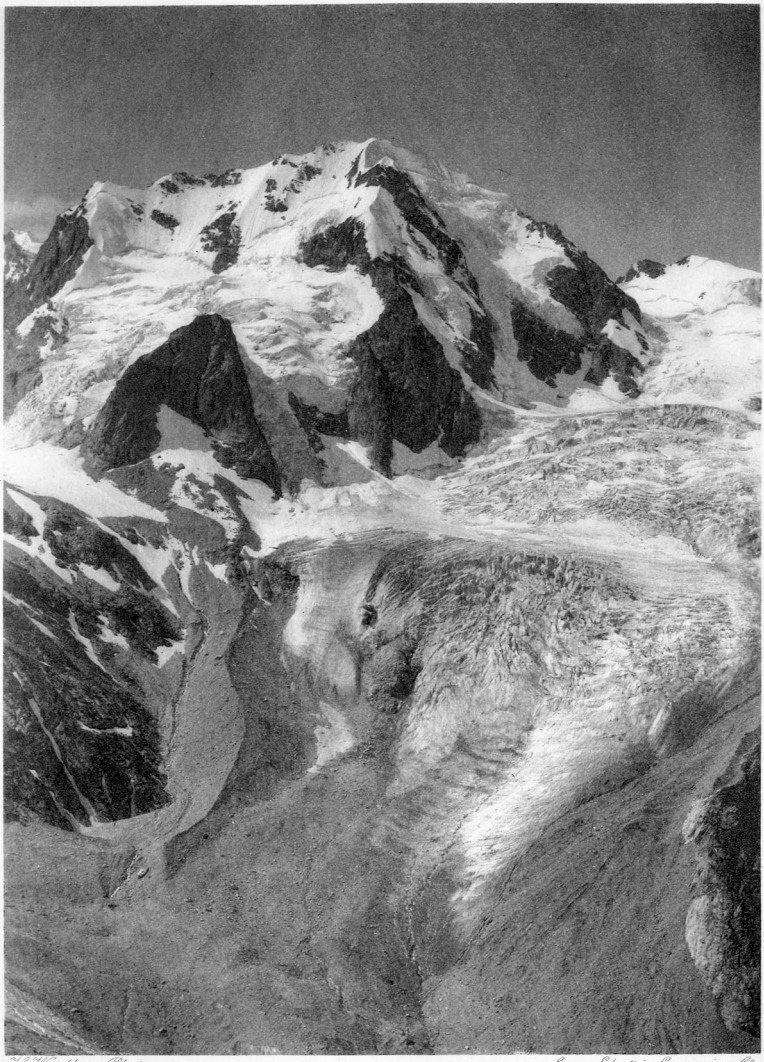


H. Woolley, Photo. Swan Electric Engraving Co.

Gyumachi, from the North.

THE

ALPINE JOURNAL.

NOVEMBER 1897.

(No. 138.)

Climbs among the Peaks of the Adyrsu, Central Caucasus.

By H. W. HOLDER.

(Read before the Alpine Club, June 1, 1897.)

LAST summer Cockin, Woolley, and I arranged to pay another visit to the Caucasus, and decided to proceed in the first place to the Adyrsu valley, near Urusbieh.

This valley had been previously visited by Mr. Grove in 1874, Mr. Freshfield in 1887 and 1889, and Herr Merzbacher in 1891. All three have spoken in high terms of its scenery, and we hoped to find amongst the numerous peaks which surround it one or two which we should be able to climb without guides, as we had resolved that we would take neither guide nor porter with us from 'the playground of Europe.'

On August 13 I reached Piatigorsk, and found Cockin and Woolley (who had arrived one day earlier) busily engaged in buying provisions and making arrangements for the commencement of our journey across the steppes to a village, where more serious preparations would have to be made for carrying on our baggage to Urusbieh. They had been joined by Merun and Dianos, both of whom had come from Tsageri, not, as we expected, by the direct route through Suanetia, but had ridden round about 200 miles by the Mamisson pass, Alagir, and Naltshik.

The next day we started, and the ride to Naurusov, which we reached at 3.30 P.M., was exceedingly interesting and delightful. We had a good carriage; there were fine views of the mountains from Elbruz away into the far E., the air was most exhilarating, and we were all encouraged to look forward to satisfactory results in our expedition. A short

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distance out of Piatigorsk we passed several thousands of regular and irregular cavalry manœuvring in the broad plains S.E. of the town. Unfortunately Merun and Dianos missed the shorter route which we had taken, and went round by Baksanski. In consequence of this delay we were compelled to spend the night in the cancellaria at Naurusov, the first village which we reached in the Baksan valley.

