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CLIMBING IN SUANETIA.

By L. W. ROLLESTON.

(Read before the Alpine Club, March 1, 1904.)

LAST spring Mr. Rickmers very kindly asked Longstaff and myself to join in a great Caucasian expedition that he was organising. We jumped at the idea, but found that his party was leaving Europe much earlier than it was possible for us to get away, and were therefore compelled to be independent. His offers of assistance we gratefully accepted, and he took a tent and some supplies into the country for us.

I know there is much to be said against two as a party, but in the Caucasus the climbs are so long that the greater speed with which a party of two can move counts for much, and may even turn an otherwise dangerous expedition into a safe one.

I must acknowledge our indebtedness to Mr. Woolley for the information and advice he gave us before leaving England. Had we followed all his hints, we should have avoided the few troubles we did meet with.

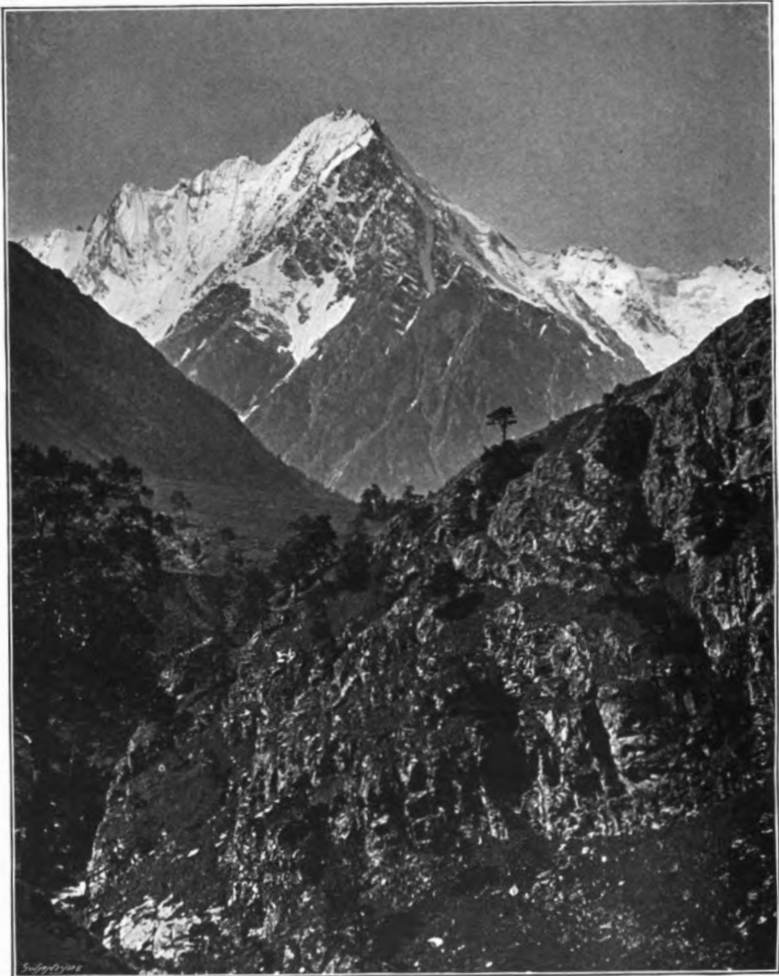
Luckiest of all were we in that the weather in the Caucasus last summer was probably the finest on record. Out of twenty-eight days we were in Suanetia, only four were utterly bad. In consequence the various parties climbed in all about eighteen new peaks, of which six were over 14,000 ft. in height. We ourselves climbed seven peaks, of which five were new.

All our climbing was done in Suanetia—the district which lies to the S. of the western end of the main chain of the Caucasus, and is so guarded on its S. by the Leila range that to enter it, it is necessary to cross a pass of over 9,000 ft.

We left London on July 16, and went to Odessa by train

VOL. XXII.—NO. CLXIV.

