

THE
ALPINE JOURNAL.

NOVEMBER 1891.

(No. 114.)

A MONTH AMONG THE SOUTHERN VALLEYS AND MOUNTAINS OF THE CENTRAL CAUCASUS, WITH ASCENTS OF TSFORGA, BOORDOÛIL (BORDJULA), AND ADAI CHOCH.

BY H. W. HOLDER.

(Read, in part, before the Alpine Club, June 2, 1891.)

I HAVE nothing of importance to add to all that has been already written concerning the routes to the Caucasus. My companions and I myself have generally found the Black Sea troublesome, and have been glad that our medicine-chest contained chalk and opium and cognac in fairly liberal quantities. But this has not been the universal experience, so I merely state it for what it is worth. With a giant stride or two, then, we will, if you please, imagine ourselves transported with incalculable rapidity from London to Batoum. Cockin received me at Batoum with great enthusiasm, and with a consideration which was remarkable, taking into account the combined rôle of English plutocrat and Eastern prince which he had previously been playing. At the door of his room I found a native of Tsageri, Merun Formovitch Kugawa by name, armed with native dagger and, I suspect, Birmingham-made revolver, who, as I thought, viewed with suspicion if not with distinct hostility, my approach to the *doma* of his lord. However, when he learnt that I was to have the honour of sharing in the payment of the roubles which served to provide him with weapons and recruit his wardrobe, he took me also under his protecting care, and proved a faithful, devoted, and courageous servant. He gave us a testimonial when we parted from him, speaking highly of our characters, wishing us every blessing

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we might desire, and especially assuring us that so great was his interest in and satisfaction with us that he was at all times ready to serve with the same fidelity—always presupposing, of course, a small *douceur* of about three roubles a day—any of our friends who might at any future time be visiting his country.

From Batoum we proceeded, as rapidly as circumstances would permit, to Gebi, by way of Kutais and Oni, having finally decided—after much discussion, and on grounds that we afterwards, with more perfect knowledge, and when it was too late, rejected as entirely insufficient—to attack first the Adai Choch group. I must pass over the incidents of this journey: the trials of patience, the difficulties in procuring horses, and the endless suggestions of *zaftra* (tomorrow), which soon led to the adoption of *loshade* (horses) and *zaftra* into our commination service; the offers of hospitality of the princes we met *en route*, especially when their hearts were warmed with wine; and, finally, our visit to the Nachalnik of Oni, who received us with the gravest courtesy, and who afforded us the greatest aid in procuring horses for the remainder of the journey to Gebi.

Thirteen versts from Oni, on the Mamisson road, there is a post station, Ootzera, with a *duchan*, where good wine may be obtained. The track to Gebi turns to the left from the Mamisson road, about seven versts from Ootzera, and it is quite possible to drive as far as this point.

We aimed for Gebi because we gathered from Freshfield that this was the best point of attack for our group of mountains. We were consequently much disappointed to find on arriving at the village that the Adai Choch group was not known by name to the natives, and that certainly there would be one or two days' journey ere we could reach our base of operations. Gebi is most prettily situated, commanding interesting views of mountains in almost all directions. On our first visit we were civilly received, and the Starsbina gave orders to his servant, whose main official duties seemed to be to take charge of the cancellaria, to act as guide for us the next day in the direction of Tsforga, an outlying peak of the Adai Choch group, marked on the 5-verst map as Gurdzivsek, from the pass on its eastern flank.

Our way led through a beautiful birch wood, over cleared fields and rich pastures, ascending nearly all the time, with beautiful views of a low snow mountain on the left called by the natives Domba, which looked as though it might prove an easy but interesting climb. On reaching

the plateau which sweeps westwards from the southern spur of Tsforga, a fine view of Boordooil burst upon us. As we were overtaken by a thunderstorm as soon as we had crossed this southern spur, and as Tsforga itself looked as though it would repay the time and energy spent in an ascent, we hurriedly pitched our tent and camped for the night. The natives called the place Tsmindaveleb. At 2.45 A.M. the next day we started for the ascent of Tsforga. Climbing along the ridge under which we had been encamped, we walked briskly through the long grass with which the lower part of the ridge was covered, and then scrambled over shale and rock, fondly imagining that this ridge would easily and speedily lead us by pleasant rocks to the summit of our peak.

