THE ADAI KHOKH GROUP FROM SHODA (11,120 feet).

FROM A PHOTOGRAPH BY V. SELLA.

THE

ALPINE JOURNAL.

FEBRUARY 1892.

(No. 115.)

DAGHESTAN AND THE ASCENT OF BASARDJUSI.

BY GEORGE YELD.

(Read, in part, before the Alpine Club, March 3, 1891.)

I.

ON August 10, 1890, G. Percival Baker and I, with Gérôme Réalini, of Tiflis, as interpreter, left Evlake, on the Batoum-Baku Railway, for Nucha, on our way to Basardjusi. Our two phaetons went off at full speed in clouds of dust, but it was not long before one required repairs in the shape of old rope and pieces of string.

Our drivers did not stop at the regular post stations, but with friends. At one place they drove down into a large river-bed, where there was still a little water running, to sprinkle the horses and allow them to drink. Our drinks for the most part consisted of water-melons. Dragon-flies, bee-eaters, hoopoes, a lizard with a grasshopper in his mouth, and small turtles in the stream attracted our attention at different times. The most noticeable plant was an iris, apparently a form of spuria, some seed of which we secured, and a magnificent reed which flourished wherever there was water.

After crossing a tableland about 900 feet high, where the earth was most curiously carved by the rain, we came about four o'clock to a large oasis where there were herds of cattle, buffaloes wallowing in the water, many magpies, eighteen or twenty together, much threshing of corn in progress, and trees of a beautiful green. At the end of this oasis there were one or two splendid trees, aspens of some sort apparently, and the best spring we met with opposite the entrance to a primitive brickfield. At the last place our

drivers put into we cooked a tin of Silver's soup to the great amazement of the natives; half-a-dozen of them at a time were on their knees staring at the process. We could now see where Nucha lay, but were not able to take photographs owing to clouds, yet golden sunset effects on the hillside were very fine.

Our men entered Nucha with loud shouts. Baker and I were soon in collision with something or other, while Gérôme's charioteer drove into a big hole in the road. It was after ten when we reached the Hôtel du Caucase amidst much shouting and the barking of dogs. We found the place fairly clean and the food quite passable.

Early on the following morning the Priestav called upon us, saying that he had received a telegram to the effect that we were to receive any help we needed. We then drove with him to pay our respects to the Chief of the district, who received us with great courtesy and cordiality, and kindly consented to forward our wishes. On the way—the main street being under repairs—our phaeton was driven down into the torrent bed, and out of it again up an incline that we thought impossible for any horses. This feat a larger experience caused us to look upon as quite an ordinary incident. On our way back we called at the post-office to send telegrams, when we were most hospitably treated by M. Seleffkoff.

The Hôtel garden contained many fruit-trees, though the grapes were not yet eatable; there were little red plums that were good, little yellow ones that were much better, a damson-shaped fruit bright crimson-red in colour, with an acid taste, capital pears, and filberts, small but excellent. The yard boasted a black mulberry-tree with fruit in perfection, the ascent of which Baker soon effected.

In the afternoon we started, with five horses and their Lesghian owners, and a Cossack sent by the Chief of the district, for Geinuk. The road had walnut-trees planted on each side, which seemed to be fairly flourishing, as most of them were protected. We soon came upon the single yellow hollyhock, which we were so often to see afterwards, and everywhere we had forced upon our attention the marvellous effect of water in this climate. Wherever there is water there is rich vegetation. Some oases, if I may so term them, were most luxuriant; the best were so many veritable gardens. Pears, vines, plums, walnuts, mulberries, as well as other fruit-trees to which we could not give names, flourished in great numbers.

Very grateful after the hot road was the byway among orchards and gardens, shaded by trees, lighted by foliage-tempered sunlight, and freshened by the pleasant sound of the neighbouring brooks. No music can be sweeter than the sound of running water, 'gurgling with gladness,' in a thirsty land like this. On the other side of the chain we were to see the destructive power of water; here it nurtures, there the rain descends with such fury as to tear away the turf from the steep slopes.

At dusk we reached Geinuk, and were taken to a house where a survey officer was quartered. A very good-natured hospitable man he proved to be.

After a time we were regaled with tea, eggs, pears and vodki, a spirit like gin, with a strong taste of juniper. We slept in our tent, which we had rigged up on the balcony. In the morning we were able to examine our surroundings. The place seemed fairly rich in fruit-trees, pears, walnuts, and especially apple-trees, many of them heavily laden with fruit, and propped with poles as in Herefordshire. At the back of the house there were green-clad mountains, which reminded me of Ronco in the Eastern Graians, though they had not Ronco's pinnacles of bare rock. We washed in a little runlet at the side of the house which was pleasantly cool. On the garden fence were three bleached horses' heads. Several fine dogs, fowls, calves and a buffalo seemed to belong to the householder.

