

CLIMBS IN THE CAUCASUS.

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'The power of attaching an interest to the most trifling or painful pursuits is one of the greatest happinesses of our nature.'—HAZLITT.

LAST year the Alpine Club was exhorted with all the weight of presidential authority to go to the Caucasus. It did not go. Do not think that I am about to repeat the invitation. Since I have been there again myself, since I have found how feasible, how delightful, and how healthful it is for hardy mountaineers to go for a two months' holiday to this new Playground, I feel, for my part, in no hurry to extend a general invitation to our own Unemployed, much less to the Alpine Clubs of Europe. Those bodies number over 50,000 members; they distribute an annual income of at least 20,000*l.* They do much for physical and historical research and cartography, something, I hope, to promote providence among guides; but they expend a large balance on what our neighbours, with their usual happiness, have termed 'the vulgarisation of summits.' By multiplying facilities for sleeping high and overcoming difficulties they succeed in bringing the noblest peaks within the reach of the meanest capacities, in filling the once peaceful solitudes of the High Alps with quarrelsome cockneys from all the capitals of Europe.

I can have no wish to subject the Caucasus to these, as I am old-fashioned enough to hold, malign influences. I like to think of those great far-away peaks waiting for their conquerors in their ancient tranquillity, solitary, unknown, almost nameless. I like to dream of glacier recesses which no eyes but the mountain goat's have ever seen, of 'star-neighbouring crests,' which since Æschylus wrote have had no new or nearer neighbours, of wide splendid landscapes which no tourist has ever gaped over, no handbook-maker has ever catalogued, no wordpainter has ever besmeared.

I have said that it is possible for hardy travellers to enjoy mountaineering in the Caucasus, and that is the honest conviction of a man who is not very robust or very young. I do not desire to ignore the other side. M. de Déchy thinks more of the difficulties; so he tells me do two young Germans whom I met at Kutais and who astonished that quiet town by starting in full Caucasian costume, bristling with weapons, for the mountains. One of these Doctors—M. de

Déchy adds—has since his return suffered from the hardships of Caucasian travel. I can easily believe it. Certainly the 'Times' was very far from the fact when it represented the Caucasus as offering to travellers the facilities of the Alps thirty years ago. It does not offer even the facilities of the Alps two hundred years ago, when Evelyn crossed them. For he found an innkeeper to quarrel with at Simplon, and an innkeeper's daughter to turn out of bed at Bouveret, with what disastrous result his Diary tells. In the mountains between Vladikafkaz Kislovodsk and Kutais there is not an inn or a bed to be found. A store of provisions must be taken, or the traveller may expect to go supperless as well as bedless, while he waits for the mutton which is still walking the mountains, or the loaves that are being baked in a distant hamlet. Travel, in short, is difficult, as Syrian travel is difficult, to those who depend entirely on the resources of the country. A Caucasian journey requires for its success a good deal of forethought, some sense of topography, and occasional energy and persistence. The mountaineer must depend more on his own judgment and less on his guides than in the Alps. He must not expect too much from others, but must be prepared in camp as well as on the mountains to bear his own share of hard work and responsibility. I have said enough probably to prevent a rush to the new Playground. I gladly leave generalities. My readers will frame their own conclusions from the story I am about to tell of my adventures above the snow-line. I will only ask them to note particularly two facts. In throwing *twice* over the main chain, once by an unknown pass, a heavy camp equipage we deliberately faced and overcame difficulties which need not necessarily be encountered. Again I arrived at Kutais on a Thursday night without having engaged either interpreter or horses. On the following Monday afternoon I was in Free Suanetia.

Urusbieh and the Adyrsu Pass.

The stars were shining brightly in a clear sky as on the night of July 23 last a solitary horseman pushed his weary animal up the track that mounts the valley of the Baksan. The moon was hidden behind the steep mountain-side, and the path where it crossed the rough bed of some stream was hard to trace, so that he was frequently forced to dismount. From time to time the dim shape and high bonnet of a Tartar horseman would loom in the darkness and disappear again with a grunt of passing salutation. The moon presently shone out on the shallows of the river, and the fires

of isolated farms gleamed on the farther side of the valley. Then the tramp of baggage horses and the voices of a considerable company rose above the sound of the torrent, and brought back the rider from memories of old days and comrades to the fatigues and discontents of the passing hour.

It was past 11 P.M. when our caravan dismounted to cross the bridge over the Baksan, and, scrambling over the scattered streams of the Kirtik, entered the village of Urusbieh (5,136 feet: R.S.). Considering the hour, we were speedily housed in the old guesthouse, which is not unlike a country cricketing shed. It was dilapidated but otherwise unchanged since I last lodged here nineteen years before.

It is, for obvious reasons, easy to get up in the Caucasus; and next morning I was out early. Dongussorun raised its broad snowy front against a cloudless sky at the head of the valley. I wandered up the steep hillside by the Kirtik path. Fine views opened through the Adyrsu opposite to the snows of the main chain. A noble cluster of pyramidal peaks, the highest of which is 13,314 feet, rose close at hand. They form the end of the range separating the Adyrsu and Adylsu glens, southern branches of the Baksan. Hard by were a small waterfall and a cluster of earth-pinnacles. The air was bright and dry, and the fatigues of the long journey from Vienna and the thirty-mile ride up from Atashkutan fell off from my limbs as if by magic. The villagers were collected in groups round the Kirtik bridge when I returned. An elderly Tartar stepped forward, grasped me warmly by the hand, and said amid general applause, 'Mingi-Tau, karasho.' His memory for faces was better than mine, but I rightly guessed him to be one of our Elbruz porters in 1868, glad to recall a fact the village has probably heard a good deal of in the last twenty years.

Later in the day the village blacksmith distinguished himself by welding on the head of a moveable ice-axe with great success. Meantime M. de Déchy, on whom in my ignorance of Russian the tiresome negotiations for transport necessarily devolved, was occupied in elaborate arrangements for the transport of our goods across the chain into Suanetia. The Tartars naturally wanted us to take one of the easier passes, the Dongussorun (the Nakra of my 'Central Caucasus') or the Betsho Pass. We were determined to try the Adyrsu. A very reasonable compromise was finally effected. Two donkey-loads of goods were sent across the Betsho Pass. Six porters consented to carry what remained over to Mestia by the Adyrsu. This conclusion was only

reached after a day's discussion. Early next morning the wrangle began again; this time it was the exact adjustment of the loads that was in question. A very argumentative Tartar produced scales, and weighed each man's pack with aggravating care. At last about noon, after an extra porter had been conceded, we were off. Steep zigzags brought us into the Adyrsu valley, and then for several hours we followed the foaming glacier stream through beautiful pine-woods overhung by snowy peaks from the hollows between which streamed frequent glaciers. The spurs of the main chain here are, like those of the Pennines, of great height. In the ridge E. of the Adyrsu, between it and the W. glen of Chegem, there are three summits of 13,584, 13,972, and 14,273 feet respectively; * the glaciers are extensive and the passes at their heads high. Both peaks and passes are, however, less steep than is usual in the Caucasus.

