

Arabah.. el Madfunah.  
[probably 13 April 1934]

Dear Mother.

I am back in camp again, & I think I had best continue the story of my adventures from where I left off in last letter.

The second day I spent seeing the desert on the Sohag side of the river. out there are two very ancient Coptic Monasteries, one called the White Monastery & the other the Red. as they are some distance apart the journey took me all day.

The White M. was the first & it stands on a broad stretch of desert midway between the cliffs & the cultivation, it is like a walled fortress & contains a church & a number of dwellings.

The Monks were delighted to have a visitor & showed me everything, including the books, in Coptic & Arabic & the vestments & pictures, there was some very fine stone work & carved tracery.

I went up on the roof & was able to look down into the church from the windows of one of the domes & get quite a different view of the interior.

I was regaled with the customary coffee, & departed

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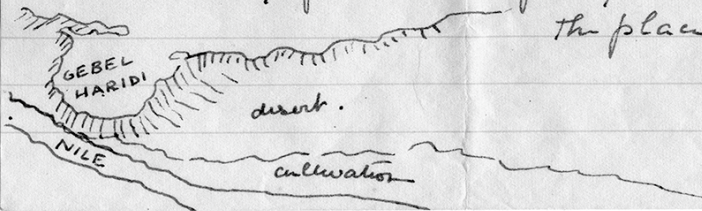
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after leaving a slight donation for the church.  
 I had my lunch under a clump of date palms  
 & proceeded on to the Red Monastery. This stood  
 on the edge of the cultivation & was surrounded  
 by the usual mud brick village houses. & was  
 therefore much less impressive than the White M.  
 inside, it was similar though smaller.

It took me the rest of the day to return to Sohag  
 in good time for a change & bath before dinner  
 & to send Sardinic to do some shopping for the  
 next excursion which was to take three days.

I was up & off soon after dawn. The donkeys that  
 were to convey Sardinic & the Ombashi were waiting  
 on the other side of the river, my intention was  
 to ride north following the Nile as far as the  
 Gebel Haradi. This is where a great cliff  
 sticks out & the river flows along its base  
 here is a rough plan but I expect you have found  
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[ R ]

- GEBEL
- HARIDI      desert.
- NILE        cultivation

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it was a distance of about 30 miles, I passed through lots of villages & in one of them was an out-post of the Camel Patrol & we stopped to say "how do you do" to the officer & men who were friends of the Ombashi. I told them where I was going & the officer said he would tell the desert patrol to look out for me. I had lunch under some trees in one of the villages, after the meal the women of the village came & talked to me & were very curious about me as Europeans are very rare over there. Then I continued my journey, it was late afternoon by the time I reached the Gebel Haridi it was very beautiful, an immense rock of weathered limestone, more <sup>like</sup> a mountain than a rock. we skirted the base until we came to Beled Haridi a little Arab village built into the cliff face. here I was told there was a famous sheikhs tomb up a wady. so we dismounted. & followed one of the villagers who offered his services as a guide up a wild rock strewn wady, it was a long climb, but the scenery was magnificent & at last

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the wady broadened out into a little amphitheatre & here we found the Sheikh's Tomb with its white washed dome, I removed my shoes & went inside, the walls & the dome inside were all decorated with crude paintings & the floor was covered with rush mats & the actual coffin of the sheikh was covered with a fine cotton cover & had knobs at each corner & a sort of erection like a tied up bundle at the head, by touching this one got a lot of blessing -

after this, I was taken up a still steeper way to some ancient stone quarries, these went a long way back into the cliff & from the entrance one could look right across the width of Egypt to the fringe of the Western Desert, I clambered down in much less time than it took me to scramble up, & by then it was nearly six o'clock so I consulted Sardic & the Ombashi about a suitable camping place for the night, I suggested some where up the wady. the Ombashi had a talk with the sheikh of the village whom he knew & he told me that there were a great many scorpions

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& snakes among the rocks there, & the sheikh said if I preferred to sleep in the open they would bring the divans from the village meeting room outside for us & we would be quite safe sleeping on them. & he would be honoured if I would consider his house my house etc. I accepted the former suggestion, & a divan was placed on the raised veranda of the meeting house for me, & three others at the foot of the steps for my body guard.

Of course I had to accept the Sheikh's hospitality & have supper with him. I pleaded fatigue as my excuse for not eating all the food that was set before me & made an excellent meal from a fine plump pigeon roasted & stuffed with savory rice, all the people were beautifully behaved & although an European in their midst was a unique experience for them they did not crowd round & stare.

It was quite dusk by the time supper was finished & I was conducted to my divan & my host & his friends wished me a blessed night & retired. I commensed my preparations by removing all

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cushions & coverings from the divan & making up my bed on it with my own blankets & cushion. but even so I had visitors - they certainly had a very blessed night. as for my own. the less said about it the better but I consoled my self with the reflection that if one will wander so far from civilization one must expect to encounter some discomforts, & certainly I was having a thrilling experience miles away in an arab<sup>sic</sup> village with a body guard of a Soudanise soldier & two bedawin servants sleeping a few yards away from me & the shaddowy village with the outline of the high cliff showing clearly against the night sky.

Next morning I was up with the dawn. I had breakfast with the Sheikh, again a pigeon. the others sat round a dish of rice & meat from which they helped themselves with their right hands & pieces of bread. I also had to eat with my fingers but I can manage this quite nicely now, of course one always washes before & after meals. I thanked my host for his hospitality & was once again on my way

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by 6.30. I intended to return along the edge of the cliffs by the desert track, spending another night on the way, as the distance is far greater than along the Nile. I must leave the account of the next two days adventures until another letter as I have no more time now.

Love to you both.  
your affectionate daughter  
Myrtle.

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