dealt with.

The exception was when the rearguard saw two lorries filled with soldiers coughing along the track behind them. The surface was very bad so that the drivers were obliged to watch the way itself and not the sides. And the soldiers in the lorries were tired with much jolting for many hours. So when the Kazak rearguard which, as it happened, consisted of two men only, shot the drivers with automatics from behind rocks within

three or four yards, the lorries went out of control, overturned and caught fire. The occupants were all killed, mostly by the flames and the overturning, but two or three by bullets. Mostly their weapons were destroyed too. But the rearguard salvaged two or three automatics and a fair amount of ammunition both for automatics and rifles before riding on. And as they went, one said to the other, laughing.

"It is well there were but two lorries, one to each."

And the other replied:

"My automatic carries six bullets and so doth thine. What matter if there had been twelve lorries, or maybe ten in case two shots went astray? And if, perchance, some of the lorries had been too far to the rear so that they were out of range, we could have destroyed the front ones and run to our horses and ridden away before those in the rear lorries knew what had happened to those in the front ones."

In the skirmishes with the Communist cavalry, the Kazaks lost several of their number killed—not all of them men, for women and girls were fighting now, as Mulia did at Gezkul, beside the men and boys, leaving the little children to take care of the animals as best they could. The little children's best proved more than equal to the problems which presented themselves, as will be told in its proper place.

The fighting ceased when the Kazaks left the Altyn range and climbed the south-eastern arm of the formidable Kunlun Mountains where the Communists did not follow them either because they did not dare or because they believed the Kazaks would never emerge on the other side. But they did get through, and almost without loss, though it was the worst month of the Tibetan winter, February. When the ice was very bad and the beasts were in danger of breaking their legs through slipping on the treacherous surface, the Kazaks spread rugs and pieces of felt for them to tread on and thus most, though not all, came through safely. But it was slow going, and very hard, both on man and beast, especially the children. Yet no one thought of turning back.

Ali Beg and his son, Hassan, wrote down for me the names of the places they passed after leaving Gezkul: such names as Oshakti, Ozinkul—which is evidently a lake—Mahmut Kal-

gan, Jinishkesov, Sarjun, Tibetishi, Sinkir. I have not been able to find these names on any map except the rough one Ali Beg drew for me himself, and I think they are mostly names given by the Kazaks themselves, much as Abraham named Beersheba because he swore an oath at the well there, and Jacob called the name of the place Peniel because it was where he had seen the face of God.

When the Kazaks reached the high plateau which fringes the southern slopes of the Kunlun Mountains, they saw Tibetans watching them from the sky-line. Ali Beg at once sent Hamza forward with a patrol to try to make contact with them and, if possible, friends, but the watchers fled before he reached them. However, Hamza located a village in the distance and that evening Ali Beg sent some men to see if they could persuade the inhabitants to supply guides. The men came back with two who led Ali Beg's party next morning to a much larger village. But its inhabitants were surly and refused even to sell food and fodder though the Kazaks could see that they had enough of both in spite of the fact that their life seemed in the words of Ali Beg to be "like that of people of the Stone Age of ancient times." Then, as they parleyed, Kazak scouts saw men gathering on the outskirts of the village with arms in their hands, evidently making ready to attack. So the Kazaks, being too few in number and in too exposed a place to wait for their onslaught, attacked the Tibetans without delay and, having put them to flight without difficulty, took what food they needed and then set fire to the village which by this time had emptied itself of inhabitants. They proceeded on their way with the two Tibetans who had taken them to the village still guiding them.

The guides undertook to lead them to the road which Ali Beg hoped to follow to Lhasa, where, indeed, he knew that Saalis and Yolbars had planned to go when they left Gez-kul in September, 1950. At that time the Communists had not yet occupied Tibet, though some apparently arrived about the same time as Saalis and Yolbars. But when Ali Beg got there in late February, 1951, he did not know that the Communists were already in the country and he therefore followed the two Tibetan guides without misgiving, hoping that the road would

lead him and his party, first to Lhasa and then across the waist of Tibet to Nepal and so to India.

The guides led the way into open country where the wind had swept the snow away, so that even in late February there was some grazing for the beasts and the way itself was not too steep or arduous. Nor was it very cold although the altitude was at least 12,000 feet. Presently they reached a place of high reeds. Ali Beg, coming as he did from Manass where the reeds were much the same, began to grow anxious about what the reed-bed might contain and, when he saw some of the camels flounder into an unfrozen swamp, he became suspicious. He galloped forward to see whether they should proceed or turn back and, as he did so, shots rang out from among the reeds. Then he saw the two Tibetan guides urge their horses into a gallop, towards the ambush instead of away from it, so he shot them both before they were able to escape.

But their mischief was already done. Ali Beg's half-brother, Zeinul Hamid, was on the edge of the reedbed when the shooting began, guiding and guarding a string of twenty camels on which were most of their joint personal possessions. The leading camel was killed at the first burst of firing. By ill-fortune, the twine attaching its pack to the nose of the beast behind did not break as it should have done. Consequently the second camel stood still, waiting for the leader to move which it could not do, being already dead. And while Zeinul Hamid hurried to cut the string, or break it, he too fell, with a bullet through his leg.

As Ali Beg galloped to help him, bullets snapped past him and he felt several sear through his clothing. Yet he reached his brother unscathed and managed, though not easily, to drag him up on to his own horse: His brother sat there clasping his hands round Ali Beg's waist while, leaving the string of camels, they galloped back to safety.

If the Tibetans had held their fire a few moments longer, they might have wiped out the whole party. As it was, there were not many casualties among the Kazaks though Zeinul Hamid died of his wound a few days after. But Ali Beg lost practically all his personal possessions, including the cooking pot which was carried by the leading camel. And when he had

time to examine his clothing after the engagement, he found that it had been pierced by no less than six bullets. He himself was not wounded, or even scratched.

The reed-bed was in a valley with hard, dry ground close by leading to a range of hills beyond which was the road. Immediately the shooting began, most of the column turned on to the high ground without waiting for orders and soon most of it was out of range. Ali Beg called a halt as soon as the firing ceased in case the dozen or so members of the party who were missing should come up bringing more beasts with them. Soon most of them did so. But two did not come the father and mother of a little boy named Abdul Mutalip aged nine.

After this mishap, Ali Beg decided they would never again rely on Tibetan guides but on his compass and a sheet torn from a school atlas. He had picked the sheet up after the battle with the indoctrinated Kuldja Kazaks near Manass in September, 1947, and put it into his pocket, he did not know why. When he told me the story I asked to see it but he said the Indians had confiscated it as military equipment when he crossed the frontier—the compass also and his field glasses. Later he sent me a copy of the map, drawn from memory, and with more names, all except one written in Latin characters by his son, Hassan. The one name is Gebel Toussoun, which Ali Beg wrote in Arabic characters. "Gebel" in Arabic means "hill" but I have not been able to find a Gebel Toussoun on any map. The names on the original sheet were also in Arabic characters. There were not very many of them but the map showed the mountains and the course of some rivers enabling Ali Beg to get a rough idea of the direction he should take.

Going to the top of the hills which bordered the valley of the reeds, Ali Beg saw the road in the distance and on it bodies of armed men going in the direction of Lhasa. Recognising them at once as Communist soldiers, Ali Beg realised that the two Tibetans had planned a double treachery, first the ambush by their own people and, if that failed, to deliver the Kazaks into the hands of the Communists. Thanking God for the escape, he turned his horse's head back into the valley as soon as he had ascertained the general direction of the road. From

that time on, the Kazaks travelled towards the west instead of the south, making for Kashmir instead of Lhasa.