Grove has described the lower part of the Adyrsu in detail. After a steady ascent we reached a brow—not an old moraine but a natural spur—beyond which a broad level, devastated or choked with rubbish by the torrent, spread between steep hillsides fringed with pines and birch. At its further end, on the slope close to the glacier, rose the smoke of a shepherd's *kosh*, where our porters proposed to spend the night.

Here we pitched our tents in a grove of stunted birch trees. It was a pleasant situation. The evening was fine and we had time to enjoy it. The peak seen from Urusbieh stood due S., a broad wall with glaciers streaming from either flank. A bolder summit rose to the right; another glacier offering a noble pass to the Adyrsu, an expedition I recommended nineteen years ago and which remains unmade, lay at its northern base. There was a glacier exactly opposite offering a corresponding pass—part of the High Level Route of the future—to the Basilsu or western Chegem valley. M. de Déchy took many photographs of our camp and the surrounding scenery. Our Tartars, who once out of the village proved thoroughly good fellows, came and grouped themselves with great readiness, and then formed a circle round the shepherds' fire. As usual in the Caucasus there was no hut corresponding to the Alpine chalet. A low wall, a few sticks, and sheepskin cloaks sufficed for shelter. The sunset was glorious. The supper

* The figures are communicated to me from unpublished measurements of the Russian Staff by the courtesy of General Shdanow.

was satisfactory. The *kaimak* or Devonshire cream mixed with marmalade was more than good: much too good for the guides, who were all more or less ill next day. It is no use trying to feed Alpine peasants on preserved meats or delicacies. They swallow without discrimination; they will devour a *pâté* with the remark, 'On peut le manger.' Soups—the simplest kind made in Germany—and cold mutton are the diet that agrees best with them. In the second part of my tour I made my men much happier by always having mutton in cut.

We slept so well that the first sound we heard was the good-humoured 'Pajom; skorei' of the porters. 'Pack up; be off,' I believe, it may be roughly translated.

By 5 A.M. we were on the march straight up the glacier on whose verge we had camped. It would have been shorter to follow the grass-slopes on its right bank, and by camping on the top of this grass-slope active travellers may reach Mestia in one day from the northern side of the chain. M. de Déchy and I walked ahead up the gently rising ice, passing a fine waterfall which bursts from an upper snow plateau W. of the peak which, as it dominates the whole valley, I shall call the Adyrsu Tau. From this plateau there is undoubtedly a pass to Mestia more direct than that we crossed. Our porters had a tradition of it, and I fancy a name for it, 'Gorvatsh Tau.' Tau is used at Urusbieh for a mountain crest, including both peaks and passes—just as *Tauern* is in central Tyrol.

'The porters are asking how the grey old man will get over the mountain?' said M. de Déchy. I replied nothing, but presently when we came to slippery snow-slopes and a chimney between ice and rock I gave a practical answer which more than satisfied all my companions that I could still walk uphill at a fair pace. On the highest rocks (marked by a small stoneman) on the verge of the vast upper snow-field I waited for the caravan and enjoyed the wide panorama of strange snows. The two peaks of Elbruz already loomed high above the intervening crests. We were in the centre of a wide basin of shining glaciers. Our pass lay S.W., so that here we bent back from the general S.E. direction of the glacier we had ascended.

If the snow had been good the walk on to the Col would have been nothing. But last year the snow never was good in the Caucasus, probably owing to the very heavy falls in the late spring. We sank in over our ankles all the way. The heavily-laden porters ploughed along manfully. The



DÉCHY *Phot.*

A SPUR OF THE CAUCASUS.
RANGE SOUTH OF THE GVALDA GLACIER, FROM THE ADYR TAU PASS.

last slope was steep, but the névé was little crevassed. The Col was broad and we walked several hundred yards beyond it to the edge of the descent before halting.*

The view to the south and west was astonishing. The topography of the ranges roughly resembled that of the Savoy side of the Col du Géant. We were face to face with a great spur, answering to the Chamonix Aiguilles, which enclosed the basin of an enormous glacier. This secondary chain was higher than the watershed, extraordinarily steep, in part covered with hanging glaciers, in part cased in delicately fluted sheets of snow. It ended to the W. in a bold rockpeak, beyond which showed in the distance the long icy rampart of the Leila range. As we descended, avoiding ice-falls by steep beds of avalanche snow, Tetnuld and Gestola raised their snowy horns over a broad white gap leading apparently to the Thuber Glacier. When we gained the main and comparatively level glacier Ushba came into view for the first time. Its two huge massive peaks, too steep for any snow-field to rest on, towered high over the nearer crest of the mountain that has been called Little Ushba. The glacier was of great size, and abounded in icetables and all the features of Swiss icefields. The shelves on the steep crags to the N. were quite green, a pasturage for mountain goats, for which our porters kept a keen lookout. A broad icefall poured down from the main chain on our right, leading no doubt to the Gorvatsh Pass. Another great glacier, flowing from a basin at least as large as that of the Talèfre, met ours. At its head is a pass from the Adylsu known to the natives.

Above the junction we left the ice for slopes covered with dwarf white rhododendrons still in bloom and a hundred flowers—yellow poppies, white anemones, forget-me-nots, and many strange species. At the angle where the united streams turned to flow nearly due south through a steep-sided trench we found traces of a hunter's sleeping-place, but still there was no kind of path. The porters thought they saw wild-goats, and did a little stalking with no result. The rocks became too steep and we had to return to the ice, or rather to the moraine, which was of the exasperating

* The height by mercurial barometer is about 12,200 feet. A pass at the head of the Adylsu is marked among the heights sent me by General Shdanow, 'Mestia Pass, 12,012 feet.' I have not been able to satisfy myself as yet whether it is identical with our Col or the Gorvatsh Tau.

character of moraines in all countries. I did not leave the ice again soon enough, and had a horrid scramble across a very steep gritty slope, rewarded at last by reaching a bank of brushwood and flowers, down which a little track meandered. Here were the first wild roses, the tall yellow Caucasian lily, and a variety of beautiful blossoms I wish I could name.* Our track was interrupted by a deep gorge down which poured a stream from a hidden glacier on the left. To avoid a climb and circuit we returned to the main glacier and thus regained the path beyond the side glen. The end of our great icestream was at last in view. The sun was already setting. I ran along the path through the first thickets; after half a mile I came on the first spot suitable for a camp, where an old moraine now overgrown and several hundred feet above the ice formed between itself and the slope a convenient dell. Water was at hand, and with darkness so near we were glad to pitch at once the Whympers' tents and light our fire. The porters cut several armfuls of bushes and grass, strewed them on the ground, wrapped themselves in their *bourcas*, and fell in a heap. We cooked a good meal and made ourselves comfortable for the night with rugs and air cushions. I was awakened before dawn by a sharp pattering on the canvas; a heavy shower was falling, and the porters had withdrawn to a neighbouring pinegrove where a bright fire threw a picturesque gleam between the dark trees.