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H. Woolley, photo.

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TIKTENGEN FROM THE NORTH.

in 72 hrs. and spent a day there shopping; thence to Batoum by the steamer which calls at many of the Northern Black Sea ports, and takes four days; from Batoum, after another day's shopping, we reached Kutais by train in a few hours, and then one long day's driving, one on horseback, and one walking brought us to the foot of the Leila range on July 27. This makes eleven days in all from London, nine of which were actually spent in travelling.

On July 29 we entered Suanetia by the Leila route over an easy glacier pass of 11,800 ft., and climbed the highest of the three peaks on the way: this peak is 13,400 ft., and is an easy snow walk. The day was cloudy, and not until we had almost reached the tree-level on the descent did we get our first view of Ushba, which emerged gradually from the clouds into the sunshine—a wonderful sight. For months we had thought of little else but the S. peak of Ushba, and we hurried down to Betsho that night, but only to find that five members of Mr. Rickmers' party had just returned from their successful ascent.

We proved that we were not jealous by taking their photographs.

On July 31 we spent a long day strolling up the beautiful Kuish valley to a bivouac just below the snout of that glacier. From this bivouac—and, indeed, on the whole way up to the valley—we got wonderful views of Ushba from the W., which enabled us to realise what a magnificent expedition was the traverse of the two peaks made some days later by Herren Distel, Leuchs, and Pfann.

The next day we made the first ascent of Lakra (12,185 ft.), following the ridge from the pass between Lakra and Leirag. On the ridge we had one very steep ice bit, covered with about six inches of unsafe snow, and a very steep and delightful rock scramble to the summit.

The day was perfect and the views so fine that for the moment we forgot our disappointment over Ushba.

Next to a wild hope of making the first ascent of Ushba the goal of our expedition was Tiktengen (15,267 ft.), after Ushba the finest unclimbed peak in the Caucasus. We felt that we were hardly fit for it yet, but, as the conquerors of Ushba also had designs on it, we hurried off the next day while they were safely engaged in attacking Little Ushba.

From Betsho we rode up the valley through Mestia to Mulakh. We arrived long after dark, and slept in the Cancellaria, or court-house, where we suffered from the



Swan Electric Engraving Co.

Photo by U. Sella.

TIKTENGEN FROM THE SOUTH.

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plagues, only too familiar in Alpine literature, which are always found in these shelters.

The next morning we went on to a spot about a mile above Jabesh on the track of the Zanner pass.

It was raining hard, and our porters and horse-owners, who had been grumbling without apparent reason all the morning, struck absolutely, deposited our baggage on the wet ground, and left with the horses for Betsho. We were endeavouring to hide our misery and struggling with our tent when (from the clouds, perhaps) appeared a hunter. He watched us curiously for a while, as do all the natives, and then began to help us with the tent: that man remained with us till we left the country. How can I tell of his virtues? He could carry any weight, he could climb rocks, he could cut steps in ice, he could cook beautifully, buy provisions cheaply, kill and dress a sheep or a chicken, could get tea ready within ten minutes of our shouting to him from our Mummery tent at high bivouacs, and, however bad the weather was, never wanted to come inside. His name is Arraman Cordiani.

On August 4 we started for Tiktengen, and, after some difficulty with a very talkative and incapable porter, bivouacked on the rocks on the left bank of the Upper Zanner ice-fall, at a height of about 10,500 ft.

Rain the next morning delayed our start till 3.30.

We crossed the glacier towards the foot of the peak in 2½ hrs. Here we had a violent hailstorm, so we dug a hole in the snow, covered ourselves with thin mackintosh sheets, which we carried in case we should be benighted, and had our first breakfast.

The weather seemed so bad that we only hoped to reconnoitre; but it improved suddenly, so we decided to go on, and began to discuss the route.