But, after two-and-a-half hours' work, we concluded that by this route it would take a longer time than we had at command to complete the climb. We consequently descended to the glacier on the right, and as we looked up at the broken masses of the ridge that we had left, and saw the array of 'gendarmes' to be climbed or turned, we congratulated ourselves that we had abandoned our original design. We kept mainly to the true right of the glacier, swerving occasionally towards the left to avoid crevasses, and having surmounted the icefall without serious difficulty, took to the rocks which lead to the final slope of ice by which the top is gained. The rocks varied in character, but were generally loose, and occasionally, in consequence, somewhat dangerous. We did not find it necessary, however, to rope till just below the ice slope, so that when we discovered the stone man at the top without any record, we conjectured that native hunters had climbed thus far in their search for game. We are, however, glad to congratulate S. Sella on being the builder of the cairn. We reached the lower or eastern summit at about 11 A.M., and, after a good hour's rest, strolled, in about forty minutes, to the top of the western peak (c. 13,600 ft.). Far away to the west we saw our old friends Shkara, Dychtau, Koshtantau, and other giants of the central group. Immediately to the east lay Boordooil, which it was clearly necessary to climb ere we could learn any details of the Adai group. Just over its shoulder, indeed, some higher peaks were visible, and it was evident that we had so far only touched the fringe of the district we were anxious to explore.

On our ascent we had observed a depression in the eastern ridge of our mountain, from which a tongue of snow

descended to the glacier up which we had made our way. We purposed working back by this, and made tracks rapidly

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VIEW FROM THE SUMMIT OF TSEORGA, LOOKING TOWARDS THE EAST.

Boerdool in the right foreground, whilst the highest point of Adai Choch is seen under the figure 1, and the top of the double-headed rock peak under the figure 2.

through the deep snow. There must have been an awkward bit of rock on the western side of this depression, so that we were tempted to descend too far, or else we greatly miscalculated its distance from the mountain top; for when we first sought our tongue of snow we could find nothing but steep, rotten, and impracticable rocks. Consequently we went boldly down the north-eastern face, and, working cautiously through the icefall, struck the ridge again much lower down. From this point we were able, by a tributary glacier, to reach the great glacier on to which, in the morning, we had descended from the ridge.

Instead of climbing back to this ridge, and so proceeding to our camp by our morning's route, we decided to follow the glacier to its spout, and then, at what we imagined to be about the level of our tent, to work straight along the grassy slopes on which we had encamped. Unfortunately we descended too far. The spring torrents had carved in the hillside innumerable channels, which, of course, became wider and deeper as they descended to the valley. And as the day wore on, and night fell upon us, we found ourselves clambering up and down these trackless hollows, moving steadily, as we hoped, in the direction of our tent. We were all heartily sick of the wearisome monotony, and I had well nigh come to the conclusion that I should prefer to finish the expedition the next day in the light, when the barking of a dog revealed to us the fact that we were at

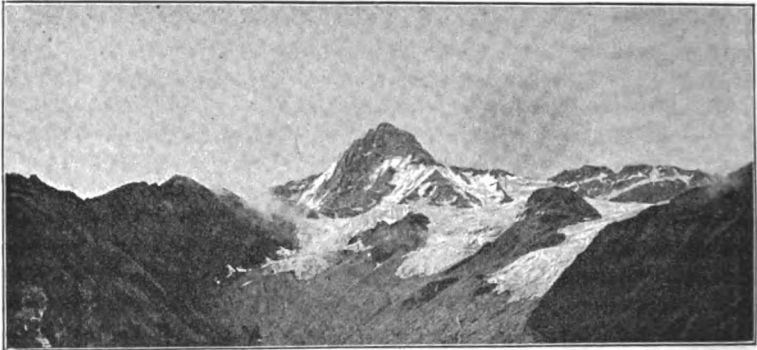
last within a hundred yards of home. We arrived at 8.45 P.M., having spent some eighteen hours in our training climb. I do not recommend the experience, and am strongly of opinion that one such climb as an introduction to a season's work, especially after the enervating influences of the Black Sea and hot Caucasian valleys, will suffice for the most ardent mountaineer.



OUR CAMP ON MOOTSANSARA, WITH BOORDOOIL.

Having moved our tent eastwards across the intervening valley, fording with some trepidation a broad and rapid mountain torrent on our way, we prepared to climb Boordooil, from which we hoped to view our promised land. Mootsansara, we were told, the alp was called where we rested. The name must, I think, connote peace and rest and beauty. It was certainly a charming spot. It was enclosed by undulating slopes on the north and south. In the background, to the east, Boordooil rose, conveying somehow much more of the sense of majesty than the photographs suggest. Away to the west there were picturesque rocks and the ice-crowned Shoda. There was rich pasture for the horses,

clear, bright, sparkling water for man and beast, the shadow of great rocks in the noonday heat, and a stillness unbroken save by the hum of insects, the flapping of the wings of great birds, the thundering crash of the icefall and the rush of the glacier stream. We started for this peak one morning at 2.35. The way led along a grass-covered ancient moraine, then by the right bank of the glacier stream, and over more moraine, recently deposited, till, at 4.25, the snout of the glacier was reached. Two ribs of rock divide the glacier into three large streams of ice, up the westernmost (left) of which we at first worked our way.