The morning was fine, and Ushba was magnificently seen at the head of a side valley filled by another great glacier, which had in comparatively recent times met ours at the junction of two valleys. It now descended nearly to the junction and terminated some 200 feet lower than the Gvalda Glacier. This further descent is attributable not to its larger mass but to the greater steepness of its course, which gives the ice a higher velocity—if velocity is the right word to use of a glacier. This glacier—the Ushba Glacier I propose to call it—is fed from two great reservoirs; one lies between Little Ushba, the N. peak of Ushba, and the peak (Gulba) I subsequently climbed; the other feeder flows from the main chain N. of Little Ushba. The pass at its head leading to the Shichildi Glacier is known to the natives, but is said to be difficult. It does not look so. The

* Botanists may be referred to Dr. Radde's 'Vier Vorträge über den Kaukasus,' in *Ergänzungsheft No. 36 of Petermann's Mitteilungen*. See also Dr. Radde's lists reprinted in my *Central Caucasus*, pp. 502–9.

glaciers end at a height little over 5,500 feet, and are, I believe, the lowest in the Caucasus.

A short run brought us to the water, and then a level path led through copses rich in wild roses and ripe strawberries amidst scenery that softened as we advanced. Near the first cluster of houses, surrounding a ruined tower, we learnt that a bridge was broken, and we must remain on the left bank. This was fortunate, for we were led across sloping hay meadows fringed with copses and broken by deep dells in which grew gigantic weeds and flowers. The peaks of Ushba, seldom out of sight in Suanetia, appeared again over the lower heights, and the long line of glaciers of the Leila chain made a fine background to the seventy white towers of Mestia (4,600 feet: Déchy), which rose among fruit-trees and barleyfields beyond the broad bed of the torrent, just above its junction with the stream from the Mushalaliz.

'Savage Suanetia,' the title of Mr. Phillipps-Wolley's recent book, although in one sense appropriate, is, so far as nature is concerned, singularly unhappy. Smiling—sylvan; such are the epithets that come naturally to the traveller's lips as he suddenly emerges from the icy recesses of the Caucasus into a region of wooded hills, gentle slopes, sunny meadows, and neatly-fenced barleyfields. Compared to the warrens or stoneheaps which serve the Tartars of the northern valleys for dwellings, even the towered villages have at a distance a false air of civilisation. North of the chain the traveller is frequently reminded of the sterner valleys of the Pennine Alps, or even of Dauphiné. Here the hillshapes recall Savoy—Contamines and Mégève; the forests show softer and more varied foliage than we are accustomed to in the High Alps; the pines—and what pines!—no longer predominate, but appear as dark cones of shadow amidst the fresh green of early summer, of beeches and alders, of copses that a few weeks earlier must have been ablaze and fragrant with blossom. Suanetia in June, in the flowertime of the rhododendrons and the azaleas, and again in October, when the azalea leaves are red and the birches golden against fresh autumn snows, must be one of the wonders of the world. But at all seasons its prospects will please wanderers with any feeling for noble mountain scenery.

Spaciousness, sunniness, variety are the constant qualities of Suanetian landscapes. The great basin of the Ingur, forty miles long by ten to fifteen broad, is broken by no ridges that approach the snow-line, and the long undulating

grassy or forested spurs that divide the glens, in place of narrowing the horizon, furnish in their soft lines the most effective contrast possible to the icy peaks and rigid precipices of Shkara and Tetnuld, of Ushba and the Leila. From the varied beauty of forests and flowers the eyes are carried at once to the pure glaciers, which hang like silver stairs on the green slopes of the snowy chain. The atmosphere has none of the harshness of that of Switzerland in summer. The breezes from the Black Sea bring up showers and moisture to soften the outlines and colour the distances; the wind from the Steppe suffuses the air with an impalpable haze, through which the great peaks glimmer like golden pillars of the dawn.

Ascent of Gulba.

I must refer to my Diary for the details of our stay at Mestia, and ride to Betsho * (4,200 feet: Déchy).

On the first day of our stay there the weather was unsettled, and M. de Déchy was disposed to attend to his photographic apparatus and other details. Accordingly I started at 5 A.M. with Michel Dévouassoud and François's nephew for an excursion towards Ushba. It is an hour's walk across meadows to Mazer, where the Gul glen, which leads straight up to the small glacier flowing from the S.E. base of Ushba, falls into the main valley. We tried a short cut at the angle, with the result usual in Suanetia; we got into an impenetrable thicket of hazels and azaleas. After this we boldly asked our way at the first cottage to the 'lednik' (Russian for glacier), and to our great surprise were understood and pointed out the track. There is a good horsepath right up to the glacier, and the Russian officer at Betsho sends up in summer sometimes for a load of ice. We mounted slowly through a fir forest, then across a flowery pasturage. The clouds played in and out between the two great peaks. Towards noon they lifted. By this time we were level with the middle region of the glacier, and it became necessary to decide how far our reconnaissance should be pushed. Since the weather now promised a few fine hours, I set my mind on gaining the top of the rockpeak opposite Ushba, at the E. end of the semicircle of crags that surround the head of the Gul Glacier. Here it was only the footstool of Ushba, but anywhere else it might have passed for a respectable peak.

The glacier pours down in a short icefall from the recess

* See p. 358.

between this summit—Gulba, I propose to name it—and the two great towers. Now we were at their very base they did not look so appalling as might have been expected—not worse than the Cimon della Pala, and certainly not so formidable as the Meije. The long snow-slope between the summits might be found in a perfectly safe and easy condition, and in that case difficulty would not begin till near its head, where there is a curtain, like the Tschierva Sattel on a larger scale, connecting the two peaks. The rocks of the S.W. peak are tough at the top, and probably cannot be climbed from the gap between the peaks. They should be taken lower down. The N.E. peak is easy, when the line of cliffs that runs round it some 300 to 600 feet below the summit has been passed. It is probably the higher, but by a very few feet. Under favourable conditions, starting from a bivouac near the foot of the glacier, I should expect to succeed in the ascent.

