

‘Oh for the days of good King Herod!’ In retrospect a despot’s power often seems alluring. We have seen strange curtailments of English liberties in these days. And it is not beyond hoping for that some day all books on mountains and climbing will have to come before the Committee of the Alpine Club, and receive the Pontifical imprimatur of the President.

Nor is it only the light and rubbishy in mountain literature that some of us would like to see restrained. Are there not nowadays too many guide-books and hand-books published—trustworthy accounts of actual ascents, and painstaking directions for particular climbs? It is very difficult to draw the line between accounts and directions of real value and need and those which in effect if not in intention spoil a climb for others by vulgarising it, turning it into a beaten track, each foothold noted, each hand-grip suggested; here turn the body, here throw the arm over the blocking boulder, here leave the chimney, here use the knee and here the eyelid. Might not much of this matter, accurate and instructive as it is, be kept locked in the climber’s breast, allowed to lie, where Wordsworth says the child does,

‘In Abraham’s bosom all the year’?

Otherwise there seems no end to the books that might be written, and the places that might be spoiled.

I confess I tremble every publishing season lest some hand-book appear to the climbs on the chalk cliffs, and some profaning pen enumerate and detail all my own pet rambles and scrambles on Beachy Head, where the foxes used to lie or run sure-footedly, although once indeed I saw one have a fall. All round the coast, wherever it is precipitous, there are to be found minor delights for the climber, places where angels yet fear to tread; and long may it be ere foolscap rush in!

HIMALAYAN SCRAMBLES IN 1914.

By CAPTAIN H. D. MINCHINTON
(1st (K.G.O.) Gurkha Rifles).

IN 1911 I had arranged to join the late Captain Todd, of the 5th Gurkhas, in the Kaghan Valley, but had to forgo my leave at the last moment, and it was not until 1914 that I again had the chance of two months’ leave.

My companions were four Gurkha orderlies of my battalion, of whom Rabia and Jaising were old hands at climbing (*vide* 'A.J.' xxviii. 382 *seq.*), and the other two, Ajabsing and Jitram, promising recruits to mountaineering. Our itinerary appeared in 'A.J.' xxix. 89 *seq.*

I settled on Lahoul for our trip, but meant to avoid the usual route thither by Kulu and the Rotang Pass and to force a way in by a little known route through Chota Baghal to Bara Baghal, and thence by some pass over the dividing range to bring me out near Kyelang, the chief village of Lahoul.

We started off on July 4, reaching Beijnath on the 6th. Here we left the main road into Kulu, and crossed the Salethar Pass (9000 ft.) to Gundah, the chief village in Chota Baghal. On the third day from here we crossed the Thamsar Pass (15,200 ft.) into Bara Baghal, arriving that evening at the village of that name. Whilst waiting on the pass for the coolies, Jaising and I climbed an easy shale and boulder summit of about 16,200 ft. to the W. of the pass.

The following day we rested and I made inquiries about the Bara Baghal Pass into Lahoul. The headman of the village informed me that the pass, locally known as the Shā or Asā Pass, was quite impossible and had not been used for years. He said that at the head of the Laluni glacier, however, there was a pass, and he produced a man who averred he knew the way over it. So I determined to use this pass, which would bring me out into Lahoul at nearly the same place—the Laluni lying in the next valley to the E. of the Bara Baghal Pass.

On the 12th, with about twenty-five villagers, mostly splendid men, we started off and made a very wet camp on a lovely hillside after about six hours' marching. The next day a lovely march took us through fir and birch woods to the Laluni nullah. The Laluni glaciers are, actually, two glaciers separated by some rock peaks of considerable height. On the map these glaciers are shown as joining and running on down like the tail of a Y for some distance. Actually, they have shrunk and the snout of each is about half a mile back from the original junction.

Our guide took us up the E. branch, crossing the ice above the snout to the W. bank, where we found a splendid camping place below a cliff of the watershed separating the two Laluni glaciers.

The Laluni country is perfect; beautiful fir and birch woods below—the two branches of the glacier above, each surrounded by an amphitheatre of 19–20,000-foot snow peaks,

and divided by a splendid ridge of rock pinnacles running to over 18,000 ft. Some of you may have read the chapter entitled 'The Spirit of the Laluni' in 'The Ibex of Shā-Ping.' The author, the late Lieut. L. B. Rundall, a brother officer and dear friend of mine, had been there the previous year on a shooting trip and had seen the great beauty of it. One of our many plans was to go there together another year to climb the Laluni peaks. Many of the pictures in his book would have served to illustrate my paper in 'A.J.' xxviii., for they are mostly pictures of the Dhoali Dhar range, or near the Thamser Pass or in the Laluni valley. By his death in action at Festubert in December, '14, the Club has lost one who, I feel, would one day have been amongst its keenest members—one who loved the mountains for themselves and what they gave him.

On the 14th we started at 6 A.M. up grassy moraines, apparently heading for the impassable rock-wall forming the N.W. side of the amphitheatre, where the pass must lie if it were there at all. I could see some hesitation amongst the men, but after an hour's walking we turned up a shale slope, heading, seemingly, for a depression in the watershed between the Laluni branches. This did not look right, but the 'guide' still seemed moderately certain. On arriving at snow slopes I took the lead and scrambled up to the depression—to find myself, as I had feared, looking down on to the W. Laluni glacier!