On account of the absurdly high prices we were asked for horses we decided to hire an arba with a couple of oxen to take our baggage to Urusbieh.

The next morning we started at about 5.30.

It was a beautiful morning; the views were charming; the rich green foliage of the valley through which we made our way contrasted in a delightful manner with the deep purple of the distant mountains, among which we thought we could distinguish one or two of our old friends of former years.

Unfortunately our pleasure was soon marred by a most trying incident. After walking for about an hour we were overtaken by a native with a troika. He offered us conveyance for a considerable distance at a low rate. We accepted the offer and went on merrily for 2 or 3 hrs. But in descending a steep hill near Ashabova (we had fortunately dismounted), either the driver exercised poor skill or the horses became furiously restive; in any case they galloped madly down the hill and, unfortunately, the troika was upset at the bottom of the hill, and the leg of the best horse was broken. After an outburst of despair by the owner of the horse, apparently accompanied with appeals to the Deity, he, immediately on our arrival, threw the blame upon us, and demanded the value of the horse, which he asserted to be 150 roubles. He even asked a party of officials who happened to pass to demand from us the amount named. We, however, had no difficulty in disproving his assertions, and when the officers had recognised our innocence, and had indicated that they could not support his claims, we gave him a 5*l.* note towards the purchase of a new horse, and this promptly relieved his distress.

It, perhaps, is worth stating that the officials, on examining our passports, intimated that we had no right to travel in this part of the country without getting them viséd at Naltshik. On our stating that, if necessary, one of our number would visit the starshina, they intimated that if we were willing to run the risk no obstacle to our progress would be presented by them.

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This being my first visit to this part of the country I was impressed with the fine hills in the neighbourhood of the accident, though unfortunately here, as in so many of the Caucasian districts, there was very little water except the glacier water of the river.

As the Baksan valley has been described in Freshfield's 'Central Caucasus,' I will merely say that although the scenery is frequently picturesque and pleasing we found it a rather weary walk, as we had to wait 20 or 30 min. every hour to allow the arba to come up with us, and to be ready to give assistance, which was sometimes wanted in awkward places. We slept at night on a grass slope near the Tartar village of Akhsu, and next day progress was so slow again that it was 8 P.M. before we reached Urusbieh.

The next morning we engaged pack-horses for our journey to the head of the Adyrsu valley, and started at 8.30.

The Adyrsu torrent has its source in the glaciers of the main chain, and, after a course of about 12 miles, flows into the Baksan valley just opposite the village of Urusbieh.

We crossed the Baksan and ascended by a zigzag route up the hill-side immediately opposite Urusbieh, until we came fairly into the Adyrsu valley. For some distance we walked along a well-trodden track on the left side of the stream. Then for a considerable time we had to work up the right side. Having reached the mouth of Merzbacher's Sullukol glen we crossed the granite boulders which had been left by the torrent, and for the remainder of our journey worked on the right side of the stream. There was a plentiful supply of wild strawberries, and it was a delightful day, so our progress was slow but pleasant. About noon we rested for a couple of hours. Shortly after leaving the resting-place the valley became more densely wooded, and the track more difficult for the horses, whose progress was barred every few paces by great fallen pine trees. However, nothing went wrong, and about 3.30 we arrived at an open plateau at the head of the valley, where we decided to pitch our tents. The height was about 8,000 ft. The situation was most picturesque. We were about a mile below the termination of the Adyrsu glacier, above which was the magnificent N. face of Latsga, a peak on the main chain, which had been visible all the way up the valley. More to the W. was another fine peak—Gumachi. We soon found that there were spring water and fire wood in the neighbourhood, and, moreover, a flock of sheep was penned every night close to our camp. The owner of the sheep

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was a tall interesting-looking man named Sarumbash, who seldom accompanied the sheep in their daily climbs, but who was a keen and successful sportsman, and, moreover, a shrewd business man. We were able ultimately to obtain sheep from him, though first of all we were compelled to display some little zeal and skill in bargaining. Then, however, some altercation occurred with reference to the destruction of the animals. Baksanukh, a Tartar whom we had engaged as porter at Urusbieh, would eat only what he himself had killed in an orthodox manner. Dianos held similar views, and as he was the stronger and more vigorous man, he had the benefit of the first sheep that was killed. To make matters satisfactory we suggested that they might kill in turn. I think, however, that Dianos was usually the butcher of the party.