The conditions in which we found the mountain were the reverse of favourable. I have never in the Alps heard a glacier keep up for several hours a perpetual hissing. In the warm midday sunshine the whole upper slopes were peeling of their surface snow. It was not falling in masses, but gliding gently downwards with a soft ominous sound. When by climbing some broken banks of rocks we had reached the level of the top of the icefall we found it all we could do to plough up the first slopes of névé; the snow gave way at every step under our feet. The rocks close at hand were steep, but our best chance was clearly to grapple with them. We found a shelf by the help of which, with some hard scrambling and more labour of arms than legs, we gained the western shoulder of our little mountain. The Gul Glacier flowed in part from a snowy recess behind this shoulder. Beyond this snow at a distance of a few hundred yards ran a range of bold rocky pinnacles, separating us from the basin of the Ushba Glacier. The rocks we had to climb were probably not so difficult as those leading up to the Schreckhorn Sattel, but they seemed to me more so, partly perhaps owing to the quantity of ice and snow about and also to the number of loose boulders. Latterday climbers can hardly realise how great a service has been done them by those who have gone before in clearing their paths of such treachery. From the point where we first looked directly down on to the Ushba Glacier the mountain narrowed to a thin comb. A nasty gully full of ice separated the first top from the highest point. I insisted on going on, and we got across without much delay, and in three hours from the lower glacier were

enthroned or 'enfootstooled' on our peak. Seen from Betsho it looks blunt and stumpy; on the top one finds that the mountain has no thickness, is in fact little more than an Aiguille. The cliff on the E. is as perpendicular as a mountain well can be, and stones sent down it to the Ushba Glacier progressed by very suggestive leaps and bounds. In photographs taken from the Mujalaliz this side of the mountain shows as a sheer precipice.

animi causâ devolvere rupem
 Avulsam scopulo placet, ac audire sonantem
 Haud secus ac tonitru, scopulis dum immurmurat altis.

writes an old Swiss Latinist.* But when we had cleared a solid space to sit on we had something better to do than imitate this classical frivolity. Gulba may be a little peak, but it is a great view-point. Happily the clouds had lifted, as they do sometimes before a storm, and nothing was hidden except the high peaks of the central group, Tetnuld and its farther neighbours. Full in front, not a mile off towered the vast bulk of Ushba, its twin peaks rising at least 3,500 feet above our heads. Turning northwards, we looked across one of the reservoirs of the Ushba Glacier to a ridge crowned by a symmetrical snow-pinnacle (Shichildi Tau), conspicuous from the Shichildi Glacier, north of the chain, and the massive rockpeak named Little Ushba. Almost at our feet lay the meeting-point of the Ushba and Gvalda Glaciers and our camping ground after the Adyrsu Pass. The great basin of the Gvalda Glacier and the ridges round it were spread out as on a map. None of these peaks appeared to exceed 14,000 feet.† Our own height I estimated (the aneroid had unfortunately been left behind) at 12,000 to 12,500 feet. Continuing the panorama we saw, under the clouds, the glaciers of the central group, and below them all Free Suanetia, spread out like a model, a maze of low ridges and deep glens—heights clothed in green forests, hollows where the shafts of sunshine played on yellowing barleyfields and towered villages and white torrent-beds. The long chain of the Leila lifted its glaciers against the southern sky as the Grand Paradis does seen from the Becca di Nona. Beyond the Ingur, towards Abkhasia, we saw far away another outlying snowy crest. And then the eyes rested on the lofty jagged ridge which forms from Betsho a foreground to

* Rhellicani Stockhornias, A.D. 1536.

† The measurements of the Russian Staff kindly communicated to me by General Shdanow confirm this impression. I am convinced that neither Ushba nor Little Ushba are actually on the watershed.

Ushba. We only got to the top at 3 P.M., but despite the guides' impatience and the stormclouds gathering over the Black Sea I insisted on remaining the best part of an hour on the pinnacle.

The first part of the descent required care. The loose stones were particularly troublesome. But as soon as it seemed to me safe I gave the order to try the snow. The slopes were neither crevassed nor steep enough to make the tendency of their surface to slide any hindrance in the descent, and we rode down in fifteen minutes on a succession of artificial avalanches a height we had taken two hours to climb by the rocks.

When the rope had been taken off I left the guides to follow at their leisure, and set off at my best pace for the valley. The thunderclouds had now enveloped the great peaks, and it seemed only a question of minutes when they should break.

I halted for a few minutes on the way down at the camp of Prince Wittgenstein and Prince Shervashidzi, the former a Russian officer who has held high posts in Central Asia and talks excellent English, the latter of an ex-princely native family. Their camp was interesting as a specimen of old native habits in travel. Four solid tree-stems had been stuck into the ground, and crossbeams nailed to them to support walls and a roof. On this simple framework boughs were being dexterously interwoven by a crowd of camp-followers. In settled weather life in such an arbour must be agreeable, and even on a rainy day the owner of a *bourca* can afford to despise a perpetual dripping. Bright Persian rugs and saddlebags were spread on the ground and gave colour to the scene. What success the princes met with in their search for gold I never heard. Jason's fleece is said to have been gilt in the streams of the Ingur: at any rate other fleeces in historical times have been placed in its stream to catch the precious particles.

Four hours after leaving the top of Gulba I pushed open the door of the Courthouse at Betsho, where we had three bare clean rooms at our disposal. Any party provided with their own hired horses, campbeds and furniture might make themselves very comfortable here, since the Priestav kindly supplies many necessaries, including bread and wine. It should be remembered, however, that an officer in so remote a post finds hospitality in every sense a strain on his resources, and means should be found to make some adequate return for the services so generously rendered to all comers.

Suanetia as a Mountaineering Centre.

I shall print elsewhere a sketch of the aspects of Suanetia which may interest the historical student or general traveller.* Here I pause only for a minute to point out the advantages it offers as a base for mountaineers. It will be seen by a glance at any good map that the villages are much nearer the snows than those on the north side. Their situations are also more picturesque. Taking them from W. to E., though there are no doubt many expeditions to be made from the lower villages, Betsho (4,200 feet) is the first good centre. The Russian Courthouse and Priestav's residence lie in an open level valley running N. and S. at the base of the towers of Ushba. Those great peaks can and will be climbed. Their tour can be made by glacier passes known to the natives. From the head of the valley (obliterated in the five-verst map, which is here worse than useless) the Betsho Pass (11,642 feet: Déchy) offers a known route to Elbruz and Urusbieh. Dongussorun (14,592: R.S.) may be climbed, a pass over a high southern spur made into the Nakra Valley. The highest peak of the Leila offers itself to the first comer. The ascent would be beautiful, interesting, and, topographically, most instructive. The surrounding ridges offer a large choice of grass walks, exquisite forest scenery, and views of snowy peaks. Or an idle day may be spent on a haycock on the verge of some fresh-mown glade, ringed by groves where the last azalea is hardly out of blossom and the lilies and lupins that have escaped the scythe still brighten the borders of the wood, until the sunset fades off the crests of Ushba and Tetnuld, and the stars and the fireflies come out. There is nothing to be feared now from the inhabitants. I at least wandered often alone, and (except at Adish) met with nothing but courteous salutations.