After breakfast we set off for Shin. The torrent (from the Shin or Salawat Pass) had appropriated a very wide bed, and caused much havoc, though not in very recent times. I jumped on behind the Cossack to cross the main stream. The Cossack was a great ally of ours, though my remarks to him were confined to 'Karasho' at intervals, with a pat on the back for emphasis sake. The men of Shin were a wild-looking company, with sheepskin caps and a sort of Norfolk smock. Everyone carried a long knife in his belt. The children were for the most part clad in red, the girls wore loose trousers of the same colour. Shin rejoiced in plums, pears, walnuts, mulberries, and French beans. Our interview with the Yushbashi, or village chief, took place in an orchard of white mulberry-trees, the fruit of which was excessively sweet. We now paid off our five men, and with the Cossack's help entered into negotiations with the Yushbashi for three horses with three men to look after them. The business was long and tedious, and though we were repeatedly told that everything would be ready 'this hour,'

we found that the infinite patience so necessary in the Western Caucasus was much called for here also. At last it was agreed that we should start with two horses, and a promise that a third should follow and catch us up. Baker had spent some of the waiting time in photographing a group of the villagers, as well as an ancient loom with the two women who were at work upon it. We parted from our Cossack with regret. There was, I should say, much threshing of corn going on; the oxen trode it out sometimes with a sledge, sometimes without, in the primitive fashion still practised in the Caucasus and South of Russia. A short way from Shin we found our first forget-me-not.

As we mounted towards the Shin Pass the valley became merely the enlarged bed of the torrent. The commonest flowers were a large puce-red epilobium, a dianthus, agrimony, several campanulas, and the single yellow hollyhock. We halted for a meal opposite the place where a large side glen joined the main valley. Here we were joined by the survey officer, and returned his hospitality of the previous night. By this time the forest scenery was interesting.

The torrent-bed here was most curiously cut into terraces, as accurately as if the work had been done by man. The third horse arrived soon after we left our eating-place. In the forest at from 5,000 to 6,000 feet the trees were fine, especially cherry, maple, and limes. The last were in full flower, and their blooms filled the air with fragrance. In fact, 'the fairies were giving a treat under the lindens,' for we came across excellent raspberries and blackberries. Campanula lactiflora was here imposing. The mountain at the head of the side glen to our right was of noble form, and the forest scenery was generally finer than we had anticipated.

The last part of the wood consisted of oaks which climbed up in open order with a very picturesque effect. There was a curious spring on the bare hillside at 7,000 feet, above the forest (which ceased at about 6,600), just before we turned to the left to pitch our camp on the level greensward that commanded a wide prospect to the south, at a height of 7,400 feet. Here we put up some partridges. The sunset promised us good weather for the morrow.

We spent a comfortable night, and in the morning started off in advance of the rest, with Ali, one of our Shin Lesghians, the other two being Cassim and Mehemet. Arnebia echioides, or the Prophet flower, so called according to a legend current in India, because the Prophet Mahomet touched the flower and left the imprint of his

fingers in the five black marks,* was the plant of this part. A white dianthus and a dark red violet that reminded me somewhat of a cyclamen also attracted us. Many campanulas flourished, and the forget-me-nots began to be of a richer blue. There were many flocks of sheep on the slopes as well as horses and cattle. We came upon a refreshing spring on our way to the Salawat, and then mounted the rise to the east of the pass. We failed to understand the map here. There is no peak like Salawat between the two passes indicated on the map; the big peak lies much to the east. We had intended to ascend this peak on our way, but it was so far off that we decided to yield to laziness. As we lay on the turf three white-headed eagles sailed slowly over us, and presently a fourth with a black head joined in the narrow scrutiny to which we were being subjected. They came so close that Baker thought of trying his revolver on them. Salawat is a fine peak furrowed by gullies with extremely sharp ridges between them, as are most of the mountains hereabouts. Some of the peaks were of a dull red colour, the Salawat reminding us something of the Tersiva. The faces were carved and scarred in a most wonderful manner. We lay long on the grass in the sun, and when we had descended some distance on the further side of the pass, had to wait for the men, who had misunderstood our directions. This descent was desolate in the extreme, for there was not a tree, much less a human habitation, in sight. The power of the rain here seemed to be terrific. It had swept off the turf from the slopes in many places on our left as easily as one would lift a tablecloth. We saw some large flocks of sheep; we counted forty in single file getting over a bad place on the mountain side to our right, and horses were feeding in places so sheer to our eyes that we thought they must be unable to move. But we as yet knew little of the capabilities of these plucky little beasts, for by-and-by, to our amazement, a herdsman fetched home the two we had noticed as well as many others, and they went at a good speed straight down-hill.