Returning to the main body, Ali Beg found a friendly altercation in progress between Abdul Mutalip, the nine-year-old orphan, and the grown-ups of the party. With the death of his father and mother, little Abdul Mutalip, as the sole surviving member of the family, had become the owner of his parents' flock consisting of a horse, two cows and about a dozen sheep.

"What troubleth the lad? Ali Beg asked.

"Nay, but ask for thyself," replied one of the grown-ups. "For, verily, he seemeth to have lost his wits as well as his parents."

"Am I not now the head of my father's house?" demanded Abdul Mutalip before Ali Beg had time to question him. "And are not those beasts yonder mine?"

"Certainly," said Ali Beg.

"Then speak to these men that they hinder me not to do what I will with mine own," said Abdul Mutalip.

"Assuredly none shall hinder thee," Ali Beg told him, wondering what was coming. "What wouldst thou do with them?"

"If my father and mother had fled before those Communists by themselves," Abdul Mutalip explained; "Instead of with so many others, the Communists would not have noticed so small a company and my parents would still be alive. Therefore will I march no more with this company, neither I nor my beasts but we will travel by ourselves. Thus shall I and they escape being killed by the Communists in the next battles and we shall come safely to India."

"But how wilt thou find the way?" Ali Beg asked.

"How can I miss it when travelling in the wake of so many?" countered Abdul Mutalip.

"But if the Communists, or it may be the Tibetans, see thee, they will kill thee and we shall not be nigh to succour."

"Did succour avail to save the lives of my father and mother?" asked Abdul Mutalip unanswerably.

Ali Beg pondered awhile before answering. Theirs was a perilous adventure, anyway, and they were all in God's hands whether they travelled together or alone. If it was His will, they would come to safety, including Abdul Mutalip. And if

they came not, it was His will likewise. Moreover, would not the lad soon tire of being alone and rejoin his comrades—if not in one day or two, at any rate within a week? And meanwhile the distance between them would not be so great, maybe not more than a mile or two.

So in the end, Ali Beg said to Abdul Mutalip:

"It is good. Take thy beasts if thou wilt and go as it pleaseth thee. And when thou hast drunk thy fill of loneliness, rejoin us. Meanwhile go with God."

"And ye likewise," replied Abdul Mutalip. "And peace be with you."

Then Abdul Mutalip went back to his horse and his tiny flock. And when the rest of the party moved on, he remained and when the beasts tried to follow because that is the way with nomad flocks, he restrained them, riding his father's horse and turning them back till the others were out of the beasts' sight though he could still see them, being on horseback.

The older folk looked back often as they went forward without him, especially the women, and some shook their heads. But others said:

"Let be! Is he not in God's hands, just as we are ourselves?"

As they journeyed on day after day, the Kazaks talked often about Abdul Mutalip saying one to the other: "He is only a mile behind today. Maybe he grows lonely and will rejoin us on the morrow." Or, "Today there are two miles between us. Maybe he grows tired or his beasts are sick or his horse is lame. Think ye that we should go back and help him?"

But most said:

"Nay, let be! Let be! How can we help him seeing the case we are in ourselves? Leave the issue with God."

Nevertheless, there were those who rode over occasionally to ask Abdul Mutalip how he fared. He always replied cheerfully to their inquiries, saying: "As thou seest, I and my beasts are well," or, "One of the sheep is dead because it lacked fodder but the rest still go forward."

"So it is with us," the inquirer would reply. "And it is worst with the sheep because they will not eat flesh though the cattle and the camels eat it and the horses sometimes."

And so it went on till at length the men were too weary to

trouble any longer and the time came when Abdul Mutalip lagged out of sight and they decided that his strength had failed him, as theirs was beginning to do. And those who still had strength to remember him, mourned him as dead.

Meanwhile, March had come and with it high winds piling snow in greats drifts which left some places clear so that they could go forward but made it harder to find grazing. Also they moved slowly because they and the beasts were weary after crossing the Kunlun Mountains and they wished to regain strength for the journey ahead which, as Ali Beg knew from the map, lay across the watersheds instead of along the course of the rivers. Therefore the party would need to be in good heart and condition because the way would be hard, being very steep in places, very barren and inhospitable and very high, making it difficult to breathe.

They journeyed first through sparsely inhabited country and all the Tibetans they met were hostile. Some were villagers and some nomads, but the Kazaks no longer tried to make friends with any of them and treated all alike as foes—as the Children of Israel were told to do when entering the Promised Land after their forty years in the wilderness. So, when the Kazaks needed food or fodder, they took it. I think, too, that if they came across any domestic animals, but not yaks, they took them too, especially sheep. Once or twice about this time they saw other small groups of Kazaks from Gezkul, making for Kashmir like themselves. But after the leaders had sent greetings of peace to one another, each party went its own way, still considering it safer and better to travel in small bodies than in large because they attracted less attention and there was more food for the beasts. All were confident that they could beat any enemy in battle. Sometimes a few individuals transferred from one body to another so as to be with friends or relations, or because they had quarrelled with companions, but not often.

Ali Beg's party travelled in this manner for about a month and I think they enjoyed themselves after a fashion. The mountains were an endless source of wonder to them: huge, towering, forbidding, unending, black rocks, often but not always, tipped with snow and entirely tree-less though there were many wild

animals: asses (which Ali Beg called zebras) bears, goats, sheep, (no doubt the mighty Ovis Ammon which stands higher than a small donkey) wolves, foxes, and many others of which he did not know the names. There was also one which he called a wild cow, but which was probably a yak. It was a mystery to him how the herbivorous animals managed to keep alive for there was very little grass or herbage after the first few weeks, except in isolated places far apart from one another.

Presumably the black stone was a kind of basalt. But, whatever it was, evidently it contained deposits of free minerals and Ali Beg says that some of them were being worked. He described one as "a stone which glowed at night like a lamp."

The Tibetan inhabitants became fewer as the Kazaks journeyed towards the setting sun and none now waited for their coming so that food and fodder were there for the taking when they needed it. In the more open plateau country, the wind raised few drifts but swept the snow from the dry grass. Also, the Kazaks came to many lakes so that there was enough water at this stage. But there were no trees, or scarcely any, until they were nearing the frontier of Kashmir. Firewood being unobtainable, they used the dung of their animals for fuel. The men sometimes went on hunting expeditions among the mountain ravines bringing back deer and wild asses across their saddles, and hares for the animals to eat so that there was no lack of food for man or beast, though the beasts ate flesh very unwillingly and some not at all.

In early May, 1951, when it was already summer, they came suddenly upon a large Tibetan village and at once moved forward to attack it as their custom now was. It was empty of inhabitants when they reached it so they took what they needed and continued their journey. They were nearing the end of the plateau country by this time and were mounting steadily into country which became ever higher, more rugged and more barren, if that were possible, till they were travelling with their beasts at not less than 18-20,000 feet above sea level, only a little below the height at which the Everest climbers found climbing impossible without oxygen. But no one except the Kazaks, and perhaps a few Tibetans, has traversed this region so the exact altitude cannot be stated.

Two days after passing the empty village, the Kazaks came to a defile which turned out of the main valley but had a good path which it seemed would lead to another and higher plateau where they might find grazing. Ali Beg happened to be with the scouts as they were about to enter the defile and he began to feel uneasy. The hill at the side of the defile was not steep so he rode up it to see if he could overlook the path below. Having found a suitable spot, he examined the path carefully through his field glasses seeing nothing untoward, and then turned to rejoin his party.

