KABRU :			
Rubenson	1907	October	Extreme cold. Clear.
N. SIKKIM, etc. :			
Kellas	1910	May/July	Not good.
Kellas	1911	April	Heavy snowfalls. Hot sun.
		May	S. winds and snowfalls. More snow below and less snow above 19,000 ft. in May as compared with August.
		June	Weather broken, turning worse towards the end of the month. Continuous mists.
Kellas	1912	July	Weather good on the whole. Mists.
		August	In August southern ranges in Sikkim may be practically unassailable.
KANGCHENJUNGA :			
Raeburn	1920	July	Wet.
		August	Generally fine with good visibility.
		September	Cold, wet and misty. Snowfalls down to 13,500 ft. Improvement later.
		October	Fair and cold.

Editor, ' A.J.']

EGYPTIAN MOUNTAINS.

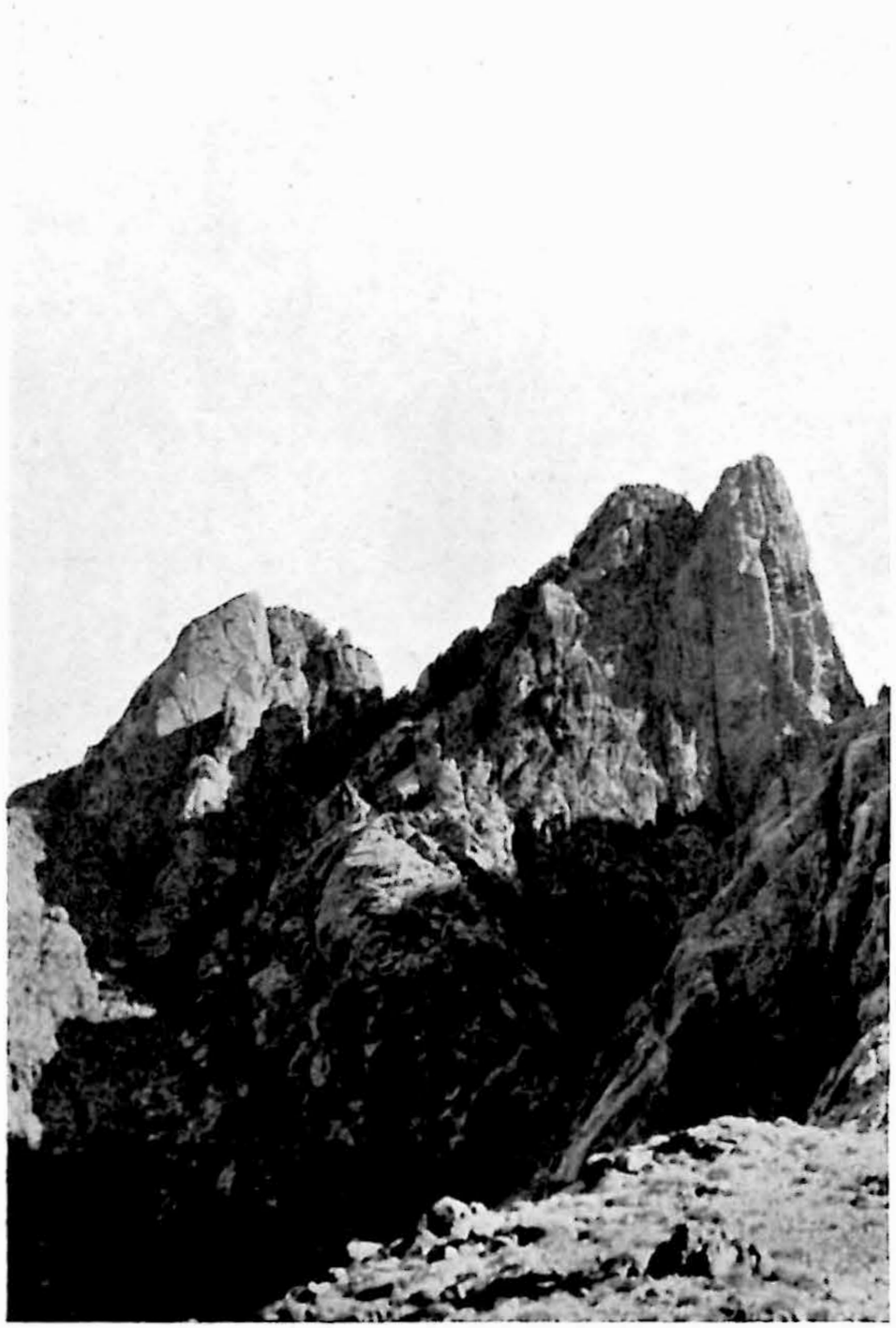
BY G. W. MURRAY.

