Latpari Pass that of the Little St. Bernard. The Dongusorun, the easiest pass over the main chain, will correspond to the St. Théodule. But the Caucasian valley is in every respect more difficult of access than its Alpine rival. The unbroken wall of rock and ice which forms its northern boundary is a far more formidable barrier than the Pennine Alps. It encloses between its complicated spurs and bastions six great snow-basins, those of the Adish, Zanner, Tuiber, Leksur, Chalaat, and Ushba Glaciers. Other great glaciers fall more steeply and directly from under the peaks of Shkara, Janga, Tetnuld, and Dongusorun. Two ridges several miles in length run out from the watershed towards the Ingur, enclosing between them the glen of the Nakra. By a prodigious blunder the five-verst map took the Caucasian watershed along the more eastern of these spurs and entirely ignored the upper Betsho Valley. All these ridges are composed of crystalline rocks, for the most part granite, which show the tendency observable in the Alps, in the Mont Blanc and Pelvoux groups, to arrange themselves in double parallel ridges. Unfortunately this structure was not recognised by the authors of the old survey, and in consequence the small map based on it both in the French and English editions of that standard work, Reclus's *Géographie Universelle*, is entirely misleading.

On the south Suanetia is fenced in by the lofty slate range of the Laila, attaining an altitude of 13,400 feet and supporting glaciers which may compare with those of the Grand Paradis group in the Graian Alps. Near the Latpari Pass its rocks display very markedly the fan structure. Foreign geologists have described them as 'palæozoic schists,' but the fossils discovered by Signor Sella on the top of the Laila, which have been examined and reported on by Dr. Gregory at the British Museum, do not bear out this designation as far as those peaks are concerned. The formation, whatever its age, plays a very great part in the Caucasian chain, forming its watershed from the Mamison eastwards.[1]

[1] See Geological Note, Appendix A.

Between the granite and the slates, in places usurping the central position of the granite in the watershed, lies a belt of crystalline schist ridges narrower than the corresponding belt on the north side. Their green rounded outlines contrast strikingly with the precipices of the main chain. It is over these, where they link the slate and granite, that the gentle slopes of the Zagar Pass (8680 feet), only 1700 feet above the highest villages, afforded in olden days, before the forests of the Skenis Skali became pathless, the main access to the valley from Georgia. Now the higher Latpari Pass, leading more directly south towards the seat of government, Kutais, is universally preferred, though in most years it is not open for horse traffic till the beginning of July, and is closed by snow early in October. The Ingur, which with its tributaries carries off the waters of Suanetia, has its source under Shkara in the glaciers that line the south side of the central chain. Its first large tributary, the Mulkhura, which drains the vast snowfields that lie west of Tetnuld and east of Ushba, exceeds it in volume. The two torrents unite near Latal, the meeting-place also of the streams from the Laila and the snows of Ushba and Dongusorun. The glens above this point—the Ingur sources—are covered with the castles of the Independent Suanetians: so called because they had thrown off all external control for at least one hundred years before Russian rule was established in the country. The narrower trench below Latal through which the united waters of the Ingur flow was 'Dadish Kilian's Suanetia,' named after a family from the north, probably of Kabardan origin, which had established a feudal lordship over its communities.

In scenery, this highland basin is in every respect a contrast to the northern valleys on the other side of the chain. 'Savage Suanetia,' the title chosen by an enthusiastic sportsman for his account of his travels in the district, may have been appropriate enough if applied to the inhabitants only. But, as far as nature is concerned, it has to be reversed. 'Smiling, sylvan, idyllic,' such are the epithets that rise on a traveller's lips as he suddenly emerges from the dark treeless glens and chilly recesses of the Northern Caucasus on to a region of gentle slopes and wide distances, of

forests and flowery meadows, of fields golden with barley. Compared to the warrens, or stone-heaps, that serve the people of the northern valleys for dwellings, the towered villages and castellated farms of Suanetia assume at a distance a false air of mediæval romance. North of the chain, at Bezingi or Balkar, the traveller feels himself at the bottom of a well. He knows hours

A SUANETIAN LANDSCAPE

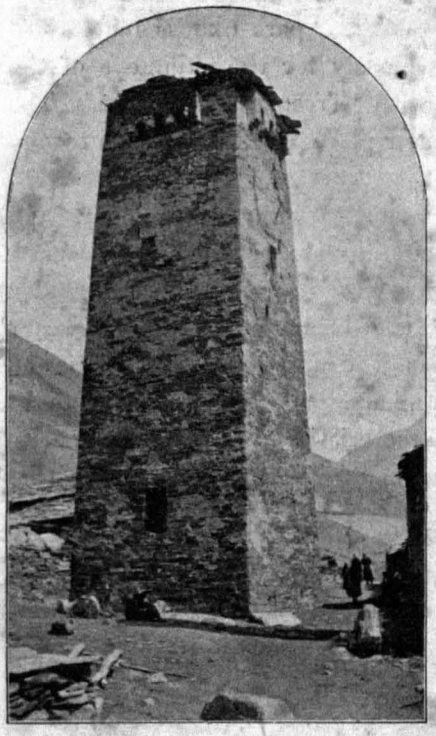
of climbing are required in order to enlarge or vary the outlook. Here the landscapes are wide and constantly changing: the visible sky is not a narrow strip but a broad arch. The hill-shapes may recall Savoy—the basin of Sallanches; but the forests show richer and more varied foliage than we are accustomed to in the High Alps. The pines no longer predominate, or press on one another until they become mere ragged staffs. They present

themselves as dark, shadowy cones amidst the fresh green of the deciduous forest, of beeches and alders, of ash and walnut, of copses that in June and July are bright with purple rhododendron and fragrant with golden azalea blossom. The glades are gay with lupines and lilies and the spires of a ten-thousand-blossomed heracleum.[1] Any comparison from the reality to an imitation must seem more or less inverted and false. But for those who only know the imitation, it may be permissible to repeat a phrase that comes to every Englishman's lips as he wanders through Suanetian woodlands. When the azaleas and rhododendrons thicken, and the tall flowers cluster among them round the mown, open spaces, the epithet 'park-like' is inevitable! One finds one's-self looking unconsciously for the chimneys of the 'family mansion,' and the board with 'Trespassers, beware.' The illusion is abruptly broken when their place is taken by the towers of Ushba.

Mountaineers, as a rule, see Suanetia after midsummer. In June among the blossoms, and again in October when the beeches, the wild fruit-trees and the azaleas turn red, and the birches golden against the fresh autumn snows, the brilliancy of the landscape must be marvellous. Suanetia is a country for travellers and artists as much as for mountain climbers. Space, variety, sunniness —these are the constant and characteristic qualities of Suanetian scenery. The great mountain basin is broken by no heights that approach the snow-line. The glens are divided only by long grassy or forested ridges. Their gentle undulating crests furnish the most effective contrast to the icy clefts and rigid cliffs of Shkara and Ushba. From the beauty of flowers and forests close at hand, the eye is carried through soft gradations of distance to the pure glaciers which hang down like silver stairs from the snowy chain. The atmosphere has none of that sharpness of definition we associate with the Alps in summer. It more resembles

[1] M. Levier writes :—'Heracleum mantegazzianum is probably the largest umbelliferous plant in the Caucasus. Its stalks reach 10 centimètres in thickness, its basal leaves exceed a mètre, and on the smallest of the plants which M. Correvin has raised from seed at Geneva I have counted ten thousand blossoms.'

that of the West Coast of Scotland or the English Lakes. The afternoon breezes from the Black Sea bring up showers and vapours to colour the atmosphere, to soften the mountain outlines and magnify their bulk. The north wind from the steppe suffuses the sky with an impalpable haze through which the great peaks glimmer like golden pillars of the dawn. To the natural beauties, the snowy peaks, the flowers and forests of the Suanetian landscape, man has added something. It is a land where every man's house is his castle. The meadows and the cultivated valleys are strewn with high white towers. In one spot a single tower stands isolated, in another they cluster in groups of fifty to eighty. Every hamlet has as many towers as the cities of Tuscany in the Middle Ages. Nothing so fantastic as these family fortresses can be seen elsewhere outside San Gimignano or the frame of an Old Master.



A TOWER AT USHKUL

Mestia alone boasts seventy towers, each 40 to 80 feet high; Ushkul over fifty, and two black castles besides. The houses to which the towers are attached are quadrangular blocks, slate-roofed, without chimneys, and with narrow slits, closed by wooden shutters, for windows. Sometimes they have no windows at all, the light penetrating only through the interstices in the unmortared wall, while the smoke escapes through the roof. Torches made of birch-bark are used at night: a wooden passage, capable of being cut down in case of necessity, leads to the first floor of the tower of refuge.

Let us enter one of these houses or barns. It contains a single large, dark room; two or three boulders form the hearth; the furniture consists of a few wooden stools or benches scattered about the earthen floor; in the corner is a raised wooden platform with skins and cushions, the family couch. By groping up a narrow passage we may reach the entrance to the tower; ladders or notched logs, easily removable, lead from storey to storey. The

CHURCH WITH FRESCOES AT LENJER

ladders are short, and to gain each storey one has to scramble up the last few feet by projecting stones left in the wall. Skulls and horns of wild goats lie about on the landings; on the top storey are loop-holes for firing. The towers are built of unsquared blocks of granite or slate, and generally whitewashed. At Ushkul, however, the two castles have been left their natural dark colour.

In the upper and more lawless communities wood was, until quite lately, very sparingly employed. In Lower, or Dadish Kilian's Suanetia, timber balconies, barns, and even houses built of un-

smoothed logs are not uncommon, and have increased in number since domestic warfare has ceased, and with it the need of dwellings at least externally fireproof.

The country is rich, strange as it may seem, in churches. The reader must not, however, let his fancy be wrought on by the familiar sound of the word and imagine buildings answering in any

TRIPTYCH AT MESTIA

respect to the church of Western Europe. The Suanetian churches, in dimensions and external aspect, are more on the scale of Italian roadside chapels. They have no towers; where bells exist they are hung on a wooden framework outside the church. This arrangement is common also in Corsica. The average dimensions of the internal nave are about 25 by 20 feet. There is commonly a porch; at Latal a portico, as at St. Mark's of Venice, runs round three sides of the building. The apse is shut

off by an iconostasis or screen; it varies in external form and decoration. At Lenjer the apse is hexagonal; in one of the chapels at Latal semicircular and decorated with a colonnade in low relief. The interior, and sometimes the exterior, are frescoed in a style varying from pure Byzantine to what in Italy might be called *Giottesque*. The roof is often decorated with representations of the heavenly bodies, on a blue ground. A large wooden cross, covered with silver *repoussé* plates, is sometimes found in front of the iconostasis. There are few Georgian features in the architecture, and it appears at least probable that the builders were rather under direct Byzantine influence.

In these churches are preserved, under the jealous guard of the village elders, a number of very interesting objects, including manuscripts of great antiquity. Many of them have been described in detail and depicted in the work of M. de Bernoville, already referred to. Among the treasures he was allowed to inspect were the following. At Ushkul, small bronzes, apparently Roman, Persian money, Persian silk embroidered with six figures of the sun, ancient arrows and weapons. At the deserted monastery of St. Quiricus, near Kalde, he found arrows, figures in silver or silver-gilt, a magnificent Greek manuscript, attributed by M. de Bernoville to the sixth or seventh century (its subject is not stated), a silver box in the form of a book, used for the preservation of the sacred elements, having on one side the Crucifixion, with the Virgin and St. John and two angels, represented in *cloisonné* enamel on a silver ground. The workmanship is said to be of the highest order. The border is set with uncut precious stones; on the reverse side is a scene which seems to be the descent of Christ into Hades. M. de Bernoville, who has figured this case in his volume, describes it, however, as the Resurrection of Lazarus. I am inclined to believe that this may be the object, the removal of which by a Russian official became known throughout Suanetia, and led to almost insuperable difficulties being placed in the way of later travellers desirous of investigating any church treasures.

At Mestia we read of two processional crosses, a number of very beautiful old *repoussé* silver pictures with Georgian inscrip-

tions, a great cross enriched with scenes of martyrdom, two silver cups, Italian in character, massive silver jugs. Some of these Signor Sella succeeded in photographing. At Lenjer is a manuscript of the Gospels, copied at Jerusalem in 1046-48—no inscriptions or manuscripts prior to the eleventh century are forthcoming; at Latal a Gospel in an ornamental binding, manuscripts rolled on sticks, bells bearing Greek and Latin inscriptions; at Ezeri, in the Prince's possession, a silver-gilt box, with Kufic inscriptions, and a massive silver bowl of Persian work.

ANCIENT CHURCH ORNAMENTS AT MESTIA

It is obvious that an expert from South Kensington might spend a very interesting holiday in Suanetia, and that the history of the country may be further elucidated, if no greater discoveries are made, by a student competent to look over the ancient rolls and manuscripts.

This seems the best place to give a brief sketch of the history and origin of the Suanetians. Students will find in the second volume of Dubois de Montpereux's work on the Caucasus, or in M. de Bernoville's *Souanétie Libre,* fuller information and ample references.

Strabo describes the *Soani* as a powerful nation, who were governed by a King and a Council of Three Hundred: he adds that they were in the habit of using poisoned weapons in war. The statement in the received text that they could assemble two hundred thousand fighting men must, even if the name is loosely applied to a confederation of the Kolkhian tribes, be taken to

be a copyist's error. Pliny speaks of the Svanetæ. It is, perhaps, worthy of notice that Suanetes and Consuanetes appear in the catalogue of the Alpine tribes subdued by Augustus, inscribed on the Trophæum that still shows 'its Roman strength' on the heights above Monaco. Suanetia was included in the Roman Empire, and Christianity, as is shown by the lists of Bishops present at the Œcumenical Councils, took root at a very early date in Kolkhis. When it penetrated to Suanetia is a matter of conjecture, but M. de Bernoville seems to have some reason for his belief that it was derived directly from Byzantium and not through Georgia. The churches found in the district are constructed on a plan not common in Georgia. Their bells, doubtless of much later origin than the buildings, bear in some instances Latin inscriptions, unfortunately without any date.

The country was reserved for Persia in the treaty made between Chosroes and Justinian when they combined to hold the line of the Caucasus against the Northern hordes. Persian objects are still found among the treasures concealed in the ancient churches, together with flint-headed arrows and weapons of a very remote period. When the Georgian kingdom first established a suzerainty over the Suanetians is uncertain. It was before the eleventh century, during which they temporarily asserted their independence. A hundred years later (A.D. 1184-1212), Queen Thamara became the ruler of Suanetia. This heroine plays, in popular imagination and legend, throughout the Caucasian isthmus the part taken by Alexander or Charlemagne in other parts of the world. She was styled by Georgian chroniclers, anticipators of the Hungarian compliment to Maria Theresa, the greatest of their *kings*. If we may believe the ballads still chanted in her honour by the Suanetians, she led the mountaineers to victory over their neighbours, the Abkhasians and Tauli, and, better still, reduced their taxes to the nominal fee of an egg per household.

Two centuries later (A.D. 1400) we find Suanetia taking advantage of the misfortunes of Georgia to again declare itself independent. The mountaineers' audacity grew until they burnt Kutais; they were chastised, and a family of the name of Ghelovani

was imposed on them as rulers. Their obscure annals continue to be full of fighting and slaughter. Early in the fifteenth century they had to give up their claims to the villages on the upper Rion, which still, in the case of Gebi and Chiora, bear traces of their influence. In the eighteenth century the people on the Ingur dispensed with the ruling family of the Ghelovani, who, as the Dadians, still exercise feudal rights in the valley of the Skenis Skali on the southern side of the Latpari Pass. The Kabardan family of the Dadish Kilians, coming from the north, had meantime acquired large possessions, and some sort of control over the four lower communities on the Ingur, while the hamlets round the sources of the Rion had become absolutely independent. They realised the new ideal of a society where the free-will of the individual overrides all other considerations, and the only check to crime is the reciprocal extinction of criminals.

From this time forth all certain knowledge of the valley was lost. Its skin-clothed inhabitants paid occasional visits to the lower country in search of salt, but what slight traffic there was passed into the hands of the few Jewish families who had established themselves at some unknown date in Lakhamula, the lowest village above the great defile of the Ingur. Upper Suanetia was left, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot.' We are, however, able to represent its condition from the reports of its first visitors in the latter half of the present century.