When the men joined us, we pitched our camp at the junction of the two Shin or Salawat Passes, where there was a so-called caravanserai at 8,000 feet. Before we had settled down, some travellers asked for medicine, two of them making as though they were ill; but, as it seemed that they were shamming, and as it was not thought advisable to have them

* *Garden*, October 3, 1891, p. 304.

for companions during the night, they were sent off. I must in justice say that, though we repulsed these pseudo-invalids, veritable sufferers, like the Yushbashi's child at Komaroffka, were doctored to the best of my companion's by no means small ability.

We here bought a sheep for about 7*s.* 6*d.* The ministry of the sheep's interior the men cooked for themselves, while we were feasted with the kidneys dished up in chopped onions. The soup was our best dish. The sheep here are of the flat-tailed breed.

In the morning (at 7,150 feet) there was a scene of wild desolation. The torrent ravages the whole valley bed. There were no trees, and but one little patch of scrub to be seen. One feature of this part was the number of springs in gullies on the mountain sides. We here saw three women with huge bundles of thistles (to be used, when dried, for fuel) on their backs. They were of small make, with rather small feet, which were quite bare. They wore a circlet of coins round their heads. We afterwards saw other women engaged in the same occupation. The men who passed us travelling wore sheepskin coats, carried flint-lock guns and knives in their belts, wore felt sandals, and, many of them, dyed their beards red. The natives lit their pipes with flint and steel and a dried fungus.

When we had joined the main valley which leads to Achti (our side valley lying, roughly speaking, at right angles to it), we enjoyed a pleasant surprise in a beautiful meadow with rich clover and many flowers—like a glimpse of summer in the midst of winter—under irrigation at the time. This meadow still remains fixed in our memories. It was all brightness and life, and its surroundings all desolation and death. There were, it is true, a few patches of corn higher up the valley, but they were sad and sickly; and I am afraid the careful observance of all Virgil's precepts could not here produce 'joyful crops.' Below the meadow the torrent divided into a number of streams, and we were carried by the men across the biggest, which was too wide to jump. Before reaching the village of Bursch, we passed a very curious burial-ground; on one of the tombstones there was an inscription finely cut.

The village of Bursch is built against the hillside; the houses are flat-roofed; the roofs are piled with square cakes of dried cowdung, which look something like peat-stacks; and the walls are adorned with drying pancakes of the same heavily-scented material. The population seemed large; many men

in groups stared at us, some greeted us. I counted thirteen on one housetop. There were also many women. Children were bathing, and several boys, non-bathers, walking in the road stark naked. Ropemaking was going on in the torrent bed. Our Shin men looked quite highborn beside the inhabitants of Bursch, and we were not surprised to hear one of them say: 'These are animals, not men.' Our men told Gérôme that during the winter the men of Bursch go, some with their wives, to Nucha and other places as shepherds and herdsmen.

We had lunch in a narrow meadow on the right bank of the stream, which we forded to reach it, Bursch being on the left bank, and sent back one of the men to buy a couple of fowls and some eggs. On our way we met the Yushbashi of Bursch, who entreated our good offices with the Government that he might be maintained in his present position. The valley was wild, and the torrent had to be crossed some half-dozen times. We came upon a small grove of trees before we got to Khnoi, which had some willows and aspens and plots of oats and barley in front of it, and is rather picturesquely situated under a big sharp-pointed rock.

Photography in the village caused great excitement. Two men were having their heads shaved with knives (apparently the custom, as we saw the same thing at Nucha) in the marketplace. We met a gorgeously-dressed horseman and his wife just as we were quitting the village. I believe one or two boys threw stones at us. Outside the village were some large burial-places and many littlefields of barley and rye. I put up three brace of partridges and saw a weasel before we reached the spot at which we decided to camp. We bought some hay from men who were engaged in harvesting it among the cornplots.

Our resting-place (height 5,700 feet) was by the side of a lateral torrent out of sight of the main track, close to a patch of barley. As we were supping an old man appeared, who asked why we had not stayed in the village, and said that we had no right to camp where we were; but when Gérôme showed him the hay which had been bought, he seemed quite satisfied that we were respectable characters.