THERE is a widespread impression shared by residents in Egypt, as well as by those at home, that the deserts of Egypt are flat sandy expanses dotted with rare oases—in fact, that the only climbing possible is on the larger Pyramids. Those who campaigned in the Libyan Desert or Northern Sinai during the late war had plenty of experiences to confirm



Photo, G. W. Murray.

BERENICE'S BODKIN.



Photo, Mrs. G. W. Murray.

Eastern Aiguilles of UMM SHOMER.

the above view. Indeed an old gentleman, whom I met at an informal dinner not so long ago, declared so roundly that 'there were no mountains in Egypt' that he provoked me into writing this article.

The grand Sinai mountains, rising abruptly from sea-level to over 8000 ft., are in Egyptian territory, while an equally fine chain, the 'African Cordillera' as the great explorer Schweinfurth called it, forms the watershed between the Nile and the Red Sea. Such pigmies cannot be compared to the Alps, but Gebel Umm Shomer or the Faraid peaks would certainly give rise to considerable admiration and comment if they were removed to Wales or the Lake District.

East of the Nile the Egyptian desert is almost rainless and without population: even in the mountains there is little game and few Bedouin. The hunters follow the ibex; where there are no ibex there is no climbing, and consequently even at the present day several of the peaks are still virgin summits, so far as anyone knows.

But from the earliest times they have been good sea-marks, and they are all set down with their correct latitudes in Ptolemy's 'Geography.'

The 'red mountain that dazzled all beholders' must be an early legend of snow on Gebel Shayib;[1] the 'mountain of Ajax' is Gebel Hamrawein, the 'emerald mountain' is Gebel Zabara, Pentadactylus is Gebel Faraid, Prionotus the Elba-Asotriba group, but the Satyrorum Mons (or 'wilderness of monkeys'), lat. 19°, and Monodactylus, lat. 18°, must be left to the Sudan Surveys to identify.

The first climbing in Egypt was done by James Burton, who climbed the northernmost of the Red Sea hills, Gebel Gharib (1751 m. = 5745 ft.), in 1823, after an unsuccessful attempt the previous year. It has not been climbed since.

Another early traveller was Georg Schweinfurth, who, in 1865, cruised down from Qusein to Suakin in a dhow and made various excursions inland. He climbed the second summit of Gebel Abu Tiur (1098 m. = 3602 ft.), near Qusein, which he described 'as a worthy pendant to my ascent of the Gross Glockner'; lost his way on Pentadactylus (1366 m. = 4482 ft.), climbed the second summit of Gebel Shellal (1409 m. = 4623 ft.), and was turned back by the Bisharin from an attempt

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[1] Floyer in 1891 saw Shayib covered with snow and compared it to the Matterhorn. 'Further Routes in the Eastern Desert of Egypt,' *G.J.*, 1893.

on Gebel Asotriba (2216 m. = 7270 ft.) just inside the Sudan frontier. They thought his botanizing savoured too much of witchcraft.

To avoid further reference to these peaks, I may say that they are all easy, that they were all climbed by me during the survey of the Red Sea coast 1923–26, and that the heights given above refer to the highest points.