To the W. of our camp was a small nameless peak on the ridge which separates the Adyrsu from the Adylsu valley, and from this point we fancied we should be able to obtain fine views of the higher peaks in the neighbourhood and decide on the most satisfactory lines of ascent. In the climb there was little of interest. We started at 3.50, crossed the bridge over which the sheep were usually driven, commencing the ascent in a line almost due W. of our camp. We made our way up steep slopes, first of grass and then of snow, till we gained the main eastern rock ridge, which we ascended in a N.W. direction till we reached the summit at 9.15.

The wind was bitterly cold, but by a slight descent we found a sheltered resting-place and were able to look round and form some plans for our future expeditions in this district. By the aneroid the height of the peak was about 12,500 ft. There were splendid views of Elbruz and Dongusorun, of Adyrsu-Bashi and Jailik, as well as, at greater distances, Laila, Tiktengen, and other interesting features of the chain. Our descent was much more exciting than our ascent. With doubtful wisdom we varied our return by going down a small glacier in a more northern glen. The result was that on reaching the snout of the glacier we were compelled to cross diagonally to the right bank, and were for some time exposed to considerable risk from falling stones. We propose to name this small peak Sarumbashi, and can recommend it as an excellent point of view for the Adyrsu mountains.

The Ascent of Adyrsu-Bashi.

When on the top of Sarumbashi we had singled out a peak near the head of the Adyrsu glacier, marked in Freshfield's

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map as Adyrsu-Bashi (14,673 ft.), for our first serious expedition, and had decided to attempt to climb it by the N. ridge.

On the morning of August 21 we started for the ascent. The previous night had been exceedingly cold, and we all had been to some extent affected by it. But the morning was fine, so we made our preparations as quickly as possible, and actually started with Dianos and Baksanukh about 9.30.

We ascended S.E. of our camp till we were about abreast of the end of the Adyrsu glacier, then turned up the grassy slopes and cutting off a corner descended somewhat to the right lateral moraine of the E. branch of the glacier. After following the moraine till 12.30, we stopped for lunch at a point which commanded a striking view of Latsga and Gumachi on the S. of the glacier. On resuming our journey we turned up a tributary glacier descending from the W. side of Adyrsu-Bashi, which was now in full view, and at 3 o'clock decided to send the two natives back that they might have sufficient time to reach the camp ere nightfall. We gave Woolley a short time to take some views, and then divided the burdens and directed our steps up towards the depression at the foot of the N. ridge of the mountain, where we could see some rocks amongst which we hoped to find shelter for the night. Before very long we discovered that there was decided danger from falling stones, which issued from gullies in the rocks on our left (N.) and raked the route along which we had to pass. As there was no other method of avoiding these stones we crossed the mouths of these gullies as quickly as we could, keeping as close as possible to such shelter as the rocks afforded us, and were soon out of danger. We then ascended an easy snow-slope and finally took to the rocks on the N. side, reached the depression at the foot of the N. ridge at about 6 P.M., and chose the best sleeping-place we could find. And since we had provided ourselves with light sleeping-bags to keep down our loads, we all felt the cold during the night. Next morning at 5 A.M. we began the ascent of the north ridge.

On the way up the glacier there had been some discussion as to changing our plan of attack and ascending by the S. ridge. In order to be prepared to descend, if we finally considered it desirable, by this route we carried with us from the sleeping-place our sleeping-bags and other impedimenta.

The ascent of the lower part of the ridge was mainly over rocks, varied, however, here and there with steep arêtes of snow or ice. There were one or two difficult places, and on the whole the climbing was both interesting and enjoyable.

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The upper part of the ridge, being mainly of steep ice, involved more continuous step-cutting, and a cornice which overhung on the E. side added somewhat to our difficulty. Gradually, however, the arête became less steep, the ice gave place to snow, and at 9.15 we reached the summit.