What the traveller needs in Suanetia in order to be comfortable is an air mattress and provisions enough to furnish him with a meal on first arrival in new quarters. At Betsho excellent Russian brown bread is forthcoming, which keeps many days. Wine also can be procured in some of the villages. Sugar and tea must be carried. In short, the

* In *Proceedings of the R. G. S.*, June 1888. See also Dr. Radde's *Drei Langenhochthäler Suanetiens*, Freshfield's *Central Caucasus*, Telfer's *Crimea and Caucasus*, Phillipps-Wolley's *Savage Suanetia*, Iljin's *Ushba* (in *Petermann's Mitteilungen*, 1884), Bernoville's *Souanétie Libre*, and M. de Déchy's *Svanétie Libre*, 1886.

traveller should provide himself with a competent interpreter, his own hired horses, and a light camp equipment.

Mestia—where there is a government shed, or Cancellaria—is the next halting-place. The situation is beautiful. Hence Little Ushba might be tried by the N. branch of the Ushba Glacier and a fine pass made by the Gvalda and Thuber Glaciers to Mujal (5,250 feet: D.). At that village the priest's house is clean and cheerful. From it Tetnuld can be climbed and the Zanner Glacier and its peaks explored. Adish will probably treat travellers with more respect after the lesson it learnt last year. Still I would not use it for headquarters. The people absolutely declined to serve us as porters. I should camp at the head of the Kal glen in order to reach the ridge between Djanga and Shkara, which is guarded by a formidable snow-wall, or to force the Adish icefall by the rocks or its (true) left and so gain Gestola or Djanga from this side.

The little loghut at Kal is in a lovely situation, but too far from the snows for glacier expeditions. The people at Chubiani (Ushkul, 7,100 feet) were very civil: but of course all our comfort was due to the Kutais schoolmaster, Busarion Nichoradse, whom we had the luck to meet there. Mountaineers should climb the crest of the chain where the watershed between the Skenes Skali and Ingur abuts on it. The slope down to the Dychnu Glacier on the N. side is, I know, steep. But a pass here would, if practicable, be an important discovery. A beautiful walk may be enjoyed by crossing the Naksagar and returning by the grasspass close under the snows, descending to the lovely alp and tiny tarn above the sources of the Ingur. The snow mountain, part of the Dadiasch (10,243 feet: R.S.), at the source of the Quirishi, south of the Naksagar Pass, is easy and panoramic. François best described it as 'tout-à-fait le Buet de ce pays.'

On a delicate matter I will venture a few words of advice. Do not strain too far the hospitable traditions either of government officials or natives. If I went again I should often say, as I did once or twice last year, 'You have, I know, a noble habit of hospitality; but Englishmen also have a custom, that of paying just prices when they travel; extend your courtesy so far as to allow my custom to prevail.' I feel convinced that such a speech will be very seldom resented, and will often lead to the speedy production of resources, the existence of which the guest who does not open his pursestrings might never have suspected, and at any rate would have taken long to discover.

The Ascent of Tetruld.

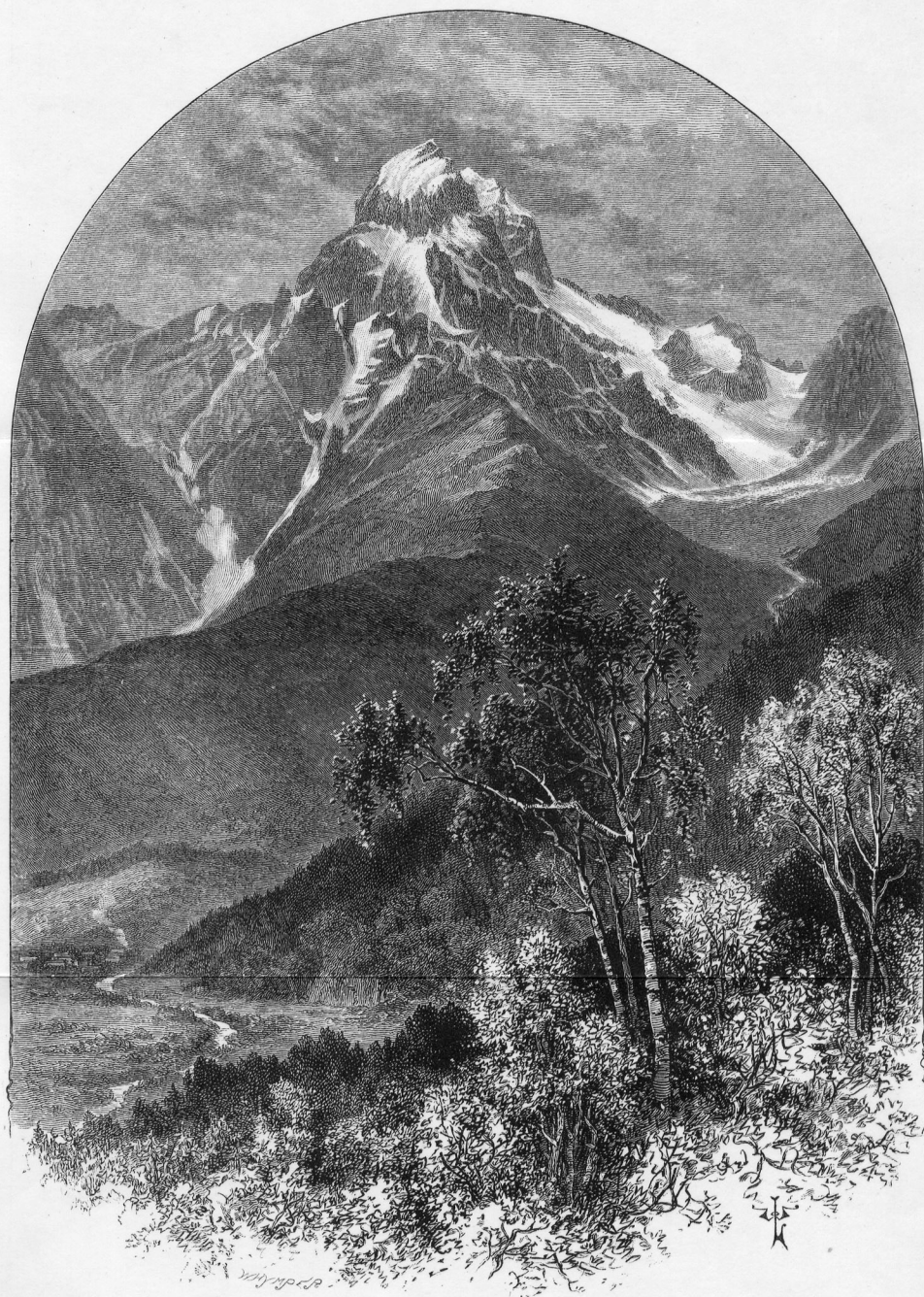
If the state of the snow rendered, to the best of my judgment, an attack on Ushba a doubtful and dangerous adventure, I was determined not to leave the south side without doing my best to climb Tetruld, the noble mountain whose silver spear had in 1868 gleamed down on me first of all the Caucasian snows as I steamed up the Rion.