To continue our catalogue of the Red Sea hills, S. from Gebel Gharib we have Gebel Umm Harba, 'Mother of Spears' (1714 m. = 5623 ft.), attacked by Dr. W. F. Hume in 1898. He found it easy till he came to the two little gendarmes on the summit from which it takes its name. The red granite of Egypt weathers spheroidally—that is, it peels off in great sheets as the skin from one's nose. The rock beneath is left smooth and without handholds. The Bedouin walk on this surface with bare feet where rubbers and *Kletterschuhe* slip, and it becomes necessary for civilized man to discard footgear and follow as best he may their example. Only too often on mountains of this kind the only problem is a huge polished summit-block. So Hume found on Umm Harba in 1898, where he was defeated 50 ft. from the summit of the mountain.

South of Umm Harba comes the easy Gebel Dukhkhan (1662 m. = 5453 ft.), climbed no doubt by the ancient Romans, whose porphyry quarries lie hid in its folds. Then the unclimbed peaks of the Qattar-Umm Disi group (highest point Gebel Qattar, 1963 m. = 6440 ft.), a mass of red horns and domes, terrifying from a distance.

Next, in lat. 27°, another red granite monster, Gebel Shayib (2181 m. = 7155 ft.), the highest in Egypt. Tradition asserts that, fifty years ago, the first ascent was made by a Bedouin girl, Selima, searching for a strayed half-wit sister. Selima certainly got somewhere near to the top, for, to her great surprise, she saw palm trees in the Nile Valley 70 miles away across the desert. She must also have seen the peaks of Sinai and Arabia across the blue Red Sea. But the summit-rock may have baffled her—it gave us some trouble on April 24, 1923, when four Arabs and myself, to say nothing of a dog, conquered Shayib. Ali Kheir, a desert guide (not the same thing as a mountain guide), was the first man up.

Just S. of Shayib is Gebel Umm Anab (1766 m. = 5792 ft.), unclimbed and probably easy. Both these peaks can be reached by car in a day from the Anglo-Egyptian Oilfields at Hurghada. Southwards again, there are no mountains exceeding 5000 ft. for 80 miles till we come to the fine Hamata

group in lat. 24° 15′. The highest point, El Samak el Mulak (1978 m. = 6490 ft.), was climbed by Dr. John Ball of the Egyptian Geological Survey in 1905, who found it very easy. Some of the lesser peaks look very wild and attractive. Dr. Ball had much more trouble with Gebel Abu Hammamid (1747 m. = 5705 ft.), at the back of Hamata, and says [2]: 'The ascent, which occupied four hours, was free from difficulty till within about one hundred metres of the top, but the last portion was extremely steep, and was only negotiated with considerable trouble; it represents pretty nearly the limit of possibility in getting instruments up difficult places.' The top he found to be a ridge 1 m. wide, and there he had to bivouac for 8 days and nights before the weather cleared sufficiently for him to get his round of angles. However, Ball got used to this sort of thing, for he spent 6 days on the nasty little Gebel Fereyid, 10 on Gebel Elba, and 21 on Gebel Gerf (1419 m. = 4645 ft.). Even now his porters speak feelingly of that season.

Ball also climbed Gebel Abu Gurdi (1562 m. = 5125 ft.) to the S.—an easy mountain. It fell to me to carry on the good work.

The next group to the S., that of Gebel Faraid, contains the most remarkable peaks in Egypt. The monolith of Berenice's Bodkin (1232 m. = 4042 ft.) resembles the Aiguille du Géant, and seems unclimbable by normal methods. On one of the foothills of Pentadactylus is a remarkable flying buttress, a pure piece of Rider Haggard, which from a distance looks like a tea-cup handle. Herein those who have graduated in climbing overhangs may proceed to an honours course in looping the loop.

