

11 a.m. February 28th, 1934.

Uvani.

"First, let me tell you in brief utterance, the boy (who for the space of some days journeyed across desert) did these things. Taking with him a large body of men were they continuously moving, marching through wide tracts reaching the fertile places wherein good camping grounds were found, water being there in abundance, also shade. They had many ways to traverse which were of rough going, some difficulties to surmount; but the journey was expeditiously performed. The boy, knowing how to lead, did his duties well. Now for the clear picture:

"The boy is within his own chamber. He is writing, and by him are two lads. They wait, but are impatient, saying unto him it were well he hastened, seeing time is indeed precious. Billy, unmoved, continues. He shows no perturbation. With calm he pursues his avocation. They stand, then, saying they will depart, leave. For one moment he ponders, then going to a large chest he opens a drawer. He looks for some time within. He then extracts an article which is of apparel. He places this upon him; then, regarding himself in a mirror, he hurriedly goes forth. I see him in swift movement. He pursues the two friends. They are again together and are now entering the car."

*Bill sent his version of this with his letter of March 13th, from Khartoum. He says:*

*"This was my first day home, and I well remember the occasion—though it occurred towards the evening. Had just returned from the Shabluca Gorge desert trip."*

Uvani wrote: "There is a great interest in this method: that I can communicate direct; that the contact made is so complete. With all others must I have an intermediary. With you as medium can my thoughts swiftly reach their goal."

I replied: "But some thoughts are impossible to get through me."

"How to explain? Madame, as it is in your world, so is it here. There are barriers, is it not so? Many things remaining unsaid—in that the barriers cannot be surmounted. There are far fewer with the bringing of our thoughts to you; yet much from this sphere cannot be transcribed in earth terms."

"I meant, Uvani, that sometimes, when you would like to give me news from other people in your sphere for those belonging to them, it is difficult, isn't it?"

"Yes. For the world are there instruments more fitted for this purpose than are you. For yourself, you have been given a delicate gift. With a vibrant instrument such as yourself, fully conscious while in close touch with this plane, the emotions of those who come are surging uppermost. Thus do you hear much of what lies within the soul of him who speaks; but, save in the case of yourself, your boys, is the same evidence not given. I would we could combine all within the one person, but this cannot be."

## XII

THE time had now arrived when Bill was going into the Libyan Desert, and I knew that after he left Khartoum it was very unlikely he would be able to send me more than the scantiest amount of news.

During the winter months he had learnt from an old Cambridge friend, then in the Cameroons, that a Frenchman, lately returned from an expedition across the central Sahara, had heard rumours from a tribe of Touaregs of a ruined city lying somewhere to the east of the Tibesti Mountains. It was said once to have been the centre of an empire; now it was engulfed in the desert sands. This traveller, it appeared, had been unable to search for the city through lack of water, but had passed on the information in the hope that some more fortunate person might make his way there.

When Bill was told this he was immediately struck by its resemblance to the stories—persistent in Egypt since the earliest dynasties—of a great capital called Zerzura, lying far to the west of the Nile, but derelict and overwhelmed by the advancing sands centuries before anyone had heard of the civilization of Greece and Rome. This city was said to be stacked with treasure, while in the Palace the King and Queen slept the sleep of the enchanted.

Bill seized this opportunity, too good to be missed. He decided that, if he possibly could, he would make his way across the desert, and search for this 'White City' that had been the goal of explorers for the past hundred years.

His plans matured, and, chance favouring him, he decided to set out in the beginning of April, 1934.

As it turned out, he also was unable to complete his journey, owing partly to water difficulties, when he was nearing the Tibesti region, and partly to the fear of overstaying his leave. These two reasons prevented him from setting out on the final stage over the desert from the last oasis near the Ennedi Mountains. Altogether, during the nine weeks of his journey, he covered eleven hundred and fifty miles by car, and some thousand or so by camel, over a route running from Khartoum to El Obeid in Darfur, and thence to the north-west by camel to Fada Oasis, where he turned back for Abesher and the south. During his wanderings (which coincided for some way with the routes of the well-known explorer Hassenein Bey) he chanced upon an extensive area of Palaeolithic culture, with potsherds and rock paintings in red and white ochre, dating back to 5000 B.C., hitherto unknown and previously unsuspected so far south-west in the Libyan Desert.