When he had duly ascertained the direction of Mecca, he proceeded to prayers. His eyes afterwards wandered so lovingly towards our cooking-pot that we invited him to join the men's repast. He accepted with gusto, evidently enjoyed himself, and departed with words of friendship. But either he had done violence to his conscience which afterwards

revolted, or his supper disagreed with him and called for revenge upon the strangers, or a voluble account of us awoke suspicions among the villagers. Anyhow this old gentleman's visit bore fruit during the night.

Between eleven and twelve I was roused by a great disturbance, and sitting up discerned Baker getting his revolver out of a pocket of the tent. There was noise enough for twenty men, and I thought at first that the villagers were driving off our horses. It appeared afterwards that two villagers came, freely abused our men, and belaboured them with sticks—also freely—for allowing their horses to get into the barley. Gérôme now had a field for his fine voice and full vocabulary. He harangued the villagers with much effect, and wound up by offering to pay in the morning for any harm that might have been done.

He then, on the departure of the natives, with great impartiality forcibly rebuked our men for not giving the horses the hay which had been bought, and for letting them wander too far. So the disturbance came to a peaceful end, though it certainly sounded at one time as if the results might have been serious. 'Shall we have incision? Shall we imbrue?' seems but a mild version of the Lesghian sound and fury.

We were off a little after six in the morning, and soon passed some sulphur springs on the track side with two rude baths, one of which was occupied by a native. We then came to a tunnel 90 paces long. After that the track became more interesting, as the number of shrubs and flowers increased. We saw a little brown snake, the only one we came across in our travels, as well as various birds, waterwagtails, some brown swallowlike birds, and another resembling a sandpiper. We also found under a damp rock a very beautiful gentian, 'azure of heaven's own tinct,' which was quite new to us. The blossoms were freely produced on slight, comparatively long stems. At 4.50 we arrived at a big bridge; here thirty or forty men were engaged in repairing the road. After halting for a meal at 11.30 we soon came to the lateral torrent which descends from Mesa. We had resolved to try the route by Mesa and Echir to Kurush instead of going round by Achti. This Mesa route, so far as we know, has not been traversed by travellers except the Russian survey officers. But it was first necessary to cross the torrent. Our passage was a ludicrous sight. Baker rode on the top of the baggage on one horse, I behind the package of a second, and Gérôme on the third. Baker and I had a collision in midstream, and we both laughed so much

that we became powerless. I own that I fell off, but luckily a few inches on the right side of the water. As for Gérôme, 'his mode of equitation was the joy of all beholders,' though, no doubt, he laughed at us as much as we did at him.

We then crossed a steep face on the left bank of the stream, while the horses went along the right bank, where, after a short time, we joined them on Cassim's back; though the water was up to his knees, and the stones loose, he pluckily made nothing of fording it with bare feet.

After this the path kept at a great height above the torrent through scenery of the wildest character. The map is wrong here; it puts the track on the left bank of the torrent, whereas it should be on the right bank. In one place a small avalanche of stones descended, though the stones were not of a size to do much mischief. The Lesghians, in fact, more than once called attention to the risk run by man and beast on such a track. Presently we saw a bridge far below us, to which we went down by a steep descent, and mounted up to a considerable height on the other side by an equally steep ascent. Just after crossing we had a full view of two of the most awesome gullies I ever saw, smooth and almost shining from the stones and earth which had swept them. This wild gorge called forth many expressions of satisfaction from my companion. The track still continued very wild, and led us after a time past some curious earth-pillars, on the edge of a side stream, with stones on their points. The torrent then plunged through wonderful gorges, in places almost abysmal, and some yellow hollyhocks, white pinks, and violets showed themselves. Next two little plots of corn greeted us like a smile, followed by many more, some of them in terraces. In fact, the Mesa people seemed to make the best of their ground, some of the patches being very good, especially the rye. We found quite a number of beautiful flowers here, the finest an astragalus-like plant with delicate pale brown flowers streaked with white.

