

THE HIGH ATLAS AND MARRAKECH : A NOTE.

THERE are no records in our JOURNAL of any visits to the High Atlas between the years of 1875 and 1928. In Vol. 6 we have the account of a journey taken by Messrs. Hooker, John Ball and Maw : theirs was primarily a botanical expedition, with some little climbing thrown in. In Vol. 14 we have a note by Mr. Freshfield on 'Algerian Mountains,' while in Vol. 13 there is a note by the same mountaineer on an ascent in that region. In Vol. 40 we have the mountaineering exploits of MM. Jacques de Lépiney and André Stofer, made in the month of September, when to quote the former : 'a burning wind is whirling the desert dust in all directions.' At first I wondered if this neglect on the part of our members to visit this fascinating country, offering as it does a new field for rock climbs, may not have been due to the desert dust which greeted Lépiney and his companion. I carefully studied Hooker and Ball but as no mention is made of dust storms, I came to the conclusion that there must be some other tangible reason—possibly political.

In Hooker and Ball's day, the country was under the domination of the Sultan of Morocco, when the traditional policy of his government was hostile to the admission of strangers. The native population was fanatical and, as a still more serious obstacle, the greater part of the country was inhabited by independent tribes, descendants of the original Berber population which has never been subjugated by any foreign ruler.

The Hooker and Ball expedition was granted a special permit through the intervention of our Foreign Office, and although it came under the direct protection of the Sultan, Ball tells us that there existed an organized plan on the part of the escort, in concert with the native chiefs, to prevent the party from accomplishing their intention of penetrating into the interior. The opposition met with by Hooker and Ball was due, I should imagine from the story, to the requisitions of their escort, who expected to be fed, free of cost, by the poverty-stricken villagers, and, but for Hooker's determination, the expedition would have ended in total failure.

To-day under the French Protectorate, although the authorities have not yet pacified the whole country, the disturbed districts are known and the traveller is very liable to be confronted, as we were on the Col de Tichka, 2200 m. with a 10-ft. notice board :

' LIMITE DE LA ZONE DE SÉCURITÉ '

117 K.M. ← Marrakech → Telouet 27 K.M.

I was there with my brother Arthur in the early spring of 1929. We were plant-hunting and made no effort to climb, but with mules effected several excursions to the upper regions. I feel that the



Photo, G. P. Baker.

ASIF MISANE above ASNI, looking towards TOLBKAL.

following rough notes, with words of caution on matters of *com-misariat*, may be of use and an incentive to others to visit a country which although practically off the list of mountain ranges feasible for climbers, is nevertheless of quite easy access from London.

For the High Atlas, Marrakech, the capital, must be the main objective. It is within five days of London, and accessible by several routes : by rail through Spain to Algeciras, thence by ferry-steamer to Tangiers, and on by rail or car to Rabat, Casablanca, and thence to Marrakech ; or by steamer from Bordeaux, or Marseilles to Casablanca. Three very fair motor roads radiate from Marrakech into the hills ; the one leading S.E. towards Telouet crosses the watershed on the Col de Tichka at a distance of 117 kilometres. The second, due S., takes one to the Berber village of Asni, 56 kilometres distant, a starting-point by mule for the higher regions. The third leads in a S.W. direction through Amismiz, 62 kilometres, whence by a series of picturesque valleys one may continue by car to Goundofa and, I believe, beyond to Taroudant.

Anyone destined for the hills should on arrival in Marrakech visit the headquarters of the 'Syndicat d'Initiative et de Tourisme' which controls the refuge huts in the mountains. The clerk in charge will tell you if the huts are in occupation, will engage mules when available, will provide you with guides and an Arab interpreter, and, I have no doubt, if need be, a cook. For a nominal fee, blankets are also supplied from headquarters. The traveller will be cautioned that although the Syndicat provides him with mules, interpreters and sleeping quarters, all outfit for camp life, even to cooking utensils, primus stove, washing tub, plates and drinking vessels, must be taken by the traveller.

Marrakech has a fairly large European population with shops where provisions of all kinds are available at reasonable prices.