The accompanying illustration, by S. Sella, was taken from the Latpar pass, a distance of seventeen miles.*

In 1898 Messrs. Woolley, Cockin, Solly, and Newmarch climbed the western ridge to within a few hundred feet of the summit, and their account convinced us that this ridge was impossible; but we had hoped to find a direct way up the S. face, if not to the summit, at any rate to the deep cleft E. of it. But the face looked too steep, and was obviously swept by falling stones. The only alternative was to get on to the

* We struck the ridge just to the left of the well-marked rock tower from which a vertical patch of snow descends.

great rock-wall connecting the eastern ridge of the mountain with Salynan-bashi, and to follow it to the summit if we could.

We crossed the bergschrund, and going very quickly on a rather rotten but easy rock rib, reached the top of the ridge in about 2 hrs., and got our first view of the northern side, which made us glad we had chosen Suanetia as a centre, so barren and inhospitable did the valleys look after the trees and flowers of the South.

Here we had another hailstorm, but a milder one; and as we could see the valleys below full of sunshine we determined to go on.

This eastern ridge of the mountain along which we now started is a very fine one; there are tremendous ice precipices on the N., and on the S. steep cliffs broken by stone-swept couloirs.

We tramped over some snow to a great rock tower. This we tried, first directly, then on its S. side, and finally managed it by a very difficult rock chimney on the N. Then came a descent into a gap and another great rock tower, and then ice and snow ridges, generally rotten snow on hard ice with rock teeth projecting at intervals, until we reached the tower, which is separated by a deep gap from the final peak.

It was now midday, and we had been climbing for 8 hrs., 9½ hrs. of which had been spent on this ridge. If the descent into the gap could be managed the peak was ours, but it looked worse than anything we had done.

As we faced the peak there appeared to be two possible courses—to our right, a very steep and narrow ice ridge which looked terribly forbidding at first, but ended in a gentle snow-slope; to our left, steep and rotten rocks terminating in an ice-slope. If we could descend these rocks and traverse the ice-slope to the right on to the ice ridge, its difficult upper part would be avoided. We tried this, but on the worst bit of the rocks; the only two handholds came away—together with the leader.

We climbed back, and after a consultation again examined the top of the ice ridge. It certainly looked very difficult, and the weather becoming worse we were on the point of turning back, but decided to have one more try at it. This time we managed to hack the necessary steps on to the ridge, and soon to our great delight it was possible with face to the slope to kick steps and descend fairly rapidly. A few more feet of ice and we must have failed, so steep was the slope.

The descent of about 120 ft. had taken us nearly an hour, but, as we had hoped, the worst of our difficulties were over.

The final climb—a mixture of snow, ice, and rock—was fairly straightforward, and in about another hour, after 5½ hrs. on the ridge, we reached the summit.

It was misty, but we could just see another rock peak looming up to the N., and began to doubt if we had really reached the highest point. In a few minutes, however, it cleared, and we were able to convince ourselves that the N. peak was lower than the one on which we stood. The views which we had from other summits later on confirmed us in this opinion, though I am bound to say the 1-verst map makes the northern peak the higher.

There would probably have been no great difficulty in reaching the other summit, but it was late, the weather was still doubtful, and we had had enough.

We descended by the same route in 6½ hrs., and crawled into our tent very wet and cold at 9.30 P.M. The night was a wild one, and in the morning rain was falling in torrents, so that we reached our main camp in the forest wet to the skin.

Every mountaineer who has been in Suanetia must have felt that Tetruld ought to be climbed. It stands in a wonderful position, and surely is one of the most beautiful of mountains. So we decided that this should be our next expedition.

On August 8 we slept on the right bank of the Nageb Glacier, very near to, if not actually at the spot where Mr. Freshfield camped for the first ascent.

Starting at 2.15 we reached the S. ridge of the mountain without much difficulty, and there found traces of an ascent from the opposite or Adish side by some of Mr. Rickmers' party. This was a disappointment, for we had hoped to make the first guideless ascent.