Next to Kazbek and Elbruz, Ushba and Tetruld are at this moment the best known peaks of the Caucasus, eclipsing in popular reputation, in consequence of their being so much more easily seen from the valleys at their base, Dychtau and Koshtantau. Tetruld, owing to its slender pyramidal form, attracted attention very early from Caucasian travellers. Dubois de Montpéroux took it, on account of its conelike appearance, for a volcano, which it is not really in the least like. Mons. E. Favre speaks of it as 'the gigantic pyramid of Tetruld.' Herr von Thielmann in his description of the view from the Latpar Pass, writes, 'Tetruld, the most beautiful of all the mountains of the Caucasus, stands out from the chain in the form of a gigantic pyramid of the height of 16,000 feet. The dazzling whiteness of its snowy mantle, combined with the grace of its form, produce an impression similar to that created by the Jungfrau, while to complete the comparison a conical peak, smaller but equally beautiful, like the Swiss Silberhorn, rises up at its side.'*

My Diary has told in a summary manner how, owing to the naughtiness of the men of Adish and the crossness of the weather, we were driven back in our first attempt to approach Tetruld by way of the ridge behind Adish.

One of the first evenings in August found us comfortably installed as guests in the priest's house at Mujal. Comfortably I have written, and I mean it. The priests in Suanetia are not native to the soil. The Free Suanetians proceeded long ago from disestablishment to disendowment, from disendowment to an agnosticism which was very like paganism. They had got rid of priests altogether, and were in such a state of ungodliness that the Russians could think of nothing better than to baptize them first and send them priests

* The second peak is the more distant Gestola. I may add that Von Thielmann's identification of Elbruz is, I feel certain, erroneous. The snowy-sided peak he describes is Dongussorun. Only the topmost crest of Elbruz is visible over the N.E. shoulder of Ushba. The translation of this passage in the English edition is execrable.



USHBA.

From a Photograph by M. DE DÉCHY.

afterwards. The priest of Mujal has built a house in civilised style with a broad balcony on the first floor running round two good clean rooms, which he can, when he chooses, make very liveable.

The village is one of a group lying on the left bank of the stream about a mile below the junction of the torrents from the Thuber and the Zanner Glaciers, in an open basin of barley-fields enclosed by wooded slopes. Beyond the river the white towers of Mulach break the hillside, and high in the air the mightier towers of Ushba show between the rain-storms their vigorous outline. Tetnuld is hidden by its spurs, and at the head of the valley only the white snout of the Zanner Glacier is seen beyond the dark cliffs and forests of a deep gorge.

On the first day of our stay I made a false start for Tetnuld with two of the guides. In the middle of the gorge we lost the track, struggled through dripping thickets, and were finally brought to a halt by the difficulties of the ground and a drenching rainstorm. Under a noble pine no rain could pierce we lighted a blazing fire and waited till it was time to return to the village.

The second day was too bad for mountaineering to be thought of. But we had plenty of entertainment at hand. First there was the arrival of the Russian forces to avenge the Rape of the Shirts. They consisted of a splendid old Cossack sergeant—quite the popular ideal of a Cossack—and his two men, a mild broadfaced Russian youth and a weak Suanetian. This trio marched on Adish, and very much to our surprise and their credit successfully arrested the ten leading villagers.

Another arrival was promised us. No less a person than the Bishop of Poti, the first Bishop who in historical times had penetrated Free Suanetia. From so fever-stricken a see one might have looked for a pale ascetic; our prelate however was much the reverse—a man of sturdy frame and sense. But I am anticipating. It was towards evening before the path that descends the beautiful slopes above the village became alive with horses. The cavalcade was divided into many detachments, camp-servants with huge saddlebags, long-haired priests, singing-men with dark locks and melancholy staglike eyes. Last came the Bishop himself, a large thickset man in imposing ecclesiastical vestments, attended by his secretary and a Mingrelian gentleman who talked French and had spent some time at Geneva. Through the latter I had some talk with the Bishop, who told me that

the first sermon he preached to the Suanetians would be on the necessity of giving up their eclectic practice of keeping the holy days of three religions and doing no work between Thursday night and Monday morning !.

The supper that evening showed the resources of Suanetia ! We all, except the Bishop, sat down to it, a company of at least thirty. The first course consisted of excellent cream-cheeses. Roast mutton, boiled fowls, roast pig followed. Knives fell short and plates shorter. But the baser sort at the lower end of the table used their *kinshals* (daggers) for knives, and the flat loaves—excellently baked for once in the bishop's honour—served as plates first and were eaten afterwards—after the fashion of Æneas. And then there was wine at discretion—capital sound Mingrelian wine, which no one but the guides despised. It was long past midnight when I retired between the folds of Tuckett's insect-proof bed, watched by a solemn group of long-robed priests and peasants very much resembling the bystanders represented in the Raphael Cartoons.

The sky next morning was less charged with vapour, and there was a touch of north in the wind. I was determined to start again for Tetnuld. M. de Déchy was anxious not to lose the advantage of the expected visit of the Priestav from Betsho in making final arrangements with the villagers to serve as porters, or the chance of any days of settled weather to cross the chain. Had we been content to take the Thuber Pass (11,815 feet: Déchy), crossed two years before by my companion, there would have been comparatively little difficulty. That is the ordinary route from Suanetia to the Tartar valleys E. of the Baksan. It must be remembered that we were calling on the villagers to reopen a pass of which nothing but a tradition survived, and which one man only in the valley pretended ever to have crossed. Had anyone a hundred years ago tried to make the men of Grindelwald cross their glaciers to the Valais he would certainly have met with considerable difficulty, and M. de Déchy deserves the highest credit for his patience and pertinacity in overcoming the very natural unwillingness of the men of Mujal for the adventure we forced upon them.