We crossed the main torrent twice, the second time by a bridge at a great height above the angry water. After much searching for a camping-ground we took refuge in the dry bed of a lateral torrent (height, 5,500 feet). We stocked out all the stones we could, and then tried a bag of hay as a mattress—one of the successes of our tour. While we were pitching our tent a large number of men, apparently the roadmakers we had seen in the main valley, arrived, and meeting a large company of donkeys, which were being driven down our lateral torrent, attempted to appropriate each man

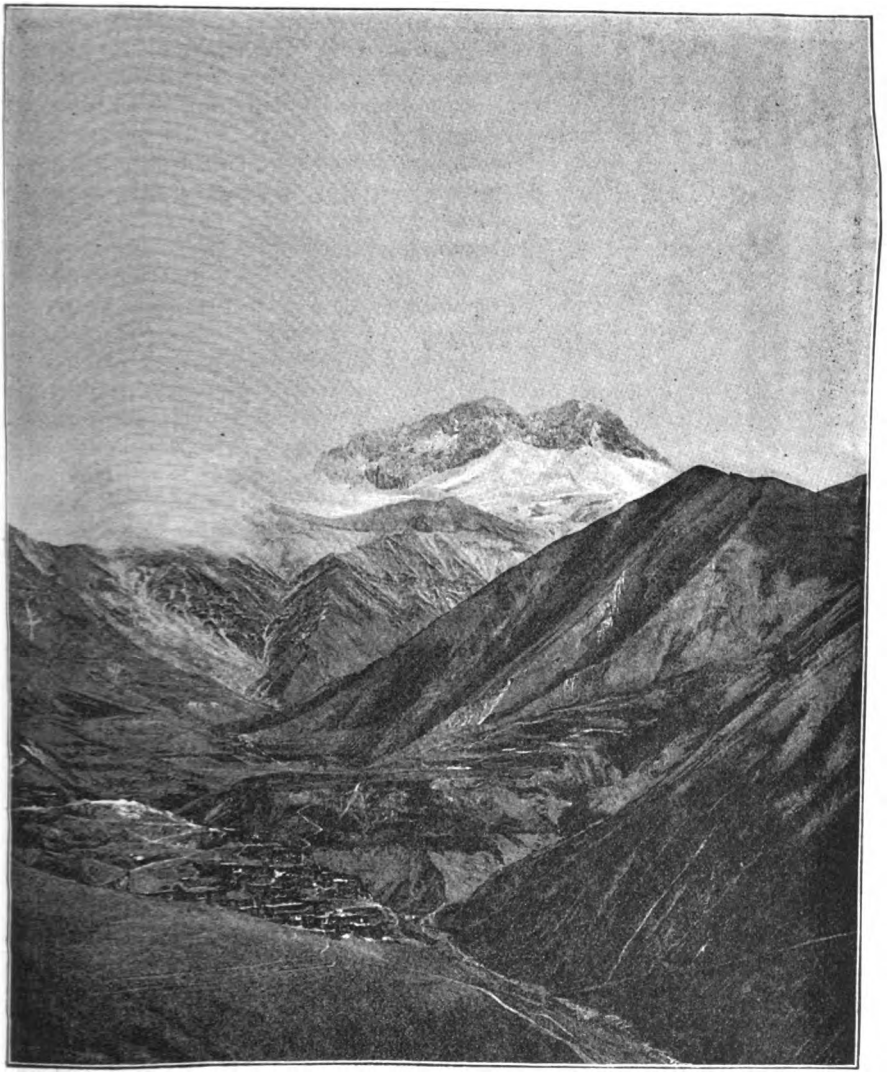
an ass. Some succeeded, more failed, for the donkeys knew how to play the game—a few made acquaintance with the water. Then the Yushbashi arrived and wanted us to go to Mesa for the night, but, as we courteously declined this proposal, he agreed to send a man to look after the horses. Baker as cook this evening was most successful. A soup and a rice with lemon-peel were beyond praise. Gérôme's Kabobs were not bad, but suffered from *trop de zèle*—I mean grease.

In the morning we passed Mesa, perched on a hillside with a pretty little grove of poplars by the torrent side and another above. Baker took a successful photograph of it from the left bank of the torrent. There was a flour-mill turned by water close to the torrent, and the old miller and his son appear in the photograph. Baker and I went on in advance, having at first intentions on a peak to our right. We found ourselves before long in a dilemma. There was a stream to be jumped or a detour of half a mile to be made. Naturally we chose the jump, but it was only by dint of building a pier to take off from that we managed it—at least, that I did. We before long gave up the peak and rejoined our men. We next came upon a glorious view of Shalbruz, a double-headed peak with red cliffs and a few small patches of snow. The track now became difficult for the horses; in fact, in one place steps had to be cut for them by Baker on a steep slope, and then, on turning the next corner, we had a still more glorious view of Shalbruz, with its huge precipices and the village of Echir below it (see illustration). It was a fit reward for our perseverance by barren cliffs, desolate gorges, and crumbling paths.