I should have been in a continual state of anxiety about Bill had it not been that I always heard about him. Steadily, faithfully, news was given me in addition to the little pictures of his doings, and although sometimes I had a terrible fear that he might be lost in the desert, or unable to find water, always the fear was taken away, not so much by the pictured seeings but because I was always told no real harm would come to him and that he would be kept safe.

2.47 p.m. April 3rd, 1934.

Uvani.

"I am endeavouring to catch the vision of the young boy as you write. The picture comes thus :

"The boy sitting within an apartment with three men. Very spacious is it, but sparse in its furnishings. There is not much which makes for Western comfort. I deem it, Madame, a room more used for the conduction of business. With the boy are three men all engaged in talk—not upon one subject : I see that all manner of ideas come readily to their minds—and while talk proceeds do they have refreshments. Also they indulge in smoke.

"The boy Billy purposes this journey, and these men are in all manner of ways lending their aid. He goes well equipped. Like his brother, these journeyings give satisfaction to his heart. No son of your lord, their father, could live a life of dull repose. This, being a woman who was born to be mother to true men, you will understand, and your reward, Madame, is great, for they have much love for you, therefore are you indeed united.

"Billy is quite sure of his going, calm, resolute. He will do well, and in his going be protected. I have said."

*Billy says to this :*

*"This is a correct picture. Discussing matters with the Camel Corps Officers at El Obeid about going as far as El Fasher in lorries."*

4.20 p.m. April 8th, 1934.

Uvani.

"Behold, I will now give you that which I see concerning the young boy. Truly do his present wanderings carry me back to my earth life, desert winds, desert sands, the long travelling. I see before me this scene. It comes clear.

"Billy sitting upon a camel, as one who is well accustomed to the manner of going, so sure he is. There is upon another camel a man who is appointed guide. He too rides. Then upon yet another is a man who has charge of that which appertains to the feeding of the boy, and who is servant. I see sundry others ; there are several animals, a retinue.

"The boy is quite well, very happy. All that he does is bringing him deep satisfaction. He, too, derives his happiness from travelling the unbeaten track.

"I will give constant word. Frank said he brings a picture tomorrow ; Abdul Latif and your lord the days following."

*Billy says :*

*"Monday the 9th, the first day with camels. A night march 4 a.m. to 7 a.m. Picture correct, and retinue as described."*

5.36 p.m. April 15th, 1934.

Uvani.

"The young boy. I see him, and begin by saying, be at peace. He goes well. There is nought affecting his health.

"He is now once more upon the desert. Familiar is it in its dark velvety night to Uvani. Almost could I find that the many years which have elapsed since my earth life finished have never been, for I view him doing what I so many times have done.

"He is still upon his beast. The little cavalcade, I see them slowly

journeying, and the air seems sweet. Night has just fallen—the sun having so short a period past been high in the heavens—and the blessed cool is even now gratefully striking upon them. They will journey some distance further, they having an objective."

There came a pause, and I asked Uvani if he had finished.

"I have two little details. One, that there was slight trouble, a camel having come to disaster. It was quickly remedied, but caused delay. Two, the man who acts as guide is worthy. He seeks to shield the boy from inconvenience. I have perceived, therefore have no alarm."

*Billy says :*

*"This picture is correct. I had obtained a new guide at Furawia Wells, Sinnein Hassein, a good fellow. We were delayed 2.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. by the necessity for watering this guide's camel. It was therefore unready for the road at the time I had ordered, and I was very annoyed at being kept waiting."*

6.25 p.m. April 27th, 1934.

Uvani.

"Shall I now give you a seeing for Billy ? I have been taking note. I think the hour is yours.