As he turned, hidden Tibetans opened fire on him and immediately several hundred soldiers dashed out of the defile below on horseback waving drawn swords and shouting as they galloped towards the long straggling line of Kazaks.

The attack was entirely unexpected but the Kazaks were ready for the charging horsemen before they arrived. The men and boys turned their horses towards the enemy, waving their own swords and nailed billets of wood while the women and children, unbidden, turned the beasts away from entering the defile and shepherded them past it along the main valley. Thus in a matter of moments there was a screen of mounted men between the Kazak column and the charging Tibetans. Long before Ali Beg had ridden back down the hill, his men had counter-charged and were among the Tibetans.

The battle which followed was a real old-time cavalry mêlée such as Genghis Khan and the Golden Horde loved: a wild charge into and through the enemy's ranks, a hasty reforming on the far side and then back once more—slash, parry, slash again, aiming always at the man and not at his horse. Clothes were thick on both sides and it took a shrewd blow to cut through them—indeed, the nails were often more effective than the swords. Unhorsings were many and casualties, comparatively speaking, few. The Kazaks admit to only three killed, though many more were wounded, in the course of a three-hour battle in which they were heavily outnumbered. They claim to have killed at least a score, disabled twice or thrice that number and captured many horses and weapons. In a sense, the horses captured themselves because when one lost its rider it generally followed the horse

of his vanquisher. The picture of the unwounded, riderless horses galloping up and down the battlefield, neighing, snorting and bewildered, in the wake of still-embattled warriors adds not only a touch of fantasy to the grim savagery of the scene, but perhaps throws fresh light on the campaigns of the Kazak and Mongol horsemen who rode victoriously to Peking, Delhi, and, indeed, across most of Asia and Europe in the Middle and Dark Ages. It also provides a glass through which to view the mass destruction methods of the twentieth century which wipe out man and beast and change the very face of the earth.

The yelling warriors rode up and down slashing and cutting at one another from their saddles till the light faded when the Tibetans withdrew, leaving the Kazaks in triumphant possession of the battlefield. The victors bound up their wounds as best they could after bathing them in urine to prevent festering. Then they buried their three dead comrades, selected the best of the Tibetan weapons to add to their own stocks, destroying the rest, tied the best of the captured Tibetan horses to their own, and set off to rejoin their womenfolk who were waiting for them in the main valley.

Ali Beg said that the Tibetans mostly kept their distance after this encounter. But their scouts were seen on the skyline day after day, watching the way the Kazaks went and, as it transpired later, reporting their whereabouts to the Communists who by this time were steadily occupying the Tibetan countryside having already occupied Lhasa.

The first sign that the Communists were in the neighbourhood was when the Kazaks suddenly found they were being followed by Communist ground troops, acting on this occasion, at any rate, in full co-operation with the local inhabitants who doubtless regarded the Kazaks as an even worse infliction than the Communists. Yet judging from the fact that some of the other Kazak refugees from Gezkul were well received by the Tibetans it is possible that Ali Beg's party was mistaken for Communists when it entered the country. If so, the Communists profited fortuitously, and undeservedly, from a genuine and unfortunate misunderstanding.

Ali Beg's first encounter with the Communists in Tibet nearly involved his party in disaster and they were only saved by their incomparable knowledge of mountain warfare and by what we usually call good fortune and they, the will of God. The road they were following at the time lay between high hills with a succession of three passes leading from one valley to another. They toiled up and over two without being molested and were in a ravine on the way to the third when Ali Beg, whose extra sense had again sent him alone some distance ahead, rounded a corner to find the way blocked with stones.

He turned his horse and was away in an instant without needing to investigate. Indeed, he was fifty yards down the road on his way to the main body before the first shots were fired behind him, and none of them touched either him or his horse. As he reached the main body, the sound of firing came from the rear and presently a prisoner was brought in, the only survivor of a small Communist patrol which the rearguard had spotted and ambushed. Keen eyes had detected from afar that he was neither a Kitai nor a Tibetan but a Turki—a native of their own land of Turkistan. So the rearguard deliberately spared him hoping to get information from him. After the prisoner had looked about him fearfully and realised that there were no living Communist soldiers in sight, he talked freely. He said there was a large Communist force nearby with tanks, armoured cars and aircraft and that a detachment of this force was even then coming along the road behind him to trap the Kazaks in conjunction with the Tibetans.

When Ali Beg saw the man and heard his story he was inclined to believe him though he learnt later that there were neither tanks nor aircraft nearer than Jeykundo, several hundred miles to the east. He offered the captured Turki the choice of remaining with them, as Emin Ta Mullah had asked to be allowed to do, or returning to his unit among the Communists. The man said that his family was still in Turkistan and there were none among the living Communists who had seen him captured so that he would not be suspected of having given information to the Kazaks and he therefore wished to go back hoping one day to be with his family again.

The Kazaks bade him go with God and he went, wishing them Godspeed in his turn for, like them, he was a Moslem.

The Kazaks were now beset both in front and rear, and there were high cliffs on each side of the road so that they were seemingly trapped, though they had no intention whatever of admitting it. Ali Beg called Hamza and Kainesh to him and told them of the road block ahead saying that he believed it had been put there by the Tibetans, not the Communists.

"Ye twain be younger men than I," he went on. "Therefore take twenty men each, unmounted, and see that ye choose them that be strong and active. Climb with them up the two hills ye see ahead one on either side of the way, but keep out of sight from the dip in the hills where is the road block. . . . How long think ye that it will take to station yourselves above the dip without being seen by those who made the road block?"

"Maybe two hours and half an hour, not more," Hamza and Kainesh agreed after a moment's consultation.

"Then take three hours lest there be an obstacle that cannot be seen from here, or there is need to détour to avoid being seen by the Tibetans. Then, when ye see our column with the animals near the corner of which I told you after which the road is blocked with stones, spring the ambush above the Tibetan ambush and entrust the outcome to God. And while ye make ready to do this, I will take yet another twenty men to reinforce the ten of the rearguard and hold the Communists back till the road ahead is cleared."

So, while Hamza and Kainesh led their detachments on foot to out-climb the ambushers in front and clear the road, Ali Beg and his men hastened back along the way they had come trusting in God that they would reach the top of the middle pass before the advancing Communists overwhelmed the ten men of the rearguard. They did so, but only just. Tethering their horses below the crest, they hurriedly clambered up the steep hillsides on each side of the path, taking care not to be seen, and joined the ten who had already taken up their positions in the rocks ready to pick off the leading files of the

advancing enemy and confident that they could at least delay his oncoming before being obliged to retreat.

The Communists advanced warily because they already knew from the Turki of the fate of the patrol. But they saw no reason as yet to occupy the pathless and precipitous hillsides above the way, so they came on with only an advance party on the path itself and the main body of infantry not far behind—the way was impassable for vehicles. Ali Beg let the advance party come within fifty paces before firing the shot which was the signal for his men to shoot also. The advance party consisted of twenty men only and was practically wiped out at the first volley. Those who did not fall started to run for cover when the Kazaks began to fire at them but there was little cover except among the main body and they threw the whole column into confusion when they reached it. Seeing it, some of the Kazaks jumped like mountain goats from rock to rock far above and, finding some loose stones, rolled them down on the Kitai, completing their discomforture, and overwhelming many. The rest withdrew hastily out of range to reorganise before attacking the pass again on less haphazard lines. And when they did so, there was no one there, except their own dead. Had they gone faster, they might have caught up with little Abdul Mutalip, but God was with him and he escaped.