Opposite rose a fine snow peak of about 20,000 feet, with hanging glaciers clinging to its flanks. To the right I could see up to the head of this new glacier, and through the mist could make out that the wall at the end was much lower than in the case of the E. branch, and at one place was a gap which looked as if it must be a pass. Naturally I surmised that we had tried the wrong branch, and determined to get the coolies down to the W. glacier and up to the gap. But it was easier said than done. The way down was not to their liking—fifty feet of steep crumbly rock and then a steep ice-and-snow couloir; moreover, they averred that the pass *was* somewhere near the head of the E. branch and that the 'guide' had lost his way: he had turned up the hillside too soon, he said.

In vain did I festoon the rocks with ropes and cut 'soup-plates' down the ice below. In vain did I induce my servant (the 'cook') to descend the rocks and join the Gurkhas in the couloir below as an example—by no means could I cajole the coolies to descend.

So there remained but one thing to do—give it up—and I did it, with much bad language born of exasperation. Two of the Gurkhas set off to climb a rock peak of about 18,000 feet near by, but could see nothing of the real pass in the dense mist which had gathered.

The rest of us returned and pitched camp again in the original place by midday. After lunch I set off with the other two Gurkhas, up débris slopes behind our camp and then, keeping on a level, crossed the shoulder of the 'watershed' and got down on to the ice above the snout of the W. glacier. From here we could see up to the head of it again, and I was more than ever convinced that the pass lay there, and determined to reconnoitre it with one of the orderlies next day.

On the 15th, while some of the coolies, with two Gurkhas, set off to make a great effort to find the pass in the E. branch, I set off with Jitram for the W. branch. We began by again ascending 'Watershed Pass' (c. 16,800 ft.) as on the previous day, then descending from it to the W. glacier. There was much slushy snow on this, and we were very wet before we got out of it up the glacier. Short slopes of névé, alternating with little plateaux, brought us to the foot of our pass—a gap in the N. wall of the amphitheatre. Six hundred feet of snow, a little ice, and easy but rotten rock took us to the gap at 10 A.M. (W. Laluni Pass, c. 17,800 ft.). A magnificent view met our gaze. A torn and sérac'd névé lay at the foot of a steep snow wall and plunged out of sight, to reappear some thousands of feet below as a glacier, the snout of which disappeared in its turn down a narrow gorge. Around us lay snow peaks and rock pinnacles—away to the right lay an icefall, falling from a névé to join the glacier below us and helping to swell it.

Straight opposite—to the North—lay the Lahoul country across the Chandra-Bhaga rivers, and quite plainly we could see Kyelang village itself, the mule path leading to it, sheep grazing on the hills, and snow peaks glistening in the sunshine behind the village.

But this was no coolie pass! A fine climbers' pass it would have made, but for us it was useless—and there lay Kyelang, which we had planned to reach this day. At 11 A.M. we left our pass and retraced our steps warily to the névé below, and plunged down the softened snow slopes till we reached the foot of the couloir leading up to 'Watershed Pass.' Hot sun and the steep pull-up frightened me off, but not so Jitram. So after a rest he began the ascent while I kept down the

glacier, meaning to cross the shoulder lower down which we had come over to inspect the previous evening. Unfortunately I turned up the rocks too soon and got emmeshed in some slanting, slabby, crumbly chimneys, where I struggled for an hour before extricating myself, very tired, and getting on to the right track.

About 5 P.M. I reached the camping ground, but not a sign of the camp was visible! While I was resting and wondering what had happened I heard a shout, and descried a figure waving from about a mile further up the moraine. So I set off again, and after half an hour's tiring walking reached the party to find the tents pitched and the men jubilant at having found the right way to the pass. According to them, about half a mile further up the moraine, a slope of scree and easy rock led to the pass—a barely visible depression in the rock-wall.¹ This gave access to a snow plateau whence they presumed a descent would be possible. The latter piece of news was not reassuring, as I had seen no sign of an easy descent when scanning the glacier-girt walls from the other pass with Jitram.

On the 16th we were off at daybreak and soon came to the mouth of a narrow scree couloir with apparently a steep rock-wall above—the top of which formed, I was told, the pass. The rocks proved conveniently broken, and an easy ascent—once enlivened by some falling stones while we were resting—took us to the top. (E. Laluni Pass, *c.* 17,000 ft.). There were a few nasty passages for the coolies, but they managed them splendidly with bare feet in spite of heavy loads. At the top our 'guide' confessed that his knowledge of the route was confined to having been carried over the pass as a small boy on his father's back some fourteen years ago, since when no one, as far as he knew, had ever crossed the pass! This explained the difficulty of finding it. However, here we were at the top and now had to find a way down. Jaising and I immediately set off across the quarter-mile of snowfield to prospect.

The snowfield ended abruptly in what appeared to be a steep rock-face, quite impossible for coolies, which plunged down 2000 ft. to the glacier below. Right and left, icefalls descended, barring any passage. We cast about to find a way down the rocks for the coolies, and by the time they arrived had traced out a line of descent—hard, but possible, necessitating use of the

¹ Photo No. 1.

hands most of the way, and an ice couloir to be crossed half-way down. The coolies were, of course, appalled at the prospect of the descent as seen from above, and refused to attempt it till Jaising and I set off down the rocks to encourage them and prepare the way. The other three orderlies at last induced them to descend, ropes being used at the worst places, and loads removed and lowered at these points. Somewhere about 2 P.M. we were all assembled on the last rocks—still separated from the glacier by a snow slope and schrund. However, a good bridge soon took us over, and we halted at the first boulders on a moraine for a long rest.² It had taken about four hours from the pass, and I must say I was greatly relieved when this really nasty descent was over without a mishap to anyone. We continued down easy ice and got off it on to grass on the right bank. The snout ended at the top of a steep, narrow gorge, choked with snow-beds and avalanche débris, which made our further descent very easy. At one spot we nearly came to grief, where a waterfall cropped out, necessitating a crawl over a dangerous slab high above the water and rocks below. Fortunately we were able to find a way over a grassy shoulder above for the coolies. The gorge seemed never-ending, and it was not until 6 P.M., with many coolies still some way back, that we halted for the night on a little grass-patch at the side of the snow at, I suppose, 11,000 ft.