"A large fire, the darkness falling, much vast stretches of sand, no green to be seen. They are encamped and the scene peaceful. A line of camels lying. There are, clustered around yet another blaze, men intent on making ready that which shall stay hunger. By the other fire reclines Billy, satisfied, for he has been given already to eat. He is content, the day's work affording him satisfaction, plenty of exercise, the feeling that achievement is his, and that at close of day he has the sweetness of rest which his endeavours have won. He has beside him his gun. This he keeps ever beside him.

"Have no qualms, no doubts, for all moves serenely. Your boy is safe."

Then, when writing for me apart from the book, Uvani added :

"Make the note that it is, we are sure, a picture which will be verified correctly, for I have felt the sight was surpassing clear. Now, having given, I leave you."

*Billy's comments on this are :*

*"At Sorto Well. Camped in the hills surrounded by high sandstone cliffs. Sand all about, and a natural well not far away under one of the walls. Some little green, otherwise details correct. I always used to keep my rifle close beside me when I went to sleep, partly because I always cleaned it in the evening after the day's march, partly to ensure its safety, and partly because, Touaregs and Goran raiders being indigenous to the country, I made sure of having firearms at hand."*

12.51 p.m. May 5th, 1934.

Uvani.

"At the time at which I see him, Billy sits, and aided by his servant is engaged in making afresh his toilet. Very hot, very toilworn is the boy. He has removed his soiled garments, and gratefully having refreshed his limbs with jets of water which have been poured upon him is now placing fresh garments upon him. When he is once more dressed he proposes sleeping (the midday sun being still at its height), and he will not proceed. He is now at a green and very lovely spot, where he will remain for

some period. His servant is getting food, a light repast, and brings it to the boy."

Uvani stopped and I asked him if that was all.

"I am trying to see the rest of his small company. They are there, not far removed, sitting with their camels, which are tethered near by. All is peace. I beg you to be happy."

*Billy says :*

"Picture correct. A good one. Halt midday, and start 2 p.m." He later amplified this picture by telling me that this was the day on which he had lost sight of the rest of his party for some time. According to his custom he had let them go on ahead, for, having a trotting camel himself, he liked to follow later and so get exercise and more variety. The caravan came to a well, however, and did not wait there for Billy, so that he had great difficulty in picking up his camels' tracks from among the many others which had been made there at different times. He eventually reached them, very hot and weary, and the above picture was what took place when he had rejoined his party.

5.47 p.m. May 9th, 1934.

Uvani.

"The young boy still is upon his way. He has been carrying out this journey across the vast desert with unabated interest, never daunted."

Uvani stopped writing, and I asked if he was looking to see what Billy was doing.

"As I spoke, I did but get a general sense of his well-being, knowing he still progressed. Now, however, see with my eyes.

"The boy is in his tent. He is reclining. A short while since he slept. Now he has awakened, and there are preparations, for presently he will again commence his wanderings.

"All around lies the great wide stretch of desert. When I view him I can smell the sweetness of the desert air, so vividly does it recall my life. How often have I too ridden across its great tracks. And I now can see what lies beside the boy. A trophy which looks like some wild beast which has been slain."

"Where, Uvani? Not beside him actually?"

"It is not far removed. I see that he has pride, in that he with his own hands did slay it. All this I can feel. The boy is so pleased."

*Billy says :*

"This was probably Thursday, May the 3rd. Camped under a thorn bush. Killed an Addra\* that day. Had been very pleased with the results of the chase."

11.30 a.m. May 12th, 1934.

H. A. K.

"Billy is in a wide stretch of desert moving along slowly, his men beside him. Billy, riding on a camel, seems to be thinking the time has come for a rest. I see him say, 'I am going to remain here', and, having said it, get down. Then he lies down and stretches his limbs. He seems to be very stiff, but is quite well. He has told one of his men to bring him food, and puts it beside him, meaning to eat presently."

(N.B.—In the middle of the last sentence there was an interruption

caused by someone coming in and speaking to me. I stopped and the writing went on as soon as I was alone again.)