Ali Beg left half his thirty men at the head of the pass with orders to hold it if the Communists rallied while he himself hurried back to the main body with the rest. He found it still moving very slowly towards the head of the third pass with a screen composed mostly of women and boys out in front in case the Tibetans should attack before Hamza and Kainesh outclimbed the ambushers and put them to flight. Telling his fifteen men to join the screen and to press on towards the head of the pass as soon as they heard firing ahead of them, but carefully lest there should be Tibetan sharp-shooters above them, Ali Beg found himself a vantage point from which he could use his field glasses to make sure that the enemy could not come at him from a flank. It was a clear day and the grim mountains all round were bare except for patches of snow. Ali Beg saw no sign of any paths except the one on which the Kazaks were journeying, so if he had felt afraid

before, which is doubtful, he certainly felt no fear thereafter.

Presently he heard the sound of firing from the head of pass three. With the help of his field glasses he saw the explosion of hand grenades which Hamza's men were dropping on the Tibetans and then the scurry of frantic men as the Tibetans, who had never met hand grenades before, jumped from boulder to boulder seeking cover from which to fire at their assailants only to find themselves exposed to Kainesh's men who shot them from behind. The pass being narrow, the Tibetans who were screened from Hamza's men were in full view of Kainesh's and vice versa. They did not wait to be picked off one by one by unseen assailants and the second battle, like the first, was over in a few minutes without the Kazaks having suffered a single casualty. They immediately went forward again sending messengers to bid the rearguard give up its watch and follow the main body though at a suitable distance so that it could give warning if the Communists re-appeared. They did not re-appear—at least, not then.

There were five or six clashes with the Tibetans and two more with the Communists while the Kazaks were crossing Tibet. All of them occurred within the first two-and-a-half months. All the time, the party went steadily forward averaging about fifteen to twenty miles a day. But it was now approaching the region in which progress was impeded by mountain mists which engulfed everything for days on end, setting tempers on edge and making it impossible to stir from the encampment lest the one who did so should never find it again.

"We could not see so much as a hand in front of our faces," said one of the refugees. "Even to go from one tent to another, we had to call to each other lest we should lose the way."

By no means all had tents by this time and those without used to lie huddled up in the lee of the camels and cows for warmth and protection. Some, especially the children with no beasts to ride and no parents to look after them, grew so weary that they sometimes dropped behind when on the march, but mostly they caught up again after the party had halted for the night.

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The mist was full of ice particles which seared the lungs like fire with each breath and the air they swallowed was so thin and mean that men and beasts gasped with the slightest exertion. There was no fodder left for the animals and the Kazaks therefore tried to feed them now on raw meat, instead of cooked, eating it raw themselves too for lack of fuel or because they could not light a fire with knives, flint and tinder owing to the mist. Many of the animals refused the flesh and died, but some took it, mostly camels and horses. The mists brought great bouts of coughing to man and beast causing tears to run from the eyes and making white furrows down cheeks blackened with grime and exposure.

The mists always cleared suddenly as the sound of a rushing wind rent the grim stillness of the mountains. The wind was icy but it brought the sun which warmed everyone's spirits as well as their bodies. Every fit person went to work at once collecting dung to dry for fuel, rounding up the beasts in readiness for the day's journey and, if any felt strong enough, going out into the mountains, though not too far lest the mists should return, to shoot antelope and gazelle for food. But though it was summer, there was not much pasture for the beasts and those which survived the mists grew very thin. If one stumbled and fell it did not rise. And if a fallen beast was one which carried a load, it could not be shared with those remaining because they had no strength to take it. So tents and household possessions were left behind one by one although some were brought right through to Kashmir.

The high altitude and the mists brought a special sickness which the Kazaks, not knowing its name, spoke of as "Tutuk-iss," the fog-swelling. Besides a sudden distension of the stomach such as is seen in victims of famine, the fog-swelling was accompanied by copious bleeding from the nose. The Kazaks have remedies of their own for most of the troubles which are prevalent in their old homes, especially the sicknesses which attack animals, but they had no cure for the tutuk-iss and more of the party died from it in Tibet than from fighting. Ali Beg lost five of his children from tutuk-iss but his three wives and his eldest son, Hassan, came through safely.

By the end of July, the Kazaks were at last descending

slowly to lower levels and, early in August, signs began to appear which told them they were approaching a region which was inhabited. The lower slopes of the hills were no longer naked but clothed in trees and grass which brought tears of joy to their eyes, though it also brought labour because they knew that if they let the starved beasts eat too much they would die.

At last they came to a road which ran, roughly, east and west instead of north and south, and Ali Beg decided at once to follow it. On August 18, 1951—a hundred and ninety-three days after they had left Gezkul—they found themselves close to the frontier of Kashmir near a place called Rudok, which is on the direct road between Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, and Lhasa.

When the Kazaks reached the frontier, Ali Beg went forward joyfully to explain to the Indian frontier guard who they were and ask permission to enter Kashmir. The officer in charge replied that he must first see their papers.

"But we have no papers," said Ali Beg, through the interpreter. "We are Kazaks, political refugees who have escaped from Sinkiang after many battles against the Communists."

The Indian officer was not impressed.

"Nevertheless," he reiterated, "without papers it is impossible for you to enter India. How do I know that you are what you say? How do I know who you are?"

"But the Communists are pursuing us," Ali Beg said. "Will you let them catch up and kill us?"

The Indian replied shortly that he knew nothing about the Communists who had not yet appeared on his sector of the country. Looking over the ragged, unkempt, armed band in front of him, he saw that they were obviously not Tibetans and equally certainly not Chinese. The Rudok road was not the normal one by which people from Sinkiang would seek to enter India. Moreover, the Tibetans had warned him about a band of brigands who had entered Tibet from the north and had pillaged many villages, killing the inhabitants and carrying off women and valuables before turning westward toward Kashmir. He concluded that Ali Beg's party were the brigands in question.

"You are bandits, not political refugees. Go back whence ye came. Ye may not enter India. Nor will I allow you to remain near the frontier."

"We are no bandits," Ali Beg replied. "And indeed we are political refugees as I told you, though we have had to fight our way through Tibet to reach this place and this may have seemed banditry to the Tibetans though there was nought else we could do seeing that they refused to help us or let us pass."

However, the Indian officer still refused to listen and in the end Ali Beg went back to his party saying as he left:

"If we die now, our blood will be on your head."

CHAPTER XII

Safety Last

THE refusal to let the Kazaks enter Kashmir was the more bitter because it was completely unexpected though I feel it was inevitable, indeed justifiable, in view of the Tibetan warning. Fortunately, the Kazaks did not try to force their way in as they had forced their way out of Sinkiang and through Tibet. They simply withdrew about a mile from the frontier, though still within sight of it, pitched what felted tents they had left and sat down to wait and recuperate. During the next few weeks, several other parties of Kazaks from Gezkul arrived and sought admission—with the same lack of success. None of them took the Indian officer's advice to turn round and go home again.

In due course, the Communists arrived, too. Keeping their troops well in the background, out of sight, they sent political emissaries to make contact with the Indians and "explaining parties," composed of natives of Sinkiang province, to approach the Kazaks and try to persuade them to return home, making the usual promises. Some of the Kazaks who had been with Osman Batur at Barkul had actually met explaining parties before and knew all about them—too much to believe a word they said. All the other refugees knew quite enough. So they listened to the explainers and did not molest them but no one accompanied them when they went away.