VIEW OF BOORDOOL, SHOWING THE DIVIDED GLACIER AND THE FACE OF THE MOUNTAIN WHICH WE CLIMBED.

Stupendous fantastic-looking blocks of ice were piled up at the head of this stream, and as we reached the rib of rock immediately on its right, we heard a crash, and saw, just behind us, the shivered fragments of great masses which had given way. Forty minutes' climbing up the rocks brought us to the undivided glacier, and at its edge we stopped for about twenty minutes—5.10 to 5.30. We cut steps, made piles of stones to guide us on our return journey, and without serious trouble had in little more than an hour crossed the *schrund*, and were working over rocks, loose stones, and finally a slope of snow, towards the south-eastern ridge of the mountain. At 8.5 we stopped for breakfast, and while Almer was unpacking and preparing the tins of soup, I proceeded a little towards the east, and endeavoured to secure photographs of the magnificent panorama which lay before me. The sun was shining brilliantly overhead, though over the Adai group clouds were beginning to gather, and running from south-east to west there was an almost un-

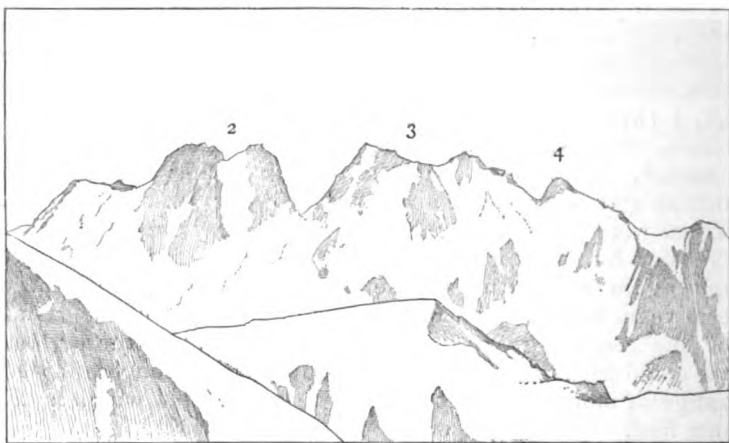
broken line of mountains. To the south-east, and below, there lay the great snow basin, round which the chief mountains of the group are ranged. In the centre rose a rugged mass of rock, which largely masked the highest Adai peak, and the two double-headed peaks so conspicuous in this district. Further east Dechy's peak was clearly visible as a blunt rock tooth. Then came, in the distance, rock-peaks with little snow, and so round to the ice-capped Shoda. Vanity of vanities! Not one of my views has stood the test of the developer's art. All, I am told, were over-exposed. At 8.50 we made a fresh start. It was good rock-climbing nearly the whole of the way to the top. It has been suggested that the Caucasian Mountains are almost entirely snow-mountains, and that there is very little to tempt a good rock-climber. Boor-dooil, at any rate, is an exception. Yet Freshfield, looking at it from a distance, judged it an easy climb. The route he contemplated was probably that by which Signor Sella actually made the ascent some days after us—viz. by the north-western ridge. But Signor Sella refers to this as a 'difficult ascent.' And certainly the rocks of our arête, with the occasional traverses of awkward gullies, were anything but work for the mountaineering tyro. We were kept on the alert all the time. As, however, the rocks were unusually firm and reliable, the exhilaration was extreme, and we were all, I think, sorry when, after about two-and-a-half hours' climb, we came upon the snow slope which leads to the summit. This slope was short, only taking about fifteen minutes to surmount, and at 11.45 our task was done. There were no signs here, at any rate, of any previous ascent. Neither hunter nor mountaineer had preceded us, and we felt again something of the emotion we had experienced two years before, when we had conquered some of the giants of the central group. But the clouds had gathered, and we could glean but little definite information concerning the range of mountains east of the great snowfield which lay at our feet. Our height was approximately 14,300 ft.

Three high peaks, and three only, were visible during the two hours we spent upon the top. Of these we were convinced that of Adai Choch the summit we afterwards climbed was the highest, that the double-headed peak came next, and that the third was the lowest of the three. I cannot now be certain whether this third was Dechy's peak or one of the two heads of the remaining double-headed peak of this group, the other head being concealed by clouds. We judged that the highest peak would best be attacked by striking

almost due east across the snowfield, and then turning at right angles northwards along the base of the two double-headed peaks till we could find a feasible line of ascent. And so we made our plans.