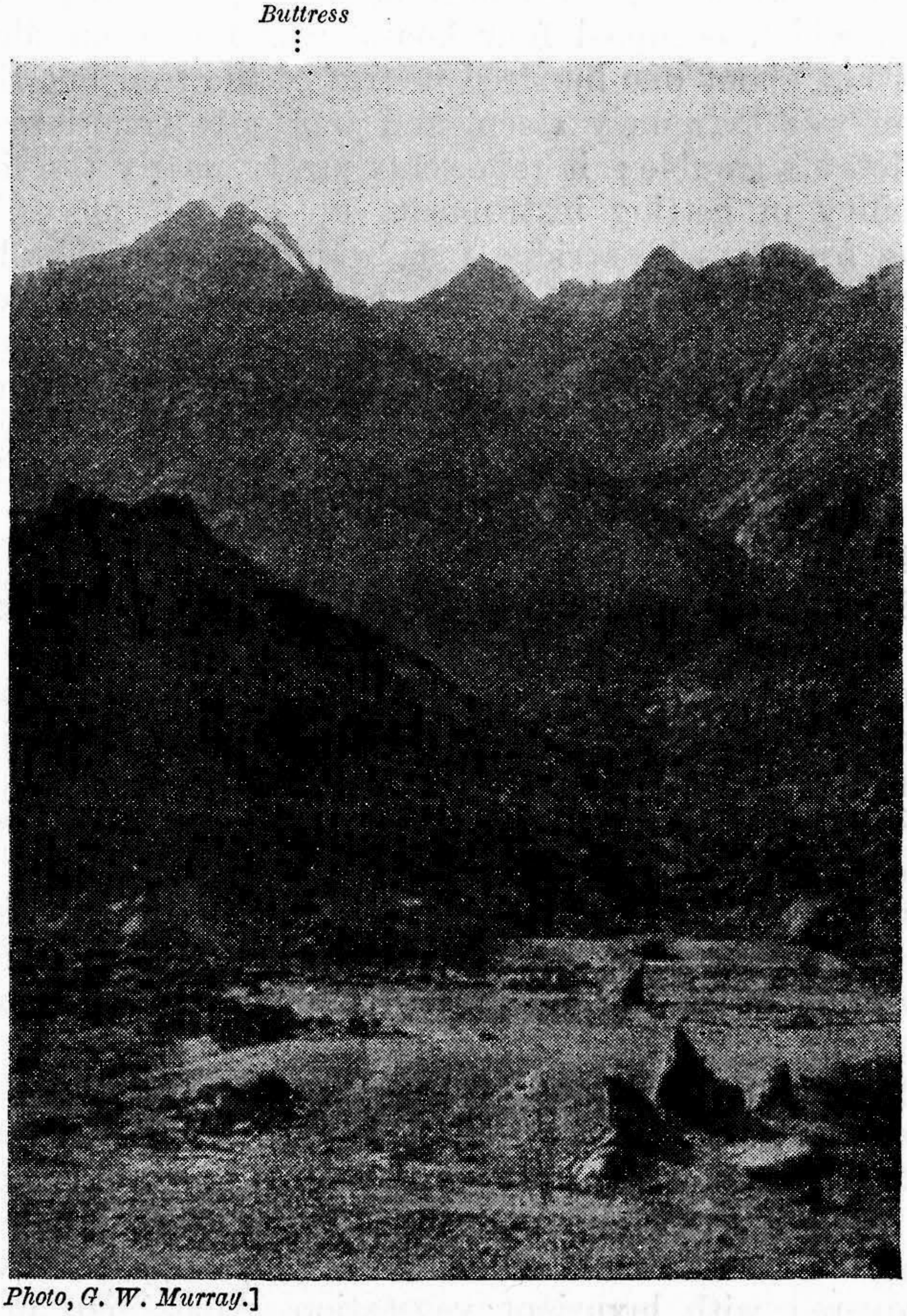
Having climbed Pentadactylus and looked at the Bodkin, we went on next season to the picturesque Elba mountains in lat. 22° on the political frontier between Egypt and the Sudan. They present a refreshing contrast to the utter desolation of the sea and desert around them. Their lower slopes and valleys are covered with luxuriant vegetation, Abyssinian in type, including the dragon's-blood tree and the quaint candelabra-shaped euphorbia.