There followed a period of uneasy quiet and, during it, before the inevitable explosion, little nine-year-old Abdul Mutalip suddenly walked into the encampment having been about five months on the road, all alone since he had separated from Ali Beg's party. His horse was still alive, and one sheep, though neither was nearly so much alive as their owner who had travelled on his own over mountains and valleys, streams and rocks and occasionally ice and snow, which were the worst for his short legs, for not less than six hundred miles, mostly

at an altitude of twelve to fourteen thousand feet above sea level and sometimes more than twenty thousand. Quite a number of other orphaned boys and girls too, lagged unnoticed at various points on the journey because everyone was weary and had much ado to look after himself and his own family. Usually, though perhaps not always, such stragglers had caught up again when the party halted for the night or, at most, after being absent for two or three days. Abdul Mutalip had journeyed alone of his own free will. Even the Kazaks, who are used to what we would regard as youthful prodigies, regarded his feat as a miracle.

When Abdul Mutalip stayed behind, he was wearing a man-size knapsack filled mostly with bread and dried corn. He carried a knife, too, in a sheath tied to a leather belt round his waist. With the knife and a stone, he was able to light a fire when he could find dried grass, or leaves or rotten wood and it was real child's-play for him to shepherd his little flock in the wake of Ali Beg's party. He saw the slowly moving column sometimes though less often as the days passed. And when he could not see them in the flesh, there was always signs to show him the way: the marks left by the animals' hooves on the rocks and hard earth, the sheep-droppings which were too small to have been collected for fuel. He had known such signs from infancy and knew how to read them, just as many children of the same age in the free world know exactly how to drive a motor car simply from watching their parents.

Fortunately for him, some of the animals he was following had been too weary and spent to go on and the keen thin, high air had preserved their bodies, nor had the beasts or birds of prey devoured all of them. So he was able to refill his knapsack from time to time and feed his beasts with flesh which he cut off with his knife. Sometimes he roasted it but more often he and his beasts ate it raw. At night he generally tucked himself into a crevice between two rocks sleeping more soundly when he could do so because he knew no marauding beasts would be able to get at him, though once they stole one of his sheep. His outer clothes were made of sheepskin with the wool inside and, being used to cold any-

way, he seldom felt it. When the ice-mists came down, he also felt secure because not even a night-hunting beast could see at such a time, so he slept and ate and slept again. But when the great wind tore the mists away, it took the sheep's pellets too, making it harder to find the trail. I think his worst moments were when he came to a path running north and south across his path because he did not know whether he would meet Tibetans on them. But I doubt if he was afraid, even then, only more vigilant.

The miracle of Abdul Mutalip heartened the Kazak refugees greatly. They told one another that it could not be the will of God, having brought him thus far in safety, to let him die now in sight of the haven they and he had come so far to find.

Yet he very nearly did die, and the others with him. One night, the Communist troops attacked without warning, catching the Kazaks unawares as at Gezkul. But a Kazak such as they always slept with his rifle and ammunition belt within reach of his outstretched hand, and he could find it in the dark as easily as in the light. Grabbing weapons and clothes, the men ran out of their tents and sleeping-places making for the hills where they hid till daylight. On this occasion the women and children seem to have stayed in the encampments and, for once, the Communists left them alone and went after the men. But when the light came, the Kazaks were the highest on the hillsides so they counter-attacked immediately, driving the enemy off, killing many and capturing their arms including two mortars with some ammunition.

The Communist attack, and the way the Kazaks dealt with it, evidently impressed the Indians and when Kazak emissaries went once more to the frontier to point out what would happen to them if they were not allowed to enter Kashmir, the officer in charge agreed to consider their request provided that they first surrendered their arms as a guarantee of their peaceful intentions. The emissaries accepted joyfully and a time was arranged at which the arms were to be surrendered. When the appointed hour came, the Kazaks presented themselves at the frontier where the Indians accepted their arms, including the two captured mortars, but declared that they could not yet admit the Kazaks, not having received

permission from Delhi. But they promised they would do so later.

Greatly crestfallen at this new delay, the Kazaks were on their way back to the encampments, without their arms, when they saw the Indians signalling to them.

"I cannot let you in," the officer in charge explained when they reached him, "till I receive permission to do so, as I have already said. But also we cannot protect you outside our own territory. Therefore it will be best for you to have wherewith to protect yourselves. Take your arms back, for you may need them this very day."

Whether the warning was simply shrewd anticipation or the result of a good intelligence service cannot be stated, but the Communists actually did attack again within a few hours. The battle which followed was fought within full view of the Indian frontier. It began with the capture of eleven Kazaks by the Communists who immediately cut off their heads. But the Kazaks drove their enemies off in the end, getting above them as usual and then shooting them down without danger to themselves and taking full toll for the murder of the prisoners. But among the eleven who were beheaded was Mohammed Turdi Kari, a saintly Mullah who could recite the whole of the Koran from memory without fault or hesitation beginning at any sura, or verse. The Koran is almost the same length as the New Testament, so that this was no mean feat and his reputation both for piety and intelligence had spread far and wide among his people and his loss was greatly mourned.

This battle was the last. The Indian commander of the frontier post no longer needed to be convinced of what would happen to the Kazaks if their entry into Kashmir were further delayed. Eleven heads had been seen to fall from the bodies of bound prisoners under his very eyes. Indeed, the Kazaks say that the grisly scene was actually filmed by the Indians so that they could prove to others what the Communists had done. So the frontier was opened and the Kazaks who had survived the fighting with the Communists at Manass, Kukuluk, Kucheng, Barkul, Gezkul and along the weary way through Tibet, were safe at last, safety having been the last

thing they thought about. How many died in the fighting or in the terror or from famine and exposure during the eighteen years of their struggle against the Communists from the time of Sheng to that of Mao Tse-tung, will never be known, but I think it cannot have been less than a hundred thousand.

When the survivors crossed the frontier on October 10, 1951, they were allowed to bring with them what was left of their flocks and herds, tents and other personal possessions, but they laid down their arms and military equipment at the frontier. So Ali Beg lost not only his field glasses, compass and map, but also his sword which the tradition of his family declared to have been a gift from Genghis Khan himself.

The party spent altogether fifty-two days waiting on the Tibetan side of the frontier before being allowed to enter Kashmir, although Mohammed Emin Bugra, the Turki leader who was living in Srinagar, hurried to Delhi to appeal personally on their behalf to Mr. Nehru himself, as soon as he heard of their arrival. They fought six battles with the Communists between Gezkul and the Indian frontier and two more while waiting for permission to cross. They also had three clashes with Tibetans. Of the two hundred and thirty-four persons who set out with Ali Beg from Gezkul, a hundred and seventy-five came through safely. They lost eleven hundred sheep, sixty horses, thirty-seven cows and forty-five camels in the fighting and from malnutrition and sickness, apart from those they killed for food. I was unable to get accurate figures for the other groups but I estimate that about two thousand eight hundred Kazaks started from Gezkul and between fifteen hundred and eighteen hundred reached Kashmir. Some of these are still in India. On the other hand some Kazaks who had been living in India and Pakistan for years joined the Gezkul refugees when they went to Turkey where other Kazaks from East Turkistan went as many as twenty years ago and have become quite prosperous, though not as shepherds but as merchants.