From the top we had a most magnificent view of the mountains: Koshtantau, Dych Tau and Shkara, Elbruz, Ushba, and Latsga—in fact, almost all the great peaks of the chain. And as the day was a perfect one we gave ourselves time on the top to lunch at leisure, note the views, and to build a modest cairn of stones. Having carried our sleeping-bags with us it was natural that we should endeavour to discover some untrodden line of descent which would be as satisfactory as, or more satisfactory than, that over which we had made our climb the previous day. We commenced in an almost due southern direction, but were stopped by a sheer break in the ridge. We consequently made our way back to the summit of the peak and started afresh down a rock gully on its W. face. Our progress at the commencement was fairly satisfactory; crossing from side to side as there appeared to be better hold or a safer line of descent. Eventually the gully opened out and we emerged on its true left side on to slopes of ice, below which the mountain-side fell westwards towards the tributary glacier in numerous terraces of rocks; the gully down which we had come becoming broader and ill-defined. We soon discovered that stones both large and small were almost incessantly bounding down these terraces from the rocks above. Before long we were forced to cross a broad channel of ice which here took the place of the main gully. Just as we were in the centre of the channel Woolley cried out, 'Stones, look out!' Cockin was out of the line of the stones. Woolley and I took as good a view of the danger as possible, protected ourselves with our well-padded rucksacks, and, as soon as the volley was over, as rapidly as possible got into a place of safety. Fortunately we neither of us suffered any serious damage. Woolley got a bruise on the shoulder which remained for some days, whilst all that I received was a scratch on one of my hands, and, as I discovered afterwards, a scar on one of my legs.

After this we managed to avoid the dangerous neighbourhood of the couloir, but only by descending the terraces by routes which were tedious and often difficult; consequently it was late ere we safely reached the tributary glacier up which we had come the day before. A leisurely stroll down the Adyrsu glacier brought us to the grassy

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slopes S.E. of our camp; but before we had crossed them it was quite dark, and our progress was naturally slow. We were all tired, and were not sorry to be met by Dianos, Baksanukh, the shepherd, and his son, who, having seen our lantern light on the hill-side, had come out to meet us and relieve us of our loads.

It should be carefully borne in mind by all mountaineers who visit this district that the danger of falling stones is exceedingly great, and at present, of course, very little known. Freshfield in his book expresses the opinion that the covering of the Shikildi glacier with masses of huge stones and moraine is due to a fall of the mountain a few years ago. Those who see the glacier and accept this view will be of opinion that climbing in this region must at times be about as dangerous as mountaineering can possibly become.

Attempt to ascend Jailik (14,868 ft.)

When on the top of Sarumbashi we had noticed a striking rock peak on the Urubashi ridge, nearly 3 miles to the N. of Adyrsu-Bashi. This peak was Jailik (14,868 ft.), the highest of the surrounding mountains, and, after our victory on Adyrsu-Bashi, we determined to try to climb it, though it looked far from easy. We started on Monday, August 24, at 9.45 A.M. Having descended by the valley about a mile from our camp we turned into the side glen, which joins the main valley about this point, and, crossing to the right bank of the tributary stream, ascended it until we were in sight of the end of a considerable glacier which descended from the E. This proved to be the nameless glacier by which Mr. Freshfield's party descended from their new pass in 1889.

After following the right lateral moraine of the glacier for some time we sent Dianos (who had accompanied us so far) back to the camp. Continuing along the moraine we soon came to the infall of a side glacier, which descends from the field of névé W. of Jailik. Having crossed the end of this side glacier we began to climb up to a ridge of rocks on its N. side. These rocks, being all of granite, gave us good sport. We followed 'tur' tracks, and at 5.30 P.M. reached the summit of the rocks, and discovered an excellent sheltered place (probably usually inhabited by the tur) in which to pass the night. From this ridge of rock slopes of névé extended N.E. up to the rocks of Jailik, which was now in full view. And not only was there this magnificent view of Jailik, but also of the N. face of Adyrsu-Bashi, as well as the Kurmuichi ridge,

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Ushba, and Elbruz. It was an almost enchanting moonlight night, and much warmer than on our previous expedition.

The next morning at 5 we started, making our way N.E. across the glacier which lay between us and the rocks on the S. side of Jailik, up which we hoped to make our way. The glacier was snowclad nearly the whole of the way, and in exactly 2 hrs. we came to the top of the pass immediately to the S. of Jailik, which is marked in Freshfield's map as Donkin's pass. Donkin worked out the height as 13,030 ft.; from our aneroid we thought it might be 100 to 150 ft. higher.

Here we stopped and had food before descending the awkward slope which lay before us. For as we had been unable to discover a promising line of ascent up the S. or S.W. side, we decided to cross the pass and try our luck on the E. side.

It was a splendid morning, though there were signs in the sky usually indicative of bad weather to be expected in the course of a day or two.