It was agreed between M. de Déchy and myself as follows:—I should set off at once with the three Chamoniards, bivouac high, and attempt Tetnuld by the glacier which flows down from its peak to meet the Zanner. Twenty-four hours later M. de Déchy should start with our Cossack, the native porters and all the baggage and pitch our tents

beside the Zanner Glacier, where I should endeavour to join him at night. Should I fail to do so we would each do our best by lighting fires to give intelligence of our safety and our whereabouts, and I and the guides would press on next morning until we caught up the Heavy Brigade on the ascent to the pass. As we had neither of us ever seen the great glaciers leading to the peak and pass, the scheme was, I flatter myself, bold as well as ingenious. As far as topography is concerned, it may fairly be compared to a proposal to climb the Schreckhorn and meet again at the Zäsenberg, or on the way to the Mönch Joch—no one having previously been as far as the Eismeer for a quarter of a century.

Warned by experience, I took the precaution to hire a native to show us through the gorge. Crossing the torrent just above the junction of the Thuber water, we found an old track of the faintest kind, which after a time failed us altogether. It was warm and moist among the dripping flowers and foliage; the guides were the reverse of exhilarated, and the chances of success for a time did not seem very brilliant.

The ice eighteen years ago—as may be seen by the photographs taken by Count Levershoff's expedition in 1869—poured over a steep cliff on the top of which it now lies, ending therefore at least three or four hundred feet higher than when Abich measured it at 6,612 feet. A rough scramble brought us to the edge of a hillside it had scraped bare. Pushing aside the hazel-branches I got the first view up the southern glacier—the Tetnuld Glacier I shall call it—to the peak. Our route was plain; it was the one I had marked out on one of the 1869 photographs before leaving England. Given fine weather and no ice on the final ridge, Tetnuld could hardly escape me.

In the foreground at the foot of a rocky spur of the mountain two great glaciers met. On the left the Zanner tumbled over from its unseen reservoirs in an impassable icefall. On our right the Tetnuld Glacier fell first in a great broken slope of névé, then in a long icefall, at last in a gentle slope, until it joined its stream to that of the Zanner. We descended on to the ice, and then mounted the Tetnuld Glacier for a certain distance until the crevasses made it convenient to cross the moraine and enter the hollow between the ice and rocks on its right bank. This was partly occupied with beds of avalanche snow, alternating with flowery slopes. On the last of these, at a height of less than 9,000 feet, we determined to spend the night. An overhanging

rock offered good shelter, and there were all the requisites for a luxurious bivouac; rhododendron stalks and roots for a fire, flowery grass for beds, water. It was not high enough; but the ground above was easy and it seemed better to start early than to freeze higher up. We had two sleeping-bags, sufficient wraps, and provisions for two days, so that the guides were sufficiently loaded. The space under the rock was soon levelled, stones thrown out, and a flooring of elastic twigs and grass laid down. Then we piled up a blazing fire, toasted Suanetian loaves, and watched with satisfaction the last clouds melt into the sky and the peaks of Ushba stand out against a golden sunset.

I felt very comfortable in my sleeping-bag, and was soon asleep. I was awakened by a sudden sense of light. The moon had scaled the high walls of the crag to the east. I could see the time by my watch by it; it was 12.30 A.M. I rolled myself out from under the boulder, set a light to the spirits in one of those admirable inventions 'Silver's Self-cooking Souptins,' and roused up the guides. In a quarter of an hour we had laced our boots, shared our soup, and shouldered the light packs containing the day's food.

The rough ground beside the glacier afforded for some distance easy walking. The shadows of the crags diminished as the moonshine flowed down the snowy avalanche tracks between them. But presently the cliffs and glacier met, and it became necessary to take to the ice. Our first attempt to pass the marginal crevasses failed, owing to the uncertainty of the light. But at the second we gained easily the middle of the glacier above its lower icefall. It was still some way to the foot of the great bank of séracs. Snow already covered the surface and the rope had to be adjusted. I had noticed the day before that to the S. (right in ascending) of an isolated mass of rock there was an almost unbroken slope. But François, in the old Chamonix spirit always ready to tackle crevasses, saw no reason for going out of our way.

It was still night, the sky above was deep blue, and spangled with innumerable stars except in the immediate neighbourhood of the moon. The white snowfields and green vaults round us seemed to emit an unearthly light. We wandered in and out until the chasms thickened and drove us far to the right. We were lost sometimes among the white undulations; a bridge failed us and we had to retrace our steps. At last we dashed at a great broken snowpit, and scaling its sides by the help of crevasses choked with the fragments

that had fallen from their own walls, raised ourselves on to the lower edge of a broad plateau.

The peak, hitherto hidden, was now before us, a coronet of stars fading away round its crest. A glimmer of dawn played over its southern shoulder and rested on something large and white far to the west—Elbruz. Soon the sky grew paler and shafts of light shot across it; they touched Elbruz and Ushba and turned their snows first red, then gold. The lesser heights above the Thuber and Gvalda Glaciers caught the sun and the upper world was awake: though the lower hills and hollows of Mingrelia and the seaplains still waited in darkness.

Under the topmost cliffs of Tetnuld lay a white terrace sloping up towards its southern ridge. To gain this terrace another long slope of séracs had to be climbed. A way through them was easily found. On the terrace above the snow began to be very soft and powdery, and the distance to be traversed was considerable. François suggested a dash at the W. ridge, which was close above us. The way, if there was one, lay up steep rocks and snow. If there was ice enough to mean step-cutting the slopes would have been endless, if soft snow on ice extremely dangerous. I did not think the chance of their being in good condition sufficient to justify the attempt, and we adhered to my original line of ascent.

A steep bank of ice intersected by crevasses had to be climbed. The loose snow on it was scraped off and good steps made for the descent. Above it there was a last level from which an ascent of a few feet over a bergschrund and up a steep bank brought us at last at 9 A.M., in 8 hrs. from our bivouac, to the longed-for ridge. It had been cold in the shadow, so cold that Michel Dévouassoud suffered for his neglect of my instructions to bring well-seasoned boots to the Caucasus by being severely frostbitten. It is no use blinking the defects of guides as travellers, and one is their inability to realise how much in a distant journey depends on care and forethought in details; for instance, that a tight boot may be fatal to a campaign. I, wearing easy boots and two pairs of socks, was, despite a slow circulation, perfectly comfortable the whole day. Michel however did not feel his misfortune till night, and there was nothing to temper the satisfaction with which we broke into the sunshine and sat down on the little platform above the cornice.