The picture they bring before our eyes should not be without interest to the advanced politicians, or dreamers, of Western Europe and Russia itself. For here we find some of their wildest imaginations carried out in practice.

I regret that I cannot give a more full statement as to the land tenures and the transmission of property, as well as some account of the old habits and beliefs of Suanetia. So far as I know, these matters still await thorough treatment; and no one should be more capable of giving it than the Surveyors, who have spent as many months among the mountain people as we travellers have days. The Government would confer a lasting benefit on students interested in the Caucasus by publishing reports from their officers

from time to time of the information they have collected. The paper of a Russian writer, M. Akinfieff, printed at Tiflis in 1890, has come under my eyes, but only in a summary which does not inspire me with complete confidence.[1] What follows here is based on notes from books, and on conversations I have had with M. Nikoradse and other persons in the Caucasus.

Each farm or fortress was inhabited by a single family, the members of which did not separate except at the death of its head. The village, according to Professor Kovalevsky, consisted originally of members of the same family or *gens*; now, however, the village generally includes several distinct families. Members of the same family do not intermarry. A community is made up of several adjacent villages. But a community has proved too large a unit. Thus in 1866, when Dr. Radde was at Ushkul, the men of Murkmeli shot at every one who came down the path from Chubiani, both hamlets belonging to the same commune. There had been some quarrel over rights of common pasturage. Public enmities were supplemented by countless private feuds. When a woman changed hands or husbands, the parties concerned could not always agree on the value in cattle of the lady exchanged. Hence arose assaults of persons and batteries of towers. The punishment for 'breach of promise' was death at the hands of the woman's relatives. As parents had the right of betrothing children in their cradles, such breaches were not rare, but the more prudent bachelor evaded the difficulty by bigamy, by marrying once for duty and a second time from inclination, a practice which does not appear to have been thought objectionable. When too many girls were born in a family, a pinch of hot ashes was placed at birth in the mouth of the unfortunate baby and its body disposed of in the courtyard. This barbarous custom is vouched for on excellent authority by M. de Bernoville. In older times the Suanetians resorted largely to wife-lifting or exogamy; yet at the last census there were four males to three females in the Ingur Valley. Morality, in the ordinary sense of the word, is lax, and

[1] See *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, June 1895.

there are reported to be traces in the relations between brothers and sisters-in-law of an old form of what may be called family marriage.

The affairs of each hamlet, in so far as they were not settled by appeals to arms, were regulated by an assembly of all adult males. Before any decision was arrived at by the assembly every man had a right to be consulted, and a late comer could reopen the debate. Dr. Radde narrates his personal experience of such an incident in the discussion that arose with regard to his proposed visit in 1864 to one of the churches at Ushkul. There being no local authority of any kind able to enforce a decision, arms were constantly resorted to, and the villages lived in perpetual warfare.

Free Suanetia, even before it had attained to Home Rule, had carried out Church Disestablishment and Disendowment with curious thoroughness. The priests disappeared, the ecclesiastical property was secularised, a village council or 'vestry,' said to have become an hereditary body, assumed its control, and kept the key of the church, which, no longer reserved for pious uses, was employed chiefly as a treasury and banqueting-house. It appears that these local elders absorbed the tithes in kind formerly paid to the church. The old Byzantine Christianity was forgotten, and in its place there grew up the wildest jumble of Church rites, Persian sun-worship, and old Pagan beliefs and sacrifices. The marriage ceremony consisted in sewing together the garments of the bride and bridegroom; baptism was travestied; the ancient funeral ceremonies were revived or continued. Of these Professor Kovalevsky has furnished me with the following description:—One of the nearest relations of the deceased follows the body to the grave, leading by the horns a fat ox. Immediately after the burial the ox is killed, and the heart and liver are placed on a wooden platter. This is taken by one of the local elders (who are not consecrated, or in any way recognised as priests by the Georgian Church), who lifts up the plate, using at the same time the following words: 'O God, accept this our sacrifice.' The portions so dedicated he keeps for himself. The rest of the animal furnishes the funeral banquet.[1] A year after the death a commemorative feast is held at the grave. The relatives bring

[1] Signor Sella was present at one of these banquets. See Illustration, p. 217.

cheesecakes, portions of meat, and the spirit locally made from barley, the provisions the ghost is supposed to need on its journey. A portion is blessed by the elder, and kept by him for his own use.

It is said that Suanetians who have reason to distrust their relations sometimes order their own funeral feasts, and take part in them during their lifetime. Every year after the harvest there is, as in Roman Catholic countries on All Saints' Day, a general commemoration of the dead, and large offerings of food are made to the elders.

FUNERAL FEAST AT MAZERI

Signor Sella has preserved in his photographs a vivid record of such a scene. Mr. Phillipps-Wolley saw seven oxen slaughtered, boiled, and distributed at Gebi, a place long united to Suanetia, and still preserving traces of its historical connection. I have also witnessed there a similar primitive banquet. The animals were killed and cut up in the churchyard.

There are no monuments resembling those of Ossetia or of the Turkish villages. Grave-mounds surround the churches, or are found under particular trees. But the dead are often put out

of sight without heed of locality. In the centre of many hamlets there is a venerable tree or trunk—at Latal a walnut, at Mestia a birch, at Lenjer a cherry—under which are placed two or three rude stone seats. Tree-worship survives in many parts of the Caucasus. The sacred groves of the Circassians are described in Bell's and Longworth's *Travels*, those of the Ossetes by Hahn. There is a sacred wood close to the deserted monastery of St. Quiricus, near Kalde in Suanetia. In the Alps a few groves that possibly owe their survival to the same worship still exist. There is a patch of old beechwood near the shrine at Forno, above Lanzo.

Of Christian observances the Lenten Fast is the chief still held in any honour. The men are said to assemble outside the churches on Twelfth Day and the first Sunday in Lent, while the women are never allowed to approach them. Three days in the week are kept as holidays, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Carlyle somewhere says that the only virtue of his countrymen consists in keeping the Sabbath. Judged by this test the Suanetians might be held to be even more virtuous than the Scotch!

The Suanetians were, it must be added, arrant thieves, cattle-lifters, and sheep-stealers, who would on occasion carry off a girl as readily as a sheep across their saddle-bows. M. de Bernoville relates how one such captive was released by the Russian Expedition of 1869. Their foreign relations were in consequence habitually strained. They in fact consisted for the most part in warlike undertakings and predatory forays on their neighbours' pastures. The great glaciers of the main chain, passes of the nature of the St. Théodule and Col d'Hérens, were no obstacle to these sturdy marauders. The Turkish mountaineers had to build watch-towers, and keep guard, in order to protect their flocks and herds. I myself saw in 1868 stolen oxen being driven hastily across the Dongusorun Pass, and so frightened were our porters of their probable reception on the north side, after their countrymen's misdemeanours, that we had the greatest difficulty in inducing them to remain with us. Dr. Radde recounts the robbery of five hundred sheep by Suanetians of the Skenis Skali.

Strangers naturally seldom came to Suanetia. I can count

on the fingers of one hand the travellers who had visited the country before 1868. Among its inhabitants there was no tradition of hospitality, such as is almost universal in the East. They not only turned the stranger from their doors, but they exacted a payment for letting him pass them. An attempt was made to enforce such a demand on my last visit to Adish.

Medicine was practically unknown, and even now the traveller who cures by his drugs is looked on more or less as a miracle-monger. Goitres are prevalent, and epilepsy—possibly attributable in part to the vile spirit extracted from barley—is not uncommon. The natives are said to be peculiarly liable to fever when they descend to the lowlands, and an incident I shall have to relate affords a strong proof of their sense of danger in doing so.

Primitive poetry and local ballads often give a nearer insight into the condition of life and the manners of a race than religious rites and beliefs. The former are indigenous; the latter as a rule more or less exotic. Dr. Radde has fortunately preserved several very curious Suanetian ballads, such as are still sung under some ancient tree, or on the march along the mountain paths. They celebrate the golden time of Thamara, past forays across the great chain into the land of the Baksan (the name of Terskol, a glen at the foot of Elbruz, occurs Tartars), or among the Abkhasians to the west. The following ballad, which records the fate of a hunter —an early 'mountaineering accident'—gives so lively a picture of Suanetian manners that I must venture on a rough translation.

Metki was a hunter of Pari, in Dadish Kilian's Suanetia. He became the lover of the Mountain Spirit. It appears from Dr. Radde's version that, besides having an official wife, he was also in love with his sister-in-law, and that to the latter he revealed the secret of her mysterious rival. How the Spirit revenged his indiscretion, Metki, or rather Metki's ghost, tells as follows:

'Metki is unhappy, and to be pitied. The men of Lentekhi were assembled for the dance. Into the circle of the dancers sprang a white hare; after running round the circle it leapt between Metki's feet. Metki said to his fellows, "Remain you quiet here; this has never happened to me before. I must follow the tracks of the hare!"

'High in the valley are the tracks. He came to a place where the mountain goats live. He came to the steep rocks. The white hare was transformed into a white mountain goat. Metki clung with the right hand and the left foot to the steep rocks. There came a neighbour from the same village, and he lamented when he saw how Metki hung, and heard how Metki spoke: "Once on a time I wounded you; remember that no more, but carry the news of my misfortune. Tell my father I fell from here, from the wild-goats' dwelling. Let him make ready wine with honey, and feast the neighbours; and bid my mother that for the repose of my soul she give to the folk bread and cheese and millet; and bid my wife that she bring up the children well, and my sister that she cut short her hair, and my brothers that they take good care of the house, and live not in enmity. Bid my friends, when they bewail me, that they sing true in the chorus. Bid my Thamara that she meet me at the foot of the mountain, that she go quickly on the level path, and climb weeping to the mountain.

'"Over me flutters the raven. He craves my eyes for his meal. Under me, at the foot of the mountain, waits the bear who shall eat my flesh.

'"The star Venus is my enemy!

'"Venus rises, and the day and the night part asunder. May my sins rest on the Mountain Spirit. O Spirit, save me, or let me fall quickly into the gulf."

'As the red of morning shone, and the day and night were parted, Metki fell; but all his misdeeds shall rest on the Spirit of the Mountains.'

The Suanetians are not (as M. Chantre alleges) mainly a pastoral people. They keep a few flocks of sheep and herds of horses. Bullocks are used to draw sledges, and are eaten in winter. But flocks and herds are seldom found, as among the Tartars beyond the chain, on the high pastures, and consequently there are often no paths to them. To reach the upper glacier basins you must find and follow almost invisible and overgrown hunters' tracks. Pigs, the smallest breed I ever saw, and geese wander round the homesteads, which are guarded by dogs. The villages are surrounded by barley-fields, fenced in with neat wattling. The foot-paths between them are pleasant. As the traveller descends the valley he meets with other crops, millet, flax, wheat, and tobacco, and Indian corn is grown in outlying plots below the most western villages at a height of about 3500 feet. The inhabitants have

learnt recently to cultivate potatoes and other vegetables. They cut a certain amount of hay on the high pastures. Sometimes they cross the chain in summer, and hire themselves out as labourers to the indolent Tartars, just as the Lucchesi do to the Corsicans. But there is no love lost between them. The Mussulmans look on the Suanetians with contempt as pig-eaters. I heard the Suanetians hiss 'Cherkess' at our Kabardan Cossack; and the Cossack — a mild, amiable creature, the reverse of our popular idea of a Cossack—despised and distrusted every Suanetian from the bottom of his soul.

It seems to me difficult to recognise any prevalent type among the Suanetians. *Variety* is the most marked characteristic. The village head-man of Mestia, huge and bull-like, was like a figure on an Assyrian monument. Fair men with blue eyes and tawny beards are common. The ordinary costume is the long brown frock-coat of the Caucasus, with cartridge-pouches on the breast. On the head is worn either a flabby Ossetian wide-awake, a *bashlik*, or else one of the tiny pieces of cloth, like kettle-holders, common in Mingrelia. The women at Ushkul have, or had in 1868, one rough sheet of sacking for clothing, and are shy. In other villages they wear the red robes common in this part of the Caucasus, and white or coloured cotton kerchiefs on the head. At Latal they wear flounced petticoats, such as might be seen in a back street of Genoa. Some one may start a theory that the Latal ladies are the descendants of refugees from one of the Genoese colonies on the coast, destroyed by the Mohammedan invasion! One per cent. of the population is said to be goitred.

The Suanetian language resembles Old Georgian. It has some affinity also with the dialects spoken by the more eastern highlanders, the Pshavs, Chevsurs, and Tushins. The late Mr. D. R. Peacock, H.B.M.'s Consul at Batum, prepared a limited vocabulary of the Georgian, Mingrelian, Laz, Suanetian, and Abkhasian dialects for the Royal Asiatic Society.[1] Even

[1] *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. xix. part 1. See Dr. Radde's and Captain Telfer's works already quoted. Hahn states that Greek words occur.

a hasty glance shows that the first four tongues have many words in common, while the Abkhasian seems to stand absolutely apart from all of them.[1] The problem that has been discussed is: Are the Suanetians—so far as they are not merely a mixture of refugees who have found shelter at different times in this mountain Alsatia—of the Georgian stock, or do they belong to some primitive Kolkhian race? The first view is taken by Radde and Kovalevsky, the second by De Bernoville, whom M. Chantre copies in the short notice contained in his encyclopædic and splendidly illustrated work. The linguistic argument seems to me in favour of the former view.

In this strange and interesting political and social condition, Suanetia appears to have remained for more than a century. Off the world's highways and out of the world's contests, the mountain communities went on turning, like the earthen pot, round and round in their own rock-girt pool, until they were swept at last into the stream of the nations. Meantime the Free Suanetians were free and independent to their hearts' content. They were as lawless as the Cyclopes of the *Odyssey*. They knew no restraint to their passions. No man could call either his wife or his house his own except in so far as he could defend them by force. The right of murder was the foundation of society. Such a state of things was too ideal to last in this prosaic, order-loving age. In 1833 Russia assumed suzerainty over the district, and as years went on her suzerainty became more than nominal.

Shortly after the Crimean War a Russian force penetrated,

[1] M. Chantre prints a very poetical legend purporting to account for the absence of any written form of the Circassian dialect. A learned Adighè or Circassian, an Arabic scholar, sat down to endeavour to make an alphabetical representation of his native tongue. He had not proceeded far when his labours were interrupted by the sudden appearance of a venerable figure. The stranger addressed him to this effect: 'Give up your hopeless task. Can you put into human writing the rolling of the thunder among the peaks, the crash of the falling avalanche, the deep roar of the mountain-torrents, the blast of the waterfalls? Can you represent the sounds of the stones as they clatter down the gorges, of the branches of the forest as they moan in the tempest, the screams and songs of the birds as they call to one another from height to height? How then can you hope to imprison in letters the free speech of the tribes of Circassia?'

for the first time, the mountain-barriers. The expedition produced no permanent political result.

In 1857 the Russian Government was brought face to face in a very dramatic manner with the difficulties every civilised government in turn meets with when, from reasons of high policy, it tolerates disorder within its frontiers. The first breakdown in the system of non-intervention was brought about by the violence of a certain Constantine Dadish Kilian, one of the feudal princes of the lower valley. This ruffian, who had already in a private vendetta slain one of his uncles and wounded his cousin, was known to be fomenting trouble. Sent for to Kutais by the Governor and ordered to live elsewhere than among his vassals, he did to his ruler as he had done among his own people. He stabbed that official and three others. The Dadish Kilian met with the usual fate of murderers; and as a result of his crime a Russian force was sent into the valley, the culprit's castle was razed to the ground, and a garrison of ten men placed in his village. The Independent Communities were, however, still left alone. This was the state of affairs at the time of my first visit. In the upper hamlets Russian orders did not run, and the Government was openly defied. Private wars still raged, individual against individual, family against family, hamlet against hamlet, community against community.

The first travellers to visit Suanetia were two Russian officials, General Bartholomai and Herr Dakradze. They wrote pamphlets, describing chiefly the ecclesiastical treasures and inscriptions existing in the district. Herr Abich and Dr. Radde, the well-known botanist, and curator of the Tiflis Museum, visited the valley in 1864 and 1866. Two years later Dr. Radde was followed by the first party of English travellers, who owed much to their predecessor's book and friendly advice.