After crossing the frontier, the Kazaks went by road to Leh where the Indian general, Mohadi Sen, met them personally and offered to take them by air to Srinagar. I do not

know whether he expected them to refuse because they were frightened of aeroplanes, only knowing them as instruments of destruction. But all accepted except twenty who volunteered to take the animals and tents by road to Srinagar. When the Kazaks reached the Kashmir capital, those who had no tents were accommodated for a while at the Safa Kadel Serai, or the inn of the Seventh Bridge as it is generally called in English. But they found all the rooms in it were occupied by Turkis, many of them wealthy refugees who had fled from their homes in time taking some of their wealth with them and reaching safety without fighting. Consequently some of the Kazaks had to live for a while in the open courtyard. It was already October, and very cold, and they had no fuel. Also, they were still suffering from the effects of their journey across Tibet.

However, these matters were straightened out in the end but the Kazaks did not feel they could settle down happily in Kashmir, although the people were Moslems like themselves. Everyone was uneasy there owing to the dispute between India and Pakistan about which of the two should govern the country, a question which the Kazaks felt was one for the people of Kashmir and not for either Indians or Pakistanis. Yet, at that time, the Kazaks had nowhere else to go. The chiefs—Ali Beg, Daleel Khan, Hussein Tajji and others who do not come into our story—used to discuss the matter often, coming always to the conclusion that they must be patient and wait, especially as Ali Beg, soon after his arrival, had sent letters to President Truman and to Mr. Churchill calling their attention to the plight of the Kazak nation.

While the Kazaks were thus waiting and wondering, news reached Ali Beg from Calcutta that Abdu Satr, the son of Saalis, and twelve years of age, had arrived there in September, 1951, but without his father and mother who were both dead. With him, the letter said, were Abdul Ghanim, son of Adil the rich merchant, and also twelve years old, and Toktogan, aged nine, the son of the historian, Abdel Kerim, whom Hamza had been sent to fetch, and Adil too, when the Communists occupied Urumchi and who had gone with Saalis and Yolbars, the Turki chieftain, and Emin Ta Mullah when they left Gezkul for Lhasa in September, 1950.

Ali Beg at once sent a letter to Abdu Satr inviting him and the two other boys to join him in Kashmir. They accepted gladly. When they arrived Abdu Satr told the story of how all three had lost both their parents and how they themselves escaped and finally reached Calcutta.

The story is an epic in itself and the Kazak bards in Kashmir made it into a saga which, by rights, should be sung in the flickering light of a dung and wood fire of an evening inside a tent and handed down thus through generations. But the song is too full of historical allusions to be comprehensible to people like ourselves, so I have used only the simple story, as told to Ali Beg by Abdu Satr himself, from which the saga was elaborated. Before telling it, I will repeat once more that Abdu Satr and Abdul Ghanim were both twelve years old, and Toktogan nine, when the events in the drama took place.

"We travelled for one month after leaving Gezkul," Abdu Satr said, "and saw nothing of the Communists. Then it became very cold and there was much snow so that we could not go forward.

"Most of those with the party which followed Yolbars were Chinese, though not all, and among my father's followers were some White Russians as well as his own men who were Kazaks. Now, there were beasts my father and Yolbars had brought with them and when it was necessary to kill some that we might eat, there was a quarrel and one of Yolbar's men came into my father's tent while he bent over the fire and shot him with a pistol in the back, wounding him mortally. My father cried out and Abdel Kerim and Adil who were in tents nearby ran to him to see what had happened and the man shot them both dead. Then Emin Ta Mullah went to Yolbars in a rage, holding a German automatic in his hand and pointing it at him, calling him a fascist, which is the worst thing a man can be, because he let this thing be done. Men of Yolbars following seized Emin Ta Mullah from behind and, having bound him, killed him with a sword. Then the wives of these four men fell to screaming and tearing their faces with their finger nails till the blood flowed and, at the sight of it, they picked up knives, meaning to kill Yolbars because he had

not prevented the slaying of their husbands. But Yolbars' servants shot them all and two of Adil's sons also who were fourteen and fifteen years old.

"My father, Saalis, being still alive, though mortally wounded, called me to him and gave me his automatic, telling me to run to the mountains and hide. But I feared to do so in daylight lest I should be seen and brought back to be shot likewise. So I went to Abdel Kerim's tent where I found Toktogan, and Abdul Ghanim. And when darkness came, we three crept out of the encampment on foot through the snow which was very deep taking our fathers' automatics with us. More snow fell that night, covering our traces, so when we had gone far enough we crawled under a rock to sleep, knowing that Yolbars and his men would not be able to find us.

"The next morning we saw Yolbars searching for us and heard him calling us by name to return, saying that he would not harm us and that he was sorry for the slaying of our parents. But we did not go and he did not find us.

"When evening came we were hungry, having taken nothing with us but a little bread and having eaten all of it. The night was dark, and it was without moon, so we crept back to the encampment. When we went to the tents in which our parents lodged when alive, they had been burnt and our parents' bodies lay beneath them, unburied, though maybe it was because the ground was frozen very hard. There was no food in the burnt tents, so we crept very quietly into other tents till we had found enough. Then we loosed three of our own camels and, mounting them, rode away."

The boys rode all through that night in spite of the absence of a moon and all through the next day till the evening. Then they halted for a while, two keeping watch while the third slept because they were afraid that if one watched by himself he might not be able to stay awake. They were on their way again before daylight and rode on all through the second day, and a third. On the fourth, they came to a frozen river which the camels refused to cross, so they followed the course of the river downstream, not knowing what else to do or where it would lead them.

Turning round to see if they were being followed, they saw Yolbars behind them, alone, and also riding a camel. He shouted to them to stop, promising them again that he would not hurt them. But they urged their camels the faster and Yolbars, seeing the gap between them widening, fired a shot from his rifle, hitting Toktogan's camel, wounding it and bringing it down. While Toktogan was extricating himself from the dying beast and climbing up behind Abdu Satr, Abdul Ghanim emptied his automatic at Yolbars but the range was too great and Yolbars still came on but without firing again.

By desperately beating the two remaining camels, the three boys at last got them to cross the frozen river where they ran into the arms of ten Tibetan soldiers of the Dalai Lama who disarmed them and then went after Yolbars whom they soon caught and disarmed likewise.

"We told the soldiers by signs, for we did not understand their tongue," Abdu Satr said, "that we feared to be with Yolbars lest he should do us some injury. So they kept us apart and were kind to us, saying that they would take us to Lhasa where the Dalai Lama would decide what should happen to us. We were content, seeing that our parents were bound for Lhasa when they were slain. And when we reached Lhasa and were riding through the streets on our beasts, thirty-five White Russian soldiers escaping from Turkistan passed by and called out in the Turki language to know whose children we were. I said: 'I am Abdu Satr, son of Saalis.' One of the Russians shouted: 'Saalis? Saalis is my friend. Where is he?' and when I told him, he told the others and they all shouted together: 'Where is that man, Yolbars, for we would kill him.' So I pointed to him as he rode behind me and they rushed at him all together. But the Tibetan soldiers resisted and others joined them and began to take away the Russians' weapons. Then the Russians resisted in their turn, not wishing to lose their arms, and they fled out of Lhasa swiftly, shouting to us that they would see us in Calcutta. But I cannot say whether they ever got there."

The three Kazak boys seem to have been lodged in a private house, not in a prison, after their arrival in Lhasa. In due

course, the Dalai Lama sent for them. An old Kazak named Ilsa Khan who had fled to Tibet with Boko Batur in 1913 was called in to act as interpreter.