On our first attempt at Asotriba we got lost, and ended up on the summit of some unknown lesser peak in a bitterly cold fog; but on January 12, 1926, we succeeded after bivouacking very high up round a huge fire of dead-wood. From the summit

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[2] J. Ball, *Geography and Geology of S.E. Egypt*, p. 176.

we dislodged a herd of at least fifty ibex, who stampeded thousands of feet down into the Sudan. On January 19 we climbed Gebel Shellal (1409 m. = 4623 ft.) and saw many more ibex. Both these peaks were very easy, but on January 22 we (Ali Kheir and self) were totally defeated 50 ft. from the



Photo, G. W. Murray.]

THE FLYING BUTTRESS FROM A DISTANCE.

summit of Gebel Shendodai (1529 m. = 5016 ft.), the 'Castle Hill' of the Admiralty Chart. Although we did not succeed in finding a route, the next man will probably get up and wonder why we stuck—lower down the mountain is only a walk. Gebel Hanquf, northern peak (1397 m. = 4583 ft.), gave us an hour's good climbing near the top, and it took us

2 days to find the way up Gebel Shendib (1912 m. = 6273 ft.). Of course, when found it turned out to be ridiculously easy. The peak had previously been cairned by one of Dr. Ball's guides. Elba High Peak provided us with two little gendarmes, the higher one not unlike the 'Red Gendarme' of the Petite Dent de Veisivi, but with this distinction, that all the holds were rotten. The actual summit was as sharp as the top of Cleopatra's Needle, white and stinking with bird-droppings. I felt that here I should have stood erect and balanced an ice-axe on my snout, but in real life I squatted comfortably, more like a toad than a performing dog.

This was a first ascent, since Ball had used a lesser summit for his theodolite work. There are many legends about Gebel Elba. The Bisharin relate that somewhere on the mountain are two caves from which a continual stream or spring issues, while the rocks below are green with vegetation. These they call the Nostrils of Elba, and a venturesome hunter who parked a dead ibex in one nostril while he pursued its comrades, found on his return that the mountain had sneezed the corpse to the other side of the ravine. I could find no one to lead me to the spot; but on our ascent we found an ibex, dead and dried up, swinging by the hind leg in a tree. It had missed its footing while grazing: not even ibex are infallible.

In 1929 the state of the leave roster did not permit of 'a vision of the Valais in the coming of July,' but, with some misgivings about heat, we arranged to take six weeks' leave in Sinai in May and early June.

We started [3] from Suez in a ship crammed full of Mecca pilgrims, whose muezzins called to prayer as the sun sank, and reached the quarantine port of Tor next morning. Arrangements for transport were quickly made, and we left with two soldiers, eleven baggage and two riding camels, and a 'guide' next morning, May-day, for the hills. The camels and guide cost twelve piastres (half a crown) each daily—the soldiers were supplied free. After a stifling day across the coastal plain, we camped the same evening beside running water in the gorge of Wadi Isla.

Next day we did a training walk to a conspicuous gendarme on the N. of the wadi, marked 1802 m. on the map. The walk was uninteresting, save that we passed the corpse of a sheep killed by a leopard, and ourselves killed a horned viper on the way. It was frightfully hot, and we lost weight rapidly.

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[3] On this expedition I was accompanied by my wife.

The actual summit proved to be a cracked boulder some 50 ft. high, and the base of the fissure not unlike the 'Mummery' crack. I cannot get into either unaided, so 1802 m. remains a virgin peak. A hundred yards farther on we consoled ourselves by climbing something a little higher, say 1804 m., and photographing the S. face of Gebel Umm Shomer.

On May 4 we moved up to Wadi Thebt and camped therein, rather too far from the base of Gebel Thebt, to allow our caravan to take the very difficult Hamr Pass over the main watershed next day. While they went on, we started at 5 A.M. and surmounted Gebel Thebt (2449 m. = 8035 ft.), which had not been climbed by a European since the Rev. F. W. Holland in the 'sixties of last century. The way up was easy and the view magnificent. The two dark-blue gulfs of Suez and Akaba met and merged in the broad, shining Red Sea, the highway to the Orient. Beyond on either side lay the misty mountain-tops of Egypt and Midian. Before us three [4] 'unclimbed' peaks of the watershed, two Yithmids and one Haleifia, separated us from Sabbagh [5] (2266 m. = 7423 ft.), the most southerly of the Sinai '2000-metres.'