The people at Echir turned out to examine us. A civil man told us that about two years ago somebody had been to Echir to look at the mountains. We supposed he meant the survey officers. There were fifty houses in the village. A few patches of greenish-yellow corn fought for existence behind the village. Both at Echir and Mesa the men spoke very good Turkish.

Shalbruz, at times half wreathed in white cloud, was so splendid that we decided to make the ascent our first object. Though the road past Mesa to Echir had been decidedly bad in places, that from Echir to the pass to Kurush was good. We saw many sheep and a fine herd of black cattle. One or two thistle-gathering women fled at the sight of us.

Baker was the first to reach the pass (9,250 feet), and waved his handkerchief as though something noticeable was in sight, but when I got up there was nothing to be seen



G. P. Bakker, phot.

SHALBRUZ.

From above the village of Echtr.

but cloud. In a few minutes, however, Basardjusi reappeared, a glorious sight, but looking so formidable, so Weisshornlike, even when allowances were made for the additional size which the clouds lent to him, that our chances of success upon him seemed very small. Baker stayed on the pass to photograph, while I went along the ridge towards Shalbruz for a reconnaissance. All of a sudden I found myself in a beautiful fogbow, a sight I had long wished to see. I then went back to Baker, and afterwards both of us walked up the ridge and appeared together in the fogbow. We then had a discussion as to whether we should camp where we were or descend towards Kurush, a question that was settled by the fact that it was already 5.45 P.M. We had spied a little level lawn where, while Baker went back for the others, I remained and watched the clouds, which moved slowly between Basardjusi and his next neighbour to the west, like a solemn procession of white nuns with uplifted arms. Presently Cassim came with a note: 'The men won't camp so high on account of the horses; besides, they have no firewood.' There was, therefore, nothing for it but to rejoin the others.

Baker and I went on in front, the others being under orders to follow. We saw shepherds and dogs on a sort of tableland above a deep ravine with a torrent at the bottom, down which we had to pass. The dogs raged against us from the top of the cliff, and we congratulated ourselves that they were so far off, when, on turning a corner to the right, four of them set upon us. The cunning beasts had a private road down the cliff. The light was growing dim, and things did not seem pleasant, but luckily Baker hit the fiercest with a big stone, and eventually all four retired to reserve themselves for the rest of our caravan. On we went down the bed of the torrent till we heard Mehemet shouting behind us. Before our discussion with him was over the others arrived, and the debate became more vehement and vexatious. Truly, patience is requisite in the Caucasus! To cut a long story short, the men at last agreed to give up the idea of encamping in the meadow, above the torrent, with long wet grass, and to push on. We soon came to the junction with another torrent, and I was sent on in the dusk to discover what I could. After crossing one torrent, I don't know how, I came back, being unable to see enough to justify our further advance. So we spent the night on the dry part of the torrent margin at 7,750 feet. We had no fire, but on one of Silver's self-cooking soups, a box of sardines, and a

very little sherry we made a very fair supper. The mysteries of 'changing plates' then followed, at which I usually played the part of an humble and justly-rebuked underling. If 'the maidenliest star in the firmament' did but twinkle, reproaches fell upon me for not having excluded the light.

We slept well. The next day was Sunday, so, as 'cleanliness is next to godliness,' we retired to the torrent for extraordinary ablutions. A fire was made with thistles, so that we enjoyed our tea as usual. While we were at breakfast, some civil shepherds, who were passing by, were heard to remark: 'These men have everything.' And so we had—except the top of Basardjusi—in our pockets! We then went on towards Kurush. Before long we came upon Scabiosa Caucasica, which is certainly one of the noblest of Kurush flowers. Another conspicuous plant was a white pink, which grew in great tufts by the roadside, and exhaled a fragrance like that of magnolia blossoms. The water seemed to be made use of, and there were many patches of rye, barley, and bearded wheat not yet ripe.

Before we entered Kurush we passed the village council, thirty or forty men in sheepskin coats, sitting cross-legged in a circle to try, so we heard afterwards, a certain man who had allowed his sheep to trespass on a neighbour's corn. As the offender was a native, the natives tried him; if he had been a Russian, a Russian tribunal would have decided the case. Thus Gérôme; with the addition that native tribunals cannot sentence to death in the case of murder.