The next morning we set off down the gorge again, soon struck a path on the right bank at the foot of the snow and in half an hour reached the small village of Muling, where the gorge opened out into grass slopes and fields, opposite to the Gundla rest-house on the far side of the Chandra river. The inhabitants were most surprised to see us, but coolies were quickly collected—of both sexes here in Lahoul—who set off for Kyelang. I paid off the Bara Baghal men, who had done very well, though they had grumbled a lot at the difficulties and nearly mutinied twice—and I can't say I wondered! Then I followed leisurely with the orderlies, and, crossing the river by a bridge lower down, struck the mule path to Kyelang, where we arrived, after a hot walk, in the course of the afternoon. We put in two days' well-earned rest there, during which time I made the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Schnabel, the Moravian missionaries, and have to thank them for much kindness—even to darning my socks.

My plan was now to follow the Bara Lacha route for one

² Photo No. 2.



1



2



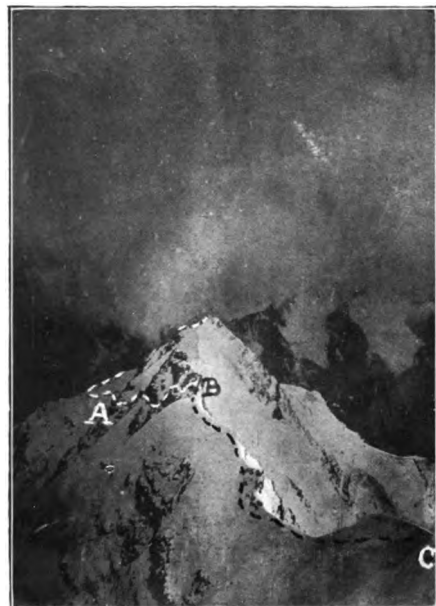
3



4



7



8

and a half marches and then turn to the N.W. up the Topo Tokpo nullah—a large valley, and, from the absence of detail on the map, more or less unexplored. I arranged for three Lahoulis to stay with us, to collect wood, and go to and from Kyelang to take and fetch letters, and supplies of fresh vegetables and bread, with which the good Schnabels arranged to supply me.

On the 20th I set off with a string of coolies and three goats, for milk, and marched up the valley to Jispa. While I had been resting at Kyelang the weather had been grand, but just as we got into camp a tremendous thunderstorm broke, and with it the weather, and gave Lahoul the wettest and coldest season 'within the memory of the oldest inhabitant'—distinctly bad luck for me.

The next day we marched up the valley for about four miles to the entrance of the Topo Tokpo nullah, struck a goat track on the left bank of the torrent, and about midday reached the few huts at Palamao.³ (I believe it is shown on the map as being on the right bank.) After a midday halt we marched on till 4 p.m. Having completed some twelve miles, the latter part in mist and drizzle, we then pitched a very damp camp. The valley bottom is not much broader than the actual river-bed. Lines of aiguilles run down at right angles to the river, the vallons between them being filled with various-sized glaciers (none shown on the map) and discharge streams which have to be crossed, often with difficulty. These glaciers descend from snow peaks behind, running to 20,000 ft., and from which the aiguille ridges run out.

The next day we did a six-mile march and stopped a little short of the large side nullah leading N. to the Shingo-la, an easy snow-pass into Zanskar. This also was a wet march.

I had hoped, so far north, to escape the monsoon, but now began to doubt it. However, I decided to pitch my base camp here and devote three weeks to climbing and exploring the surrounding peaks. We could see up to the head of the valley, which was filled with a large glacier and a 'cirque' of good peaks.

On the 22nd, Jaising and I went on up the valley to explore, whilst the others collected wood from a few stunted fir-trees—the sole firewood available.

A wet night and day followed, and I came to the conclusion that this was not good enough, so decided, being apparently

³ Photo No. 3.

not out of reach of the monsoon, to go still further north by crossing the Shingo-la into Zanskar.

On the 24th I sent off one of the permanent Lahoulis to fetch coolies again, and with Jaising and Jitram went up to a bivouac at about 15,800 ft. on a rocky peak to the N. of our camp. We saw numbers of golind (snow-cock) on the way up, from which I gave a name to the peak. We were delayed by dense mists in starting the following morning, but easy going on shale, rocks, and snow took us to our summit (Golind Peak, *c.* 18,300 ft.) by 9 A.M. We got fine views of some of the neighbouring peaks—the two Kundino peaks lying across a glacier-basin to the E. of us. Clouds obscured everything to the S. and W., but on the latter side, across the Shingo nullah, we could see ice-cliffs on a peak of evidently considerable height. To the W. steep snow slopes descended from our peak to a little glacier from which a torrent fell into the Shingo nullah, and I decided to try and traverse our peak by a descent to this glacier, and back by the Shingo-la route. We had first to strike N. down a snow ridge till we could find a place to break through the cornice. The first 500 ft. of the descent—bad snow, ice, and rotten outcrops of rock—was rather difficult, below which easy rocks took us to a final snow slope and schrund and the glacier below. We made a mistake in keeping down it too long and had an hour's ice-cutting down the snout to get off it. We then ran down to the Shingo torrent, found a track, and reached our camp at 4 P.M. During the day a party of Lahoulis had arrived to take me over into Zanskar, and we started early the following morning. I left Ajabsing and Jitram at the base camp, with half the stores, the outer fly of my tent, and my camp bed and table, as I wanted to travel light. The goats I sent back, as one had died of exposure, and the other two threatened to do likewise.

