

As the base camp was short of flour we decided to send two of our boatmen and our five donkeys back to camp No. 80 in the Lop delta to fetch the 500 catties of flour that CHEN and I had left in the tent there.

BERGMAN started with his caravan at sunrise on May 30th. GEORG, who had crossed the river to confer with TSERAT and give him some tips for the journey to Urumchi, stayed on with us till we were ready to go over to the base camp. We said good-bye on the bank, leaving him to follow in BERGMAN's tracks into the mysterious desert.

At camp No. 70 I took out of my suitcases and boxes what I should need for my journey to Korla — or perhaps Urumchi, a journey on which YEW was to accompany me. We had still a fair amount of petrol left, having eked it out with paraffin; but we had not enough to take all three motor-lorries as far as Urumchi. What we were short of was lubricating-oil. Of this we had just as much as the small car needed to cover the more than 700 km separating us from the capital of Sinkiang.

ARRIVAL OF HUMMEL

We took a week's provisions for three men, but no tent. From the very beginning our expedition had been rich in dramatic happenings; and now, at base camp No. 70, there were further improbable coincidences. CHEN and I had been away for a month, yet we just caught BERGMAN and GEORG on their last night on the Qum-darya. And at half-past one, as I was sitting arranging my belongings for the long and hazardous journey, CHEN and KUNG suddenly shouted in one breath:

»Here comes Dr HUMMEL!«

And sure enough, there he was, walking quickly up from the river-bank. He was wearing pyjamas and sun-helmet in the burning heat. He had shaved off his beard and looked well and strong.

All preparations had been made for my departure. TSERAT stood waiting by the car. The loading of YEW's and my luggage was all that now remained to do. This might take a quarter of an hour. So if HUMMEL had turned up a quarter of an hour later I should already have been on my way to Korla. He had come at the very last moment.

»But why have you got your right arm in a sling?« I asked. »And why is your hand bandaged?«

He laughed.

»Oh, rather a nasty business. When KONSTANTIN« (one of the Russian soldiers) »and I were out shooting we surprised a family of wild pigs and caught three little ones. We've had them ever since in a box on board. One day when I was feeding them one of them bit my thumb, and I had rather a nasty bout of