It was real Red Sea summer weather, and we looked down into a near foreground of rusty red, tiger-striped hills, as blackbeetles tipped out on the kitchen-fire might look on hot black summits, red-hot ridges and incandescent ravines. It was impossible to believe that when Dr. W. F. Hume and H. G. Skill climbed Sabbagh (December 31, 1898) their porters suffered from frost-bite and snow-blindness.

Our way now lay down a steep buttress to the col between Gebel Thebt and the northern Gebel Yithmid. On uncoiling the rope, which we had not used on the ascent, our 'guide,' a local hunter, exclaimed scornfully 'A hundred ropes won't get you down there.' Followed by him and two Ababda porters from Egypt, my wife and I commenced the descent. The Arabs were so shy of the rope that we contented ourselves with handing each other an end now and then on the steep and easy rocks, and came down in a little over an hour, to the 'guide's' great astonishment, to the col. The rock was a good dark-red dyke rock.

The northern Yithmid looked very easy and close, but thirst drove us down the boulder-strewn gullies of Wadi

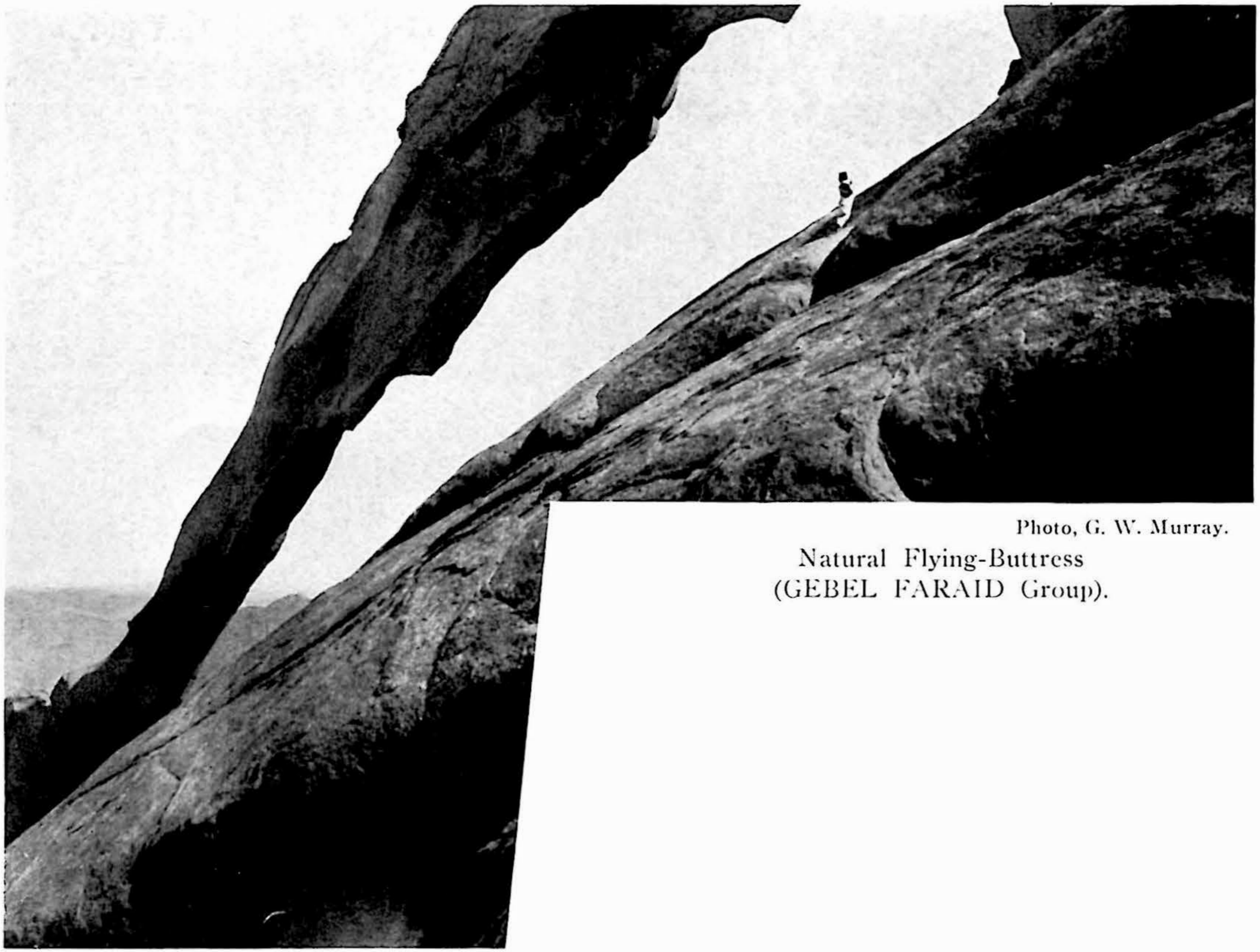
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[4] All, no doubt, have been climbed by ibex-hunters.
[5] Old maps give Sabbagh 1000 ft. too high.