The slope which we had to descend was in the centre steep, and completely covered with ice. On the feasible side the rocks were exceedingly loose and rotten, so that it was difficult to get either a safe footing or a secure hold. Moreover, as an individual in the rear moved forward it was necessary for those in front to do their best to protect themselves from falling stones, and, indeed, to place themselves in the strongest possible position, for fear of an awkward fall.

At the foot of the rocks we turned sharply to the left (namely, N., or slightly N.W.), and cut steps across a slope of névé till we reached the foot of a couloir running up to the E. ridge of Jailik. The snow in this couloir was in a very bad condition, resting chiefly on ice. We were, besides, during almost the whole of our ascent exposed to falling stones from the precipices above us.

However, by keeping as closely to the rocks as possible, and exercising great caution, we were able without serious mishap to reach the ridge which falls steeply eastward from the summit of Jailik to the head of the Jailik glacier of Freshfield's map.

Going along this ridge in a westward direction for about half an hour we came, at 12.30, upon a snow ridge only a few yards long, which abutted against a great mass of rock, which appeared to be the lower part of the final rock tower seen in distant views.

The ridge of snow fell away in the steepest of precipices on both sides, and the rocks against which it abutted consisted of smooth slabs coated in places with ice. We were forced to

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come to the conclusion that an ascent from this point at the hour of day which had been reached was too dangerous to be attempted, and that probably from this point it was absolutely impossible. We consequently had lunch, then turned and commenced our descent. By the aneroid the height we reached was about 14,400 ft.

The views on the N. side were of bare arid-looking glens with small glaciers, whilst on the S. side, between us and Adyrsu-Bashi, there was a fine snow peak, apparently over 14,000 feet in height.

We spent very little time on the point we had reached, but as quickly as possible (taking into consideration the fact that the snow was in a decidedly unreliable and dangerous condition) made our way down the couloir we had climbed in the morning.

Before completely descending to the foot of the awkward slope on the W. side of Donkin's pass we noticed a gap in the rocks of the ridge which extends from the pass up to the summit of Jailik, and it occurred to us that if we could make use of this gap we should gain time and moreover avoid the rotten and unpleasant rocks encountered in the morning. We fortunately quickly discovered that the pass in this direction was decidedly preferable to Donkin's pass.

At 5 P.M. we reached our bivouac, and at 6, having warmed and finished our last tin of soup, commenced the final portion of the descent. Instead of taking the route we had climbed we took a direct line more to the E., over *huge* fragments of fallen rocks, to the nameless glacier, which we reached at a point nearer to its source.

The ramble down the glacier was simple, and there were no crevasses worth referring to; but we only managed to reach its snout and get on to the moraine a little before the light had departed. Thence it was a rough-and-tumble walk down over stones and rhododendrons until we reached the path about a mile above the bridge. Here Dianos and Baksanukh met us with food and, to the intense delight of some of us, a little wine, which Merun had brought with him from Tsageri.

We did not reach our tent till 10 P.M.

It was a source of pleasure to us quickly to discover that Merun had bought and cooked a sheep, and moreover that the shepherd, who had been away a couple of days, had returned in safety. The reason for his absence we soon discovered to have been the fact that a native of Suanetia, who had passed our tents the night before we started for our Jailik expedition,

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had carried off a couple of the sheep. This had led him to follow promptly after the visitor. What occurred it was of course impossible for us to tell, but as on his return his impassive and angular features relaxed from time to time and actually almost gave us the impression that he was about to smile, and moreover as Merun had had no difficulty in dealing with him, we concluded that pleasant reminiscences were floating through his brain.

Gumachi.

The two days following were so cloudy, windy, and unsettled that we decided not to sleep out for our next climb. Almost due S. of our camp was a fine snow peak called Gumachi, from which a glacier descended in a steep ice-fall and became united with the main Adyrsu glacier just above its termination.

As this peak was only 13,481 feet in height, we thought we might be able to ascend it in one day. So on Friday, August 28, at 4 A.M., we started for the climb. We proposed to attack the peak by the W. ridge. This necessitated an ascent to the head of the glacier to which I have referred, and which might conveniently be named the Gumachi glacier. Consequently we crossed to the left bank of the Adyrsu torrent and climbed the grassy shoulder S.W. of the camp, thereby avoiding a considerable stretch of the moraine. At the commencement of our climb a thick mist had prevailed, but at the top of the shoulder we emerged from the mist and then descended slightly to the left lateral moraine of the Gumachi glacier. We ascended by the moraine till we were compelled to change our route by the precipitous rocks of Sarumbashi, on our right. We consequently made our way by a slight descent on to the glacier, up which we climbed till we were well above the ice-fall. We then crossed to the S.W., continued the climb over the glacier till we reached a point at which we could arrive at a decision as to the best line in which to continue our ascent, and then stopped for breakfast at about 6.30.