In the following year (1869) Count Levashoff, then Governor of Mingrelia, assembled an armed force and marched with some pomp over the Latpari. M. de Bernoville, a Frenchman, who was allowed to take part in the expedition, has given a detailed account of its progress. The Suanetians met the Russian force in arms

on the heights above Mujal, but in the end they made their submission. The leader of the insurgents—or patriots—sent a peace-offering in the shape of a cart laden with boiled beef and vessels of the horrible native spirit, brewed from barley, called 'raca.' M. de Bernoville gives a picturesque description of the scene that followed. First came a troop of suppliants for redress: an old man whose son had been assassinated, a pale husband whose wife had poisoned him and fled to the tower of a neighbour, a youth whose entire family has been slain in a vendetta. These were all put off and ordered to present their complaints to regular judges—when they were appointed.

This formidable incursion, which was not followed up by any practical steps for throwing the country open by means of new roads, seems to have rather irritated than awed the Suanetians. In 1871 the Russian Government, which up to this time had only maintained a post of a dozen Cossacks at Pari, a hamlet in the lower and comparatively civilised portion of the district, found it necessary to plant a garrison of a hundred men at Betsho, on the banks of a branch of the Ingur, from the head of which a glacier-pass, commonly used by the mountaineers, gives access to, and, therefore, possibility of relief from, the Baksan. How little respect the presence of these troops ensured for the representative of the Russian Government is amusingly shown by Captain Telfer, R.N., who has given a full account of his travels in the district in company with a Russian official in 1874:[1]

> One of the objects of the Chief's official tour in the upper valley of the Ingur was to superintend the fresh elections of the village officers in the several communes; and notice having been given upon our arrival that the voters for Kala and Ushkul were to assemble in the morning, the male population of those two communes began to muster in front of our encampment at nine o'clock, and when all had assembled the proceedings were opened with an address from the Chief. The instantaneous and unanimous expression of opinion being that the Chief should himself select the most fitting men, the Colonel had to explain at some length

[1] Telfer's *Crimea and Transcaucasia*, 1876. See also *Edinburgh Review*, No. 237.

that he could only approve the choice of the people, as it was quite impossible for him to make judicious appointments, seeing that every man was a perfect stranger to him. Some dissatisfaction was shown at this reply, but after a time the crowd moved away, and almost immediately hurried back, pushing to the front one of their number who was doing his best to resist. The favourite refused to be the "elder"; in the first place, because his three years' term as "rural judge" had just expired and he desired to be released from further responsibility, and because he thought no greater misfortune could visit him than that of becoming *mamasaklysy*. "I killed a man in the next village to this ten years ago; I have paid his relations the full amount of blood-money, but they are not satisfied, and I believe that they are seeking an opportunity for revenge; if I am made *mamasaklysy* I know what I will do—I will kill another of the family, the man who wants to kill me." This was the explanation offered; but the Chief told him that if he persisted in making such a statement he should arrest him, and have him tried for murder; on the other plea, however, that of having already served as judge, he was entitled to decline the new honour, and a fresh election must take place. The determination of the people was not, however, to be altered, for they clamoured in favour of the late judge, and *vox populi* being *vox Dei*, he was prevailed upon to accept the office.'

The occasional dangers and annoyances incident to a district-officer's post in the Caucasian Alsatia may be estimated from the following further extract from Captain Telfer's narrative:

'The "elder" and the priest made their official report, which was to the effect that an old feud between the villages of Zaldash and Mujal had resulted in the violent death, the previous January, of a son of Kazboulatt Shervashidze, the *mamasaklysy* of Mujal, and as the people of Mujal muster stronger than they of Zaldash, the allies of the deceased man's family had kept the assassin and his friends besieged in their tower since the commission of the crime, for which blood-money had never been paid. The Chief was inclined to the belief, from the evidence at hand, that the murder had not been premeditated, and that one man slew the other in self-defence; he accordingly despatched a messenger to Zaldash, to tell the accused and his two brothers that they were to leave the tower and come to him forthwith. A first and a second summons remaining disregarded, the Chief himself rode off to Zaldash, accompanied by his interpreter, the priest, and a Cossack, and ordered the trio to descend,

which they promised to do, provided they were not constituted prisoners. After being repeatedly urged to give themselves up unconditionally for the easier investigation of the charge preferred against them, a ladder slung to a long rope was let over the parapet, and the three brothers descended to the ground, when he who was accused of the murder hurriedly approached the Chief, and insisting upon kissing him on the naked breast, pronounced his submission and readiness to follow.

'This farce being over, the brothers were ordered to the front, and as the party moved off necessarily at a walking pace, a loud voice at a loop-hole called upon it to halt, under a threat to fire. The explanation offered by the brothers was, that a man of Ipari who had fled his village for murder, had sworn to defend with his life the murderer of Zaldash, in return for the protection afforded him from his own enemies. The interpreter shouted to the scoundrel that no harm was intended to the brothers, and that they were not being carried off against their will; the Iparian, however, who kept his rifle levelled, still threatened to fire and kill the Chief or the priest, if his friends were not immediately allowed to reascend the tower. Hereupon the youth pleaded to having sworn to stand by the runaway of Ipari, proscribed like himself, to the last extremity, and to avoid further bloodshed begged that he might be permitted to stay, for the Iparian, he said, would most assuredly fire. The advantage being decidedly in favour of the bandit in his unassailable position, the Chief deemed it prudent to release the assassin from his bond, leaving the settlement of the matter to a future occasion, when he should be better prepared to enforce his authority.'

On another occasion two travellers provided with Russian recommendations were, despite the Chief's personal remonstrance, refused lodgings and compelled to sleep under a tree. When we find a magistrate unable, even when on the spot, to enforce the simplest order, or to procure provisions for his own party, it is easy to understand that for ordinary visitors travel in Suanetia thirty years ago was not altogether easy.

The danger of this policy of letting ill alone and allowing government representatives to be insulted with impunity, was shown in 1875, when a serious outbreak was only averted by the forbearance of the officials concerned. The survey preliminary to a readjustment of the land-tax roused the discontent of the Suanetians, who surrounded the detachment at Betsho, and prepared

to resist in force their relief over the Latpari Pass from Mingrelia. The Russians threw 300 Kabardan Militia into the valley by the Betsho Pass. Captain Telfer has related from Russian sources the story of the disturbance and its suppression, which was effected without any fighting, except in the dislodgment of an obstinate ringleader from his tower, where he had to be formally bombarded with a howitzer.

Even this warning, however, did not suffice to convince the Government of the expediency of impressing its strength on the handful of unruly mountaineers. Temporary tranquillity was purchased by concessions, and no force adequate to overawe the turbulent communities was left in the district. The result was lamentable. During the summer of 1876 a small detachment of soldiers was sent to Kala, a group of villages at the northern foot of the Latpari Pass, to arrest a fugitive criminal. The Suanetians fled to their towers and took up arms in defence of the right of asylum. At nightfall the Russian force retreated from the hamlet, having lost its three officers, and leaving dead Colonel Hrinevsky, 'the Chief' of Captain Telfer's narrative, and his interpreter, who were shot through the roof of a barn. Such an outrage was too much even for the patience of the Caucasian authorities. The Government inflicted an adequate, but by no means excessive retribution, made a great many good resolves as to new roads and other measures, and tightened to some extent, as it might well have done earlier, the reins of administration. Troops and mountain-guns crossed the Latpari. At first the Suanetians from their towers defied the invader, after the manner of Orientals; but they had reckoned without artillery. The mountain-guns soon brought the stones about their ears. Iprari is now a collection of barns without towers; its teeth are drawn. A certain number of its inhabitants have had experiences of Siberia, and, strange to say, returned to tell them. The authorities at Vladikavkaz are less lenient than those of Tiflis. A late commandant of Ciscaucasia justified the capital punishment of brigands by the judicious remark that to send men from the climate of the mountains to Siberia would be to put a premium on crime!

The Government has appointed responsible headmen or *starshinas* in every commune, has sent more Georgian priests, has established several schools, erected sheds or court-houses where travellers can find shelter, and placed its representative at Betsho in a position to command a certain amount of respect and obedience. The framework of local government has thus been laid down. But the machinery is naturally still rude and ineffective. Thus, at Ushkul the Starshina does not understand a word of Russian, and the official documents he receives are carefully preserved, unopened and unread, in one of the church chests! Some thieves from Adish (formerly so notorious a robbers' den that in 1864 Dr. Radde did not dare to pass through it by daylight) stole from our camp in 1887 what they could lay their hands on under cover of night and storm. But this was an exceptional experience; Russian justice speedily overtook the culprits, and the offence is not likely to be repeated. I walked about in 1887 and 1889 alone and unarmed by day and night over the hills, as freely as I should in Switzerland. A change is slowly coming over the people: schools, perhaps the only effectual civilisers, are doing their work.

There have been no further serious troubles during the last twenty years. The princes mediatised, the natives once taught the effect of field artillery on their stone walls, and the discomforts of a journey to Siberia, the country has been free from public disorders, and private vendettas and robbery have been kept within limits a tolerant administration may wink at. Since in Paris, where a lady is in the case, murder is held no crime, it may be lightly punished under similar circumstances in the Pari of the Dadish Kilians. To waylay a Jew pedlar after he has converted his stock into money may be looked on as a merry jest in Suanetia as well as in Sherwood. But since 1875 a new generation has grown up, which knows the meaning of 'school,' has learnt to cultivate potatoes and keep bees, and to welcome English travellers for the money they leave behind them. By 1920 it seems probable that the Suanetians will have begun to collect crystals and make bouquets of yellow lilies—there is not a scrap of Edelweiss in the Caucasus; the son of the murdered Jew

will have set up a general store at Betsho; the priest at Mujal will keep a 'Gostinitza London,' and the village headman will have a roll of porters and a tariff for the Tuiber and Zanner Passes.

The Suanetians are a mixed race, a tribe of refugees; they have the qualities as well as the vices of their ancestors, and amongst them there are undoubtedly individuals of capacity, who, now that reciprocal slaughter is forbidden, will turn their wits and energies to some better account. The pacification of their country without serious fighting has been one of the successes of the Russian Administration in the Caucasus. It has been effected chiefly by patience in overlooking petty offences and by the gradual introduction of some control and new ideas. It is hardly, however, a complete success. In the same time a more energetic and wealthier government might have spent much more money, and done much more for the district. Roads might have been made, mineral resources examined, and perhaps utilised. The defile of the Ingur might have been opened. A district of ten thousand inhabitants would hardly have been left to be administered by a native civilian with ten men, lodged in a row of shabby wooden sheds. But the Caucasian Administration is compelled to do its work cheaply;[1] it aims at making things easy, under certain conditions, to the mountain tribes. Its subordinate officials have less money and less energy to expend, and are more easily influenced by their surroundings than British Civilians. Not infrequently they are members of subject races. So long as they can keep the peace they are apt to let progress shift for itself. They avoid, no doubt, some of our mistakes and indiscretions; but they are less capable as administrators. So long as Great Britain maintains among Orientals her unrivalled reputation for uprightness, justice, and tolerance, she need not fear any contrasts that may be drawn by her subjects when the great Empires meet in Central Asia.

[1] According to Professor Hahn, however, the force at Betsho costs the Government annually 300,000 roubles.

CHAPTER XI

TRAVEL AND MOUNTAINEERING IN SUANETIA

(1868-87-89)

The mountains were all dark with clouds upon their heads. Such an impression I never received from objects of sight before, nor do I suppose I ever can again. Glorious Creatures; fine old Fellows! I turn back to these great places, participating in their greatness.

CHARLES LAMB.

THE passage through the forests of the Skenis Skali from Gebi to Ushkul has been described in the preceding pages. I broke off my story at the point where, on a great crocus-studded hay-meadow, gently sloping towards the Ingur, the first English explorers of the Caucasus caught sight of the black towers of 'Queen Thamara's Castle,' the old fortress that watches the easiest entrance to 'Free Suanetia.'

As the green featureless glen we were descending opened out towards a larger valley, a great company of towers met our astonished eyes. We could count at least fifty, clustered in three separate knots, and most of them covered with a rude white plaster. Square in form, they were redeemed from a resemblance to factory chimneys by their roofs and battlements, pierced for musketry. Round their base clustered barn-like dwellings built of dark slate. The scene was weird and strange. My mind wandered far for a

comparison: first to some woodcut familiar in childhood, an illustration to Lane's *Arabian Nights*, then to Tuscan San Gimignano.

We hurried on towards these habitations with all the eagerness of men who have been rained on for several days, and have had little to eat or drink beyond high sheeps-brains, wild raspberries, and water flavoured with the dregs of tea-leaves. In 1868 our tent was not waterproof, and our commissariat was simple in the extreme.[1] We found quarters in a barn slightly above the village, a gloomy building without windows. Many of the houses at

USHKUL

Ushkul have no windows, and depend for light on what can pass through the chinks between the unmortared stones of the walls. In this gloomy lodging we spent two nights and a day, surrounded by the most savage and dangerous-looking set of people I have ever come across, outside Arabia. The men went about armed with flint-lock guns and pistols; even the small boys carried daggers. Their arms seemed almost their only possessions; their clothes

[1] I observe that a recent traveller, Mr. Trevor-Battye, says of Whymper tents, 'to pretend that they are waterproof is not even reasonable humour.' The last I had proved perfectly waterproof under the most severe trials possible in a temperate zone. It was made by Messrs. Silver, of Willesden canvas.

were sheepskins, or rags and tatters, their coats as often as not sleeveless, their headgear dirty *bashliks* tied up into turbans, or small shapeless pieces of cloth, from the size of a crown-piece upwards, fastened on the top of wild, unkempt locks. The women were as a rule hideous, and their dress was shapeless; the children wore a single piece of sacking, or nothing at all. We could not sit outside our barn without being mobbed: if we retreated for peace into the black interior, we were pursued by individuals who planted themselves a yard off, took a steady stare which lasted any time from five to fifteen minutes, and then began to overhaul our persons, with as little scruple as if we had been figures in a waxwork show. Here a line had to be drawn and the sightseers requested 'not to touch any of the objects exhibited.' But still, on one pretext or another, visitors crowded in, and as the day wore on, grew more and more aggravating. Towards evening a short revolver practice, and a bold statement by our Mingrelian interpreter, an old servant and travelling companion of Gifford Palgrave, that our weapons were self-loading, produced a certain pause in the persecution. But we barricaded ourselves in for the second night, not without some apprehension as to how it would pass, or how we should get away from the place next morning.

STREET IN USHKUL

Our final departure was a singularly dramatic scene, and gave promise at one time of a tragic ending. After an attempt on the part of the people to separate us, by shutting our interpreter

and our Chamoniard, François Dévouassoud, up in the barn, had failed, we succeeded in hoisting our slender baggage, partly on the one horse we had secured, partly on our own shoulders. Then forming in close order, and holding our revolvers in our hands, we made ready for a sudden start. Meantime some of the inhabitants, yelling and jabbering, barred the way, others brandished swords, daggers, and pistols on either wall of the sunk lane which led through the village: a few ran off making signs they would fetch their guns. The women, screaming and apparently endeavouring to restrain the passions of their relations, added to the picturesque confusion.

Things seemed getting worse and worse, and the issue more and more doubtful, when a demand of some sort, shouted out by a man on the right-hand wall, suggested a simple stratagem. I flung a handful of kopeks into the crowd, and at the same moment we all made a sudden push down the lane. The crowd scrambled and fought for the coppers, the men in the roadway yielded as the cold muzzle of the revolver touched their faces, and in less time than it has taken to describe the incident, we were outside the hamlet and among open fields. With our fifteen barrels we now felt comparatively safe. When roused to passion, the Suanetian will occasionally use his dagger in open fight—I have more than once seen daggers drawn—but he much prefers the safety of a neighbouring thicket, whence he can take a deliberate aim with the help of his forked gun-rest, and shoot his enemy unobserved. The owner of our horse, a native of another village, who had disappeared during the disturbance, now came up to tender his services and his congratulations, while our Mingrelian interpreter explained to us the voices on the wall: 'Let us tie them up, let us rob, let us kill.'