The sunrise, I remember, was particularly gorgeous, and to turn and look at Ushba made many an excuse for a halt.

The great S. ridge, which we followed all the way to the summit, may be compared to the Bionassay ridge of Mont Blanc on a larger scale. It is sensational, for there is a sheer drop of thousands of feet on the W., and exceedingly steep slopes on the E., but an ideal climb for crampons, and we had only to cut a few steps on the whole length of the ridge. We went slowly for the last thousand feet, both feeling the effects of the altitude (Tetruld is 15,918 ft.). A hailstorm on the top spoiled what is said to be the finest view in the Caucasus, but we had had it lower down. The ascent took

7½ hrs., and the descent to our bivouac 3¼ hrs., so it is evident that the climb is an easy one.

The two porters we had for this expedition (of course they came to the bivouac only) were Arraman Cordiani, and Bitta Zourabinai. Arraman I have already spoken of. Bitta was also a hunter, and distinguished by having a breech-loading rifle, which he kept permanently loaded and at full cock. He had crampons, and on the way down from the bivouac, having our crampons in his sack, he suggested that the best way was by the glacier. He led at a great pace, and we were left hopelessly behind, frequently having to cut a step or two where he walked with comfort, and this pleased him immensely. He is a very intelligent old fellow, and we managed to have much talk with him, though his knowledge of Russian was almost as limited as ours. Among other things we had a long discussion on the various sorts of Francos, as they call all Western Europeans. He was greatly relieved to hear that the Germans were Christians. Much to our regret, he had to leave us the next day, having business elsewhere. Though not so strong or energetic as Arraman, he could go on any reasonable rocks or ice.

That evening Rickmers came up and called on us, giving us all the latest news of his party, and suggested that we should pay a visit to the Leksur. So the next day (August 10) we all lunched with the priest of Mujal, rode to Mestia in the afternoon, and on the following day said good-bye to Rickmers, and pitched our main camp on the left bank of the torrent which comes from the Leksur Glacier, just opposite the Chalaat Glacier. It was an ideal place for a main camp. Our last had been too close to the village, and the people came in shoals to stare at us.

On August 12 we made a high camp on the left bank of the Leksur Glacier at the foot of Margyan-Na. Here we slept four nights, and were never tired of the wonderful views which Mr. Freshfield has described in his account of the Mestia pass.

On August 13 we climbed the W. peak of Latsga (13,790 ft.). Starting up the right bank of the westernmost of the two big gullies under Gumachi, we traversed to the right across the small glacier at its head to the col between Gumachi and Latsga, and then followed the N.W. buttress of the latter to the top. There was good rock scrambling for the last 500 ft.; the rest was quite easy.

Latsga is an enormously long ridge (about 1 mile) with

an E. and W. summit. We climbed the W., which Merzbacher makes the higher and calls Ullu-tau-tschana; but the eastern peak certainly looked higher than ours. The most striking view from this summit was to the west, a sea of peaks extending southward from Elbruz, about the sources of the Kodor, each one a Viso.

On August 15 we climbed Bashil-tau (19,685 ft.), a bold rock peak with two great ridges, on the southern of which is a very remarkable rock tower.*

We left our bivouac at midnight, thanks to a mistake in setting an alarm watch at 11.15 instead of 12.15, which we did not discover until we had started; but unless this had happened we should probably have been benighted, as the climb is a very long one.

