

AN UPSETTING LETTER FROM HUMMEL

On the evening of June 30th YEW and I were sitting in our room as usual, killing time with backgammon, when a servant from the Consulate-General came in and handed me a letter addressed in Dr HUMMEL's writing. It had evidently been forwarded by the commander of the Russian garrison at Korla.

My last hurried meeting with our doctor had been on May 30th at base camp No. 70 on the Qum-darya, when he had recovered from a nasty blood-poisoning. I read his letter with growing anxiety. The blood-poisoning had afterwards grown worse, and the fever would not abate. He thought he ought not to remain on the river in the heat of summer, and had decided to travel on a horse-borne stretcher via Singer to Toqsun, where he might be met by car. The letter was dated June 10th, and he was to start on the 11th. The fact that he thought it necessary to fly to Peking, or hurry by car and railway to have an operation, was further proof of the seriousness of the case.

HUMMEL had started on the 11th, and now it was the 30th. He ought to have been at Urumchi long ago. Evidently he had become worse on the journey and urgently needed help. Perhaps he was already dead.

When I had hurriedly translated the letter to YEW, we drove to the Russian Consulate-General. We were told that the consul was ill, and the other members of the staff were out, but would be back in an hour. We were standing in the avenue, and had just decided to wait, when a short, strongly built man in a white summer suit came up to us. I had never seen him before. He introduced himself as Dr SAPOJNIKOV, doctor and surgeon to the Consulate-General. I could have fallen on his neck — the meeting was providential. Dr SAPOJNIKOV had just been to see his patient, Mr APRESOV, who had a headache. He now accompanied us to the house in the consulate grounds where Vice-Consul KOROLOV lived. We were received by the latter's wife, a pretty and agreeable lady, French by birth.

When Mr KOROLOV arrived I translated HUMMEL's letter sentence by sentence. SAPOJNIKOV's view of the case was refreshingly optimistic. But there were indications, he said, of a secondary infection in which there might possibly be a complicating factor. He regretted that he himself had so many patients at the moment, and so much to do at his clinic and two hospitals, that he could not go to HUMMEL's aid. The latter's route over the Quruq-tagh was 450 km, an appalling distance for a sick man without a car.

With an energy and rapidity that quite moved us, Mr KOROLOV now went to the telephone and rang up CH'EN TEH-LI. In an authoritative tone he demanded ten *puds* of petrol and some oil. He then telephoned IVANOV at the garage, ordering him to give TSERAT at once all the help he needed for the temporary repair of the small car. Everything was to be ready on the morrow, Sunday, July 1st.