We left the top at 2.5, and indulged in a change of route on our descent. By variations of easy rocks and snow and glacier on the eastern aspect of the mountain we, in less than an hour and a half reached the edge of the watershed at a point somewhat east of the glacier up which we had ascended in the morning. Thence by a steep glacier and loose rocks we descended to a shaly and grass-covered ridge which led in the direction of our tent. At 5.55 our day's work was done.

The best idea of the Adai Choch group will be obtained by imagining a large snowfield, approximately rectangular in shape, of some twenty square miles or so in area, surrounded on all sides by mountains, the loftiest lying towards the east. In the centre of the field there rise great irregular masses of rock, some entirely covered with snow and ice of enormous thickness. There must be ten or twelve peaks in all,



VIEW OF (2) THE DOUBLE-HEADED ROCK PEAK, (3) THE DOUBLE-HEADED SNOW PEAK, (4) (PROBABLY) DECHY'S PEAK, FROM A COL AT THE SOUTH-WEST OF THE GREAT SNOW-FIELD.

lying at irregular intervals, and varying considerably in height, around this snowfield. Some are of most interesting appearance: on one side a narrow stair of snow leading from base to summit, whilst on the opposite side the rocks are steep and apparently almost unclimbable. In the double-headed rock peak two parallel ribs of rock seem to run from base to crown, separated by a narrow strip of snow. The other double-headed peak presented at its summit the

appearance of two truncated sugar-loaves, covered as they were almost entirely with snow.

Some parts of this snowfield are at lower level than the watershed and consequently snow and ice are constantly pouring into it. There are, however, great outlets: to the north is the Karagom glacier; to the south-east a glacier sweeps along the bases of both double-headed peaks and then falls rapidly into the Rion basin; and to the south a glacier which feeds a stream that ultimately joins the Rion river.

One fine morning at 12.30 we started to try our luck—or skill—with the highest peak. The first part of our route was practically the same as the last part in our descent from Boordool. We reached the crest of the watershed at 5.5. After a few minutes' rest we struck across the undulating snowfield in an easterly direction, intending, as we had arranged when reconnoitring from Boordool, to turn the central masses of rock and make our way between them and the double-headed peaks to the base of our peak.

From the central mass of rock a ridge runs down into the snowfield. Reaching the foot of this we discovered that between it and the double-headed peaks there lay, hundreds of feet below, a glacier instead of a level field of snow as we had anticipated. Two courses were open to us; we could either descend to the glacier by what looked to be steep and broken rocks, and then continue up the glacier in the direction we had first decided on, or else we could climb the central mass of rock hoping to find an easy descent from this on the northern side. We chose the latter alternative. We cut up the snow-covered ridge for about twenty minutes, and then, at 6.37, stopped for food. At 7.15 we continued our ascent of the rocks, and at 8 we reached the summit. We turned eastward, and descended by rocks and snow to the snowfield, which we reached in about half-an-hour. Then for nearly an hour we were tramping over this snowfield in a straight line to the foot of the lower icefall. At this time the sky was almost cloudless and the sun shone brilliantly; the snow glittered and sparkled like diamonds. The magnificence of the snowfield, surpassing anything we had previously seen, profoundly impressed us all. Silently we marched, each possessed by his own thoughts and feelings, and gradually the heat, the glare, and the monotony of the march began to tell, and we almost fell asleep as we finished this part of our journey. There was no crevasse to stumble over; nothing to strain our energies; no demand on skill and previous experience: simply a steady tramp through the snow. We reached the foot of the lower

icefall at 9.20, then for about fifty-five minutes cut steps straight up the mountain side to a plateau where for half-an-hour we halted. At 10.45 we started again, making straight for the schrund immediately under a well-marked depression in the ridge. We reached the schrund at 11.10, and the ridge at 11.30. Keeping to the ridge we, by a tedious and uninteresting climb chiefly over snow—the last part being, however, over loose stones—reached the top at 12.50, after a little more than twelve hours' work. Again we were unfortunate in our view. The clouds came sweeping up the mountain sides so that it was impossible to obtain a satisfactory idea of the glacier system of this district. We did, however, get a view of all the mountain-tops of the group with the exception of one lying immediately east of us, whose lower part was covered with rocks arranged like spines symmetrically, which gave it a most unique and interesting appearance. By the use of the clinometer we were again convinced that we had selected the highest of the group.

On our return, instead of crossing the central mass of rock, we, by way of variation and additional exploration, turned to the right, and then worked round till we came upon our morning track. But, as I have already stated, snow and ice are constantly pouring into the hollows of this basin, and we had to work our way through séracs and crevasses down to the lowest level, and then up again to the watershed on the southern side. Much time was consequently lost, and we did not reach our tent till 9 p.m.

