

## Chapter VIII

It was 1934. Bill's regiment was now in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, and he was due for some leave, which he had decided to use travelling across the still partly unexplored South Libyan Desert between the Sudan and the Tibesti Mountains, in what was then called French Equatorial Africa. He planned to avoid the great heat by setting off in April from Kuttum, in north-west Darfur province, taking with him a Sudanese servant, four Sudanese camelmen and eight camels; and I knew that once he had left the Sudan it was most unlikely that he would be able to send me anything more than the scantiest news until his return weeks later.

Planning for the expedition took him all the previous winter. The officials of the Sudanese Government were helpful with permits and advice; the officers of the Camel Corps at El Obeid helped him on his way to Darfur; and there the District Commissioner, Mr. Moore, and his assistant, Wilfrid Thesiger (who was later to make an international name for himself as an explorer) were invaluable in selecting camels and trustworthy camelmen to form Bill's "hamla". Only the French authorities in Cairo were hesitant. Much of Bill's projected route lay across little visited country, ominously labelled either "Régions plates et sablonneuses sans eau ni pâturages permanentes à chameaux", or simply "Terrain inconnu", and the bureaucrats were clearly out to avoid possible trouble. Finally, however, reluctant permission was given and a visa was issued, carefully terminating with the warning "...à ses risques et périls", which they no doubt hoped would exonerate them in case of disaster.

Bill left Khartoum for El Obeid on April 1st, 1934, and thence travelled for three days by Camel Corps lorry across the sands -- there were no roads at that time -- to El Fasher, the capital of Darfur; and finally on to the north-west border hamlet of Kuttum, where for some time past Wilfred Thesiger had kindly been collecting his camels and men