On the 26th we did a six-hour march up the Shingo nullah, pitching camp in mist and rain. The 27th dawned badly, but we made a start. After an hour the drizzle turned to sleet, and then to snow before we reached the easy glacier and moraine leading to the pass. The pass presents no difficulty. Lahoul and Zanskar men take their sturdy little ponies and yaks over it, but the driving snow hid all traces of the track on the flat snow and shale moraine, and we were soon floundering hopelessly, thigh-deep. I went ahead to try and find the pass—the orderlies helping and encouraging the coolies. Soon I found myself amongst crevasses and saw visions, through

the snow clouds, of huge precipices towering in front—evidently I was off the track. Then a lucky break in the storm showed me a low depression half left, which I knew must be the pass. So off we floundered again through deep snow and driving storm till we reached a patch of rocks where the storm lifted and welcome sunshine appeared to dry us. In a short time we found ourselves at a cairn marking the summit of the Shingo-la (16,722 ft.). A weird flat-topped pass, this, with moraine and glacier from E. and W. meeting gently to form it and to flow N. and S. a little way down each side of the pass. Below us lay a barren valley, curving out of sight a mile further down, just below the snow line. Down this we went and round the corner to find, half a mile further down, an edelweiss-covered patch of grass by a stream. This seemed an ideal place for our bivouac-camp, and we accordingly pitched it at once to give things a chance to dry in the late afternoon sunshine.⁴ We had not descended much from the level of the pass, the camp being at a good 15,200 ft. Behind us rock buttresses, enclosing a tiny glacier, rose to a rock peak, whence a tremendous serrated ridge—with two tremendous gendarmes, peaks in themselves, half-way along it—ran along with a final rise to a fine peak, capped with ice, and from the faces of which fell snow slopes and glaciers. From later observation I rather fancy this may be identical with Col. Bruce's 'Great Kakti Peak,' which he reached by snow slopes from the E. Looking back southwards a small circle of peaks was visible to the W. of the pass, enclosing a glacier which ran down on to the pass, while further to the W. a large glacier lay close to us. There was obviously plenty of work to be done here, given fine weather.

The great difficulty was firewood—there were no trees, only a few stunted little bushes a foot high, which, with their roots, formed the only combustible obtainable.

So I arranged for Rabia to descend with one permanent coolie next day to the nearest village in Zanskar (owing to absence of map and notes I cannot remember its name)—a long march—to bring back wood and some goats, whilst the other two coolies returned to the base camp for firewood.

They left the following morning before daylight, while Jaising and I started, later, to explore. We crossed the glacier stream and in three hours reached the top of Glacier Peak, opposite our camp. The going was very simple—shale and a snow

⁴ Photo No. 4.

slope; the peak, being about 19,000 ft., made it a fine view point. The summit was an immense ice-cap, whence tremendous sérac'd ice-walls fell northwards to a glacier several thousand feet below. A snow peak in the 'cirque' W. of the Shingo-la attracted our attention, and we were able, amidst the drifting clouds, to trace a route up the small glacier and thence up the peak, and managed, luckily for us, to retain it firmly in our memories. By 3 p.m. we were back in camp, intending to try this peak next day.

The morning was dark and rainy, but Jaising and I started at 6 a.m. and when near the top of the Shingo-la turned to the W. on to our glacier and followed the moraine till it ceased amidst crevasses. Clouds swooped down and it began to snow lightly, but with the route firmly in our minds, from our reconnaissance the previous day, we determined to persevere as far as possible. So we roped and put on our crampons, and left our rucksacks under a mackintosh.

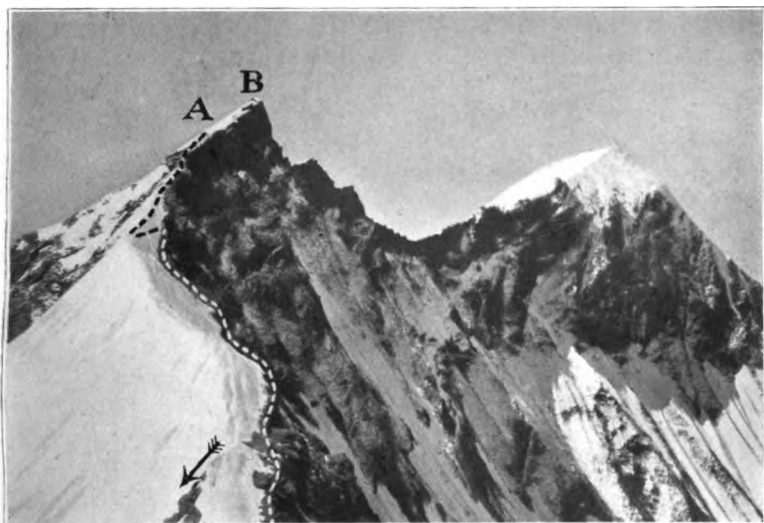
We started up the middle of the glacier-basin till crevasses sent us to the left, then back towards the middle on account of séracs on a rock-face above us, débris from which we skirted. The swirl of snow made the locating of hidden crevasses very difficult. Whilst prodding for a bridge over one, I suddenly heard the tinkle of falling icicles under my feet. Too late I realised that I was already standing on a crevasse, and as I stepped hurriedly backwards the covering gave way and I found myself in a realm of icicles below. Luckily it was a small crevasse, and my crampons stuck into the walls. Jaising had kept the rope taut, so I was within arm's length of the surface and was soon up again. Not to be discouraged by this little *contretemps*, we kept on up the steepening névé till we struck the base of a very abrupt wall. Though we could see nothing, we knew that above this lay a depression in the ridge leading to our peak. A bridge at the steepest part took us over the schrund, and then began most fatiguing step-cutting up this extremely steep pitch—mostly ice and necessitating huge steps, in spite of crampons. After some 800 ft. the slope began to ease off, and led us to a sloping névé, of which a portion was covered by blocks of ice, fallen from a cornice above. Skirting this, we soon arrived at 'Snowstorm Col' (c. 18,600 ft.). We sheltered in the lee of some rocks, munching chocolate and raisins and debating whether, having done the worst part of the ascent and reached the Col, we should try for the peak or retreat on account of the storm. We decided on the former course, for we knew