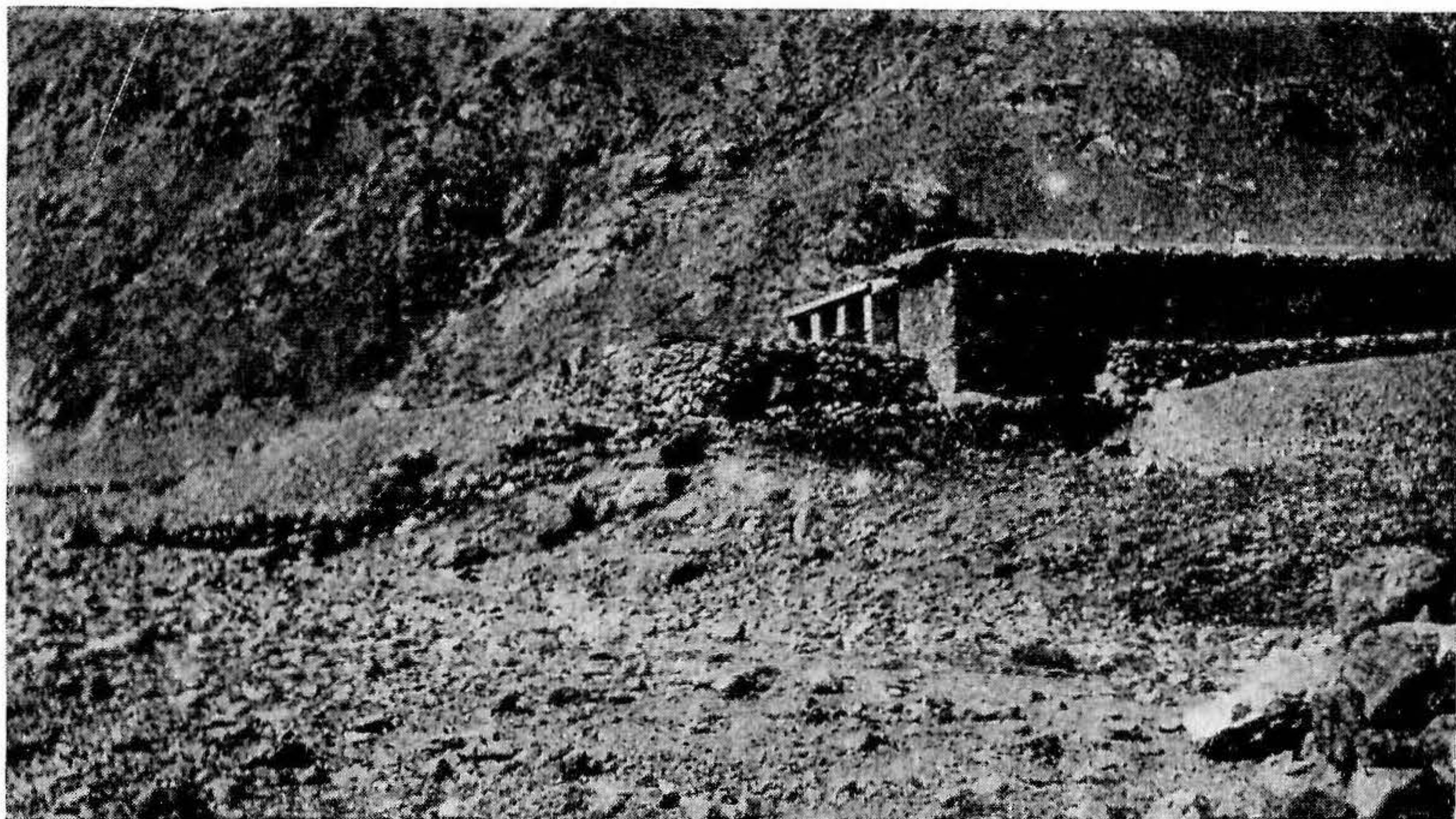
The Syndicat points out that the villages in the hills are all too poor, and must not on any account be depended upon for food. The Syndicat controls some five or six huts dotted about at altitudes of 7000-9000 ft. and at intervals of 6 to 7 hrs. distance from each other, and so situated that in the course of 10 to 15 days a good deal can be seen of the hill country.

These huts are very superior, strongly built, stone and cement buildings, each room provided with spring bedsteads, fibre mattresses and green canvas pillows. A party of six or eight can be accommodated easily.

By arrangement with the French proprietor of the *auberge* at Asni, we were provided with plates, but this cannot always be depended upon. In the higher altitudes it is imperative to have a primus stove, and oil for fuel is very scarce. I wish also to emphasize the importance of taking a pair of old stirrups with their straps, or else some rope to serve the same purpose. The muleteers do not supply stirrups : I found riding a whole day in heavy Alpine

boots without stirrups very tiring and painful. Asni is known at Marrakech as the Chamonix of Morocco. We stopped at a typical French *auberge* which with its comforts may be worthy of its reputation, but its surroundings hardly deserve the above compliment.

Here it was we found our mules according to plan and started thence for the hills towards Arround. Mounting rapidly we reached the refuge situated at 1900 m., situated on what looked like a



Photo, G. P. Baker.]

CLUB HUT AT ARROUND.

moraine in the bed of the valley. Arround makes a good centre for climbers and is especially interesting for the plant hunter.

We were in the Tachdirt refuge, 2500 m., a fortnight after Easter. The snow had not melted at this altitude on the northern slopes. Here it was we met an enemy, something like Jacques de Lépiney's 'burning wind, whirling the desert dust in all directions.' It was no sirocco or desert dust which struck us, but at times what seemed to be stones and pellets came upon one, seemingly whirling from all directions, with a peculiar burning sting as each pellet struck. At times we had to hold on to the rocks to prevent being blown over. One of the muleteers was blown off his feet but fortunately the slope below the mule path was not precipitous. The storm sprang up during the night, and when early morning dawned Bentley Beetham, A.C., and his companion Mr. Thomson appeared at the refuge.¹ They were blown out of their camp at a higher altitude. I observed on this occasion that the snow slopes on the opposite side of the valley were quite discoloured with the displaced sand.