A crowd, by no means uncivil, followed us as we went with the Yushbashi through the village, a journey terribly strong in odours. Here a bunch of the magnolia-scented pink, which I had gathered before entering the village, was a great boon. On our arrival at the Yushbashi's, a big black dog barked at us loudly but without offering to bite; in fact, he might have been engaged to bark at so much an hour, when suddenly he tucked his head between his forelegs to hunt for an exasperating flea, and all but fell over on his head, while we roared with laughter at him. After this he gave up barking and retired.

The houses were built with flat roofs one above the other in irregular terraces, on a big projecting buttress of the hillside, and reminded us of old Biblical pictures. The roofs were piled up with squares of dried cowdung. At midday the muezzin on one of the housetops uttered the call to prayer. From the front of the house, looking S. by E., there was a magnificent view of Basardjusi. With shoulders

wreathed in vapour but unclouded head the great peak were hard to excel in grandeur.

The room we entered had a floor, like a stable, of plain earth. We sat on rugs on the floor. Baker perched himself on his photographic tripod. By-and-by the owner brought me a chair, and afterwards another for Baker. Internal Kurush, though the village is so finely situated, was a sad disappointment. We had been given to understand at Nucha that Kurush possessed houses equal to those of Nucha, but the traveller will find it advisable to sleep in his tent rather than in this Zermatt of Eastern Daghestan.

The women wore loose trousers, mostly red. On a house-top near us were three musicians, a boy with a drum and two fellows with droning pipes, one of whom worked so hard at his instrument that he looked as if he would burst. Two women at a time danced not ungracefully to this music. Crude, rude, and mad of mood the music seemed to us, but I question whether it was not equal to that of which the bard of Asolo spake when he wrote:

> Bang-whang-whang went the drum, tootle-te-tootle the fife.
> Oh, a day in the city square, there is no such pleasure in life!

But I must say something of the topography. Kurush faces Basardjusi, which is, roughly speaking, S.E. of it. At the foot of the mountain-buttress on which the village is built, the torrent from between Basardjusi and the next peak to the west (fed, too, by that from the Echir Pass ravine) is joined by that from between Shah Dagh and Basardjusi, one arm of which descends from the pass to Kuba and Kutkashin, the other from the huge glaciers on the north face of Basardjusi. N.W. of the village is Shal-bruz, whilst on the E. is Shah Dagh, the outer barrier of which, above the track from Kurush to Achti, is called Kizil Dagh, or the Red Mountain.

West of Basardjusi (its ridge running roughly from N. to S.) is a great rock mountain, very like the Levanna, called by our hunter Messent. Again to the W. of Messent is a peak (called 'Misfit' on Baker's photograph) which the hunter styled Charrou. This peak from other points of view reminded us of the Grivola. Again, W. of this is a third peak of a similar character (I omit one smaller ridge), the shoulder of which runs down to the pass between Echir and Shalbruz, named by the hunter Moolar.

The sight of Kurush is the great western peak of Basard-jusi, with a noble ridge which runs steeply down towards the

village; another huge ridge runs down towards the gap between Basardjusi and Messent. Had we been a strong party we should have tried to climb Basardjusi by the ridge which runs down to Kurush, but we did not feel justified, under the circumstances, in making the attempt. Our plan was to make the tour of the mountain and get at (from the south) the ridge which descends to the gap between Basardjusi and Messent. I may here anticipate a little by saying that from our camp (at 11,600 feet), on the south side of the great peak, we thought at first that the ridge by which we eventually made the ascent was identical with the one which led to the gap between Basardjusi and Messent; but there was, in fact, another great ridge with escarped sides between us and the Basardjusi—Messent ridge.

The rocks of Basardjusi are very dark, and stand out black against his crown of snow and ice.

We were not sorry to start for a camp under Shalbruz, and ascended gradually without any troubles. In one place a large number of donkeys were feeding and braying together. Before we reached our camp (9,500 feet) we came upon a large flock of sheep in charge of a young shepherd. His two big dogs barked fiercely at us, but, when their owner took a shot with a large clod of earth and hit the bigger one on the head, they collapsed amidst cries of 'Well thrown!' from us. Baker photographed this flock, and it was a most interesting sight to see the sheep all run together round the shepherd at a whistle which was barely audible to us. They certainly 'knew his voice.'

We bought a sheep from this shepherd, and our dinner would compare favourably with many a pretentious table-d'hôte at a recognised 'centre,' for Baker surpassed himself, and two very big mushrooms, found by me, were no unwelcome addition to the bill of fare, though Gérôme fought shy of them and thought we should be poisoned. Our Kurush hunter—I should have mentioned that we had engaged a man in the village—said his people ate them.