that all that now remained was to keep on up the easy snow ridge we had now reached, which would lead us in about 700 ft. to our summit. The danger was a known cornice to the right of the ridge and the unknown to the left of it.

We could only see the length of the rope, but gaily started off up the easy slope. By bending down and peering along the surface, a dark line could be discerned; this was the edge of the cornice, so we could check our position every few steps. To the left we could see nothing but the broad snow slope disappearing into the driving snow, so were safe from falling over anything in that direction. After about 300 ft. we began to see a dark line to the left also—evidently another edge, and a little higher we noticed that the edges on both sides were beginning to converge. Keeping strictly in the middle, we pushed on up till we could see the edges meet as the apex of a triangle—evidently the top! Another hundred feet of careful going landed us upon it—to find ourselves looking down into a swirl of snow-cloud into which an ice-covered rock-face disappeared. Right and left, snow arêtes fell away, and as nothing was visible rising in any direction we were, without doubt, on the summit which we had aimed at—Snowstorm Peak (c. 19,300 ft.). No thought of a descent by a different route could be entertained, and we were somewhat hard put to it to follow the same route in the descent through the storm. The descent of the wall was nasty, but difficulties ceased on the névé below, and we found ourselves at length, without further incident, at our rucksacks again. They were nearly buried in snow, and several minutes were needed to untie the sodden rope with cold fingers. By 3 p.m. we reached camp, pursued by sleet, which turned to snow towards evening. The tents had to be weighted with stones, and a wall built, to prevent their being blown away, but Rabia had got back with three milch-goats, a success this time, and a load of alder branches, the only wood he had been able to obtain at the village below. We spent a wretched night, with snow drifting in everywhere, and a bitter wind made it impossible to keep warm, in spite of much extra clothing and spare garments, ropes, boots, &c. wedged in along the bottom of the tent fly. The next morning was brilliantly fine, but several inches of snow lay over everything, and all day long avalanches crashed from the peaks. In the afternoon I climbed up 'Buttress Arête' to a height of about 18,000 ft. and got some fine views, discovering a fine peak—the Silver Cone—close to and connected with our snowstorm Peak, though in the storm we had known nothing

of its proximity. It was obviously to be reached via 'Snowstorm Col' by skirting close under Snowstorm Peak itself. Behind me 'Buttress Arête' joined a huge rock buttress which terminated in the rock-peak whence the great ridge running to 'Kakti Peak' commenced, and this I determined to attempt next day. A descent by an ice-couloir to a little glacier at the foot of the buttress showed me the lie of the land and how to get on to the buttress at its Shingo-la end. I gave Jaising a day off, instructing him to send off two coolies at daylight over the pass to the base camp for wood and the outer fly of my tent; I did not want more cold snowy nights under a single fly if possible. Rabia and I started at 4 A.M. and made our way up to the Buttress Glacier and across above its snout, and then over scree to the foot of what appeared to be a snow slope leading to the top of the buttress. This turned out to be ice, and gave us an hour's cutting before we reached the end of the buttress and our breakfast. We then scrambled along the broad top of the buttress and up easy rocks to the peak at the beginning of the Kakti ridge—Buttress Aiguille (c. 19,100 ft.). The ridge to the Kakti, perhaps a mile long, was very narrow. On the S. side, throughout its entire length, fell a sheer precipice of many thousand feet to the glacier on to which we had strayed when crossing the Shingo-la.⁵ To the N. fell a steep snow slope. The ridge itself was snow standing out from the rocks, and corniced, leaving a little ledge of rock overhanging the precipice. Half-way along towered the two tremendous gendarmes. It was our intention to traverse the whole ridge, descending by some easier route on the Lahoul side of the peak and back over the Shingo-la—probably by lantern-light. Our traverse began to be difficult at once. Good rocks descending from Buttress Aiguille landed us on the snow arête, but the crest was unsafe and we had to progress by the rock ledge to the right (S. side) overhanging the precipice. This was mostly iced and very nasty. At length the rocks got too steep and we had to effect a traverse across bad snow to get on to the crest of the snow arête. A slip was not to be thought of, as Rabia had to remain on the rock on the edge of the precipice whilst I trod in Agag-like fashion across the rotten snow—once on the crest we were safe, as it was easier here. The snow arête soon abutted against the first and lower 'Gendarme Aiguille' and some wriggling took us along the S. side of it. Then suddenly our hopes fell with a crash. Between