This Adai Choch group would, I imagine, prove an admirable district for mountaineering without guides. We had no semblance of difficulty with its highest summit, and it was clear that the second highest peak (the double-headed rocky one), and probably the third highest (for M. Dechy's ranks only sixth or seventh in the group) would yield to any vigorous effort made by sturdy mountaineers. There are several smaller peaks which could be taken by way of training, and the district is fairly accessible from at least three sides—north and east and south.

I was anxious to see the central mountains and Ushba on the southern side, and as, without moving much further east, an attempt on the remaining high peaks of this group would necessitate a repetition of much of the work we had already more than once accomplished, we decided to move westward with the least possible delay, though, as Cockin remarked, "idleness here is mighty pleasant."

I have already* spoken of the difficulty we experienced in securing horses, and of our method of overcoming it. Our return to Gebi was practically by the same route that we had previously travelled in the reverse direction.

The natives of Gebi were wonderfully civil. A young lady, inhabiting with her mother an enclosure opposite the cancellaria, made advances by sending her younger brother with unripe pears and potatoes. We responded with a few kopeks. The villagers brought us eggs and fowl and beef. We bought French beans also, the preparation of which for dinner proved a severe trial to Almer's patience. The Starshina concluded the arrangements for the supply of horses for our journey, and early on the second day after our arrival we prepared to start. By six the horses were packed, and we were glorying in the prospect of so good a beginning of our journey. But troublous times were in store. Freshfield says somewhere, I think, that the men of Gebi are keen bargainers. They are that and more. They illustrate a maxim that in the early stages of civilisation men hold but lightly to their contracts. The Starshina had gone to look after his harvesting, and just as we were ready to start, one of the owners of the horses made a demand for increased terms. We offered a slight concession, which was declined. We refused any further increase, and then, after a conference, both owners unpacked the horses and threw our luggage to the ground. I trust the recalcitrant owner will be boycotted by future visitors. They will have no difficulty in recognising him: he has a wooden leg. S. Sella's interpreter—Solomon Finkelstein, of Vladikavkaz—was stopping at the cancellaria, and he advised that we should promise all that was asked, and then at the end of the journey repudiate the bargain, paying only what had been arranged with the Starshina. We scouted such a proceeding as not only dishonourable, but impolitic, and likely to embarrass future travellers. But we resolved we would not be trifled with. So we sent Merun to Chiora to procure horses, if possible, and decided that in the event of failure we would, with our one horse, work the distance by stages until we could meet with other horses in the country.

This was, I think, the only occasion on which Merun showed signs of wavering in carrying out our orders. Seeing, however, that we were in earnest, he rode off to Chiora, and soon after noon brought back the horses required.

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xv., p. 318.

As soon as he reappeared our natives rushed off as if they had a final card to play. We feared mischief, and packed the horses as rapidly as possible. The usual consequence followed: what had been hastily done had been badly done. And our first horse had hardly turned the corner of the cancellaria when his pack rolled off. We repacked and started again. The path, after leaving Gebi, follows for three or four miles the left bank of the stream, and then crosses to the right. The picturesqueness of the valley is in summer spoilt by the river's bed. The water is contracted to narrow channels, and the rest of the bed is filled with stones and shingle and *débris*. But the hills on each side are well wooded. The summits of the ridges are sharp, and interesting valleys open out of the main valley on both sides of the stream. Our progress was but slow. Twice within the first two hours the loads had to be taken off, carried for some distance, and then replaced on the horses' backs. The first occasion was when, at a short distance from Gebi, the path ascended the hillside, and became too narrow for a horse to travel with packs on both sides. The second was when we reached the bridge by which we crossed from the left to the right bank of the stream. This bridge was so roughly and carelessly constructed as to be almost unsafe even for men to cross. The packs were therefore carried over, and the horses driven to ford the glacier stream as best they might. Four oxen were being driven over just as we arrived, and from the buffeting they received I feared our horses might come to grief. However, they crossed in safety, and, after the usual delay, we set out again. The loads were constantly in need of readjustment, owing partly to bad packing and partly to the roughness of the way. But after the first few miles it proved a very pleasant journey—now over level pasture, now by steep paths, but always amid the stillness of the forest, with fine beeches towering above us, and the hazel and rich undergrowth bordering our path. We caught glimpses of snow peaks—of the double-headed peaks of the Adai group—of Tsorga, Boordooil, and others, in the range running from east to west, which were quite unknown to us. At seven, as it was growing dark, we halted, spread out our sleeping-bags upon the long grass, made a good fire close to the river, and prepared our modest evening repast; then, covered only by the protecting branches of the trees, and lulled by the noise of rushing waters, we slept well till daybreak. Somehow, I did not at first take kindly to this *al fresco* kind of

entertainment. But the blaze of the fire restored me to my wonted cheerfulness. I thanked Prometheus, and felt prepared to climb any number of Caucasian peaks to deliver him from his cruel fate, so great was my gratitude for the service he had rendered man.