Such was my first introduction to Suanetians. It will be allowed that, if I have written some hard things of them, it has not been without provocation. There is no doubt, however, that in the last twenty-five years the Suanetians have changed very much for the better. But readers who may be disposed to consider my early descriptions overcharged, because more recent experiences do not correspond with them, may do well to look into narratives contem-

porary with mine. Dr. Radde, the Curator of the Tiflis Museum, was even in 1866 no raw traveller, and this is the account he gave of the inhabitants of Jibiani after his first visit:—

'The impression left by my stay at Jibiani cannot exactly be called peaceful. Constantly surrounded by from sixty to eighty natives, amongst whom were many children and even women, it was only by the greatest patience and forbearance that we could protect ourselves from their obtrusiveness. Presents, friendliness, and a scrupulous and often affected indifference to insolence succeed best with such a people; but there comes a point when it is necessary to draw a line, and to take decided measures to put an end to their excessive rudeness.

'During my stay two wounded men presented themselves, and I frequently heard gunshots from an old castle called Lenqueri, which stands on the left bank of the Zurischi (?). In this castle lived eight robbers, natives of the neighbouring hamlet of Murkmur, which, with Jibiani, forms part of the same community, Ushkul. A quarrel about the pasture-grounds had involved the two hamlets in open war, and the bitterness of the quarrel was such that the whole population took part in it with powder and shot, two-edged daggers and swords, while the robbers issuing from their castle carried off at every opportunity the herds of the opposing party, and spread murder and rapine through the district.'

The Doctor added:

'Among this population men are frequently met with who have taken two or more lives. Murder is not only sanctioned, but in many cases commanded by their code of morality.'

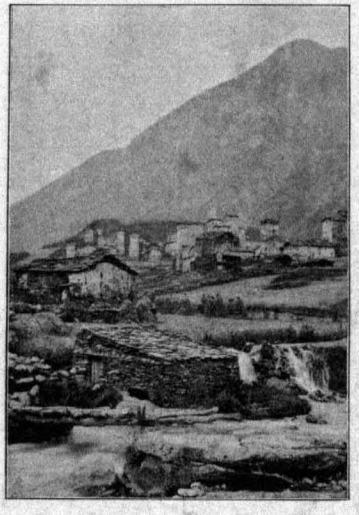
Certain Georgian writers have argued, on the strength of the name Edenis Mta, that the Garden of Eden was situated among the sources of the Rion. They might fairly have gone on to suggest that Cain took refuge in Suanetia, and founded that 'régime of reciprocal assassination' which, according to M. Renan, is the earliest stage in human society.

Nineteen years later I returned to Ushkul. After descending from the Latpari Pass to the guest-house at Kal, we turned up the path that leads to the sources of the Ingur. Except one striking glimpse of the Kalde glaciers and Janga, there is little to see in the trough beside the stream until the fifty towers of Ushkul

rise among the yellowing barley fields, and the shining crest of Shkara crowns the green hillsides of the middle distance. I must confess that it was not without a certain involuntary tremor that I walked between the well-remembered walls, straight into the den of thieves from which we had once been so thankful to escape. On my companion François Dévouassoud's face I noticed a more than usually pensive air, as if his recollections were too much for him, and he took the occasion to remind me that our camp had been plundered at the neighbouring Adish a fortnight before. His relief and my pleasure were consequently great when a man dressed as a well-to-do Georgian stepped forward and introduced himself to us. He proved to be one Bussarion Nikoradse, a Suanetian orphan, who, I know not why, was educated at government expense for the priesthood, but has preferred the post of a schoolmaster at Kutais. Nikoradse was spending his summer holidays among his native people, and he cordially invited me to share his lodgings—a room which he had provided with a floor, a table, and a bedstead, thermometers and a field-glass—luxuries of civilisation unique at Ushkul. Our host obviously exercised much influence over the villagers. The people were in every way strangely changed for the better. Twenty years before every man had seemed to have the terror of sudden death in his eyes—that strange, hunted look, as recognisable as the gambler's frown, that marks a land of vendetta. This wild expression was now far less universal. When Mr. Phillipps-Wolley passed in 1882, the priest dared not eject the turbulent crowd from his room lest he should be shot for his pains. Now I was left in undisturbed quiet in our lodging, and was seldom mobbed in my frequent rambles. Provisions were supplied without difficulty, and the three horsemen whom we subsequently secured to go with us to Gebi served us with something less than the usual Caucasian intractability. Even paper-money had a purchasing power, and payments no longer had to be made in piles of metal kopeks. After all, the change has been gradual compared to that effected in Hunza, where the greatest brigands of Central Asia served contentedly as Sir Martin Conway's porters a year after the British occupation of their fastnesses.

During my stay of nearly two days I was able to do full justice to the sights of Ushkul. There are two castles: one close to Chubiani, the other high on the hillside, which—according to local tradition—were Queen Thamara's winter and summer residences. Thamara, as I have noted elsewhere, plays in the Caucasus the part as an architect taken by Alexander in Syria, the Saracens in the Alps, and the Devil generally. Everything remarkable in the way of buildings is placed to her credit.

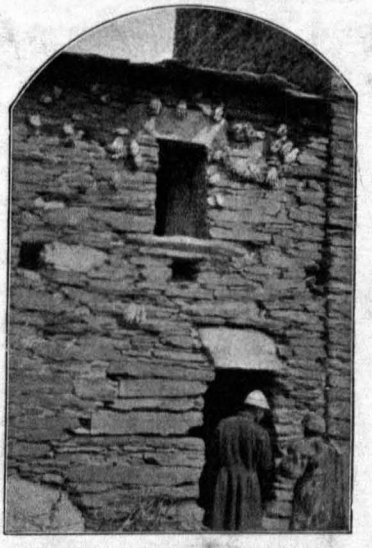
During my stay I never tired of sitting on the rocky knoll crowned by the black towers of the lower castle, and watching the lights and shadows shift on the grey cliffs and white glaciers of Shkara. When the eyes needed rest there was the village beneath me; I could watch all that was going on in these primitive homesteads. It was not very much. There was hay to be brought in on wheelless wains, drawn by oxen, there was corn to be beaten out on the paved threshing-floors, which form a sort of terrace outside the houses, or to be ground in the little watermills beside the stream, cakes to be baked, a sheep, perhaps, to be killed and cut up. Little boys, perched on the rude boards set with stones which are used as threshing implements, exhorted their beasts with odd cries, while their parents, clad in sad grey rags, superintended the business. Other children played a rough game in which an old cap was scrimmaged for.



WATERMILLS AT USHKUL

My host acted as cicerone. We visited the remains of the chapel in the Castle; we wandered up to the church which stands isolated above the hamlets. I was taken to a certain historical barn, where I was told a party of Franks had many years before been entertained. I remembered that 'entertainment' very well. Two or three young trees planted in front of the church represent

an ancient sacred grove which has been destroyed by weather or war. Throughout Suanetia there are traces of tree-worship in early times. In several of the villages a single tree of great age and size is found near the church on a sort of village green with, beneath its shade, ancient tombstones, and a stone seat apparently used in village assemblies.[1] We saw the outside of the hunter's home where Mr. Phillipps-Wolley was lodged, decorated with 'fifty off-forepaws of bears in varying stages of decomposition.' I went carefully over the house and tower in which our host had constructed his apartments; it varied little, if at all, from that I have described in the last chapter.



THE HUNTER'S HOME, USHKUL

I naturally did not limit my exploration to the three villages that form Ushkul. A pleasant walk of two or three hours up the grassy dale of the Ingur leads to the junction of the Shkara and Nuamkuam Glaciers at the very base of the enormous cliffs of the great chain. The ice is in retreat, and has left behind it a tract which is full of interest for the student of glacier action. As far as I can learn from their works, some English glacialists are not much given to studying the Reports of the United States Survey. It seems to me a pity, for they convey useful cautions to the inconsiderate advocates of glacial erosion. Here, in front of the Ingur Glacier, were to be seen on a small scale, as in a model, most of the features found on the outer edge of the region once covered by the great North American ice-flood. Within the limits marked

[1] For the Caucasus, see Bell's and Longworth's *Travels in Circassia*; generally Frazer's *Golden Bough*, vol. i., and Fergusson's *Tree and Serpent Worship*. Similar stone 'Chairs of Justice' are found in some of the villages of Val de Lys, south of Monte Rosa. See Brosset's *Rapports sur un voyage archéologique dans la Georgie et dans l'Arménie*, 1847-48.

by the half-dozen great erratic blocks, ranged in a curve, which mark the terminal moraine of the last advance, there is a series of mounds and pools, formed by the damming of streams. Of lowering in the trough of the valley there is no sign whatever.

Above the meeting of the ice-streams and on their true left lies the Belvedere Alp of the Caucasus. After a steep climb I found myself in a lovely meadow, the nearest to the snows of an army of green hills, unbroken by copse or wood, except here and there by a slender birch or a tangle of the cream rhododendron. The surface was one sea of flowers, pink and white daisies, gentians, forget-me-nots, and waving grasses. The spot was not, however, altogether unknown to man, for, wading ankle-deep in the thick bright carpet, I found on the brow which commanded the best view of the mountains two stone-men—no common stone-men, but carefully built pyramids tapered up with scrupulous neatness to a point. Could they be the work of Russian Surveyors? Hardly, for at that time the new map was only in contemplation in this district, and it would be an insult to the maker of this portion of the five-verst map to suppose that if he had really visited the ground he would have misrepresented it as he has. I would rather believe that some bold hunter raised these piles as altars to that Spirit of the Summits who—as the ballad tells—led astray the adventurous Metki.

Whoever the builder may have been, he showed his taste. The view from this point is unsurpassable of its kind. The source of the Ingur lies below; the spectator stands on a level with the snow-basin out of which rise the great rock-walls and buttresses that support the five peaks of Shkara. They carry snow and ice to an extent hardly ever seen in the Alps. This richness of frozen hangings is a joy to the traveller, but a terror to the climber. To the right stretches the long and formidable crest, reached from this side by an Alpine party in 1893, and in 1895 from the Dykhsu basin, which extends to Nuamkuam.

I despair of creating in the minds of those who have not travelled in Suanetia any true picture of the extraordinary sublimity of the face of the Caucasian chain that overlooks the Ingur sources.

There is nothing in the Alps to compare to the view from the ridge above Adish; on one side Shkara and Janga, on the other the ideal glacier, that wonderful ice-fall which pours down in one unbroken cataract from under the white pyramid of Tetnuld, a mountain as high as Mont Blanc and as graceful as the Weisshorn. And as a background to this magnificence there is a wide western view over leagues of rolling hills and delicately curved spurs, where, ringed in by peaks too numerous to be named, Ushba and the Laila first catch the eye, the leaders of a host once strange and indistinguishable, now shapes and names familiar to many of our countrymen.

The Italian side of Monte Rosa is cut up into sections by the high lateral ridges that divide the valleys and abut against it The southern faces of Shkara, Janga, and Tetnuld are only separated by such low banks as the Col de la Seigne, and from any eminence they come into view together.

No doubt the aspects of nature viewed by the prisoner between high mountain walls are often extremely impressive. But most of us, I think, in the long-run prefer the broader landscapes, which admit all the infinite variety of light and shadow, of atmosphere and distance. Space, light and shadow are the characteristics of Suanetia. Its scenery has no parallel in the Alps, or elsewhere in the Caucasus. The traveller feels his senses inadequate; he longs for a memory to carry away more of the beauty that is set before him in such profusion.

I have been tempted for convenience of contrast to throw together my two visits to Ushkul. The rest of my Suanetian experiences I shall deal with in chronological order. In 1868, after escaping from our barn, we were led by a native, who must have had an exceptional number of vendettas on hand, by a curiously circuitous path as far as Latal. In place of following the direct track down the main stream of the Ingur, or crossing into the basin of the Mujalaliz, we were taken up the glen of Kalde, not, however, by the proper path, for the villagers of Iprari were among our horseman's numerous enemies. Perhaps we did well to avoid them, for they were the men who treacherously slew two Russian officers

in 1876. The last time I passed in sight of their homes their towers had been razed to the ground, and a few selected ruffians were enjoying free quarters in Siberia. But we innocent strangers did not suspect the object of our deviations, and were well content to be brought back to the glaciers.

We hurried through ill-famed Adish, and, leaving behind us the comparatively bare glens of the Ingur sources, followed for miles the low spur which, projecting from the base of Tetnuld, separates the narrow trench of the Ingur from the broader valley of the Mulkhura, known as the Mujalaliz.

This brow is a more or less level natural terrace some ten miles in length. The walk along it is the most beautiful I know in any mountain country. Nowhere else do the sublimity of snows and the beauty of woodlands so completely join hands. No descriptions can convey, except to a very sympathetic reader, who supplies a great deal from his own experience and imagination, the faintest idea of the natural charms here united.

A map, if he can read one—few Englishmen, and hardly any Englishwomen, know how much instruction, what romantic pictures may be derived from maps—a map to those who can profit by it may give some suggestions of the views that meet the traveller in every direction. Overhead soars the splendid pyramid of Tetnuld. On one side the eye ranges down the deep pine-clad defile of the Ingur to where the triple crest of the Laila sends down long glaciers into the forests. It follows the great sweep of the main chain, from the towers of Ushba round to the massive crags of Tiktengen, tracks the glaciers as they wind between granite precipices, until, at the edge of the forests, they release their streams to dance down among the meadows and corn-fields of the Mujalaliz, the valley of towers.

All these visions the map may suggest to such Alpine travellers as can read its shorthand. But the beauty of the foreground is beyond all possible anticipation. Level lawns of smooth, lately mown turf are surrounded or broken by thickets of laurels, rhododendrons, and azaleas. Yellow lilies, lupines, and mallows flower amongst them; bluebells and campanulas carpet the ground. Woods of ash, hazel and fir, beech, birch and pine offer a pleasant

shade. A painter might camp here for a month, and, if he could imbue himself with the spirit of the scenery, bring home sketches which would astonish those who think mountain landscapes are wanting in variety, natural composition, atmosphere, and colour.

In 1868 we followed, more or less, this glorious terrace almost to Latal. Very much bewildered at the hill-paths we were led along, we did not appreciate the reason of our meanders. In fact, our track was still regulated by the blood-feuds of our horsemen, and the consequent need they felt to keep clear of the hamlets of their enemies.

Our second great sensation on my first visit was the view we enjoyed on a clear morning from the brow between Latal and Betsho. I have crossed that little pass five times, besides spending one long solitary day in strolling about its by-paths. I can see as I shut my eyes how the birches group themselves, how the path winds, the exact corner where Moore stood still and shouted as Ushba first broke on our astonished eyes. Its peaks had up to that moment been concealed by clouds, so that it came upon us with all the force of a complete surprise. The view of the mountain is not perfect; the rock-screen on the west, which for the present may be called the Mazeri Peak, hides part of its base; the crests are neither wholly detached, nor does one stand in solitary grandeur; the spectator is a little too much under the great mass. But the dimensions tell: fancy yourself at Cormayeur, and in the place of the Aiguille du Géant a Matterhorn of the height of Mont Blanc. You would have the counterpart of the relations of Ushba with Betsho, and the Caucasus provides as a foreground the loveliest woodland landscape imaginable.

That brief vision of the summits, one of the few we had in Suanetia in 1868, was soon over; the mists again wrapped round them. We went on our way past the broad meadow, then tenantless but for haymakers, where Betsho was to be created in after years. It was not until we reached Pari, the old seat of the Dadish Kilian who slew his Governor, that we found Russians, the first we had seen since leaving Kasbek. These were ten Cossacks, on whose good offices we relied for our transport in

crossing the chain. Our passage of the Dongusorun Pass will find its place on a later page.

I must now ask the reader to leap nineteen years, and join M. de Déchy and myself on our descent from the great glaciers that separate the head-waters of the Baksan from the Asian slope. The valley of the Mulkhura is divided by nature into two basins; the highest, known as the Mujalaliz, is a broad smiling oasis of corn-lands and meadows. Below a ravine lies the second basin, that of Mestia, partly devastated by the torrent from the Leksur Glacier.

I and my companion had with us three Chamonix guides, and some eight Urusbieh men as porters. We were consequently no small addition to the society of Mestia, and on our arrival had, as usual, to be 'at home' to the entire population.