¹ Mr. Beetham has, we understand, made the ascent of several of the High Atlas peaks.—*Editor.*

There are no published maps of the High Atlas ; the Syndicat, however, supplies sketch maps ² which for the moment must suffice, pending the completion of an authentic map now in preparation by the Moroccan Geographical service.

Morocco is an immense country of open rolling downs, almost treeless, but in full cultivation with cereals of all kinds. In early spring the green of these stretches is of a brilliancy never seen elsewhere by me. This to my mind is one of the chief characteristics of the landscape of the country. We travelled by motor-car from Tangiers to Marrakech *via* Rabat and Casablanca on excellent roads, many of them straight as an arrow for miles, at the cost of 3 fcs. per kilometre. In places on each side of this highway we were struck by the wealth of colours from the 'herbaceous borders' of uncommon plants.

The hotel season in Morocco is a short one, for on May 1, the modern tourist hotels, many of them belonging to the Cie. Générale Trans-Atlantique, are accustomed to close. This should not deter climbers, for commercial hotels and private lodging-houses are always available. We were at Marrakech at Eastertide, which I consider the best time of the year for visiting the hills, though the climber may find it too early.

One word of caution is necessary. There are parts of the country not fully under control. The authorities, through our consuls, should be consulted and their advice sought for and followed. In the country we found the peasants' attitude always respectful ; as they passed us on the road their salutation was the Roman one, of an open hand raised above the shoulder. All seemed happy, but many were in rags. The wretched condition of the Jews in the villages of the foothills struck us very forcibly. Those of Asni inhabit the side of the village ; and as we entered the heaps of rubbish from their houses on the slope of the hill were covered with flies and gave off offensive smells.

The children suffered from eye diseases. They appear to be just tolerated by the Berbers who, while healthier in appearance, are still very degenerate and poverty-stricken.

To anyone interested in the colour and glamour of Oriental peoples, Marrakech appears to the traveller in this respect as the most captivating of all Moroccan cities. It is said to have six miles of city walls, 30 ft. high, of *tappia* work, with eleven gates, the whole of a reddish-rose colour. It lies 30 miles N. of Asni, the so-called Chamonix of the upper regions, on the N. side of an extensive

² Carte-esquisse orographique des Massifs de L'Inghemar, du Likoumt, du Toubkal et de l'Ouenkrime, 1 : 40,000. By J. de Lépiney, L. Neltner and A. Stofer. 1930. A portion of this map appeared in *A.J.* 40.—*Editor.*

palm-tree area, well irrigated with running water. Its population is somewhere near 150,000.

Within the city walls are its Souks, or Bazaars, which, while interesting, are dirty and evil-smelling. It is amongst its buildings of mosques, koutoubia, palaces and kasbas, that many vestiges of former Moghreb dynasties make the city so interesting to the traveller. But perhaps even more attractive are the strange diversities to be seen among its citizens.

On a fair day in the large square in the heart of the city, one may spend hours watching the motley crowd of strange peoples. Here are assembled the Arabs or Berbers of the country proper, the Touaregs of the Sahara, Moors of the sea coast, negroes from the Soudan or Timbuctoo, the Sous of the hills, Jews from all parts—relics of those driven out of Spain in the fifteenth century.

Here one gets a biblical movement of colour in the outfit and costumes of the crowd. Rubbing shoulder to shoulder you see the storyteller haranguing a crowd squatting on the ground, or a snake charmer attracting another group. Jugglers, wrestlers, some singing, some laughing, some playing in monotone rhythm on cymbals and tambourines. Each plying his stock-in-trade in some way or other and, in doing it, collecting the coppers from the crowd. Occasionally some European passes in a motor-car to complete the picture of strange contrasts.

G. P. BAKER.

OCCURRENCE OF MANGANESE NEAR VAL D'ISÈRE, SAVOY.

I VENTURE to think it will interest some readers of this JOURNAL if I record a few of my observations on the occurrence of a mineral containing manganese, in the region of Val d'Isère.

Before commencing my narration, I wish to state that my attention has been called to a very exhaustive geological treatise, dated 1923, under the title (in English) of *Iron and Manganese in Switzerland*. A perusal of this work makes it clear that the ores of the metal manganese are to be found in some quantity, in five or six localities—in the Jura, in the region of Schaffhausen, and in two or three parts of East Switzerland. I have not, so far, come across any similar work, or article, dealing with the occurrence of this metal in other parts of the chain of the Alps. Without doubt other spots will be well known locally. In my own experience of periodic wandering during upwards of fifty years from the Ligurian Alps to the Dolomites, I have only once, before the find under consideration, come across this metal in any quantity. That was near the Mediterranean coast.

The story of my find is quickly told. In July 1929 I was at Tignes with two young friends. Towards the end of our stay I