It was very delightful the next morning to awake in the midst of this Caucasian forest. We got off soon after six, and for about two hours followed the right bank of the river. Then, when the glacier from which the Rion apparently takes its rise was well in view, we turned to the left, and in about two hours had reached the top of the pass we had to cross—the Goribolo.

Having rested awhile, we descended to the rapid glacier stream, the head of the Skenes Skali river.

Up to this point our Chiora driver had been most tractable, but here he commenced to give us trouble: he refused to cross the river without a promise of further roubles. We declined to make any definite promise, but assured him we would take all the difficulties of the way into consideration when we arrived at Lashkete. He seemed at first half afraid of the rushing torrent. But when Merun had led one of his horses across, and he saw that the rest of us had waded over in safety, he unpacked the horse he had been leading, and made a rush to secure the one that had already crossed. The attempt failed, and we threatened an appeal to the authorities if he refused to complete his bargain. The odds were too great for him—four to one—and he ultimately gave in.

All trace of track was lost as soon as we reached the right bank of the Skenes Skali. The course of the river was our only guide. Had we all been mounted, this part of our journey would have been more pleasant. But as Cockin, Almer, and myself were without horses, we had to make tracks first on one bank, then on the other, as either offered the better path. We had frequently to cross the stream, which occasionally was no easy matter.

Finally, the night closed in upon us, and we had again to camp by the rushing torrent, this time on a stony beach, a soft and level place for our sleeping-bags being impossible to find. Our Chiora driver, after his discomfiture, had worked magnificently: he splashed through the river leading the horses, and was most energetic in making a roaring fire as soon as we had concluded that we must encamp. The next day our difficulties were even greater than any we had hitherto encountered. On one occasion our baggage was saved from

a ducking only by a fine jump of the horse at a critical moment. Repeatedly we had to make tracks through the brushwood wide enough for our horses with their packs to pass. Huge trunks of trees lay across the path. The horses rebelled. Once, after great effort, we succeeded in planting the two fore feet of one of the horses over a great trunk, whilst his heels remained behind, and his belly rested on the tree. Such is not an easy situation from which to extricate a quadruped. Later we had an altercation with our driver as to the best method of working up a steep bank from the river's bed. He was tired of unloading and reloading. We set to work with our ice-axes, and prepared a passable path. But on turning round to bid our Jehu lead on his horse we found him blubbering like a child. He had evidently quite lost heart, or feared that he had indeed fallen into the hands of the Philistines and would never see his home again. We petted him and encouraged him, assuring him that in good time he would receive his reward. In places there were slight tracks along which sheep had apparently been driven; but about midday, having lost all traces of any path, we came upon a bend in the river where the channel contracted, and the waters, several feet in depth, rushed wildly between two steep and inaccessible walls of rock. We had completely lost our way, and there seemed no means of escape. We retraced our steps and scouted. Ultimately we discovered a track leading, at some distance from the river, across an open pasture into the depths of the forest, full of magnificent beeches, pine, and fir. Soon we came upon some woodcutters, and our hopes revived that we should ultimately reach our journey's end. The path, now good, led to the river's edge. The bridge had been carried away by the spring floods, and we had, with difficulty, to wade across. Then on for some distance on the right bank of the river, when the path doubled back to the river, and we crossed to the left bank again by a good bridge. The path doubled back again, and at a point where the river was broad and the waters were deep we were compelled (the bridge having been carried away) to cross on horseback with considerable danger to ourselves and to the beasts. Then our troubles were over. The road was good; the forest through which we passed was magnificent. I almost wished we might be benighted here that at least one night might be spent under such glorious trees. But we had no time to lose. On and on we pressed, hoping against hope that we might reach Lashkete ere nightfall. No such good fortune was to be ours. By eight we had reached a little village

called Malashe. It was quite dark, and we were still at least two hours journey from Lashkete. So, with a barn for our hotel, fresh straw for beds, and calves for our boon companions, we turned in for the night. The next morning early we reached Lashkete, the journey from Gebi having occupied nearly three days, instead of, as we had been told would be the case, a little more than one. At Lashkete we bade farewell to our Chiora driver. As we parted from him he, in an impressive manner, gave us his blessing, and wished us God speed.

Travelling and Mountaineering in the Caucasus.

I cannot refrain from moralising. I am convinced that mountaineers visiting the Caucasus with good Alpine guides should confine themselves to mountaineering—should with the least possible delay make their way to the district they intend to explore, and stick to the mountains.