⁵ Photo No. 5



5



6

the 'Gendarme Aiguilles' was a huge gash of at least 200 ft. with perpendicular sides, without a vestige of a chance of getting into it or out of it again. That ended all chance of climbing the Kakti by this arête—a great pity, for it looked as if, on past the 'Gendarmes,' it would have given fine climbing. and, though difficult, would go. We set to and climbed our 'Gendarme Aiguille' (c. 19,000 ft.)—quite a good scramble—and lay on a slab on the top smoking and debating what to do, for the day was yet young, and a cloudless one. Several thousand feet below to the N. lay a large glacier, and we conceived the idea of descending to it, thus making a traverse and breaking new ground. To descend direct from here was impossible, but it looked practicable to do so from near 'Buttress Aiguille,' below which the snow slope was less steep. We could not see the rock-face below the snow slope, but imagined it falling to the big glacier and not difficult. So we set off to retrace our steps and did so successfully, with a 'mauvais quart d'heure' getting from the crest of the arête to the iced rocks—luckily less iced now, under the hot morning sun. Arriving at the selected spot to strike down, we made an easy descent in fairly good, though soft, snow to the rocks, and saw that they fell at an easy angle—but to a hanging glacier only, and not to the main glacier. Some ice-worn rocks gave us trouble in getting on to this glacier, and then Rabia anchored in a small crevasse while I crept to the edge of the hanging glacier to prospect. It was an extraordinary sensation, leaning over the very edge of the hanging glacier—peering down the enormous face of a sérac, wondering what would happen should it suddenly elect to join its forerunners at the bottom of a thousand feet of rock, where they lay shattered on the moraine of the big glacier.

An abortive attempt to the left sent us over to the right, where better luck attended us, and a moraine-covered tongue of ice ran down till it was lost in the larger moraine below and gave us easy access to the main glacier. A weary two hours of 'dry' glacier—covered-in streams—and then moraine, took us to a spot on the left bank where we could get on to grass slopes, and another hour over a grassy shoulder took us back to camp (4 P.M.) and gallons of hot tea, a good reward for a not unenterprising day.

The glacier we had discovered—the big one—was surrounded by some good peaks, and Rabia was detailed to find a bivouac place on its right bank on the following day, while Jaising and I tried our luck on the 'Silver Cone.'

The night was so fine that we hardly needed a lantern when we started a few minutes after 4 A.M. (August 1). We followed our previous route to Snowstorm Col, having to make the best possible time up the steep wall, as small fragments of icicle were already sliding down over the glittering surface from the cornice on Snowstorm Peak above us to the right. After breakfast on the Col, we cut across almost on a level on moderate snow to a little depression separating Snowstorm Peak and the Silver Cone. From here to the summit—a rise of some 1500 feet—there was no difficulty. It was just a plain snow ridge, but it cost us much fatigue. The ridge—the watershed between Lahoul and Zanskar—rose at no great slope, but, owing to the presence of a cornice overhanging a tremendous rock-face to the W., we were obliged to keep down on the E. slope of the ridge. The snow, after the recent bad weather, was soft and binding, every step was knee-deep, and it caked in our crampons till each foot felt like a ton weight—rather trying under a hot sun and at that elevation! After much laboured ploughing, at about 10 A.M. we reached the summit of the Silver Cone (c. 20,000 ft.)—a corniced ridge, with good snow, and some bare rocks lying invitingly at the further and higher end. We spent a glorious hour basking in the sun and smoking, and trying to take in the marvellous panorama. By far the finest of all the view was a peak lying just S. of us across a glacier. This huge peak—‘The Pyramid’—overtopped us by at least a thousand feet—a truly magnificent peak with ice slopes glistening in the sunshine and séracs plastered on to its steep sides.⁶ Just one possible route was visible, by a shoulder which jutted out to the S., if this could be reached. It was part of this peak which we had seen through the clouds from Golind peak, and it is probably the finest peak in Lahoul and very possibly the highest.

We might have descended to a glacier on the Lahoul side of us, thence over a col to another glacier descending to the S. of the Shingo-la, but the state of the snow forbade it, and we decided to retrace our steps exactly by the same route. This we did without difficulty, except at the steep wall below Snowstorm Col.

The day remained perfect, and at the early hour of 2.30 we were back in camp, having done our highest but far from hardest climb in a little over 10 hours.

Unfortunately it clouded over during the night, and the

⁶ Photo No. 6.

morning saw heavy snow-clouds drifting above the peaks. However, Rabia and I determined to get in a climb if possible and made a start at 8 A.M. to try to traverse 'Yellow-rock Peak' (c. 19,100 ft.). It looked fairly easy on the N. side, with some good rock climbing near the top and what appeared to be easy snow slopes to run down on the S. side. An hour found us at the base of the peak, and another hour at the top of a scree slope and below a shoulder of yellow rock—hence the peak's name. This gave pleasant scrambling for some time and then failed us. Roping, we set off to traverse to our left over a nasty ice couloir to reach another rock ridge in the face of the peak. Then followed a few hundred feet of loose and often difficult rock, up which Rabia led.

As this was easing off, I mismanaged the rope and upset two rocks just above me. The larger one nearly knocked my legs from under me; the smaller one passed over one hand, badly cutting one finger, and gave me a playful push in the chest as it went on downwards. At the same moment the clouds swooped down and it began to snow. As we were near the top of the peak, we decided to push on, relying on an easy descent on the other side. The rocks ended in a steep snow slope of about 200 ft. overhung by a cornice, but after much cutting and hewing I managed to break up through it, in spite of my squashed finger, and crawl over the edge on to the summit, closely followed by Rabia. We started down immediately, faces into the driving snow, descending the easy snow slopes, and were just preparing to glissade the last few hundred feet to the shale below when the snow gave place to ice and forced us to spend an hour cutting down instead. Then we ran for camp, but the snow followed us down and did not cease for two nights. Fortunately the outer fly of my tent had arrived, which improved matters, but the cold was pretty severe.