The first mark of progress was that we had a roof to be at home under, a modest wooden shed or Cancellaria; the next was the presence of a representative of order, responsible to the Government, in the shape of a burly Suanetian, whose chain and medal—like a waterman's badge—proclaimed him to be the Mayor or Starshina. He was a very big man, of wild aspect, with a broad face like a Nineveh Bull. A very small sharp boy acted as his interpreter. The acquirements of this precocious youth were explained when, on my afternoon stroll, I came across a school-house, a wooden cottage, the walls of which were pasted with newspaper pictures of single Cossacks pursuing Turkish armies, and of common objects of civilisation, some of which must have sorely puzzled the brains of the young Suanetians. It was holiday time; the master was absent. The environs of the village, or rather villages—for Mestia consists of several hamlets and no less than seventy towers—are charming. Close to the guest-house is a very ancient birch-tree, with stone seats under it. The open ground is fringed with azaleas and rhododendrons, the glacier streams meet in a birch-hung cleft resembling the gorge at Pontresina, and at an amazing height in air the spire of Tetnuld flushes red in the face of the sunsets. The peak farther off, seen over its northern slope, is Gestola.

It is a pleasant ride of about two hours, or a much pleasanter walk—for in Suanetia the bridle-lanes are stony ditches, while the field footpaths resemble those of our own country—down the open valley to Latal. For most of the way the traveller passes between barley-fields divided by neat wattled fences. The foregrounds are shifting combinations of golden grain, white towers, and graceful birches. On the slopes of the middle distance the sombre tints of the evergreen forests lie like shadows across the

SUANETIAN HOMESTEADS

brighter hues of the beech, poplar, and alder groves. In either direction the view is closed by noble snow-peaks, the Laila in front, Tetnuld behind.

At Lenjer, a group of hamlets about half-way to Latal, there is a church with a hexagonal apse. The masonry is very superior to that of the houses or towers, the blocks being of limestone and carefully squared. The external walls are frescoed after the manner of an Italian chapel. There are some graves near the church, and others near an old fir-tree, which has stone seats under it, as at Mestia. The rarity of graves in Suanetia is striking. This strange

people will bury their dead anywhere.[1] M. Levier was in 1890 present, at Pari, at the exhumation by the Russian officials of the corpse of a victim killed in some private feud. It had been laid a foot or two under the common path. The Suanetians, it appears, have this much reverence; they object strongly to the face-cloth being raised, and it would be as much as an official's life is worth to do so.

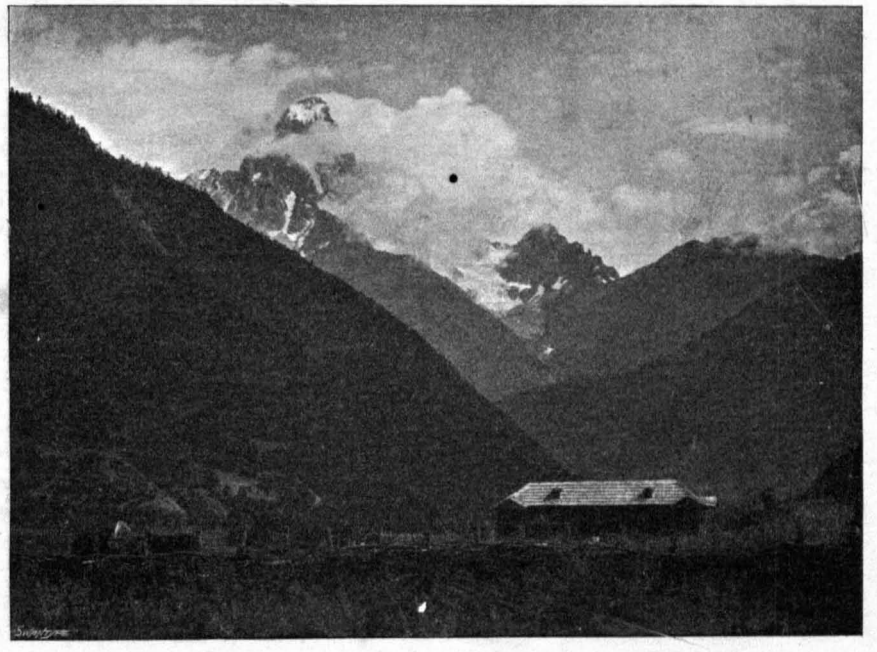
Latal is a very large group of villages, the lowest in Independent Suanetia. Its hamlets stand on knolls, many of them obviously ancient moraines, above the junction of the Ingur and the Mulkhura. The vegetation shows traces of a warmer climate, and walnuts abound. The homesteads are less crowded, and stand apart in the fields. There are two or three churches or chapels, and the apse of one is decorated externally with an arcade. They are all kept locked up, and on none of my visits have I succeeded in getting access to them. The women are more prominent here than in the upper villages, and occupy their full share of the ring that surrounds the traveller who halts for lunch under the shade of the great village sycamore. On one of my visits the common fountain, a long wooden trough, was in use as a bath by a lady of the locality, who seemed but little embarrassed at the appearance of strangers.

Beyond the familiar little pass that leads to Betsho we found the new capital of Suanetia. Betsho is as much an official and artificial creation as St. Petersburg itself. But very little money and not too much energy has gone to its erection. An unfriendly critic might describe it as two wooden sheds and a bungalow. In the modest bungalow lives the Priestav, or Commissioner, as he may be called, who rules Suanetia. The shed opposite his house, once a barrack, is now a ruin, and untenanted save by a casual Mingrelian, who has established himself, with his poultry and a few barrels of wine, in a floorless, half-roofed corner of it. The upper shed, a long, low building built across the valley, contains the quarters of the police staff, and a Cancellaria

[1] Levier, *A travers le Caucase*. 1894.

or courthouse, sometimes placed at the disposal of travellers. The slopes of the valley of the Dola torrent are well wooded, its bottom is open and cultivated, and the towers of two considerable villages rise among its meadows. The view up it is closed by the great peaks of Ushba. Their vertical height above the courthouse is 10,700 feet, and their distance under ten miles.

The attraction of Ushba, which acts as a candle to the



THE GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, BETSHO

Alpine moths who gyrate round it, careless of all else that lies close at hand, generally keeps English visitors at Betsho. It affords, however, from many points of view, the worst quarters in Suanetia. Provisions are scarce, and horses or porters often unprocurable. The natives being accustomed, perhaps, to be requisitioned for public services, are not eager to meet the requirements of the Priestav's guests, and in that official's absence his subordinates are not always cordial in their reception of strangers. It is possible, however, to get large Russian loaves baked here, and

these are almost indispensable to travellers who do not bake for themselves.

On the first day of our stay in 1887 the weather was unsettled, and M. de Déchy was occupied with his photographic apparatus and other details. Accordingly, I started without him for an exploration of Ushba, taking with me two of my Chamoniards. We were off at 5 A.M. An hour's walk across meadows and corn-land up the open valley brought us to Mazeri, a picturesque village overshadowed by a castle of the Dadish Kilians. Here the Gul glen, which leads straight up to the small glacier that lies under the eastern cliffs of Ushba, falls into the Betsho valley. At the angle we attempted a short cut, with the result usual in Suanetia: we imbedded ourselves in an impenetrable tangle of hazels and azaleas. After this experience we humbly asked our way at the next farmhouse to the *lednik*, which is Russian for glacier. To our surprise we were understood, and directed to a beaten horse-track, improved for the benefit of the Russian officers, who send up occasionally in summer for a load of ice.

The path mounted steadily through a fir forest, and then traversed flowery pastures. The white clouds played in and out between the two great peaks; towards noon they lifted. By that time we were level with the middle region of the glacier, and it became necessary to consider how far our reconnaissance should be pushed. Since the sky seemed to promise a few fine hours I set my heart on gaining the top of the crag opposite Ushba, which forms the south-east extremity of the semicircle of rocks that encircle the head of the Gul Glacier. In such neighbourhood it showed only as the footstool of Ushba; yet a summit of over 12,000 feet,[1] the height of the Wetterhorn, may be called a mountain even in the Caucasus.

The glacier pours down in a short ice-fall—easily turned by the rocks on its left bank—from a recess between the base of the two great towers and our summit—Gulba, I propose to call it.

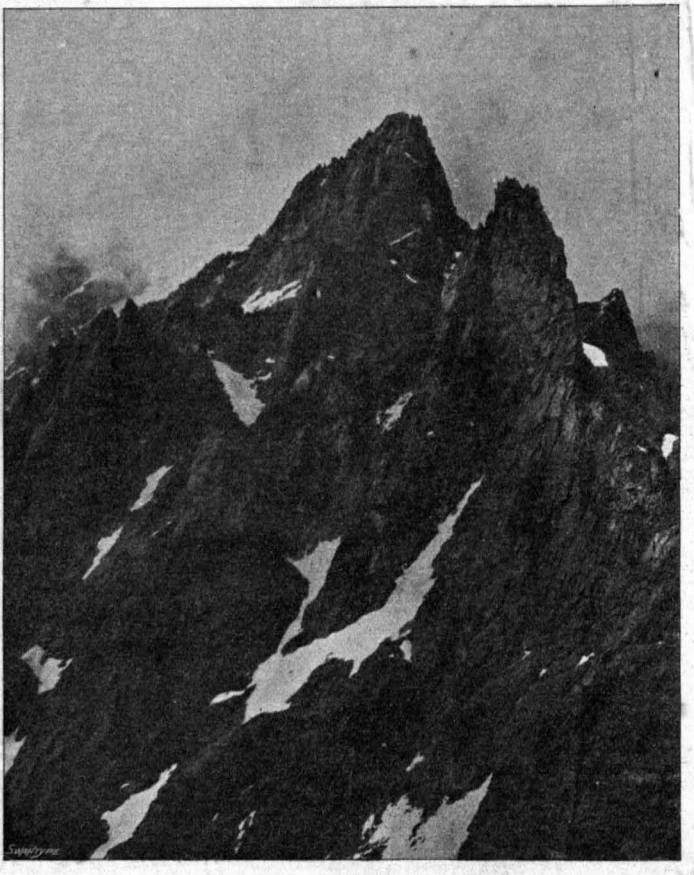
[1] Mr. Donkin, from observations while climbing on Ushba, estimated the height of Gulba as 12,500 feet. The Gulba of the one-verst map is a much lower summit.

The moraines of the Gul Glacier are gigantic and out of all proportion to its size. Their dimensions become instructive when their true origin has been recognised. They represent not the excavating capacity of this small, and not very steep, ice-stream, but the extent and looseness of the cliffs that surround its *néré*. They are formed of the missiles the demon of Ushba is constantly hurling across the path of his assailants. These vast piles of spent projectiles may well give cause for reflection to those who do not feel confident that climbing a frozen chimney under fire is altogether a reasonable form of recreation. The caution is the more called for, as from this point of view the proportions of the great mountain are not fully displayed, and its cliffs conceal some of their terrors.

Now we were at its very base, Ushba looked less formidable than might have been expected; less formidable than it is in reality. The Meije and the Cimon della Pala have certainly both a greater air of inaccessibility. The mountain is, of course, much foreshortened. It must be remembered, also, that the great snow-trough between the peaks is rather dangerous and laborious than difficult. Were it not for the missiles—stones and icicles—that sweep it from time to time, the ascent to the saddle would not be beyond the powers of any strong party when the slopes are in fair condition. Mr. Cockin came down them in the dark, and with 'one shoe off'! The rocks of the southern peak are very formidable, and it seems doubtful whether the ridge leading to the top from the saddle can be climbed directly. There may be other ways, either on the western or eastern face of the final peak. Possibly its conquerors will, as in the case of the Matterhorn, reach it by disregarding altogether the tracks of their predecessors. Very favourable conditions, however, will be required for the ascent.

The local conditions in July 1887 were the reverse of favourable. Never in the Alps have I heard a mountain keep up for hours a continuous discharge of miniature avalanches. On the whole of the upper slopes the surface snow, under the influence of the mid-day sun, was peeling off. It was not falling in masses, but

sliding gently downwards. When, by climbing some banks of broken rocks, we had overcome the ice-fall, we found it almost more than we could do to plough up the first slope of *névé*. The surface gave way at every step under our feet. The stillness of



GULBA

the upper air was broken by a singularly soft and ominous hissing sound, like that made by a disturbed snake.

The rocks on our right were steep, but our best chance was clearly to grapple with them at once. We took advantage of a sort of shelf, by which, with more labour of arms than legs, we raised ourselves on to the western buttress of our peak. It

projects into the *névé*, part of which flows from a recess behind it. Beyond this snow, at a distance of a few hundred yards, a pair of rocky pinnacles divided us from the basin of the Chalaat Glacier. The rocks were probably not more difficult than those leading up to the Schreckhorn Sattel. The impression they made on me was probably due to the quantity of ice and loose snow spread about them, and also not a little to the superabundance of loose boulders. Latter-day Swiss climbers can hardly realise the extraordinary service that has been rendered them by their predecessors in clearing the ordinary tracks up rock-peaks of treacherous handholds.

At the point where we first looked directly down a grim precipice on to the Chalaat Glacier, the crest of the mountain narrowed to a thin comb. We made the cliffs smoke with the boulders we dislodged for safety's sake. But the climbing was not difficult, and we speedily gained the nearest summit. There was a second beyond, perhaps a foot or two higher. An ice-gully separated them, but with a little delay we crossed it, and at 3 P.M. —in three hours from the lower glacier—were installed on our belvedere.

From Betsho, I must confess, Gulba is 'a poor thing,' blunt and stumpy; but when on the top one discovers that the mountain is in fact a wedge, and a very thin one. The cliff on the east is, from the picturesque point of view, perpendicular, and stones sent down it towards the Chalaat Glacier disappeared at once from sight, leaving behind them a sulphureous reek.

> 'Animi causâ devolvere rupem
> Avulsam scopulo placet, ac audire sonantem
> Haud secus ac tonitru scopulis dum immurmurat altis,'

writes, in his clumsy hexameters, an old Swiss Latinist. This pleasure we enjoyed for a minute or two, but as soon as we had cleared a solid space to sit down upon we found something better to do than to imitate such mediæval frivolity.

Gulba may be a little mountain, but it is a great view-point. The sky overhead was ominous, but the lower clouds had lifted,

as they often do before a storm, and nothing was hidden from us except the actual tops of the Central Group, Tetnuld and its farther neighbours. Beyond the highest reservoirs of the western branch of the Chalaat Glacier rose two spires of snow, part of Chatuintau. Almost at our feet lay the meeting-place of the Chalaat and the Leksur glaciers. The great basin of the Leksur Glacier and the ridges round it were spread out as on a map. All 'Free Suanetia' was laid as a carpet before us—a maze of low smooth ridges and deep glens, heights clothed in shadowy forests, hollows where the shafts of sunshine played on yellowing barley-fields and towered villages and white torrent-beds. The long chain of the Laila lifted its glaciers on high; they showed as pale streaks under the storm-clouds advancing from the Black Sea. Beyond the Ingur, far off in Abkhasia, we noticed another glacier-bearing crest, part of the southern limestones. From these distant objects the eyes returned to rest on the vast bulk of Ushba, the eastern face of which was fully displayed. From this height its cliffs and ice-raked slopes looked far more formidable than from the lower glacier.

The first part of the descent demanded care, for the loose boulders were particularly troublesome. As soon as it seemed to me safe, I gave the order to try the snow in the bay on our right. The slopes were not crevassed, nor was their angle steep enough to make the tendency of the surface to slide any danger in the descent. We rode down in fifteen minutes, on little avalanches of our own starting, a distance we had taken two hours to climb by the rocks.

As soon as the rope could be taken off, I left the guides to follow at their leisure, and set off at my best pace for the valley. The great peaks were already black with thunder-clouds, and it seemed only a question of minutes when the storm would break.

At the foot of the descent I found a camp had been set up since the morning by Prince Wittgenstein and Prince Shervashidzi. The former, who has since died, was a Russian officer who had held high posts in Central Asia. He talked English perfectly. The latter is a Caucasian noble. Their camp was interesting as an example of the old native habits in travel. Four solid stems

had been first fixed in the ground, and cross-beams nailed to them to support walls and a roof. On this simple framework boughs were being dexterously woven by a crowd of camp-followers. Bright Persian rugs and saddlebags were spread on the ground and gave colour to the scene. In settled weather life in such an arbour must be agreeable, and even on a rainy day the owner of many *bourkas* can defend himself from a perpetual dripping. What success the Princes met with in the object of their travels, the search for gold, I never learnt.