After breakfast we turned more to the S. and began to ascend slopes of glaciers and névé leading up to the W. ridge of Gumachi. There was no difficulty in these, but a number of very long crevasses caused us to zigzag considerably till we reached the schrund below the final slope leading up to the ridge.

Having crossed the schrund our leader began to cut steps diagonally towards a point of the ridge at which there was no

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cornice. When he had cut twenty or thirty steps we came to a broad band of ice running down the slope from top to bottom.

This necessitated a change in our tactics, and we were now compelled to cut steps straight up the snow slope, which fortunately was hard, so that we had no difficulty in making good steps.

About 11 A.M. we reached the top of the slope and discovered that a cornice overhung so as to make it impossible without some further efforts to mount the ridge. We were compelled to make a short traverse, cutting steps in hard ice below the cornice till we reached a point where we thought we might break through. As Woolley was leading it fell to his lot to cut a passage through the cornice, a tedious process which lasted three-quarters of an hour.

Cockin and I fixed ourselves as firmly as possible, but as our leader was in a position almost at right angles to the line in which we were compelled to remain, a slip would probably have produced the most serious results. Moreover, although he had been able to secure good footholds he was compelled to cut holds for his left hand, and with his right first to cut through the outer crust of ice and then to remove the overhanging snow until a sufficient way had been made for us to ascend a few steps, and with extended arms to squeeze through the narrow gap on to the ridge of snow above. From this point to the summit of the peak there was no serious difficulty. Our way led along a ledge of snow till we came to the rocks which formed the lower part of the W. ridge of the peak, and we discovered that this part of the ridge could in all probability be easily reached from the Leksur glacier on the S. side of the mountain.

We stopped a short time for lunch, but as an exceedingly cold wind was blowing from the S. across the ridge we quickly recommenced our climb.

There were fortunately no serious difficulties. A few broken rocks had to be surmounted; then our way had to be made along a sort of gully; then a short spell of step-cutting enabled us to get fairly on the ridge which leads to the summit. Three projecting points had to be surmounted ere we reached the crown at 3 P.M.

The view was similar to that from Sarumbashi, though of course more extensive; moreover from this point we were able to look down into the valleys of Suanetia. Elbruz towered head and shoulders above his neighbours, and seemed to reign with a calm and supreme majesty.

We only spent half an hour before commencing our descent.

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When we reached the cornice through which, as I have intimated, we had made our way in the ascent, there was a moment's consideration of a suggestion to descend from the ridge at a point farther to the W. As, however, this would have meant cutting steps *down* a ridge of ice, we rapidly concluded that first of all we would attempt to descend by the route which we had climbed. We had no serious difficulty in our descent to the upper part of the ridge, and as, fortunately, this had been but very slightly exposed to the sun, our steps were in a perfect condition, so that with care we were enabled quickly to gain the main portion of the Gumachi glacier. We crossed the glacier before the light had disappeared, although it became quite dark as we went over the moraine. Having lit our lantern, our line of descent could easily be seen by the men in camp. Evidently at one time we were making our way too near to a precipice overhanging the valley on the right. Our men consequently shouted, waved their lanterns, and rushed out to direct and meet us. The sound of the falling water made it clear to us that we must work slightly more to the left, and so ere very long, though with tumbles over stones and shrubs and slight hollows in the ground, we safely reached our camp.

The shepherd had seen us on the top of Gumachi, and both that night and the morning following he expressed himself to us in language none of us could understand, and which was differently understood. Some considered it a serious condemnation, others an indication of awe and deep surprise that the 'spirit of the place' should have allowed us to visit the region and return in safety.

Early Summer in the Oberland.

By FREDERICK GARDINER.

I SUPPOSE that most of us must take our Alpine holidays when we can get them, and I also suppose that the most convenient time for the majority is late rather than early, and it is undeniable that for certain expeditions the month of August is more desirable than June. But still each month and season has its particular charm, and the climber who has invariably started work late in August can never have seen the loveliness of the Alpine flora at its best, nor have enjoyed the splendid length of a mid-June day in the Alps, nor have received the extremely cordial welcome that meets the early climber everywhere. However, I freely grant that as a rule

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