For 3 hrs. we walked slowly up the glacier by moonlight, taking the line of the Mestia pass, and then halted for breakfast and daylight. The way to our peak now lay to the right, over a rather complicated glacier with some of the most enormous crevasses we had ever seen. At 7.20 we reached the col at the foot of the great N.W. ridge, the ridge which we followed to the summit. The lower rocks were steep and so rotten as to be dangerous, and in one place we had to traverse on to the ice of the eastern face. Just before the final rocks the ridge turned to very steep ice. The quickest way appeared to be to cut across the ice slope and strike a secondary rock ridge which led directly to the summit. This we managed to do, but the ice was very hard and the slope so steep that for absolute safety enormous steps were necessary. You know the sort of thing. When you put your foot in the step the ice above pushes your leg outwards, so that you have to remove a large portion of the slope after the step is cut. But once off the slope we had our reward; rocks as firm as those in Chamonix, and as difficult, I think, as anything but the exceptionally severe climbs there, led us to the summit. It was 12 o'clock. We had been 4 hrs. coming from the col. The view of Tiktengen was splendid, and again satisfied us that the S. peak is the higher of the two.

On the descent we avoided the very objectionable rocks at the foot of the ridge by a long traverse on the western face, and reached the col in 3 hrs. It was absolutely necessary

* This peak has a fine position at the head of the Leksur Glacier. We were unable to satisfy ourselves that the peak marked just to the N. of Bashil-tau on the Russian map, and called Sarikol-bashi, has any existence.

to get off the upper glacier by daylight, so we allowed ourselves only 15 mins. halt, and reached our bivouac at 7 o'clock, just after dark, in drenching rain.

We examined the southern ridge and think it could be climbed. If so, the traverse of the two ridges would make a magnificent expedition. Personally, I got more pleasure from this climb than any I have ever made, though the descent varied so little from the ascent.

On August 18 we bivouacked for Svetgar beside the lower Asmashi Glacier. We had carefully reconnoitred the mountain, and, I think, had found the proper line of ascent; but the weather, which had been perfect, changed suddenly in the night, and snow fell heavily till well into the afternoon. Though it was fine the next day, the mountain would not have been fit to climb for at least three days, and we thought it best to spend these in travelling to another district. So on the 20th we rode over the Uguir to Ipari, and on the 21st to a camp above Ushkul. Ushkul is a village close to the source of the Ingur river, and is 6,762 ft. above sea-level.

Our plan was to climb Nuam-Quam, and on the 22nd we reconnoitred, but could find no way that looked at all practicable. So we turned to the S. face of Shkara for consolation, and found a ridge leading up to the W. peak which we thought might be climbed. The W. peak is 16,592 ft., according to the 1-verst map—that is, 400 ft. lower than the E. or higher point; but from Ushkul the W. peak is very much the finer. The only previous ascent was that of the E. peak from the N. by Mr. Cockin with U. Almer and C. Roth in 1888, and, so far as I know, no attempts have been made on the mountain from the S., or on the W. summit from either side.

On August 23 we bivouacked at the base of the subsidiary peak marked 14,140 ft. (Merzbacher), on the S. side of the western Shkara Glacier, at a height of about 10,500 ft. It was not high enough, but it seemed impossible to take the porters higher.*

It was a lovely evening, and from our camp we had a wonderful view over Racha to the mountains of Ossetia. Arraman, to be more in harmony with his surroundings, discarded the ruffianly looking hat he usually wore, and arrayed

* This subsidiary peak is well seen in the plate opposite, lying just to the E. of the glacier between Shkara and Janga, and separated from the broken rock ridge by which we ascended, by a well-marked hanging glacier.