Abdu Satr described the Dalai Lama as being "a young boy, like me." He was very friendly and began by asking the three Kazak lads where they were from. Abdu Satr replied:

"We are from Urumchi. Our fathers were slain by Yolbars who has taken all our goods and our camels, everything. As we fled from him, your soldiers found us and saved our lives but they have taken our automatics."

Hearing this, the Dalai Lama ordered Yolbars to be brought and, when he arrived, the Dalai Lama, according to Abdu Satr, asked him simply:

"Why did you kill these boys' fathers?"

Yolbars replied that he knew nothing about that but that perhaps his men had quarrelled with them and slain them, though not with his consent.

So the Dalai Lama went on:

"Let that be. But where are their fathers' goods, their gold, camels and their other possessions? Are they in your hands or in the hands of these boys?"

Yolbars said that they were in his charge, and the Dalai Lama then said:

"Bring all to me and hand it to the boys in my presence so that I shall know that nothing be missing of all their fathers' possessions."

So Yolbars sent and fetched their goods from his tents which by that time had reached Lhasa with his son, Yakub, and he handed over everything in accordance with the Dalai Lama's order.

"But the Dalai Lama was still angry," Abdu Satr went on, "and ordered that Yolbars should be executed. So Yolbars withdrew hastily and returned later wearing a red robe and declaring that he had been converted to Buddhism, whereupon the Dalai Lama relented and Yolbars was pardoned."

He must also have left Lhasa in a hurry because, according to Abdu Satr's story, Communist troops arrived from Lanchow about this time. Someone told them about the three Kazak

boys and the Communist commander sent for Abdu Satr and asked him:

"Who killed your father?"

Abdu Satr told him and the Communist officer said:

"If your father had not fled with that Yolbars, he would have been a great man today in his own country. Come now with us and we will send you back to Urumchi, and the greatness that Saalis would have had if he had stayed shall be yours when you are older."

Abdu Satr made no answer and the Communist officer called a junior officer and bade him fetch Abdul Ghanim and Toktogan and care for all three and guard them till they could be sent back to Urumchi. But it was the winter season and the roads were unfit for travel so they remained in Lhasa, being now in effect prisoners of the Communists. But they were still under the Dalai Lama's protection and lived unmolested in the house he had lodged them in when they first arrived. They were also allowed to go where they would in the city during the daytime.

It happened that there were some merchants from India in Lhasa and one of them who had been to East Turkistan in earlier times spoke to Abdu Satr, though haltingly because he did not speak much Turki. The boys told the merchant about his father, Saalis, and how he died and also about the coming of the Communists to Urumchi. And later, but not till he felt he knew what kind of man the merchant was, Abdu Satr asked him to take the three boys back to Calcutta with him when he returned there in the spring.

The merchant said he wished he could but it was too dangerous. He explained that he was naught but a merchant, not a politician or a spy or a soldier, and he dare not risk the trouble that would come upon him if he were caught smuggling out of Tibet, not merchandise, but three young lads by whom the Communists seemingly set great store, seeing that a guard had been put over the house in which they were lodged. So Abdu Satr let the matter drop and did not mention the subject again though they often met and talked about other things, including the merchant's plans for returning to Calcutta and the merchandise he would carry with him when he

went and whether he intended ever to come back again to Lhasa.

When spring came and it was time for the merchant to start on his journey, he said goodbye to Abdu Satr, telling him that he was leaving in three days and wishing him well as they would not meet again. Abdu Satr said goodbye too, and then went quickly back to Abdul Ghanim and Toktogan saying that the time had come and they knew what to do having discussed it together so often. That night, the three boys, who slept together in one room, climbed first on to one another's shoulders so that they could reach the window which was high above their heads and then let themselves down noiselessly into the street. They had worked out beforehand a way by which they could leave the city without being challenged and before morning they were miles distant, having run most of the way because they had taken nothing with them except food to last them three or four days and perhaps a little of their fathers' gold which the Dalai Lama had recovered for them from Yolbars. But if so, Abdu Satr did not mention it when telling the story and they would, in any case, have had to spend all, or nearly all, of it in getting to Calcutta first and then to Kashmir.

When daylight came, they left the road they were following and hid, but keeping the road in sight because Abdu Satr knew from his careful questioning that it was the one by which the merchant planned to travel. But he also knew that it was not safe to wait there for the merchant to catch them up lest he should be followed by Communist searchers who would take the boys back to Lhasa first and then to Urumchi, if they found them.

So at nightfall the three went forward again, though slower than before because they had three days' start of the merchant and his caravan. On the third night, having seen no sign of pursuit either during the nights or the days, they went slower still and on the fourth night they stayed in the same hiding place in which they had passed the previous day. Two of them watched now while the third slept, just as they had done when escaping from Yolbars. But the weather was pleasant and the sun warm so that they enjoyed them-

selves after a fashion knowing that every hour that passed made discovery less likely, and indeed they already felt certain that the adventure would end happily.

It was six days before the merchant caught up with them. And when Abdu Satr, coming out of his hiding place, went to him and asked for his protection, the merchant was angry for a moment. Then he kissed the boy and clapped him on the shoulder saying it was well that they had not met sooner for the Communists had indeed searched his caravan though before it was a day's journey from Lhasa. He added that the men with him were trustworthy so that the boys now had nothing to fear, and, very soon, all three were dressed in Indian clothing. So the adventure really did end happily for them and they arrived in Calcutta in September, 1951, a few weeks before Ali Beg was allowed to enter Kashmir.

After Abdu Satr had finished telling the story of his father's death and his own two escapes, Ali Beg asked him why he had not gone back to Urumchi as the Communist officer suggested who offered to give him the position and possessions which his father, Saalis, left behind when he left with Yolbars.

Abdu Satr replied instantly:

"If my father had wished me to remain in Turkistan, he would not have taken me away."

The story of the three young Kazak musketeers, Abdu Satr, Abdul Ghanim and Toktogan, is not only a fitting climax to the Kazak epic but also an unmistakable sign that the Kazak nation, in spite of all it has undergone and suffered, is still irrepressibly and gloriously alive. The men whose lives, and deaths, fill these pages, have bred a progeny in which the heroic strain—the Batur element—is at least as strong as in the veins of their forebears. As they would say themselves, it is on the knees of God whether their blood is now to be transfused into other races or whether the march of historical events will rid the Kazak nation of the hated and turbulent incubus of Communism with its own cruel and arrogant brand of stereotyped colonialism and enable the Kazaks to develop their own inimitable brand of individuality which marks the fifty years with which this book is concerned.

The rest of the Kazak story is soon told—indeed, we have heard most of it already, though not quite all. After fifteen weary months in Kashmir, where the free world briefly recorded their arrival and then forgot their existence, the Kazaks received a generous offer of homes from the Turkish Government, and the United Nations then provided the funds to transport them by land and sea to Istanbul. There the authorities screened them carefully to make sure none of them harboured the virus of Communism, taught them Turkish which they learnt in the space of a few months although it was written in Latin characters and they were used to Arabic ones. Finally, in 1954, the Kazaks were distributed to the various settlements in which the Turkish Government offered them free houses as well as free land, ready ploughed and sown, and free of all taxes, provided they would stay on it and cultivate it for ten years.

The Kazaks who have gone to Develi, which is near the city the Turks call Kaiseri and St. Paul called Caesarea, have accepted the offer—among them Hussein Tajji, Karamullah the Bard, Kainesh, young Abdu Satr, to name only those who are known to us. Those who have gone to live at Salihli with Ali Beg and Hamza asked permission to work as navvies instead of becoming farmers and to save what they could of their wages to buy sheep and cattle. The Turkish Government wisely agreed, knowing that the Kazaks are more skilled than almost any race in the world in the care and rearing of domestic animals. A dam is to be erected near Salihli soon to serve a new hydro-electric project—indeed, work was due to begin in April, 1955. Many manual workers will be needed while it is being built and this means that for the next five years at least the Salihli Kazaks will be able to earn good wages. By that time, they hope to be in a position to become shepherds again.