"He seems thoroughly happy, thoroughly serene, and everything seems to be going well."

(There came a pause, and I said, "We have been disturbed. I am so sorry.")

"Never mind. I think I got it, and you can make a note about the disturbance."

*To this Billy says :*

"Time late, for I had actually reached Abesher and had dismissed my camels by this date. Otherwise picture quite correct, remarks and all. Just as it would happen."

9.23 p.m. May 15th, 1934.

Abdul Latif.

"Your young boy, Billy, is now seated. There are others beside these men who are employed by him, and they appear to be men whom he has come across, and to whom he offers food. I see four beside the boy. They are not of native origin, but are like himself. I see one is old in years when compared with Billy, well experienced. The others vary. They all appear to be very cheerful, friendly and pleasant.

"Your boy is speaking. I gather he has recounted the history of his wanderings and is now being listened to with interest. They are, I should hasten to inform you, in a large room. It is most comfortable, well equipped, and the boy will be housed therein, given a room in which he will have a sleeping couch. This will be luxury"

"Abdul Latif, does he just seem to have arrived there?"

"To me does it seem that he has recently arrived, for there is surrounding all an air of interest as if they were being made acquainted anew."

*Bill says :*

"Abesher, where the Governor asked two French officers (from whom I had received hospitality at Furawai) and myself to dine with him. There were altogether five beside myself."

10.35 a.m. May 20th, 1934.

Uvani.

"How does our young boy comport himself? Thus! He is now journeying."

"In what way, Uvani?"

"At present he is not seated, as has been his wont, upon a camel. This is the scene:

"A hot sun, very much dust. Most trying is the whole proceeding, for the boy is in a rough contrivance which is being propelled by the same method as are the motor vehicles which he often uses. The contrivance is not of the same luxurious design. It is roughly hewn, large, containing much. People are within it, also baggage, and there is no shade. It is of the type of carts, but useful in that it saves many miles of toil.

"The boy is getting now from out a box some garment. This he uses as a further protection, placing it upon the bench whereon he is seated. He has turned and spoken to the servitor. I see him also. There are some five men."

Uvani stopped, and I asked: "Can you see any more?"

\* A large gazelle, found in parts of the Sudan.

"He is well and happy in the achievement. Now he comes to you. The boy's thoughts are with the homeward journey. Madame, I have no more."

*Bill's comments are :*

"I travelled in an open lorry between Abesher and El Obeid with men and baggage from May 11th-16th. The picture must be at least four days late therefore, but it is otherwise correct. I had dismissed my camels and the camel men at Abesher, but had my servant Tom still with me."

2 p.m. May 22nd, 1934.

Uvani.

"Take swiftly the small seeing. Your young boy is safe, he is well, he is happy. Once more within the abode from whence he made his preparations. He is back."

*Bill says to this :*

"Left Khartoum that day for England, having arrived there on the 16th."

Bill wrote from El Fasher, his starting-off point, on April 8th. Then I did not hear from him until he sent me a cable on May 11th from Abesher, in which he said he hoped to be with us on May 30th. No more news came, and when the allotted day arrived I confidently expected Bill, or, at all events, a wire ; but the afternoon came and no word from him. A dread feeling of anxiety came over me and I was racked with fears that he might still be somewhere in the desert, and that possibly what I had been hearing about him was wrong. Then, almost directly, I was calm again, for clearly, decisively, my hand moved ; it was my husband, telling me not to be frightened, that all was well, and very soon I should have Bill with me. Immediately following came a picture from Uvani.

2.10 p.m. May 30th, 1934.

"Madame, in that you have feelings of anxiety about the non-arrival of your boy, I should wish to give you every reassurance. I will again picture. Do not grow troubled. I can tell you somewhat concerning the young boy. What you have been steadily given is correct. He is indeed fast approaching you. Ere long you will all be reunited. That he has not sent you further word is explained in this wise : Has he not already announced unto you his arrival ?"