In one moment the upper glens of Suanetia and the sources of the Ingur burst on us. The towers and meadows of Adish lay at our feet. The secret cradle of its great glacier

was all revealed. We looked right up the névé lying in a recess between Tetnuld and Djanga and the rockpeak N. of the Djkumer Pass—the Adish peak of previous travellers. Beyond it the crest of Shkara raised its long white curves against the dark blue sky.

Here we made our first serious halt and meal. Henceforth our path lay along the ridge. It looked inviting; fairly broad, not too steep, and with no uncomfortable shimmer of ice. But it was long, and the softness of the snow made it longer. At every step the leader sank over his ankles. Consequently leading was exhausting, and we had frequently to change. From time to time there was a little variety, a narrowing of the ridge which made it convenient, after careful inspection, to trust to the flat top of a substantial cornice—or a sudden steep rise which forced us to zigzag and hold on to our iceaxes. The hours passed; but there was too much to look at on our airy edge for the time to seem long. First of all there was the sensation of looking down. A few steep white curves and then, between our boots, we looked on green hills and meadows 8,000 feet below. Just such a view one has on the top of the Wetterhorn. Close at hand were our gigantic neighbours, the snowpeaks of the central group. To the west Elbruz loomed higher and higher as we mounted, and all the lesser heights bowed before the great white throne. But ever in front rose a new frozen bank. I looked across to the western ridge, and a point I had marked on it was below us. ‘*Nous approchons,*’ I said to François. ‘*Nous arriverons assez,*’ he replied cheerfully. The aneroid was marking 16,500 feet. The snow got thin and some steps were cut, then it held again. There seemed to be less bulk in our peak, little but air round us. Ten minutes more and a white cone cut the sky, it flattened at our feet, our eyes overlooked it. I ran on a few level yards, there was nothing more; two ridges fell steeply from my feet. Tetnuld was conquered. It was 1.15 P.M.; we had been four hours on the last 1,700 feet of crest, 12 hrs. 30 m. from our bivouac.

Illimitable shining fields of space, waves upon waves of distance, clothed in hues that grow softer and more aerial as they curve to the enormously remote horizon; to the north the level lines of the Steppe, to the south tossed Armenian Highlands, east and west snowy vales and pinnacles, a silence that might be felt, such were the impressions of the first moments on this glorious peak.

I enjoy, I hope, the poetry of mountain peaks—above all of virgin peaks. But after I have drunk in the sentiment

of such scenes I like to recognise the topographical features. There was Gestola, Dent and Donkin's peak, just satisfactorily below us; the green valley over its shoulder should be Chegem. The great snowfields of the Zinner, over which next day we must force a pass, called for very particular attention. What a superb icevalley led up to the gap between us and Gestola! Koshtantau (17,091 feet: R.S.) was a surprise, the rocky face of Donkin's photograph was now snow. Dychtau (16,925 feet: R.S.) was masked, all but the pyramidal peak, by a great curtain extending from Koshtantau along the northern side of the Bezingi Glacier. Shkara dominated everything on the watershed, Djanga was something higher than ourselves, their southern precipices streamed with ice. The part of the horizon occupied by snowy peaks was small in comparison to most alpine views, but the peaks were greater than our old friends.

Beyond the sunny hills of Mingrelia and a level floor of sea-haze the distant snowflecked ranges of Kars and Trebizond lay along the horizon. Ararat I could not discover. General Chodzko, when encamped on the summit of Ararat while making the five-verst survey, saw Elbruz at a distance of 280 miles! Neither between the two peaks of Ushba nor those of Elbruz was any difference in height recognisable.

The aneroid marked 16,700 feet. I did not make any further observations except some rough levellings and bearings. I prefer to take my heights from an ordnance survey. Mountaineers are not, as a presumptuous pressman lately remarked, the camp-followers, but the pioneers of science. 'Fiat experimentum in corpore vili.' I accept the proverb. Where our vile bodies have opened the way the glorious army of surveyors has got to follow. I have reason to believe, however, that the aneroid was marking too high, and that Tetnuld will come out finally slightly over 16,000 feet. The peak, the measurement of which (15,947 feet) General Shdanow, the present director of the Caucasian survey, has recently sent me, is probably Gestola, which is perhaps 200 feet less than Tetnuld.

After an hour's stay I thought it prudent to return. The descent of the ridge was easy enough. In something over an hour we were back at the saddle. Light clouds had begun to form in the hollows of Suanetia, and now suddenly as if at a signal swept up to us.

The vapours lingered about the peaks, but they were too light and shifting to trouble us. The descent was without incident. The snow was heavy, but our hearts were light.

The only occasion when I lapsed for a moment into discontent was when the leading guide, knowing our old tracks through the séracs would be bad so late in the day, made for the northern corner of the great plateau. François and I had to insist on a sharp half-face, which brought us after twenty minutes' heavy walking to the long straight slope I had seen the day before south of the rocky boss. We wallowed to our waists in banks of snow, soft, but steep enough to make progress—even by wallowing—rapid. We were soon at the bottom and on hard ice, where the rope could at last be thrown off. Jogging steadily downwards we regained about 7 P.M. our boulder and white-rhododendron bank. The clouds had all melted. Ushba was a noble shadow in the sunset.

Generally in such a situation the thoughts go backwards to fight over again the day's battle; but ours and our eyes were strained onwards. Could anything be seen of our companion and his baggage train on the opposite hill? We searched in vain the sides of the Zanner icefall. I quickly came to the decision to stop where we were, since our beds were already made, in the trust that if our party were on the road, which we should doubtless learn, as soon as it was dark, by their beacon fire, we might catch them up next day. Presently our own beacon flamed up, and after the guides had turned in I rested long beside it in a comfortable hollow, watching the slow muster of the heavenly host and waiting for the responsive glow—which never came. Soon after ten I too crept into my bag, thankful that I had not to seek the narrow shelves of some crowded Clubhut.

(To be continued.)

AN ASCENT OF THE HOHBERGHORN.

BY AUGUST LORRIA.

THE Nadelgrat is one of the most interesting, and at the same time one of the least known, bits of the Monte Rosa district. What Mr. Conway, who knows the Zermatt mountains so well, wrote of it in 1881* still remains true: 'Switzerland abounds in neglected districts. Such, however, for the most part lie round sequestered valleys, and are invisible from the main roads. The pedestrian is ignorant of the names of their peaks, and the cockney climber shuns them, as he shuns all secondary summits. But that a group

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. x. p. 332.