Up to Lashkete we had spent eleven days in travel, and we spent eight more before we had finished our expedition, a total of nineteen out of thirty-five which I had at command in the country, leaving—making allowances for necessary off-days—less than a fortnight for mountaineering proper. Trudging through hot valleys is enervating, and is distinctly demoralising to the guides, to whom it is distasteful, and who, so far as our experiences have gone, display few of the qualities of the ‘dragoman.’ I enjoyed the travel: I found it interesting and stimulating, and I greatly appreciated the largeness of the acquaintance with the southern side of the central portion of the Caucasian chain which I obtained. But we accomplished much less climbing than in 1888, when we settled in one district and made ourselves well acquainted with the mountains there. To drag Almer with us day after day, through hot valleys and along the beds of streams, was a waste of guide-power, and, indeed, tended to diminish rather than increase our enjoyment. And from the time we had at our command to spend among the mountains our mountaineering successes were not commensurate with the cost. For the giants of the Caucasus, guides—and first-rate well-experienced guides—are, to my mind, indispensable unless men are prepared to run great risks and endure inordinate fatigue. But until natives are trained, climbers in the Caucasus, would, in my opinion, do well to be willing to be dubbed ‘centrists,’ and to settle down to climbing in some particular district. I am glad that my opinion is shared by my friends. Cockin fully endorses it; and when Woolley returned in 1889 almost

his first words to me on his expedition were: 'Holder, I am a confirmed one-valley man.'

Is the Caucasus Played Out?

I have more than once heard the expression that the Caucasus is played out. By no possible interpretation does this seem to me to indicate a truth. Certainly many of the highest peaks have during the last three or four years been ascended for the first time. But there still remains unconquered the southern peak of Ushba, which looks as though it would not be undeserving of the title of 'the blue ribbon of the Caucasus.' In the same district there is Mestia Tau. The highest peak of Janga has not been ascended. Mishirgi Tau has hitherto defied the attempts which have been made upon it. Very little climbing has been done on the southern side of the central chain, and our attempt on Janga, of which I will later on give a few particulars, will indicate what glorious work awaits the ardent mountaineer. In the Adai Choch group there are still several virgin peaks, and north east of this group Gumaran Choch,* accessible from Vladikavkaz, will, I suspect, amply repay if necessary, a whole summer's effort.

Here are surely sufficient possibilities of 'first ascents' to satisfy the most voracious appetite; and, though I do not depreciate the charm of a first ascent—a charm quite distinct from any mere vulgar desire for reputation—yet, if these possibilities be set aside, there are grand and unexplored passes for the Caucasian wanderer. Very few have yet beheld the glories of this range; it is still free from the visits of the ordinary tourist; the natives retain many of their primitive characteristics; there are no crowded hotels or pensions, 'crosses between health resorts, mountaineering centres, and the headquarters of matrimonial agencies.' Nature can be seen in all her original charms. Perfect freedom, the most complete change from the ordinary avocations of civilised life, and the most absolute rest can be secured. Played out! They have hardly yet had an innings. And it is to be hoped that, in spite of the occasional tedium of the journey many members of the Alpine Club, true lovers of mountains, will yet visit this wonderful and magnificent range.

An Attempt on Janga from the South.

More is sometimes learnt from failure than from success. An unsuccessful expedition is often stored with the richest

* See p. 558.

memories. Certainly I more frequently revert to our unsuccessful attempt on Mishirgi Tau in 1888 than to any of the successful ascents we that year accomplished, and I look back with the greatest interest on our attempt on Janga in August last. As our time was so limited we could not spare days for reconnoitring, but must needs attempt to take the mountain by one grand *coup de main*. We intended, marching up the Kalde valley, to sleep as high as possible, so as to start fair the next morning; but a storm coming on in the afternoon, we preferred dry shirts and the shelter of a kosh in the valley to exposed rocks for our resting-place at night. We started from the kosh at 3.20, a ridiculously late hour, which is only to be explained by the facts that all our watches were an hour or more late, and that we, of course, did not care to reach the icefall much before daylight. In the early part of our journey we lost time owing to the difficulty of crossing the glacier stream, which was remarkably broad and deep, and in the end we thought it best to cut steps over the huge arch of ice at the glacier's snout, under which the torrent flows. A short walk up the right bank of the glacier brought us to its eastern arm, over which without difficulty we made our way to the foot of what appeared to be, as I have elsewhere stated,* a huge buttress of rock leading right to the summit of the mountain. Though we had spent more than three hours in reaching this, yet we had great hopes of success, as the rocks did not appear to be difficult. At 7.30 we began zigzagging our way up this buttress, keeping the peak as much as possible directly in front of us. We found the rocks loose but not steep, and for $1\frac{1}{2}$ hour we made good progress. Then a rock-tower necessitated a descent on to the eastern side of the ridge for about half-an-hour. A short snow-wall was crossed. Then we attacked the arête again. At 11 we came upon a slope of ice, up which, for a little over half-an-hour, steps had to be cut.