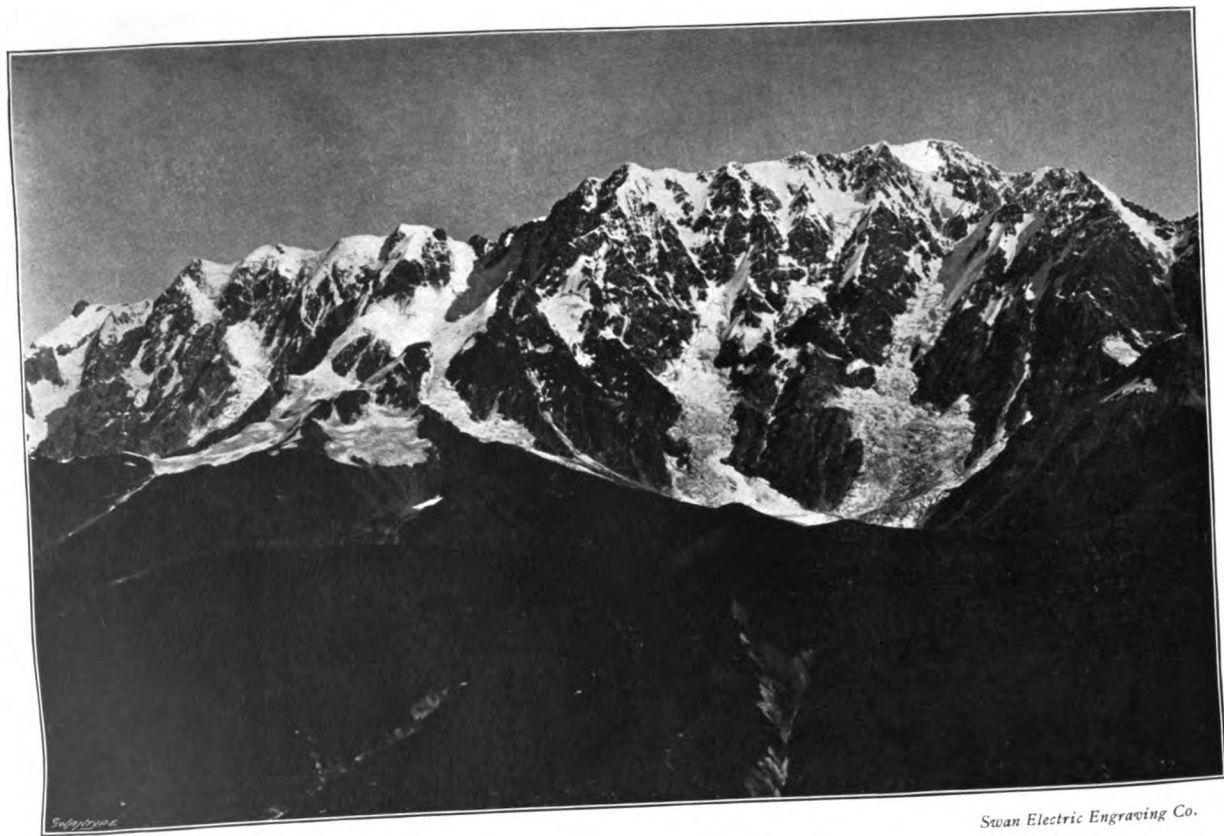


Photo by U. Sella.

JANGA & SHKARA FROM THE SOUTH.

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himself in a bashlik, the well-known picturesque headgear of the Caucasus.

Next morning the weather was doubtful and delayed the start until 5 o'clock. We descended to the glacier, traversed snow slopes at the foot of the subsidiary peak, rounded the corner, and then ascended rapidly, at first on very easy rocks, and then on snow slopes, towards the hanging glacier which separates the subsidiary peak from the main southern ridge. To gain this ridge we had to descend into a very deep ravine and cross under the hanging glacier. For a few seconds



OUR CAMP ABOVE JABESH.

only were we in danger; stones and ice must fall here, but we saw none going or returning.

After this we scrambled up snow slopes and easy rock to the ridge. The lower part was steep and broken, but the climbing was for the most part easy, the difficulty being to find the best route and to avoid dislodging loose stones.

Higher up we came to an extremely narrow snow ridge which gave us much trouble. It was about 250 ft. long, sloped rather steeply downwards from each end, and was slightly corniced in places. We took it most of the way

astride, breaking down the cornice where necessary. We had been climbing very fast till now, but this cost us so much time that we began to fear that we should be benighted, or at any rate should have to return along the ridge at a late hour in the afternoon, when it would be in a very dangerous condition.