Photo, G. W. Murray.

GEBEL RIMHAN.



Photo, G. W. Murray.

Natural Flying-Buttress
(GEBEL FARAID Group).

Yithmid to water at Moiyet Lulia, the 'Pearl Spring,' about 4 P.M. Here our riding camels met us, and 1½ hours later we were in camp at the junction of Wadi Yithmid and Wadi Hamr. There were fine steep mountains near the camp, but wishing to avoid red granite at all costs, we retraced on foot all those weary miles up Wadi Yithmid next day, and ascended the next col to the S. between the two Yithmid peaks with a view to bagging both.

Before starting we made two mistakes: we got rid of our 'guide,' telling him to look for ibex with my rifle, and, despising our adversary, we left our rope behind. Burdened with water-bottles, my wife and I, with one porter, Mursi Abdu, trudged for 5 hours over scree to the col. Hence up the N. arête of the southern and higher Gebel Yithmid was a nice little climb of about Egginergrat quality. It took an hour over steep and good dyke rock, but there was a nasty gully full of loose scree at the start. This route was new and declared impossible by the ibex-hunter, who said 'we always follow the S. arête.' Returning to the col at 2 P.M., we were again too thirsty to tackle the northern Yithmid. Also the soles were gone from both my rubbers, and it was a lame leader that brought his party down to the Pearl Spring at sunset. Here we found three men and three camels waiting about 150 yards above the water, and about 30 yards from a fair-sized leopard crouched under a boulder. It was a sort of inverted Zoo, because although they had not noticed him, he had been watching them all the afternoon. The hunter was said to have just gone down to the spring with my rifle. I sent the whole party after him and waited. Such waits seem long to the unarmed. But in 5 minutes a boy came back and said the hunter had gone on to camp 5 miles away. It was pretty dark now, so I said 'Good-night, pussy,' and left. (The Sinai leopard is small, and feeds chiefly on hyraxes and ibex. The Arabs often offer skins for sale, but only one has been shot by a European, so far as I know.)

Moiyet Lulia would make a good bivouac for hunters or mountaineers.

After visiting the Gulf of Akaba we returned to the Monastery of St. Catherine and walked up Gebel Katherina to see the sun rise over Arabia.

On May 20 we left for Zeytuma, and next day started for Gebel Umm Shomer. On the way we had a magnificent view of the unclimbed Gebel Rimhan, the third mountain in Sinai (2452 m. = 8045 ft.). Arrived at the col N. of Umm Shomer,

where there is a good spring, we put down loads for a bivouac. This col is about 7000 ft., so we hoped for a cool night.