On the 4th the snow ceased falling and I at once sent down to the Zanskar village for coolies, having come to the conclusion that, as climbing was out of the question for some days, I might as well get back to my base camp. On the 5th Jitram and Ajabsing, who had come over to join us, made a trip with me up the large glacier to the W. of Yellow-rock Peak, and on our return to camp we found that the coolies had arrived.

On the 6th we started at daybreak in order to get over the Shingo-la, with its new snow, before the heat, and to enable us to reach our base camp that same day. The coolies got over

the pass well—though several suffered from the glare before we were off the snow on the S. side at 10 A.M. Then we made leisurely progress down the Shingo nullah to a snow bridge which spanned the torrent shortly before it joins the Topo Tokpo stream. We found the snow bridge nearly destroyed by an avalanche of stones and mud which had descended from a buttress of Golind Peak. This accounted for a tremendous roar we had heard not long before. When half an hour from camp we had an alarming experience. The goat-track crossed some flat slabs of rock—above was a 40-foot waterfall, below a similar one—into a steep gully leading to the river below. There had never been more than a trickle of water across the slabs from above whenever we had crossed before. Just as the leading coolies were approaching the slabs, suddenly, without warning, a mass of mud and boulders shot over the waterfall above. Instinctively we all crouched under cover. With a crash that shook the hillside and splattered us over with mud and splinters of rock, the mass hit the slabs and then went roaring on down the gully to the river. For several minutes the mud avalanche swept past us, then it began to subside, with now and then an extra rush as a big boulder crashed over. After half an hour we were able to get by, the normal trickle of water being now a rushing, muddy torrent. From a shoulder a little further on we came in sight of our tents; a few yards behind the tents flowed a stream in a sunken waterway. As we breasted the last rise, a sullen roar burst from somewhere above, and we saw another stream of mud and rocks sweeping slowly down the hillside behind our camp, apparently straight for it. Fascinated, we watched its impending doom, but the bank of our stream stemmed and turned the advancing mud wave, and the avalanche rushed down the waterway into the river. A flock of sheep, grazing higher up, had not been so lucky, and several were swept away in the rush. We saw yet another such avalanche sweep down further ahead, all from somewhere on Golind Peak. Evidently the many days' snow had filled some hollows, and the melting had proved too great a weight for the confines.

The following day was wet, and I decided to get back to Kyelang and strike out in another direction, so sent off to Jispa for coolies. The 8th pretended to clear up, and I conceived a sudden idea to try the huge 'Pyramid,' hoping the big shoulder might be accessible from this side. At 1 P.M. we started off, and, after crossing the snow bridge to the right bank of the Shingo torrent, struck straight up a gully, meaning to bivouac as high as possible. Above the gully lay some

jagged red aiguilles, higher above a black rock peak—the ‘Aiguille Noire’—and behind that again a snow summit, the ‘Aiguille Blanche.’ I hoped to find a way from the latter on to the Pyramid’s snowy shoulder. But bad luck dogged us—a bad night swooped down, and we hurried back to camp in rain.

The 9th was bad, but on the 10th it looked more hopeful in the afternoon, and we rushed off very late and bivouacked at 6 P.M. at under 15,000 ft., much too low, but it could not be helped. There was rain during the night, and mist delayed our start till 5 A.M. Then I did a fatal thing. Every single day since July 6, when we left Bir, I had never once failed to carry a lantern in my rucksack; but this one day, through an inexplicable fault in reasoning, and a desire to save weight, I sent it back with the Mummery tent and blankets. This day the party consisted of Jaising, Ajabsing, and Jitram, besides myself.

An hour’s scrambling took us obliquely under the red aiguilles to névé at the foot of the ‘Aiguille Noire’ and another hour’s easy climbing to the top of it, where we breakfasted at 7 A.M. Then we roped and began to follow a rock ridge towards the ‘Aiguille Blanche.’ One gendarme gave us some trouble, but Ajabsing found a way up the flank on somewhat iced rocks, above which a snow slope took us to the top of the Aiguille Blanche (c. 19,500 ft.).⁷

We now found ourselves almost on a level with the Pyramid’s shoulder, but separated from it by a long snow ridge, with some gendarmes cropping out half-way along. The ridge descended about 500 ft. to a depression whence a very steep snow slope rose to the shoulder. The ridge was heavily corniced and the commencement an impossibly narrow and steep arête, which would not ‘go.’

So we descended a snow ridge to the E. for 600 ft., then traversed a nasty snow slope to reach slabs which formed the E. face of the gendarmes. Here we got into great difficulty, and after half an hour I found our progress so slow that I decided to continue with Jaising alone, if we were to have any chance of reaching our peak—two moving so much quicker than four. So Ajabsing and Jitram returned by the same route to the breakfast place on one rope, whilst Jaising and I continued on the other. The slabs were at a steep angle, mostly iced and distinctly dangerous. I led round into an ice couloir, and then Jaising, taking the lead, led out of it up very difficult rocks,

up which I hardly dared to follow, with only the moral support of the rope, as he was badly placed.⁸ However, some precarious moments saw the danger over, and we climbed straight upwards to the last gendarme and then followed the snow arête—easy here—to the depression. Then began the ascent of the shoulder, which proved to be of very hard snow. We scrambled up this, one close behind the other, more or less ‘on all fours’—digging in toes, axe points, and fingers, and in this somewhat unorthodox fashion quickly gained the shoulder without mishap at 2.30 P.M.