I said : "Yes, Uvani, and I now think his idea must be to send me word when he knows the exact hour of his arrival." (1)

"That is so. He also says : 'I know my mother will be kept informed.' He furthermore says this : 'I know my mother has the supreme faith.'" (2)

Uvani stopped, and I asked : "Does it now seem to you that I haven't ?"

"Do I not well understand ? Great is your faith, great your knowledge, great your understanding"—Uvani again stopped as though he were considering—"but, when waiting for confirmation of that which we have given, do these thoughts come : 'It may be that the words in which I have been told the doings of my well-loved boy have perchance gone astray.'"

"That is what I have been wondering ; whether by any chance they can be wrong."

"But you will continue, please, Madame, strong. I swear to you—I, Uvani, who for so long time have brought all counsel to you—that truth has been observed. Your lord (he whose love has, ever since he left you, overcome all obstacles) has also spoken truly ; Abdul Latif also ; and also Frank. Now the boy still journeys. This I plainly see.

"He is within the train. He has been many hours within these conveyances all bearing him on his way, and I think the time swiftly approaches when he will land upon your shores. (3)

"It may be that he will still continue for the space of some hours. I am unable clearly to know." (4)

"Uvani, the main thing is to know he is coming, and that he is all right."

"He is well, I assure you ; robust, full of vigour. He is content and happy. He is rapidly borne upon his way, and his thoughts go out to you. I am taking note of what lies within his immediate vicinity."

Nothing happened for a couple of minutes and I asked : "Is it hard to see ?"

"Why should it sometimes be harder, Madame ? This is what happens. I look, and like a picture mirrored in clear crystal do all details show. Then, upon another occasion, do I attempt to see, and my vision becomes as it were blurred. Then do I give what is difficult to make clear to the boy, so great the difference in my portrayal."

"Is it blurred now ?"

"It is not clear. I do however visualize this : a crowded interior, many seated side by side. The boy idly reclining, not in posture of lying but leaning against the cushions, his legs outstretched, and many there are with him. (5) There is also perpetual movement as people walk beside the apartment, seeking first one thing, then another. The boy himself has risen and gone without and walks along a narrow corridor, thus affording a limited amount of freedom. The journey is somewhat wearisome. I am pleased you will so soon have him restored unto you."

*Bill numbered these points, and his comments are :*

"(1) Yes. (2) Yes. (3) Yes. (4) Landed Genoa morning of the 30th. (5) Yes, except that there were no others in my apartment." At the end of the entire picture he puts 'Correct'.

So my fears were laid to rest.

That same night my husband, when writing, said : "You will hear from Bill the first thing tomorrow morning." Very early, while I was still in bed, a wire arrived from Paris to say he would be with us that same afternoon.

Ronald and I met him at Victoria station safe and sound, none the worse for his adventures.

For five weeks I had both my boys with me again, and the pictures did not start again until Bill's departure for Cyprus, where he was next to be stationed.

When Uvani, more than two years later, was speaking to me through Mrs. Garrett, he mentioned that Bill's caravan had gone for many hours in the desert without water, and the suffering I should have experienced had I known about it at the time. There is nothing in the pictures to

show what happened, but the dread of this very thing had been constantly in my mind. I have asked Bill to give the story in his own words. This is what he says :

"The wells at Toukou were deserted now by all but scorpions and enormous spiders. The next well was five long marches to the south, as much as the camels could stand in their present condition. I had decided, however, to head straight across the desert to Abesher, and determined that we would attempt it even now. We filled every water-tank to the brim and the next morning found us already far on our way, with the Ennedi fast disappearing behind us.

"There was nothing to see ahead except sand and a shimmering heat haze—not even the horizon, for sky and land merged imperceptibly one into the other. There was no noise but the soft padding of the camels and the clank, clank, clank of the tanks bumping against their sides. By day the heat was blistering. Mirages were plentiful and the wind, blowing steadily from in front, drove the fine particles of sand into our faces in a most maddening way. Mercifully, at night, which was when we covered our greatest distances, it was refreshingly cold, and I would walk at the head of the camels following the guide's lantern as it twinkled away in front. I had picked up this man at Fada, and he always marched alone. All his faculties were needed to keep direction, and any distraction might have led to unhappy consequences. For the first day and a half we had to hobble the camels on camping, in order to prevent them returning to Toukou. They seemed to know what lay before them ; but, once far enough away from water, they resigned themselves to the future in the loudly complaining but fatalistic manner of their kind.