Indeed when I visited them in November, 1954, three months after their arrival, they had already managed to collect a flock of sheep although the cash allowance which the Turkish Government is able to pay to those out of work is less than one shilling a day in English money. I did not inquire where the sheep came from because Kazaks do not think their guests, or anyone else, should show curiosity about their affairs though

their hospitality makes them ready to slay the last ewe in their flock, if need be, for their guest's entertainment. My friend who went to Turkey with me and who speaks the Kazak language spent ten days at Salihli as Ali Beg's guest, and Ali Beg was very angry indeed when he suggested repaying the hospitality by a gift of food.

So, because of the laws of hospitality which must not be broken, I cannot say where the sheep came from but perhaps some kindly, and wise, Turkish resident at Salihli knowing, as Ismail Hajji of Manass did, that the Kazaks would care for his sheep better than he could himself, placed some in their charge to the mutual benefit of both parties. But I do know that the flock numbered one hundred ewes and a ram or two at the end of November, 1954, since when there has been a lambing season so that it is now without doubt much larger. The flock is cared for by one Kazak shepherd and his family, chosen by all the rest at a special meeting. The sheep were placed in his care for a year at the end of which there will be a reckoning and he must give back twice the number of sheep he received, keeping for himself any above that figure and also all the wool and the cheese produced during the term of the agreement. Many ewes bear twins and some triplets so the shepherd should have had at least fifty sheep of his own at the year's end in September, 1955. After that, who, save God, knows how many the Salihli Kazaks will have?

For people like Ali Beg and Hamza who held executive posts in Sinkiang Province, the problem is much more difficult than for the shepherd and the navvies. Frankly, I do not know how they will solve it nor, as you have heard, do I feel that I can ask without giving offence. So I can only say that I am quite sure they will solve the problem somehow. Meanwhile, Ali Beg, who, as we have also heard, lost five children of his own in Tibet through the fog-swelling, has acquired some forty more by adoption because they became orphans while they and their parents were under his charge during the great exodus. Some of these adopted children are, no doubt, of an age to be able to fend for themselves by now. But Ali Beg holds himself responsible in his own sight and the sight of

God—although Turkish law is silent on the matter—for all of the forty children who are still too young to earn their own living. If any must go hungry, it must be he first, then his own family, and the adopted children not at all if he can help it.

Somehow I do not think that any of them—he, his family, or the adopted children—will actually go hungry, though they may not see much more than bread on their plates, and broth, for a while, certainly very little meat and other luxuries. But I have no knowledge of how Ali Beg will carry out his self-imposed obligation.

I am sure, however, that the free world has an obligation of its own to Ali Beg and Hamza and, indeed, the Kazak refugees as a whole. I am sure, too, that in meeting this obligation, the free world will do itself not only justice, but a service. The Kazaks have fought a very great fight for an ideal, through blood and sweat and tears beyond what we ourselves experienced during the second World War. They have seen with their own eyes the strength and weakness of Communism in the heart of the vast and uneasy Continent of Asia where the secrets of Communist colonisation are so closely guarded today against the intrusion of free ideas.

The Kazaks have a culture of their own which is not based on material riches although they themselves were often rich. Their way of life endowed them with endurance and courage far beyond the ordinary. And they have a great love and admiration for the free world, knowing not a little about it though the free world knows almost nothing about the Kazaks.

Except for a brief interval between 1943 and 1948, the Kazaks, and indeed all the East Turkistanis, have been almost entirely cut off from the free world since 1930 both by the facts of geography and the political factors described in these pages. But in the days before Governor Sheng, when English was taught in the schools, they acquired a touching confidence in the strength and integrity of Great Britain and America.

I have a letter in front of me written by Ali Beg's son, Hassan, on behalf of his father who does not know any English himself. No doubt the proverb he quotes dates from those days before Soviet interference became a menace to their existence.

We used it ourselves a good deal, though in a slightly different form, fifty years ago, but not so often now.

"We have a proverb in Turkistan," the letter says, " ' The sun rises in the land of England and sets in the land of England.' Our people know that England is an honest land, a strong land, culturally, economically and politically. We beg that you will tell the people of England about our sufferings. . ."

Somehow, one does not expect a race of nomads to write like that. But that is what Ali Beg told Hassan to say. And let there be no mistake: he was not asking for charity but simply for sympathy and understanding.

When my Kazak-speaking friend was about to leave Salihli after his ten days there, Ali Beg said to one of his three wives:

"Go and prepare the farewell meal." And to the other two: "Go and write the farewell poem. He has asked for poetry. Let him be given poetry."

So Kadisha and Mulia went to write their poem which they did in a couple of hours or so. As usual it is too full of incomprehensible allusions, and also too long, to quote in full—there are thirteen verses altogether, consisting mostly of references to Kazak history. But I have a recording of it and here is a free rendering of two of the verses:

Long live your free country, Mr. Churchill and your might!
Set our country free from Communism's blight.
Decide to help us now.
This is our farewell song to you,
O Knight of the Golden Comb
Who left your own country specially to visit us in our new home.

Your name, O England, is very great, your honour greater.
The history of your might is longer than a thousand years.
The ends of the whole earth within your arms finds shelter.
Now, hope is strong within us that our country will be freed,
O Knight of the Golden Comb
Who left your own country specially to visit us in our new home.

The last lines are a refrain which is repeated at the end of each verse. The Kazaks say that the Order of the Golden Comb was founded by Genghis Khan the Great and, if so, is almost exactly the same age as our Order of the Garter which Edward III founded in 1348. There, of course, the parallel ends for the Order of the Golden Comb lapsed long ago and the title is now simply used as a compliment to an honoured guest.

Such a poem and, indeed, such a people, pose a challenge and provide an opportunity. In spite of all that has happened, the Kazak refugees still believe that their country will be free again. They are an Asiatic people whose necks are still unbowed after all the years during which the Chinese and the Communists tried to force their yoke upon them. They know the strength and the weakness of the Communist system in Asia. They understand how it obtained its hold and how that hold can be loosened. Their exploits provide tangible evidence that the heart of Asia, where is the centre and core of Communist power, is full of men and women who are bitterly opposed to everything that Communism stands for.

L. ZAISAN
Kobdo
OUTER MONGOLIA
L. BALKHASH
R.
Tarbagatai
IRTYSH R.
ALTAI MTS.
DZUNGARIA
BAITIK BOGDO
Manass
Kuldja
ILI R.
Urumchi
Kucheng
Barkul
HAN MTS.
Hami
Turfan
GOBI DESERT
Karashahr
THIRSTY MTS.
KANSU
Aksu
TARIM
Ansi
LOP NOR
Tung-huang
Kashgar
TAGH
NANSHAN
Yarkand
Timurlik
GEZ KUL (9000')
Makai
Charchan
ALTYN
KOKO NOR
TSAIDAM
Khotan
ULUGH MUSTAGH 25,000'
CHINGHAI
KARAKORAM MTS.
KUNLUN MTS.
INDUS R.
KASHMIR
Srinagar
Leh
TIBETAN
Rudok
PLATEAU
(12,000' - 20,000')
ANTI-TAURUS
HIMALAYA