At last we were on the main peak—at about 19,700 ft., and there now remained a rock and snow ridge and then a final steep slope, probably ice. There was not much hope of getting there, but after a few minutes’ ‘breather’ we started off. At once a gendarme barred our way, and it took us half an hour to defeat it and retrieve an axe which I let slip, and which luckily fell into a patch of soft snow at the foot of the rocks.

This was not good enough—8 o’clock, the long ridge hardly begun, a final slope of unknown quality, a storm blowing up from the S.—and no lantern. We had, however, at least found a way on to the peak reaching nearly or quite 20,000 ft. and had some most difficult climbing, so could be quite satisfied.

We decided against retracing our steps—the thoughts of those slabs were not pleasant—but traced a route to a *névé* below us to the E., partly on rocks, partly by the edge of the snow slope we had come up, where this abutted against the rocks. At first the rocks went well, then the snow looked preferable and we descended fairly rapidly, one at a time, mostly face to the slope.

A final descent of easy rock landed us on the *névé*, about 1700 ft. below the gendarme. We traversed this *névé* below the ‘*Aiguille Blanche*,’ then turned up easy rocks and shale to reach our rucksacks at the breakfast place. It was now about 6 P.M.—we had had no halt of more than a few minutes’ duration since 7.30 A.M., so were rather ‘done.’ We found Ajabsing waiting for us, shivering under a rock; he had sent Jitram down to fetch a lantern to meet us, foreseeing that we would be benighted.

In spite of the lateness of the hour, hunger and weariness compelled us to rest for half an hour. Then we scrambled down our old tracks to the *névé* below the ‘*Aiguille Noire*,’ where a squall of driving snow met us. Now followed a nasty descent across gullies in the face of the red *aiguilles*, most enjoyable

⁸ Photo No. 8.

scrambling in daylight, but highly unpleasant in the gathering darkness and storm. We soon lost the route of ascent, and were completely benighted.

We knew, however, that we had only to creep down in a certain direction to reach the head of the gully in which we had bivouacked, and after various vicissitudes, including a slide down a huge wet slab, found ourselves there, and on known ground.

We crept on down the gully, nearly breaking our legs over boulders many a time. When half-way down, the storm blew over, and at the same time we espied a lantern wending its way across the snow bridge over the torrent below. Much cheered, we quickened our pace and met the lantern and its bearer Jitram with our head coolie, much perturbed as to our safety. So perturbed had they been that they had forgotten to bring a spare candle, and before we were half-way back to camp the only one burnt itself out. We were, however, on the oft-trod goat-track, and reached camp before midnight.

The coolies had meantime arrived from below, and we started early next day to reach Jispa, about a sixteen-mile march, arriving there about 6 p.m. Here I found a runner awaiting me with a telegram from Dharmsala, sent on from Kulu, recalling me to my battalion at once. A week's forced marching, over the Ranghi-la, Rotang, and Bubu Passes, took us back through Kulu to Dharmsala on August 20, to find that my battalion had left for service.

I was ordered to remain at the depot until, after ten months' strenuous work, in June 1915 I took a draft to join the battalion in France. With me went Jaising; the other three orderlies had gone with a draft a month before. Rabia was left on duty at the base in France as being rather too old for the trenches—the authorities there little knew what sturdiness his small frame concealed! Jitram was invalided with appendicitis. Jaising and I both fell foul of Turkish bullets (later) in Mesopotamia—leaving Ajabsing, now a promising N.C.O., alone to represent our little party of climbers.

NOTES ON THE ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Head of the E. Laluni glacier—from second camp on moraine. A denotes the position of E. Laluni pass, and ++ the route up to it. (July 14, '14.)

2. The N. (Lahoul) side of the E. Laluni pass. + denotes the difficult descent from the pass to the glacier, which the party made. (July 16, '14.)

3. Loaded yaks on Bara Lacha route.

4. My camp in Zanskar, just north of the Shingo-la. A denotes Snowstorm Col; B is Snowstorm Peak. (July 29, '14.)

5. The long ridge from Buttress Aiguille to Great Kakti Peak (?). A is the Lower Gendarme Aiguille; B is the higher Gendarme Aiguille. Gap between them not visible, but sun shining through on to patch of snow. Route of ascent marked: same for descent as far as arrow, which marks direction of our descent to glacier. (July 31, '14.)

6. Looking S. from the 'Silver Cone.' A denotes the Pyramid peak. B denotes Golind peak (July 25) with route of descent marked. C denotes the Pyramid shoulder, which we reached at +. (Aug. 1, '14.)

7. On the way to the Pyramid shoulder. A gendarme, round which Ajabsing, seen below +, has just led. (Aug. 11, '14)

8. The 'Aiguille Blanche' from the Pyramid shoulder. Gathering storm-clouds. From summit, reached from S., we descended snow ridge to E. (left). From A to B was the difficult traverse across snow-covered and iced slabs to the last gendarme (B), whence snow arête was followed to C (depression), whence steep snow slope rose to the Pyramid shoulder. (Aug. 11, '14)

SUCCESS AND FAILURE ON MONT BLANC.

BY WM. CECIL SLINGSBY.

I.

A DAY'S WALK FROM COURMAYEUR TO CHAMONIX OVER MONT BLANC.

'Where undissolving, from the first of time,
Snows swell on snows amazing to the sky;
And icy mountains, high on mountains pil'd,
Seem to the shivering sailor from afar
Shapeless and white, an atmosphere of clouds.

Alps frown on Alps, or rushing hideous down,
As if old Chaos was again returned,
Wide rend the deep, and shake the solid pole.'

THOMSON'S *Winter*.

UP to now, no description has ever appeared in any mountaineering Journal of the crossing of Mont Blanc in one day which a friend and I, accompanied by two guides, made in the year 1879.