"On the third day stones appeared in the sand, and the camels' pads became badly torn. One of the men stitched pieces of an empty water-skin over their feet and we were able to continue, but it seemed to me that the pace was getting slower. That evening we saw a solitary gazelle, and the next morning a low range of hills with a single conical peak appeared to the south, hiding the wells we were making for. The sight of the hills put new life into the camels, and we began to move more quickly. A few thorn trees and acacias appeared. The heat was tremendous and our minds were filled with nothing but the thought of water. We reached the well in the afternoon. It was bone dry.

"For some moments no one spoke a word ; but at length the men turned to me and said calmly : 'It is forty miles to the next well, and the camels are weak. Who knows if there is water even there ? It is Allah's will that we die here.'"

"Only after long argument was I able to persuade them to push on, for they were all quite prepared to sit down and wait for death to overtake them. There was one small tank of water left, and I ordered two of the men to give it to the camels. They did this by blowing it up the creatures' nostrils, which so revived them that they began to graze off the thorn trees. We rested for the remainder of the day and broke camp as the sun was sinking. Ever since leaving Toukou we had been walking for the sake of the camels ; but by now they had very little strength left, and though we made good time for the first few miles they were almost used up. During the night one of them collapsed. The poor beast sank

helplessly to the ground, and though we did our best to revive him he was too far gone. We divided his load among the rest and left him to follow if he could. It was the camels who were the chief sufferers. We had been marching hard ever since leaving Fada, and they had had no chance of regaining their strength ; but even the men and myself were very tired, and I think we must have slept at times as we walked along, for all my memories of what happened on that march are vague.

"Dawn found us still moving, the camels staggering as though drunk ; but the guide assured us that, if we could reach them, the wells were no more than three hours distant. We stumbled on ; then, as the sun rose, we called a halt, and the exhausted men turned towards Mecca and said their prayers. The last part of the march was the worst, as the sun hurt our aching eyes, and the increasing heat weakened us still further, beside adding to the torment of thirst ; but at nine o'clock we reached the well, two pits full of green stenching liquid, redolent of camel dung. Seldom have men been more glad of a drink !

"After watering the camels and leaving them to graze as they wished, we flung ourselves down and slept until nightfall. We had marched fifteen hours without water."

### XIII

ALMOST as soon as he was back in England, Ronald began making plans for another journey into Tibet. This time his main objective was the source of the Salween River, which rises somewhere to the north of Lhasa. He left England on February 27th, 1935, and, with John Hanbury-Tracy and three native servants, went into Tibet through Upper Burma by the same route he had used on his way back in 1933. By the beginning of January, 1936, when they were within a month's journey of the source, it proved impracticable to continue any further, and they were forced to turn south towards India again. They arrived in Assam in December, 1936, and reached England at the end of January in the following year. They had been away altogether twenty-three months, of which eighteen had been spent in Tibet ; and they covered between two and three thousand miles of hitherto unexplored country.

Ronald's first letter from Tibet, written on May 31st, 1936, reached me on July 22nd, but this was record time and owing to the great kindness of the Tibetan Governor at Shikathang. He sent a special messenger with Ronald's and John's letters in order to get them through to India before the rains made it impossible. Ronald wrote again from this same place only five days later, and this letter took over six months to reach me. A month after that a batch of three arrived together, the most recent of which was four and a half months old. At the beginning of the journey, however, and before they disappeared into the jungles of Burma, Ronald was able to send me back confirmation of fourteen of the detailed accounts I had received about him. They were remarkably correct. Several which dealt with the voyage out were full of minute details which he was able