Four hours after leaving the top of Gulba I pushed open the door of the courthouse at Betsho, and discovered my companion sedulously immersed in those tiresome occupations which are the price the mountain photographer pays for his successes.

Two years later, in 1889, I again found myself in Suanetia, this time with my friend Captain Powell, as the guests of Prince Atar Dadish Kilian, the representative of the old princely family who were once the rulers of Lower Suanetia and still hold the document by which the Tsar Nicholas confirmed them in their rights as feudal lords of the country. Ezeri, the Prince's residence, consists of a number of detached towered hamlets, spread over a broad shelf of sloping meadow-land some 6000 feet above the sea, and only a few miles west of Betsho. The situation is pleasant and picturesque. Beyond the Ingur the snows and forests of the Laila are all in sight; Ushba shows its enormous tusks over the low hill behind the villages; down the valley there is a fine view towards the gorge of the Ingur.

The Prince, now a man in the prime of life, was educated at Odessa, and then sent to travel on government business in Japan and Manchuria. He speaks French, and is an educated gentleman. None the less he plays the part of a native noble in the mountain home to which he has been allowed to return. He lives like a feudal chief in the Middle Ages, surrounded by retainers, and receives his rents in services and in kind. He keeps more or less open house to guests. From the old home of his family he sends out his messengers to Ossetia to buy horses, to Sugdidi for provisions, to Kutais for household necessaries. He has extensive

possessions, many castles and farm-houses in the valley and pastures on the hills. His horses are kept in summer at an establishment in the forest west of the Laila, on a track that leads to Lentekhi.

He has abandoned his old castle, and built for himself a wooden house in the form of a large Swiss cottage. An outside staircase leads through a balcony to a large hall, furnished with heavy wooden benches and vast chairs, such as might serve as stage furniture for *Macbeth*. The inner apartments are provided with Persian divans. Meals are served in the hall, and the waiters are native retainers, who join from time to time in the conversation. The fare is abundant, and every meal ends with an Oriental dish as old as Isaiah—curds and honey. The chief ornament of the table is a noble silver bowl of Persian workmanship. We had as fellow-guests a Mohammedan chief from the Karatshai, and another member of the Dadish Kilian family, with a very pretty bride from Kutais. The day after our arrival was Sunday. To our astonishment we were awakened by a church bell. We could hardly believe that we were in Suanetia. The Georgian priest lately established at Ezeri held a service in the half-ruinous church, which stands in a beautiful situation on a brow beyond the village, approached by an agreeable footpath between the barley-fields. The congregation muster outside the church. We were too late for the service, but were allowed to inspect the *repoussé* silver images studded with rough turquoises still preserved in the interior.

The rest of the day was given over to sports on the green before the Prince's house. Native spirit, brewed from barley, was handed round to the men in loving cups, various games were played, the women danced, and the boys tumbled about with some young bears which had been caught in the forests.

Our supper, which was seldom served before 10 P.M., was followed on this occasion by the entrance of a chorus of women, who sang long ballads, dancing in a circle to the refrain. In these ballads, and nowhere else, is buried the lost history of Suanetia. I implored our host to collect and publish them. He summarised the purport of some of them for us. One told how a company of

Suanetians had been overtaken by the Turkish mountaineers on the Tuiber Glacier, and how in the midst of the battle an avalanche had fallen and, overwhelming the combatants, stilled in a moment the clamour of the strife. Prince Atar assured me that arms of very ancient date and human bones had been recently found in the moraine at the foot of the glacier and were believed by the people to be relics of the legendary catastrophe. Other ballads

SUANETIAN WOMEN

were tales of private love and revenge, Æschylean horrors, chanted with much force and emotion by the chorus. We did not end without the praises of Thamara, as indispensable in Suanetia as 'God save the Queen' in the British dominions.

On the following day we set out to make the first ascent of the Laila, long an object of my ambition. Two days before we had from Betsho made an excursion up the valley that leads directly to the base of the highest summits. It had no mountaineering result, but the ride through a forest of flowers was of the most enchanting beauty.

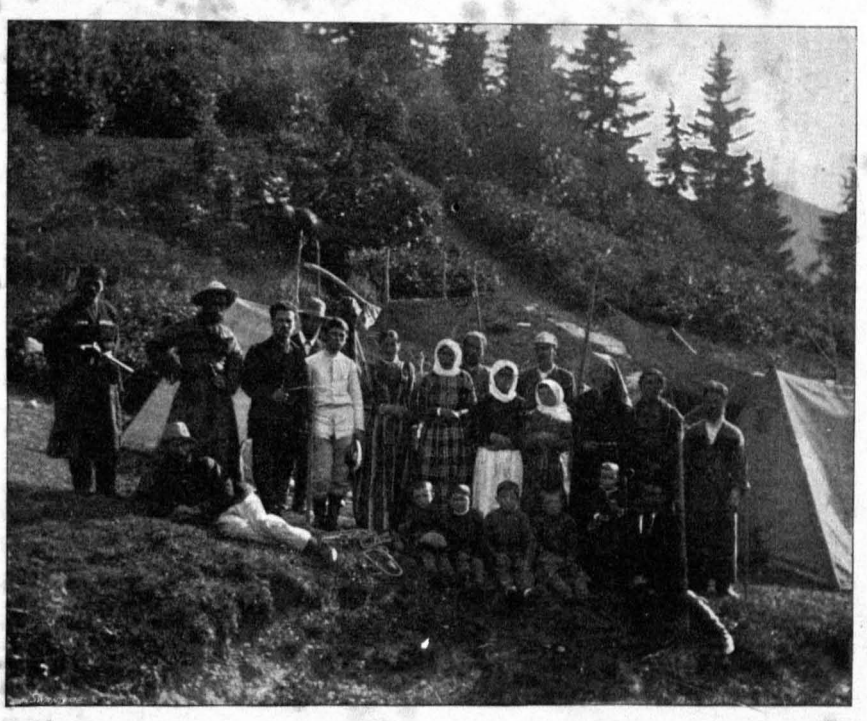
The path crosses the Ingur and winds amongst copses, and meadows full of hay-cutters, round the spur east of our valley. Then, traversing the water of the Laila, it follows the tumbling stream into the heart of the mountains. How can I suggest the tranquil loveliness of that wood, or the beauty and variety of the flowery meadows it enclosed? Near the head of the glen its main branch turns westward, and ascending through glades laid out by that great gardener, Nature, as if to frame vistas of Ushba and the snows of the main chain, we entered a basin into which the ice of one of the Laila glaciers, now directly overhead, fell in avalanches, fragments of which had rolled as far as the yellow lilies and wild-roses that grew all about us.

We laid our sleeping-bags beside a clear spring-fed pool, shadowed by maples and beeches. Ushba was first a double flame in the sunset, then a black cathedral front against the starry heaven. Beyond it loomed the immense pale cone of Elbruz. As I write the words, the ghost of Dr. Johnson seems to repeat, 'No, sir, it may be called immense, and a cone, in a book, but it is no more than a considerable protuberance.' We cannot all of us look on mountains with the Doctor's comprehensive and almost cosmic eye, and, perhaps, if he had seen Elbruz he might have pardoned me for measuring it by the scale of six-foot humanity. To ants even a molehill must seem something more than a protuberance.

Before dawn rain splashed through the beech-leaves, and we had to retreat from before our mountain, which on this side looked formidable enough. We amused ourselves on the way down by trying who could find the most blossoms on a single stalk of the yellow lilies. Fourteen won the competition. Pursued by rain-storms we fled through Latal, and away from the scanty resources of the Priestav's deputy at Betsho and the native *dukhan* to the hospitality of Prince Atar on the heights of Ezeri.

Prince Atar announced his intention to join us in our second attempt on the Laila. Caucasians dine too late to start early, and it was 1 P.M. before our cavalcade was ready and we set off to ride across the meadows and down the steep zigzags to the Ingur. At a village on its left bank lived an uncle of the Prince: at

his house we halted for tea. He was a hearty person, but our conversation was necessarily limited. He set my mind, however, at rest as to the native origin of the names I have used since 1868 for the two most conspicuous mountains of Suanetia. '*Ushba, Tetnuld,*' he exclaimed, as he sat on his balcony and waved his hand to the two peaks, which were both in sight. Samovars always take a long time preparing, and male Caucasians are as



A MOUNTAINEERS' 'AT HOME'

prone as the women of other nations to linger over afternoon tea. To arrive before dark we had to push our animals at a trot up a staircase-path where boughs threatened to sweep the rider from his saddle. After two hours' ride we found the shepherds' quarters, a good log hut.

Of course the first idea of our Caucasian companions was not bed—or rather sleep, but supper. They set to work to boil a sheep in the hut. Next to boiled mutton, the smell of it is a chief

object of my detestation, and I and Powell spread our sleeping-bags on the turf outside, where we were haunted by cows and nipped towards morning by frost.

At daybreak we were led by our native companions to a pass in the ridge that separates the wooded glen holding the great western glacier of the Laila from the Ingur Valley. It commands a superb prospect. I have seldom seen such beautiful effects of morning light and shadow as those thrown across the vales of Suanetia, such richness of colour and variety of mountain form combined in a single view. In front of us was the western face of the Laila; a broad glacier flowed from a well-marked saddle, on either side of which rose steep icy ranges. The three highest peaks were at the head of the glacier, and from a hollow north-west of them a smaller glacier afforded easy access to the crest overlooking Suanetia, a mile or more from where we stood. We determined to make for this point. But we had to descend 1000 feet in order to reach it.

The hunters, whom the Prince had taken as his escort, led us, or rather misled us, according to their lights. In their minds the word Laila had a distinct meaning: it was the point at which they occasionally crossed the chain when seeking a short cut to Lentekhi. Towards that pass they were conducting us. Politeness to our host kept us with them to the point where, to reach our peak, it was essential to turn to the left up the smaller glacier. There they insisted there was no way, no *doroga*—or path—except up the main glacier, and the Prince unfortunately believed them. We each took our different tracks. Without adventure of any sort, without even using the rope, Powell, Maurer and I mounted the ice and snow-slopes to the broad saddle, conspicuous throughout Suanetia on the west of the Laila peaks. This point has been reached from the Ingur Valley by subsequent travellers without the long circuit we were led into. The remainder of the way to the top was as easy as the ascent of the Titlis. First we hastened over some broad rocks, next across a long snow-plain, then up a bank of ice with just enough snow on it to save step-cutting; finally, up a steep slope of slate, broken by weather into small fragments that slipped

away, like a sea-beach, from under our feet. Its top was the first of the Laila summits, the crest seen from Ezeri. The second was a few feet higher, but we had lost so much time that we could hardly afford to go on to it. Signor Sella climbed it a week or two later, and subsequently Herr Merzbacher of Munich visited all three summits.

The Laila is admirably placed for a panorama. It rakes the central chain of the Caucasus and overlooks the great forests westwards. But, apart from its topographical interest, the view gains a peculiar charm from the carpet of green and gold that is thrown down at the feet of the stupendous cliffs of the great chain, to the contrast between the vales of Suanetia and the snows of the Caucasus. The position of the climber relative to the great chain may be compared to that of a traveller on Mont Emilius behind Aosta to the Pennine Alps. To suggest the comparison is to enforce, on those who have seen both, the superiority of the Caucasian view. And it can hardly be said too often, the transparency of the Caucasian atmosphere softens the outline, deepens the shade, magnifies the bulk of the peaks. The mountaineer who has spent several hours on a fine day on the crest of the Laila will ever after carry in his mind a recollection of a sight, or rather of a series of visions, of exquisite aerial effects, of transfigurations, in which what the author of the Book of Proverbs calls 'the highest parts of the dust of the world' appear as the silver spires of a temple raised by no mortal architect.

The ascent is so very easy and, when taken the right way, comparatively so short, that there is little excuse for any traveller, who has higher ambitions than to be a chimney-jack, leaving it out. It fills me with surprise when I remember that I did not myself seek this Pisgah until my third visit to Suanetia.

The Prince and his hunters were visible on a patch of rocks some distance below the snow-pass. We rejoined them at the base of the peak, and regained Ezeri very late the same evening. The next morning broke unclouded, and was succeeded by one of the finest and hottest days I have ever known in the Caucasus. I strolled alone up the shadeless dale behind Ezeri, to a gap from which a path descends directly to Mazeri, above Betsho. Thence I followed

a zigzag path to the brow on the right, for which Signor Sella got the name of Mesik. He visited it in October, the day after the first snowfall. I found the turf enamelled with gentians, forget-me-nots, and pyrethrums. This crest commands an unique view of the south-west peak of Ushba, and an almost complete panorama of Suanetia and its ring of mountains. It will be one of the lady's walks of the twentieth century, when Caucasian travel is organised, as Syrian has been for the last fifty years, by the establishment at Kutais of dragomans with the needful camp-equipment.

I close this record of my rambles in Suanetia with a keen sense of regret at their incompleteness. As I look once more at the well-worn sheet of the old five-verst map, I recognise how many lovely green downs and ridges, doubtless as beautiful as those I have tried to describe, remain still unknown to me. I long for more idle days spent in lounging on a haycock on the verge of some fresh-mown glade, until the sunset fades off the crest of Tetnuld, and the stars and the fire-flies come out together. I am haunted by the faint perfume which the last azalea blossoms are pouring forth from thickets, under which the lilies and lupines that have escaped the scythe brighten the borders of the wood. I even begin to indulge in audacious doubts as to the orographic insight of my juniors, and to fancy that I might perhaps have found the way up the maiden peak of Ushba better than great climbers have done, had I concentrated myself more on the attempt. When I get to this point I know that I am dreaming, and hasten to put away my papers and my idle thoughts.

CHAPTER XII

THE ASCENT OF TETNULD

Constitui posthac, quamdiu mihi vita divinitùs concessa fuerit, quotannis montes aliquos aut saltem unum conscendere. Quanta enim voluptas, quantae sunt, putas, animi, ut par est affecti, deliciae, montium moles immensas spectaclo admirari, et caput tanquam inter nubes attollere! Quibus vero socors est animus nihil mirantur, domi torpent, non prodeunt in mundi theatrum. Volutentur igitur in luto: lucro et illiberalibus studiis attoniti jaceant. C. GESNER, A.D. 1541.

THE literary success of Mr. Grove's *Frosty Caucasus*, great as it was, did not produce in this country any immediate revival of Caucasian Exploration. Its failure in this respect was, I think, due mainly to two causes—the war of 1877, and the impression created by the fever which fell on Mr. Grove and his companions during their descent to the Black Sea.

It was to M. de Déchy, the Hungarian traveller, as I have already said, that the credit of recalling our thoughts to the Caucasus was to a great extent due. His three journeys, in 1884, 1885, and 1886, had resulted in several interesting climbs and some valuable topographical explorations, and also—what was more generally effective—in a large series of excellent photographs, which brought for the first time the scenery and people of the Caucasus vividly before men's eyes. In 1885 I became the channel through which his work was made known to the Alpine Club, and it was partly perhaps through this communication that my friends Mr. Clinton Dent and Mr. W. F. Donkin were, in 1886, induced to try their luck in the Caucasus. They set out with the intention of following Mr. Grove's suggestion, and attacking the peak at the

head of the lower reach of the Bezingi Glacier, which he and A. W. Moore had identified with the Tetnuld of Suanetia. They were successful, but when they gained the summit we now know as Gestola they found that there was another Tetnuld—the true Tetnuld—in the field. It is a peculiarity of Caucasian peaks, Elbruz, Ushba, Dongusorun, Janga, the Laila—I might name others—that they have a way of proving double-headed.[1] Since it provides double employment for climbers, it may surely be reckoned to them as a merit.

In all probability Gestola will, with Tetnuld, be ranked in the future among the easy peaks of the Caucasus. But the first ascent was by no means tame. By a failure to allow sufficiently for the rapid changes in the condition of Caucasian slopes, or perhaps from inadequate reconnoitring, the party found themselves —very much as we had done on Kasbek—in the position of Mr. and Mrs. Diskobolus in Edward Lear's ballad. They were on the top of a wall from which there was reason to doubt if they 'could ever get down at all.' Mr. Dent tells me that he is about to repeat the story of his adventure, with which he long ago thrilled the Alpine Club. I shall not, therefore, anticipate here such confidences as he may think it expedient to lay before the public.