This was followed by more rocks, easier snow ridges, and two or three short bits of ice-work, until we got above the level of the subsidiary peak. Above us rose the sloping ledge which leads on to the great final S. ridge, and which from below had looked so easy; but we found it a vile mixture of rock, ice, and snow, set at a steep angle and dripping with water. We got up with considerable difficulty, and it was nearly 2 o'clock when we seated ourselves on some warm and comfortable rocks at the foot of the final ridge.

We then tried to talk seriously about turning back; if we went on we should undoubtedly have to spend the night high up on the mountain, so prudence called for a retreat. On the other hand the peak was certainly ours, the weather was perfect, and in fact the question whether we should be benighted or not had been decided long ago; for it was far too late in the day to attempt that snow ridge two or three hours below us. So we started up the ridge, which was very narrow in places and had a tremendous drop on each side. Fortunately, the snow was in perfect condition nearly all the way, and we were just able to kick steps, the axe being rarely needed.

After climbing for about an hour we came to ice, and our spirits sank terribly, but it only lasted for about 100 ft., then it turned to snow again. But the summit was further off than it seemed, and it was not until 5 o'clock that we reached it.

Though the summit was corniced to the N., we had a splendid view of Dychtau, rising up in a sheer cliff from the Bezingi Glacier at an enormous depth below us. But we could not wait to admire it. As we came down the ridge the sun began to set, and so wonderful was the effect as we looked right across Georgia to the mountains on the Turkish frontier, with Ararat itself in the distance, that each of us in turn kept calling for halts, though every minute was of importance to get us down to the rocks before dark.

The light failed just as we were on the awkward traverse down from the ridge; the dripping water had frozen on the rocks and made their descent very difficult. The snow ridge which leads down from the traverse was easier, but it was

quite dark when we reached the rocks immediately below it. We lit the lantern and tried to find a comfortable place for the night, but the rocks were too difficult to explore by candle-light, and we had to be content with an uncomfortably narrow ledge. We could not hitch the rope anywhere, and were much too insecure to think of trying to sleep—the height of our bivouac was at least 14,500 ft. Neither of us had been benighted before, and up till midnight we endured the experience fairly well; afterwards we found it horribly cold, while clouds gathered, and a little hail fell. We kept our feet from frost-bite by putting them in the rucksacks together with the lighted lantern; but when we tried to improve matters by adding our aluminium stove, we had more heat than we had bargained for, and destroyed a rucksack and a pair of stockings. We should have been wiser to remember our Shakespeare :

O, who can hold a fire in his sack
Though shivering on the frosty Caucasus ?

However, the morning proved fine and we started down, very stiff, at 5 A.M. The snow ridge was in good condition, and the passage under the hanging glacier safely effected. We had a splendid glissade off the mountain, and reached our bivouac just before midday. Arraman had heard our shouts, and soup and grilled mutton were ready for us.

We rested till 4.20. Arraman absolutely refused to let us carry anything, and though almost hidden under his great load of tent, sleeping-sacks, cooking-pots, burkha, &c., led us at a great pace down to the Ingur valley and our main camp.

The next day the weather had broken absolutely, and on the following morning we started in the rain from Ushkul and rode out of Suanetia over the Latpar.

This ended our climbs for the year. But as there are only a few members of the Club who know the Caucasus, it may be worth while to say a little about our general impressions of the country.

The difficulties of travel and transport proved much less than we expected. It is a great advantage to be a small party: to get two or three horses is easy, but if more are wanted the time and trouble are multiplied tenfold.

The climbing, on the other hand, was decidedly more difficult than we had anticipated. Rocks, I suppose, are the same all the world over; but the ice and snow conditions were much more trying than anything we had experienced in the Alps. Wherever a sound snow slope might reasonably be

hoped for, we found some inches of snow on the hardest of ice; or, again, the snow took the form of a ridge, such as is generally found on the ordinary route up the Weisshorn or on the Gabel of the Gabelhorn. Crampons were a great help, but even with them much step-cutting was often necessary.