Then, owing to numerous towers, we turned on to the west side of the ridge, and advanced slowly, mostly over rocks, which in some places were by no means easy, till we had reached a height of from 13,500 to 14,000 feet. On our left was a magnificent couloir, unfortunately filled with ice, so that we could make no use of it either in our ascent or on our return. At the height of 14,000 feet we discovered

* *Alpine Journal*, vol. xv. p. 318.

that between the ridge we had been climbing and the final peak there was a glacier at a depth of several thousand feet. The ridge turned sharply to the west. Here it was covered with snow. In half-an-hour we had arrived at the highest part of this ridge. From 2 till 2.30 we rested. We then descended by a snow-covered ridge, requiring care, to the head of the glacier which separated us from the mountain. Without difficulty this was crossed, and we worked vigorously for about two hours up rocks which we hoped would lead us to the summit. We were all in good condition, and up to this time had hardly allowed ourselves to dream of failure. When, however, at 5 P.M., we emerged from a small couloir up which we had been climbing, and saw, still towering above us, enormous masses of rocks, whilst the true top of the mountain was still hidden, we felt bound to call a council of war. Immediately above us the rocks looked smooth and difficult; yet we had little doubt but that they could be surmounted. But the question was, How soon could we hope to reach the top? Almer's estimate was at least two hours; and I did not think this was extravagant, for above the rocks there was a final ridge of snow or ice. In two hours it would be dark. Suppose we reached the top, we should, therefore, either have to spend the night upon the top or scramble down the mountain-side in the dark. We none of us cared for the prospect of spending the time till daybreak, especially as our food and drink were well nigh done, at a height of some 17,000 feet, and we all clearly recognised that the descent during the night would be perilous in the extreme. As we were deliberating, I remembered the wise words of our secretary—'Remember, Holder, that mountaineering is only recreation; it is not the main business of life.' And most reluctantly, yet unhesitatingly, when the full bearing of our situation had been ascertained, we all voted for an immediate return.

Before we were across the glacier night was on us. We thought perhaps we might get through the icefall and descend by the main glacier on the east of the ridge that we had climbed. From a distance the route seemed easy. There appeared to be innumerable bridges and few crevasses to bar our progress. But when we began to work our way there, yawning chasms presented themselves on every hand. The lantern shed its light but a short distance, and, after several fruitless attempts, we ascended to the ridge, intending to spend the night in a sheltered spot we had observed in our morning's climb. Our sleeping-place was the summit of a

ridge sloping slightly to the north, and thus affording some protection from the winds which might blow in this direction, whilst, on the south, a ridge of snow had drifted and frozen, forming an efficient barrier against wind or snow coming from the south. But though the night was clear and there was little wind, the cold was intense. Soon Almer and I were kicking our toes and shivering, and declaring that it were better to run any risks rather than be frozen to death—in whole or part. So we decided to move slowly and cautiously down by the route up which we had ascended. Our plan was to work for a while until we were well warmed, and then to rest in a convenient place until the cold compelled us to renew our energies and again to descend. It was, doubtless, perilous work. We had but one lantern, and when the leading man had found a footing, it had to be passed back to enable the rest to reach him. However, we slowly and surely made our way down, and at noon had reached without accident the kosh from which we had set out.

We returned to the priest's house at Kal, and were hospitably entertained. Our tent had been pitched upon his lawn, and his nephew was most assiduous in attending to our wants.

I only had time afterwards to reach Mazeri, and to spend one night away from tent, in the fond imagination that an attempt on Ushba would be possible. I had to abandon it, and the only additional valuable information I can give is that by hard riding I was able in just over three days to reach Kutais from our camp about a mile above Mazeri.

I append a list of prices of articles which we purchased from the natives, as it may be useful to future travellers:—

Bread.—Ordinary barley cakes, 12 per rouble; ditto, with a layer of cheese, 5 to 8 per rouble. Polenta cakes, 5 to 8 per rouble.

Wine.—30 to 50 kopeks per bottle.

Vodka.—30 to 40 kopeks per bottle.

Cheese.—15 kopeks per small cheese.

Fowls.—25 to 40 kopeks each.

Sheep.—1 rouble 60 kopeks to 3 roubles each.

Eggs.—1½ to 2 kopeks each.

Horses.—1 to 3 roubles a day, including the services of a driver. At Gebi we were asked 4 roubles a day.

[We hope to be able, in the February number, to give a map of the Adai Choch, illustrating Mr. Holder's journey.]