The same morning, avoiding the usual way up the big central gully, we started a new route up the obvious right-hand couloir (partly filled with snow in the plate, taken in 1921), and at the point where the snow ends, attempted to climb up on to the W. arête. This attempt failed, and we returned to our gully and became involved in a struggle with a chockstone. This was a real 'severe,' and I surrendered the lead to Mursi Abdu, whose prehensile toes helped him over the difficulty. After this we were soon on top and admiring the names of the earliest known conquerors, 'T. E. Yorke, T. J. Prout, 1862,' cut on the riven boulder which is the summit. Long ago, in 1816, Burckhardt turned back from the saddle between the two summits though he had just climbed a more difficult step on Gebel Serbal. Thence we crossed to the lower E. summit, had great fun climbing all the various boulders to its top, descending by a new but not difficult route to the central gully. And so to bed. The four summits shown in the plate watched over us, and for want of local names we called them Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Next day we essayed the conquest of the two aiguilles, Matthew and Mark, which guard Umm Shomer on the E. Scrambling up a great gully, filled with snow, we reached the top of Matthew without great trouble, and descended into the couloir between the two. Thence to the secondary summit of Mark was easy, but between it and the top was a sheer smooth drop ; progress seemed blocked by a boulder, whose top it would be necessary to lassoo. Beyond that again the way lay easy to the summit. We gave this best, and, returning to the couloir between the two aiguilles, attempted another route which soon became too steep. Finally, in a furious temper, we abandoned Mark and attempted to descend the couloir just mentioned. This too we found impossible, and we were obliged to retrace our footsteps to the summit of Matthew and down the 'snow-filled' gully by which we had come up. We then picked up our bivouac, and with heavy hearts made our way over the ridge of Abu Shagara to our main camp at Zeytuna.

Our next Sinai mountain was Gebel Abu Qadis [6] (1981 m. = 6499 ft.), an eastern outlier of the Serbal range and first climbed on February 25, 1894, by Mr. E. N. Buxton and the Misses H. M. and T. Buxton. On May 26 we traversed it from E. to

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[6] Beidat Takha on the old Ordnance Survey map.

W., and found it easy, except for one awkward step with small holds on the way down. Probably this could be avoided—new-comers' routes can usually be improved upon—and we were all fresh to the mountain. From the top we saw the whole S. face of Serbal sloping gently down till it fell, at the last steeply, into the Wadi Sigillya. It seemed an anti-climax after our view of the magnificent northern façade. We went on to the Wadi Aleyat, and on May 29 ascended it by the usual route over awkward scree, and came down the same way. Next day, May 30, we went up again by a more direct route with only one awkward step, and met three Greek monks from the Monastery of St. Catherine, about half an hour below the top. They had come up the usual way, and though two rested at the little spring beside the almond tree, the *οἰκονόμος* continued with us to the summit. Here we shivered in an icy breeze, a complete change from the lower slopes. We returned and lunched at the almond tree, which would make an excellent bivouac for anyone shooting or climbing in the Serbal range. All the main peaks are easy, but there are plenty of attractive-looking minor needles and new routes. As to ibex, it is at the moment a reserve; and judging solely from a short visit, these creatures are far scarcer here than in the Red Sea Province of the Sudan.

We returned by a more direct gully with a notable white-stained waterfall (dry) on its E. side: though the priests made rather heavy weather of this, it is far the quickest way of ascending and descending the mountain.

Our Sinai holiday continued with a visit to the abandoned turquoise mines of Maghara, and my fourth ascent of Gebel Ateirtir el Dahami, which frowns above them. It ended with a visit to the temple of Sarabit el Khadim, and two scrambles on the very rotten sandstone of Gebel Umm Riglein (S. peak, June 6; N. peak, June 8). The Rev. F. W. Holland's initials were carved on the northern summit.

So we left Sinai with three 'first ascents for Europeans,' the S. peak of Yithmid, 'Matthew' the easternmost needle of Umm Shomer, and Gebel Abu Qadis. Our routes were really new in the descent of Gebel Thebt by the S. arête, the ascent of Gebel Yithmid (S. peak) by the N. arête, and the W. couloir on Umm Shomer. The weather was too hot for strenuous climbing: in winter we should have done much more.