On Mr. Woolley's advice we worked hard at Russian before leaving England and on the journey out, and picked up enough to enable us to do without an interpreter. Arraman used to teach us Suanetian by the camp fire, but the pronunciation is extremely difficult, and the natives on whom we tried it did not always understand us. Fortunately, Arraman could also speak Russian, and was extraordinarily intelligent in making out what we meant by our words and gestures.

As to provisions, we found no difficulty in buying (and very cheaply) sheep, chickens, eggs, and the bread of the country—such as it is. Raspberries, blackberries, and strawberries we got by the bushel. We could generally get a sort of cream cheese in the villages, but only on two occasions could we get potatoes, and only once butter and milk. We took from England some soup squares and 30 lbs. of jam in tins of various sizes. This sounds a lot, but it proved none too much. Biscuits, chocolate, cocoa, &c., we bought in Odessa and Batoum. It is very important to take a good supply of biscuits, as the unleavened, half-baked black bread of the country is pretty sure to disagree at first, though in time we learned to like it very much.

We were everywhere most hospitably received by princes and priests, but the princes' entertainments are not quite the thing for men in strict training.

Only those who have been in the country can realise how beautiful are the villages, the trees, and the flowers, and we would urge every climber who finds himself with two months to spare in the summer to go to Suanetia. He will never regret it.

Note on the Route from Kutais, over the Leila Pass.

Start very early from Kutais and drive in a phaeton through Alpana to Orbeli in about 10 hrs. Cow carts or pack horses take the luggage from Orbeli to Tsageri in about 2 hrs. From Tsageri ride or walk to Lentekhi in about 6 hrs. with pack horses. If a very early start is made from Kutais Tsageri may be reached on the first day, but probably the first night will be spent at Orbeli.

From Lentekhi, with porters, follow the Kheledula river for

about 2 hours to a village called Khelade, and in 2 hrs.' time another village, where two rivers meet, is reached (Freshfield's map inaccurate).

Follow the left river for 2 to 3 hrs.' easy walking to a very small collection of buildings in an opening with flat maize fields called Djudari. From Lentekhi to Djudari is an easy and delightful day's walk.

From Djudari turn sharply to the right up the Skimeri valley, which has the Leila visible at its head, and follow it to its end by rough path on right bank of torrent. Then scramble through a wood to an obvious grass ridge which leads up the Leila pass, and bivouac at the top of this ridge at a height of about 10,000 ft. The day will have been spent amid most gloriously beautiful forest scenery.

From here the way is clear on Freshfield's map (the village marked 'Tobalt' is generally called 'Schomari') and the three peaks of the Leila may be traversed—in which case the ascent of pass No. 2 is avoided—and Betscho reached easily in one day.

It would be quite possible to reach the Ingur valley in two days from Lentekhi, but if the Leila pass is not reached very early the view may be spoiled by clouds, and on this account it is better to take three days.

AN ASCENT OF THE ORTLER BY THE S.W. RIDGE.

By OLIVER K. WILLIAMSON, M.D.

IT was, if I remember rightly, during a traverse of the Grosse Eiskogele in 1901 that the idea of the possibility of an ascent of the Ortler by the S.W. ridge occurred to my friend A. W. Andrews. The rugged ridge in question extends from the Ortler Pass to join the Hochjochgrat, which connects the Hochjoch with the summit of the mountain. To the south-east of it steep snow slopes descend to the névé of the Zebrü glacier, whilst north-westwards it rises in an even more formidable wall from the lower Ortler glacier. To any one who has looked at this ridge it will be obvious that it is in reality continuous with that portion of the Hochjochgrat which connects the point 9,631 m.* with the summit of the Ortler, the snow arête extending from the Hochjoch to this point being merely a connecting link from the pass. The south-west ridge, as seen from the west, is well shown in the accompany-

* See map of the Ortler in Richter's *Erschliessung der Ostalpen*.