

## The Golden Age

### Wangemann's Story of Jhengis Khan

By A. B. FARMER

IN the summer of 1911 A. Wangemann was the secretary of the Chicago Single Tax Club, which maintained a modest downtown office. It was in that office that I met him and heard him tell the story of Jhengis Khan, which includes much not to be found in the history books.

From some of the monastic records Wangemann first learned of Jhengis Khan, and of the tremendous booty which that Asiatic conqueror carried back to his homeland. Later, he became a chemist and buyer for a dyestuffs industry. In that capacity he visited a village inn in the Caucasus, where he heard peasants speak of "the golden age of Jhengis Khan."

The Golden Age! he had read in ancient records of "Jhengis Khan, the Scourge of God." Yet here, near the center of the territory from which bloodthirsty hordes had poured out upon Europe, the peasants were speaking of his Golden Age, a story which he afterwards found as far east as the borders of China.

#### The Vision

When Jhengis Khan returned from his expedition to Europe, so the tradition goes, his booty included a thousand ox carts loaded with gold and silver and precious stones. This great treasure he heaped up before his tent. There it lay, year after year, while the great Khan lived as his fathers had before him, and conducted his affairs and ruled his people according to ancient custom.

Years passed on, and the old conqueror was no longer so rugged as he had been. He began to think of the comfort of the palaces he had plundered in Europe, and at last he sent messengers to Italy and to China and to Persia and to India, to bring the most skillful architects and artificers, to build for Jhengis Khan, a palace more magnificent than any he had plundered. And so the Palace of Jhengis Khan was built, and in it the old king dwelt, and every morning he rode out the front gate of the palace on his charger and administered justice to his people.

As Jhengis Khan grew older there came to him the desire to do some great good thing for his people that would cause his name to be revered as a benefactor instead of being merely glorified as a conqueror, and he sent east and west and north and south for wise men from every country to advise him how he might confer the greatest benefit upon his people. From every direction the wise men came, yet none of them was able to make any suggestion that seemed to the old king good. So the wise men were sent away, and the soul of the old king was grieved that he did not know how to confer benefit upon his people.

Then came a night when the old king had a vision. In the morning he rode forth and gave his instructions. The people wondered at the orders that he gave, but they obeyed, for he was Jhengis Khan.

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These are the orders that Jhengis Khan gave after he had seen the Vision:

First, he ordered that a record should be made of all the property that every man had. On a white parchment should be recorded the land that each man held, its boundaries, its length and its breadth, and its position, and its value according to its size and location. All this should be recorded upon a white parchment. "For the land is mine," said the old king. "I am Jhengis Khan." On a red parchment should be recorded the man's buildings and his cattle and his implements—all his possessions except his land, which was recorded upon the white parchment. On all that was recorded upon the red parchment the old king decreed that no tax should ever be levied, but that every man should be taxed according to the value of the land recorded upon the white parchment only. "For the land is mine, I am Jhengis Khan."

Further the old king ordered that a thousand oxen should be killed, and their hides should be cut into squares, and upon each square should be stamped the impression of the seal which was upon the hilt of the sword of Jhengis Khan, with which he had led his people to the conquest of Europe and Asia and the destruction of their enemies. These squares of ox hide, stamped with the seal of Jhengis Khan, were for money, and all taxes paid upon the lands recorded upon the white parchments were to be paid in the oxhide money stamped with the seal of Jhengis Khan.

The people did not understand the Vision of Jhengis Khan, and some of the mighty men who had great tracts of land which they did not use objected. But they feared Jhengis Khan, and they kept what of their lands they could use, for their crops and their cattle were safe from thieves and taxes, and the rest of their lands they left for those who wished to use them and pay the taxes. So all who wished had lands, and the people learned to use the oxhide money, and there were none poor or unemployed. The country became like a garden, and the people lived all of them in happiness and contentment all the rest of the days of Jhengis Khan and all the days of his two sons who ruled after him. Then there were no poor in the land, and none were very rich, but all had comfort and plenty, and the king judged justly among the people. This was the Golden Age of Jhengis Khan.

#### The Vision Lost

When the grandson of Jhengis Khan came to the throne, he did not understand the Vision. He wished to be like other kings. In his greed for wealth and power he coveted all the wealth recorded on the red parchments; for he said, "Are not the cattle and the crops and the buildings mine? Am I not King on the throne of Jhengis Khan?"

Then the grandson of Jhengis Khan ordered oxen slaughtered by the tens of thousands, and their hides cut into squares and stamped with the Sword of Jhengis Khan, and with this money he hired servants and bought whatever his heart desired, and for a little while the

people seemed to prosper, for prices were rising, but really the oxhide money was becoming cheap. Then too he began to levy taxes upon the cattle and the crops and the houses

recorded upon the red parchments which Jhengis Khan had decreed should not be taxed.

Year by year the richer of the people began to buy up land and keep it idle, and the poorer, unable to bear the burden of the double taxes began to give up their land. Poverty and hunger began to stalk abroad through the land, and the people became restless. They blamed the grandson of Jhengis Khan, and there was a rebellion and the king was murdered.

But the people did not understand the Vision of Jhengis Khan, and without a king and without law and order, they fell back into barbarism and became the victims of their enemies. But they remembered the Golden Age of Jhengis Khan, and talk of it to this day.

#### The Vision in America

When Wangemann had heard the Story of the Golden Age of Jhengis Khan, he told the old innkeeper of a great Republic across the ocean, and of an American, Henry George, and also of a great Russian, Count Tolstoi, who had seen the same vision. The heart of the old Jewish innkeeper was so gladdened that he would accept no payment from the visitor who had brought him the great news.

Wangemann died in a Chicago hospital a good many years ago. Before his death he wrote out the story for me. I handed the manuscript to J. W. Bengough, an artist friend in Toronto to prepare some illustrations, but the artist left soon afterwards on a journey to New Zealand, and the manuscript was lost. So I have told the story as best I can from memory.

Bolton Hall of New York heard of Wangemann's story. I saw a letter from Hall pronouncing it a myth. Some folks who knew Wangemann slightly thought little of him. In part I must sympathize with them; for when I knew him he had become very neglectful of his personal appearance, and of his health. He was drinking such quantities of strong coffee—quarts every day—as even his magnificent constitution could not stand. This was undoubtedly affecting his mental clearness. Yet Wangemann told me the story as one that was true.

Kublai Khan's paper money, which aroused the admiration of Marco Polo, may have been an adaptation of the oxhide money of Jhengis Khan; possibly a supplement to it.

It is curious that in Russia as in England people should look back to a Golden Age. Professor Thorold Rogers, in his great work *Six Centuries of Work and Wages*, has shown that during the period between the Black Death and the reign of Elizabeth, the eight hour day was the rule in England, and the average unskilled laborer was able to support a family of five with at least as much comfort as the average unskilled laborer of today enjoys, on an average of two days' work a week. This was the period that left behind the British tradition of Merrie England.

—From the Square Deal, Toronto