This ascent was the main result of the journey. An attack on Dykhtau—the climbers called it Guluku—was not pushed very far. Mr. Donkin fixed a number of points about the great Bezingi Glacier, and then the mountaineers rode back by the way they had come to Naltshik and the nearest railway station. This very brief and limited experience of Caucasian travel sufficed, however, to furnish Mr. Donkin with the material for a chapter which stands out, I think, from the monotony of Alpine publications by the vivid impression it leaves behind it, not only of the incidents of daily life in the mountains, but of the sensitive and happy nature of the writer, who saw and enjoyed so much in so short a time.

The discussions raised by my friends' journey made me feel

[1] Tetnuld and Gestola, however, are entirely distinct peaks, as much so as the Dent Blanche and Dent d'Hérens.

that I could no longer resist the temptation to go myself and see once more the great mountains, of many of which I had in 1868, owing to broken weather, had but fleeting glimpses. I felt confident—and as the event proved, rightly—that one unclouded view would clear up most of the confusion that still encompassed the nomenclature of the Central Group, and enable me to determine between the various identifications of the two summits first measured and named by the makers of the five-verst map as Dykhtau and Koshtantau.

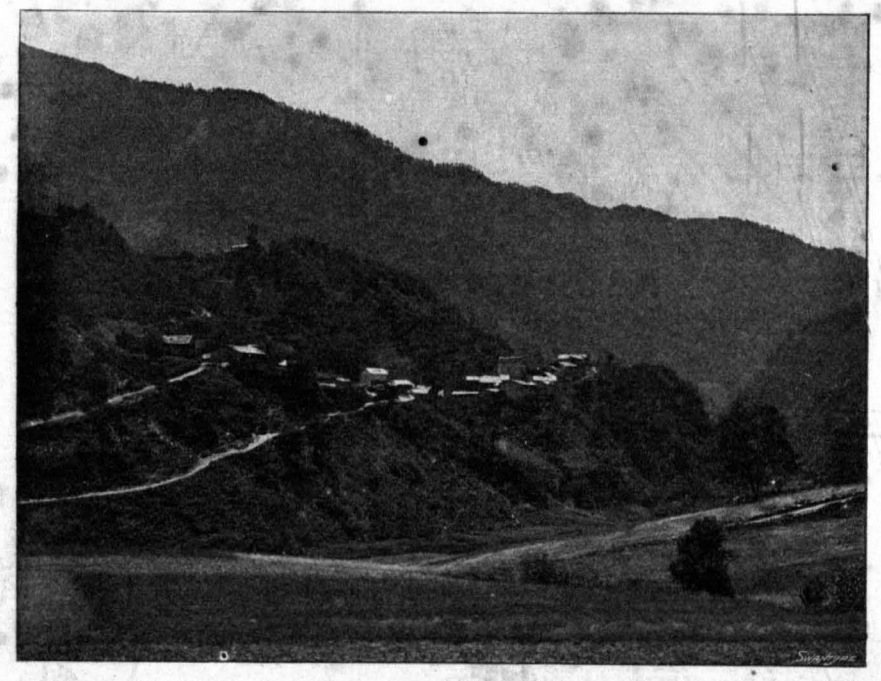
In August 1887 M. de Déchy and I, with my old friend and guide, François Dévouassoud, and two of his relations, found ourselves at Betsho, the centre of Russian administration in Suanetia. The condition of the snow had forced me to give up any designs on Ushba, the Suanetian Matterhorn. The experience of subsequent and more competent peak-hunters has since fully proved the wisdom of that decision. My thoughts naturally turned to the other great mountain which dominates the upper basin of the Ingur, Tetnuld. The views we had already gained had sufficed to remove all the doubts raised in the previous year, and to establish the entirely separate existence of Dent and Donkin's peak. We had seen the two mountains from the west, rising at least a mile apart and separated by an immense glacier basin.

Shkara, Ushba, and Tetnuld, owing to their being so conspicuous from the valleys at their base, and even from the distant lowlands, are at this moment among the best-known peaks of the Caucasus. Twenty-five years ago they were unrecognised, and hardly even named. Shkara, when seen from the distant lowlands, was described as Pasis Mta, because it is not very far from the passes at the Rion (Phasis) sources, just as Monte Leone was called the Simplon—or St. Plomb—by the contemporaries of De Saussure.

Tetnuld and Ushba preside over Suanetia, as the Jungfrau and Wetterhorn do over the Bernese Oberland. Owing to its peculiarly graceful form, Tetnuld was one of the first peaks to attract attention from Caucasian travellers. M. E. Favre speaks

of it as 'the gigantic pyramid of Tetnuld.' Herr von Thielmann writes:—

'Tetnuld, the most beautiful of all the mountains of the Caucasus, stands out from the chain in the form of a gigantic pyramid of the height of 16,000 feet. The dazzling whiteness of its snowy mantle, combined with the grace of its form, produce an effect similar to that created by the Jungfrau, while to complete the comparison a conical peak, smaller but equally beautiful, like the Swiss Silberhorn, rises up by its side.'



IPARI

Before leaving England I had studied photographs of the mountain, and found, as I thought, the right way up it. The most convenient starting-point was obviously Adish. From the pastures above that village the snowfields at the western base of the final peak could, by crossing a spur, probably be reached with less trouble than by ascending the glacier they feed, which drains into the Mujalaliz or valley of the Mulkhura.

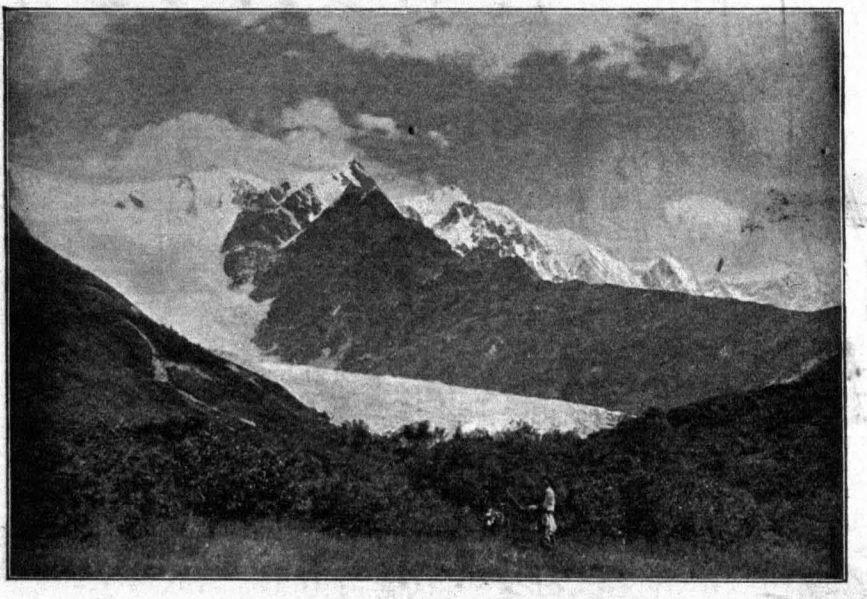
Our first stage was to Ipari. As usual at Betsho—I might

say in the Caucasus—the horses did not come till past noon, and it had long been dark when we all reassembled in the court-house at Ipari. Half the party came by the Ingur, the others by Mestia and the Uguir Pass. The former route is considerably the shorter. The path from Ipari to Adish, a three hours' ride, is most romantic. Fancy the Valley of the Lyn with two mountains of over fifteen thousand feet closing every vista, the white pyramid of Tetnuld in front, the rock-towers of Ushba behind. One of the views of Ushba was the most perfect imaginable. But there are so many perfect views of Ushba! The particular charm of this was in the water, and the foliage of the foreground, and the way in which the lower hills formed a framework for the great peaks. The path continues by—and often in—the stream until the barley-fields and towers of Adish come suddenly in sight. Adish, as I have before pointed out, is the most isolated, and one of the wildest of the communes of Free Suanetia. It has no priest or headman: but in 1865 the villagers are said to have been formally baptized; they are certainly still unregenerate, and utter barbarians in their manner of dealing with strangers. But, strong in our escort of two Cossacks,[1] we had no fear of the inhabitants, and made our mid-day halt in an enclosure at the top of the village. High prices were asked for provisions, and the villagers quarrelled noisily among themselves as to the distribution of the money, or invented grounds for petty demands, which they pressed on us with noisy persistence. Compared, however, to our encounters in 1868, this appeared to me but a poor performance. Violence of tone and gesture are conventional in Suanetia: there was no real passion. We scattered smiles and kopeks in return for a sheep and other provisions. One man demanded payment on the ground that we had lunched on his land, and on being laughed at had recourse to the traditional pantomime of fetching his gun; another laid hold of my ice-axe,

[1] The reader must be reminded that, in records of Caucasian travel, a Cossack is not an ethnographical but a military term. The two men we had with us on this occasion were one a Suanetian, the other a Kabardan from Naltshik. The surveyor's 'Cossack' at Karaul was a Tauli. Many of the Cossacks, both men and officers, are Ossetes.

which I had stuck in the ground while mounting, and required a ransom for it. A few kopeks, however, settled all questions. The whole affair was nothing more than an attempt at petty extortion, enforced with habitual violence of tone and gesture.

We had intended to sleep out high above the village. But 'the basest clouds' had succeeded a glorious morning, and we were content to establish our camp in a birch grove an hour above Adish, and close to the foot of the great glacier. The glory of



THE ADISH GLACIER

its ice-fall exceeded my remembrance. It is unequalled in the Alps, and only rivalled in the Caucasus by that of the Karagom Glacier. M. de Déchy rode on to examine the marks he had set up two years previously. The ice had advanced nearly forty feet. The steeper glaciers of the Caucasus were mostly showing signs of slight advance in 1887 and 1889. Many of them had shot fresh streaks of brown and grey rubbish over their green moraines. The advance of glaciers depends mainly on the amount of snow-supply in their upper basins, and it is therefore those which travel

fastest—that is, those which have the greatest volume and the steepest beds—which take the lead in oscillations. For example, the Glacier des Bossons begins to encroach on the Valley of Chamonix long before the Mer de Glace shows any sign, and the Upper Grindelwald Glacier advances before the Lower. With night, heavy rain began to fall. Our Willesden canvas resisted the downpour, but the guides, who had pitched their tent badly and in a hollow, were inundated. The Cossacks made an arrangement in birch-boughs and *bourkas*, which, as the event proved, was not only water- but sound-proof.

In the grey dawn Dévouassoud withdrew the tent curtains, and in the gloomiest tones made the solemn announcement—'Our mutton has been stolen.' Further research showed that the thieves had been singularly audacious, and that our loss was far more than a few joints of meat. The luggage had been piled under a waterproof sheet between our tent and the Cossacks' shelter. The cover had been lifted, the lock of M. de Déchy's hand-portmanteau removed, and the contents ransacked. A revolver, some *steigeisen* presented to me by Viennese friends, and my companion's store of clothes, had been abstracted. His medicine-chest had been opened, but the contents were left untouched. The waterproof cover had been skilfully and carefully replaced, so that the more serious theft was not suspected until long after we had missed the mutton.

This vexatious, but by no means disastrous, theft had its most serious result in a telegram which by some means found its way through Germany to the English newspapers to the effect that, owing to the robbery of all my goods, I had been compelled to give up my Caucasian journey. Some of my friends were in consequence needlessly alarmed, and I received much undeserved sympathy.

We had little doubt as to where the thieves came from. After such an experience, we could hardly leave our camp to the mercy of the men of Adish, while we attempted Tetnuld. In the drenching rain we decamped as best we could. It was a noisome struggle with wet ropes and canvas and photographic cases that had to be carefully tended to keep them from suffering from damp. Adish

seemed almost deserted as we passed through it. At noon the heavens cleared; and we had an exquisite view from the brow above the Mujalaliz, where we found troops of haymakers at work, quite regardless of weather, as indeed haymakers have to be in Suanetia.

We ran down the steep hillside and installed ourselves in the priest's house at Mujal. It is a good wooden cottage, and on

SUANETIANS

the first floor are two large clean rooms, with a broad balcony running round them. The village is one of a group lying in an open basin of barley-fields, enclosed by wooded slopes, on the left bank of the stream, about a mile below the junction of the torrents from the Tuiber and the Zanner Glaciers. Beyond the river the white towers of Mulakh break the hillside, and high in the air the mightier towers of Ushba show between the rainstorms their vigorous outline. Tetnuld is hidden by its spurs, and at the head

of the valley only the white snout of the Zanner Glacier is seen beyond the dark cliffs and forests of a deep gorge.

Next day we despatched the priest's son with 15 roubles (28 shillings) to Adish to try to recover our goods. In case of his failure we sent the Suanetian Cossack to Betsho to inform the Priestav of our loss.

About noon I, with two of the guides, made a futile start for Tetnuld. We got on the wrong side of the gorge leading to the Zanner Glacier, and after spending some hours of storm under an impenetrable pine, came back again. The weather all day was like that of the English Lakes, storm and gleams, and we had some wild visions of Ushba hung with cloud-banners.

The following day was all storm and no gleam. We had, however, our fill of entertainment indoors. It was a day of arrivals. First there was the advance of the Russian forces to avenge the Rape of the Shirts. They consisted of a splendid old Cossack sergeant—quite the popular ideal of a Cossack—and his two men, a mild, broad-faced Russian youth and a weak Suanetian. This trio marched on Adish, and, very much to our surprise and their credit, successfully arrested the ten leading villagers.

Another arrival was promised us—no less a person than the Bishop of Poti, the first Bishop who, in historical times, had penetrated Free Suanetia. From so fever-stricken a see one might naturally look for a pale ascetic. Our prelate, however, was much the reverse—a man of sturdy frame and sense. But I am anticipating. It was towards evening before the path that descends the beautiful slopes above the village became alive with horses. The cavalcade was divided into many detachments, camp-servants with huge saddle-bags, long-haired priests, singing-men with dark locks and melancholy stag-like eyes. Last came the Bishop himself, a large, thick-set man in imposing ecclesiastical vestments, attended by his secretary and a Mingrelian gentleman who talked French and had spent some time at Geneva. Through the latter I had some talk with the Bishop, who told me that the first sermon he preached to the Suanetians would be on the necessity of giving up their eclectic practice of keeping the holy days of three

religions and doing no work between Thursday night and Monday morning.

The supper that evening showed the resources of Suanetia. We all, except the Bishop, sat down to it—a company of at least thirty. Roast mutton and boiled fowls were followed by roast pork. Knives fell short, and plates shorter. But the baser sort at the lower end of the table used their *kinjals* (daggers) for knives, and the flat loaves—excellently baked for once in the Bishop's honour—served as plates first and were eaten afterwards, after the fashion of Æneas. And there was wine at discretion — capital, sound Mingrelian wine, which no one but the guides despised for its goatskin flavour. It was long past midnight when I retired between the folds of my insect-proof curtains, watched by a solemn group of long-robed priests and peasants, resembling nothing so much as the by-standers depicted in the Raphael Cartoons.

A BOY AT MUJAL

The sky next morning was less charged with vapour, and there was a touch of north in the wind. I was determined to start again for Tetnuld. M. de Déchy was anxious not to lose the advantage of the expected visit of the Priestav from Betsho, and his assistance both in recovering his lost apparel and in making final arrangements with the villagers to serve as porters.

It will be most convenient if I give here the result of our application. Early in the afternoon of the second day, after I had started for Tetnuld, a party of villagers came in from Adish.

Soon after the Priestav arrived, and the villagers were summoned before him. The two men who had demanded money of us were first questioned: 'What do you mean by asking money from my guests—honourable persons who are escorted by Cossacks?' Their side-arms were taken away, and their hands tied behind their backs. Then came the turn of the fifteen heads of families. They protested that the village was innocent; that the robber must have been a chance traveller. 'That cannot be,' said the Priestav; 'you know perfectly well that there is no road, and there are no travellers in your valley.' They were given two hours to produce the property. Nothing being forthcoming, their side-arms were, after some pretence of resistance on the part of one or two, taken from them, and they were ordered to remain in custody at Betsho until the goods were returned. 'I am anxious,' said the Priestav, 'to show Mr. Freshfield, as an Englishman, that we can act with vigour in case of need.' And certainly no English officer could have come to the help of his countrymen with more vigour, good judgment, and (as the event proved) success, than M. Aetovsky, the excellent Priestav, came to ours. In the end M. de Déchy's effects were recovered—with the exception of the revolver—and sent back to him months afterwards at Odessa.