Near this camp—so Gérôme, instructed by the chief actor in the tragic drama, told us—an elderly murderer comes every week to weep and lament his crime. This was the story. The homicide was tending his flock on a ridge when a second shepherd arrived with his sheep. 'You shall not pass here,' said the homicide, who was armed with a gun. 'I shall,' said the new arrival, and drove his sheep forward. Thereupon the other, in a furious rage, shot him dead. For this he was condemned to imprisonment for a certain time and a

fine, and was forbidden to carry a weapon of any kind. Now he comes weekly to bewail his crime on the spot where his victim fell; but he is always attended by his two brothers with their guns, lest the relatives of the murdered man should catch him by himself and slay him in return for their kinsman's murder.

Soon after five next morning we were watching the sun rise from the tent-door. Lovely tints of reddish orange shaded to gold. We started at 5.45 for the ascent of Shalbruz, taking the hunter with us, though we followed the line of attack which we had previously agreed upon; indeed, had we taken the hunter's advice, we should probably have failed to climb the peak. At 11,600 feet we had a fine view of the River Samur. At 10 o'clock we were on a sort of col, with a cairn, 12,800 feet, having passed many magnificent obelisks and pinnacles of red rock, some of which Baker photographed. There was here to be seen a magnificent effect of the sun through mist on the lower peaks, which were a ghostly slate colour.

After a meal we proceeded, and reached the summit at 11.20; height by aneroid, 13,340 feet. The climbing was easy, and I do not think that we lent one another a hand more than twice. The hunter walked well.

The view of the Samur with the road beside it was fine; the little groves of trees near the river made a welcome relief to the bare slopes. We thought we saw the Caspian. We were struck by a curious Gunib-like rock peak to the NN.W. (apparently the Kaluk of the map). The track across the hills towards Achti wound in and out serpent-like; the comparison, if old, is at any rate truthful.

There was a cairn on the summit, the rocks of which were white, though the main part of the mountain was red. I ought to add that there were cairns in every conceivable position. The peak farther away from Kurush seemed to be slightly higher than the one we were on.

On our descent we went down towards the col between our peak and the apparently higher one, and then turned, making a right angle, straight down towards the Shrine (12,000), to which we had already seen a number of Mohammedan pilgrims ascending. The rocks were desperately rotten, but though the descent was steep there was no other difficulty. We then crossed some rather steep snow, traversed a snow-covered glacier, as we imagined, free from anything in the shape of a crevasse, and reached the top of the cliffs (which looked formidable from below) immediately above the Shrine plateau.

Here Baker unhappily broke his axe (it was supplied with a new handle at Kurush with a despatch we hardly looked for), and I was deputed to lead. Going first to the right and then to the left as the rocks required, and in places almost riding on stone avalanches, we got down to the Shrine without difficulty about 1.30. There were beautiful fawn-pink clouds floating lingeringly over the Samur valley as we descended.

This Shrine was a most curious place. The rocks were red and broken, and many pieces of rag, attached by pilgrims, were to be seen here and there. We afterwards saw at Bum and elsewhere many trees much rag-bedecked after the same fashion. Our Kurush man began to drone the usual pilgrim hymn. Baker tells me that on his way back to England he met a Lesghian in Constantinople who became fast friends with him on the strength of his having visited this Shrine. Here again cairns were visible on almost every rock-point. Near the Shrine we noticed the blood and entrails of sheep newly killed, though we were not fortunate enough to see the roc, Sindbad's porter-bird, who, so tradition says, makes his home hereabouts.

Many of the mountain forms were most fantastic. Shah Dagh looked like a huge deeply-moated camp with a double ring of towers. We found a number of pretty flowers as we continued our descent, a pale-blue sagelike plant being perhaps the most curious. Two villages on the route from Kurush to Achti, as they basked in the sleepy sun, were very picturesque. The first had a few yellow corn plots, the other was backed by green mountain slopes. The Samur with its comparative verdure was a refreshing contrast to the 'cold rocks and mountains rude.'

On our return to camp the men (they had received orders to collect mushrooms) presented us with a multifarious mixture of toadstools and gruesome-looking agarics, with a fair percentage of mushrooms. I was appointed examiner, and was able to select a good number as eatable. Thanks mainly to Baker's exertions, our dinner that evening was excellent; it was, indeed, known afterwards, as a standard to measure by, as 'the Shalbruz dinner.' During the night one of the horses grazed too near the tent, and kicked out one of the pegs close to my head. Sleepy protests from me brought down Gérôme's thunders on the Lesghian who was in charge of the horses, and we were all soon asleep again.

(*To be continued.*)