A SUANETIAN HUNTER

Had we been content to take the Tuiber Pass (11,815 feet), the ordinary route from Suanetia to the Tartar valleys east of the Baksan, crossed two years before by my companion, there would have been comparatively little difficulty in procuring porters. We were calling on the villagers to reopen a pass

of which nothing but a tradition survived, and which only one man in the valley pretended ever to have crossed. Had any traveller a hundred years ago tried to make the men of Grindelwald cross their glaciers to the Valais, he would certainly have met with considerable difficulty. M. de Déchy deserved the highest credit for his patience and pertinacity in overcoming the very natural unwillingness of the men of Mujal for the adventure we forced upon them. Our plan was as follows:—I should set off at once with the three Chamoniards, bivouac high, and attempt Tetnuld by the glacier which flows down from its peak to meet the Zanner. Twenty-four hours later M. de Déchy should start with our Cossack, the native porters, and all the baggage, and pitch our tents beside the Zanner Glacier, where I should endeavour to join him at night. Should I fail to do so, we would each do our best, by lighting fires, to give intelligence of our safety and our whereabouts, and I and the guides would press on next morning until we caught up the Heavy Brigade on the ascent to the pass. As we had neither of us ever seen the great glaciers leading to the peak and pass, the scheme was, I flatter myself, bold as well as ingenious. As far as topography is concerned, it may fairly be compared to a proposal to climb the Schreckhorn and meet again at the Zäsenberg, or on the way to the Mönch Joch—no one having previously been as far as the Eismeer for a quarter of a century.

Warned by experience, I took the precaution to hire a native to show us the way through the gorge. Crossing the torrent just above the junction of the Tuiber water, we found an old track of the faintest kind, which after a time failed us altogether. It was warm and moist among the dripping flowers and foliage; the guides were the reverse of exhilarated, and our chances of success did not seem very brilliant.

The ice twenty-seven years ago—as may be seen by the photographs taken by Count Levashoff's expedition in 1869—poured over a steep cliff. On the top of this it now lies, ending at 6640 feet, which is practically the same height at which Abich found it in 1856. A rough scramble brought us to the edge of

a hillside it had scraped bare. Pushing aside the hazel branches, I got the first view up the southern glacier—the Nageb Glacier of the new map—to the peak. Our route was plain; it was the one I had marked out on an old photograph before leaving England. Given fine weather and no ice on the final ridge, Tetnuld could hardly escape me.

In the foreground, at the foot of a rocky spur of the mountain, two great glaciers met. On the left the Zanner tumbled over from its unseen reservoirs in an impassable ice-fall. On our right the Nageb Glacier fell first in a great broken slope of *névé*, then in a long ice-fall, at last in a gentle slope, until it joined its stream to that of the Zanner. We descended on to the ice, and then mounted the Nageb Glacier for a certain distance, until the crevasses made it convenient to cross the moraine and enter the hollow between the ice and the rocks on its right bank. This was partly occupied by beds of avalanche-snow alternating with flowery slopes. On the last of these, at a height of less than 9000 feet, we determined to spend the night. An overhanging rock offered good shelter, and there were all the requisites for a luxurious bivouac: water, rhododendron stalks and roots for a fire, and flowery grass for beds. It was not high enough, but the ground above was easy, and it seemed better to start early than to freeze higher up. We had two sleeping-bags, sufficient wraps, and provisions for two days, so that the guides were heavily loaded. The space under the rock was soon levelled, stones thrown out, and a flooring of elastic twigs and grass laid down. Then we piled up a blazing fire, toasted Suanetian loaves, and watched with satisfaction the last clouds melt into the sky and the peaks of Ushba stand out against a golden sunset.

I felt very comfortable and was soon fast asleep. I was awakened soon after midnight by a sudden sense of light. The moon had scaled the high wall of crags on the east and was looking down on us. The sight of four climbers in sleeping-bags can hardly have been attractive to a goddess who had once discovered Endymion: she showed, however, no disposition to withdraw her excellent brightness. It was a moment, I felt, not

for poetical reflection, but for practical action. I rolled myself out from under the boulder, set a light to the spirits of one of those admirable inventions known as 'self-cooking soup-tins,' and roused the slumbering guides. In fifteen minutes—a 'record' time in my experience for a start—we had laced our boots, shared our soup, and shouldered the light packs containing the day's necessaries.

For a short time the rough ground in the hollow between the ice and the mountain afforded us easy walking. The shadows of the crags diminished as the moon's beams flowed down the snowy avalanche-tracks between them. Where the cliffs and moraine met we were driven out on to the glacier. In the white uncertain moonshine it was not easy to discover a way among the narrow ridges between the ice-trenches. Our first attempt to pass the marginal crevasses failed, but at the second we gained without difficulty the centre of the glacier above the lower ice-fall.

It was still some way to the foot of the first great *séracs*. The ice was turning to *névé*, snow covered the surface, and the rope had to be brought into use. During our halt we faced the vast frozen cascade, a mile broad and 500 feet at least high, stretched out in front of us, high over which, crowned by stars of astounding brilliancy, for the moon was passing westwards, the virgin peak of Tetnuld glimmered against the dark blue heaven. On the previous day I had observed that the southern arm of the fall beyond some rocks which divide it was comparatively unbroken. But François Dévouassoud, who in the old Chamonix spirit is ever ready for an attack on crevasses, saw no reason for us to go out of our way, and we kept a straight course. It was magnificent, but a mistake on his part.

The struggle that followed, although it lasted a great many hours, did not seem to me long; for the actual path-finding among the broken masses of *névé* soon grew sufficiently difficult to be amusing. The whole situation was stirring. The scenery was more fantastically lovely than a child's dream after the Pantomime. The snows around us seemed to emit an unearthly light. Huge towers of milk-white substance shone against the dark background of sky, green icicle-hung vaults yawned between them.

Presently the clefts and caverns grew more frequent and troublesome, the bridges over them more frail and ill-adjusted. We seemed often to lose our way among the deep undulations. At moments all progress appeared to be barred.

In such cases the boldest course is sometimes the best—at any rate before dawn, while the frost holds. We struck at the slope where it was steepest, and the crevasses were filled by pieces fallen from the impending cliffs. By the help of small, half-choked crevasses, François dashed through and up the sides of a huge tumble-down snow-quarry, and we found ourselves at last on the platform which stretches under the western base of Tetnuld. The final peak, previously hidden for a time, was again full in view, the stars still formed a coronet round the highest crest. Slowly they faded, and a glimmer of coming dawn played behind the southern shoulder of the peak and rested on something vast and white, far and high in the west—Elbruz. As the sky grew paler, arrows of daylight flashed round the edge of the world across the upper vault; other arrows seemed to rise to meet them from the depths of the distant sea. It was very long before any light touched the Earth, but at last the great dome of Elbruz was of a sudden illuminated, and the twin towers of Ushba caught the flames, first red, then golden. In a few minutes the lesser crests of the 'Frosty Caucasus' were kissed by the sun, the shadows fled away for shelter under the loftiest ridges. The upper world of the mountains was awake. The inhabited world—the grey hills and dales of Mingrelia and the sea-spaces beyond—still waited in sombre twilight.

The next stage in the ascent was to gain the snow-terrace, which slopes across the cliffs of Tetnuld up to the base of the long southern ridge that falls in the direction of Adish. A steep bank seamed by crevasses brought us to the terrace, the snow on which proved to be very soft and powdery. The distance to be traversed was great, and progress became slow, exceedingly laborious, and, owing to the cold in the shadow of the mountain, somewhat painful. Dévouassoud suggested that we might force a path up to the western ridge, which was immediately above us. I declined.

The way, if there were one, lay up steep slopes of rocks, snow, and ice. If the ice entailed step-cutting, the task would have been endless; if soft snow lay on ice, extremely dangerous. I did not think the chance of finding the slopes in good condition justified the attempt, and we abided by the comparatively certain route I had laid down from old photographs.

We turned to our right and ploughed up the terrace. The only variety was afforded by a short, but steep, bank of ice. The loose snow on it had to be scraped off, and good steps made for the descent. It was bitterly cold in the shadow, but I had no suspicion at the time that the cold was of a kind to make frost-bites probable. After crossing a tiny plain we pushed our leader over the *Bergschrund*, and he tugged us up a last bank, on the top of which we broke through a cornice and came out into glorious sunshine. It was 9 A.M.; we had been over eight hours climbing from our bivouac. We sat down to lunch on a little terrace, which lies at the base of the long southern ridge of Tetnuld, and is very noticeable from the Latpari Pass.

The prospect was glorious. The upper glens and sources of the Ingur lay at our very feet. We could have cast our shoes on the towers of Adish; we looked across the face of the great cliffs and ice-falls which are opposite the traveller on the Latpari Pass. We commanded the great *névé* of the Adish Glacier, which spreads out between Tetnuld and the rock-peak called Lakutsa on the new map, and is backed by Katuintau and the western top of Janga—a shining tableland, never before looked down on save by the stars.

This was the decisive moment of the day. I examined anxiously the long lovely ridge which curved down to us from the still distant summit. It promised well; it was fairly broad, nowhere very steep, and but little ice glittered on its crest. Still, it was long, and the softness of the snow made it seem longer. At every step the leader sank over his ankles. Consequently leading was exhausting, and we had to change frequently. From time to time there was a little variety, a few yards of ice or a sudden steep rise, which forced us to zigzag and use our axes. Once we were driven on to the flat top of a snow-cornice, a cornice so prodigious

that it could be seen even from Mujal, and strong enough to have borne an elephant.

All the way the views were sublime, and we were free to use our eyes. Those who are familiar with the down-look from the top of the Wetterhorn will understand our situation if I say that on the edge of Tetnuld one enjoys for hours a similar sensation. The snow falls away in a short white curve, and then you see, literally between your legs, the meadows of Suanetia, 7000 feet below. Close at hand were our gigantic neighbours, Janga and Shkara. In the west, Elbruz loomed larger and loftier at every step. As the dome of Brunelleschi dominates the campaniles of Florence, or St. Paul's our City spires, so it raised its vast curves above all the lesser heights. Even Ushba sank to a footstool before the great white throne, inhabited, as the Caucasians believe, by the Prince of the Power of the Air.

So three hours or more passed; my aneroid was marking 16,500 feet (equivalent to about 15,700 to 15,800), but ever in front rose a fresh frozen bank. I looked across to the north-west ridge, and an eminence I had noted on it was below us. 'Nous approchons,' I said to François. 'Nous allons arriver,' he replied cheerily. The snow grew thin; some steps had to be cut into ice. There seemed less bulk in our peak; the converging ridges were below; there was little but air above us. Twenty minutes later a white bank cut the sky; it sank, our eyes overlooked it, our feet trampled it. I ran on for a few level yards; there was nothing more; two ridges fell steeply beneath me. Tetnuld was ours; another great peak of the Caucasus was climbed.

It was 1.15 P.M. We had been nearly four hours over the last 1700 feet of crest, twelve and a half hours, including halts, from our bivouac. I am afraid I enjoyed the next hour more than the secretary of a scientific—or quasi-scientific—society ought to have done.[1]

[1] The Royal Geographical Society, of which I was for thirteen years (1881-1894) one of the Honorary Secretaries, is scientific in its aims but popular in its constitution. Owing to the absence of any qualification for its membership—save sex and an annual subscription—the four initials F.R.G.S. do not necessarily indicate that their possessor is either a traveller or a geographer. It is high time some conspicuous and easily recognisable line was drawn between the qualified members of the Society and those who are simply subscribers.

I might have been boiling thermometers, or feeling my own pulse, or securing accurate bearings. But I would put in a plea for the makers of 'first ascents.'[1] They open the way, and make it easy for others to follow them. We mountaineers are not the camp-followers, as some critic has impertinently suggested, but the pioneers of science. *Fiat experimentum in corpore vili*: I have no objection to the application of the proverb. Where our bodies have opened a new observatory, let the Scientific Bodies follow at their ease and their leisure. Had I tried to measure precisely I should not have succeeded. As it was, I estimated Tetnuld as 'slightly over 16,000 feet.' The new survey makes it 82 feet under 16,000 feet. The survey makes Gestola 14 feet higher than its sister peak. But I should like to be certain both peaks were measured from the same side of the chain. There have been very considerable discrepancies in some of the heights from time to time communicated to me by the Surveyors, as results of the new measurements. Undoubtedly they are, as a whole and approximately, accurate, but I feel confident that—as has been the case in the Austrian Alps—further corrections will in several cases have to be made in the official figures.

We had time to study in detail the vast panorama commanded by our space-searching summit. The broad snow-fields of the Zanner, over which next day we hoped to force a pass, called for particular attention. What a superb ice-gorge led up to the gap between us and Gestola! The green valley over its shoulder should be Chegem. Dykhtau was a surprise; the southern face was this year all white, while Donkin's photograph had prepared us for a bare cliff; Koshtantau, all but the pyramidal top, was masked by the cliffs of Mishirgitau; Shkara dominated everything on the watershed; Janga was a little higher than ourselves: between them they cut off the view of the eastern snows. The part of the horizon occupied by snowy peaks was narrower than in most Swiss and

[1] I am fortified in my plea by the fact that I have my old friend, Professor Tyndall, with me. His famous description of the first ascent of the Weisshorn concludes as follows: 'I opened my notebook to make a few observations, but I soon relinquished the attempt. There was something incongruous, if not profane, in allowing the scientific faculty to interfere where silent worship was the "reasonable service."'

many Caucasian views, but the heights were on a scale more imposing than that of the Alps.

Beyond the sunny hills of Mingrelia and the sea-haze I made out plainly the distant snow-flecked ranges towards Kars and Trebizond: Ararat I failed to recognise, though there were some distant pink cumuli which probably marked its whereabouts. General Chodzko, the first Director of the Caucasian Staff, who camped on the top of Ararat, asserts that he identified Elbruz from it. The distance between these peaks is 280 miles; Tetnuld is 30 miles less. On the Alps I have, from a height of 12,000 feet in the Ortler Group, seen Monte Viso at a distance of over 200 miles.

As we were on the point of starting a guide kicked an ice-axe and set it sliding. It happily hitched on the very verge of the Adish slope. In cutting the few steps needful for its recovery, we had another opportunity to realise what that slope is. The descent of the ridge proved perfectly safe and easy, and in about an hour we were back at the saddle. Here I felt some headache, our only suffering from the rarity of the air: it passed off after a light meal, and was probably more due to hunger than anything else. Light clouds had begun to form in the seaward hollows; they collected in the dales of Suanetia, and now suddenly, as if at a given signal, streamed up to us. I was reminded of the procession of the Ocean Nymphs in the *Prometheus Vinctus*. They passed lightly overhead, lingered a while round the peaks, and before sunset had again melted away.

The descent was without further incident. The snow was very heavy, but our hearts were light. We had a momentary difference when the leading guide, justly dreading our track through the *séracs* so late in the day, began to make for the northern corner of the great basin. François and I had to insist on a sharp turn to the left, which brought us to the top of the long straight slope by which I had proposed to ascend, south of the rocky boss. We wallowed up to our waists, but the slope was steep enough to make progress, even by wallowing, comparatively rapid. We were soon on hard and bare ice, and the rope could at last be taken

off. Jogging steadily on, we regained our boulder and the white rhododendron bank at 7 P.M. There was no longer a mist in the sky. Ushba rose a dark shadow against the sunset.

Generally in such a situation the thoughts go backwards to fight over again the day's battle; but ours, and our eyes, were strained onwards. Could anything be seen of our companion and his baggage-train on the opposite hill? We searched in vain the sides of the Zanner ice-fall. I quickly came to the decision to stop where we were, since our bivouac was already prepared, in the trust that if our party were on the road, which we should doubtless learn as soon as it was dark by their beacon-fire, we might catch them up next day. Presently our own beacon flamed up, and after the guides had turned in I rested long beside it in a comfortable hollow, watching the slow muster of the heavenly host and waiting for the responsive glow—which never came. Soon after ten I too crept into my bag, thankful that I had not to seek the narrow shelves of some crowded Club-hut.

END OF VOLUME I

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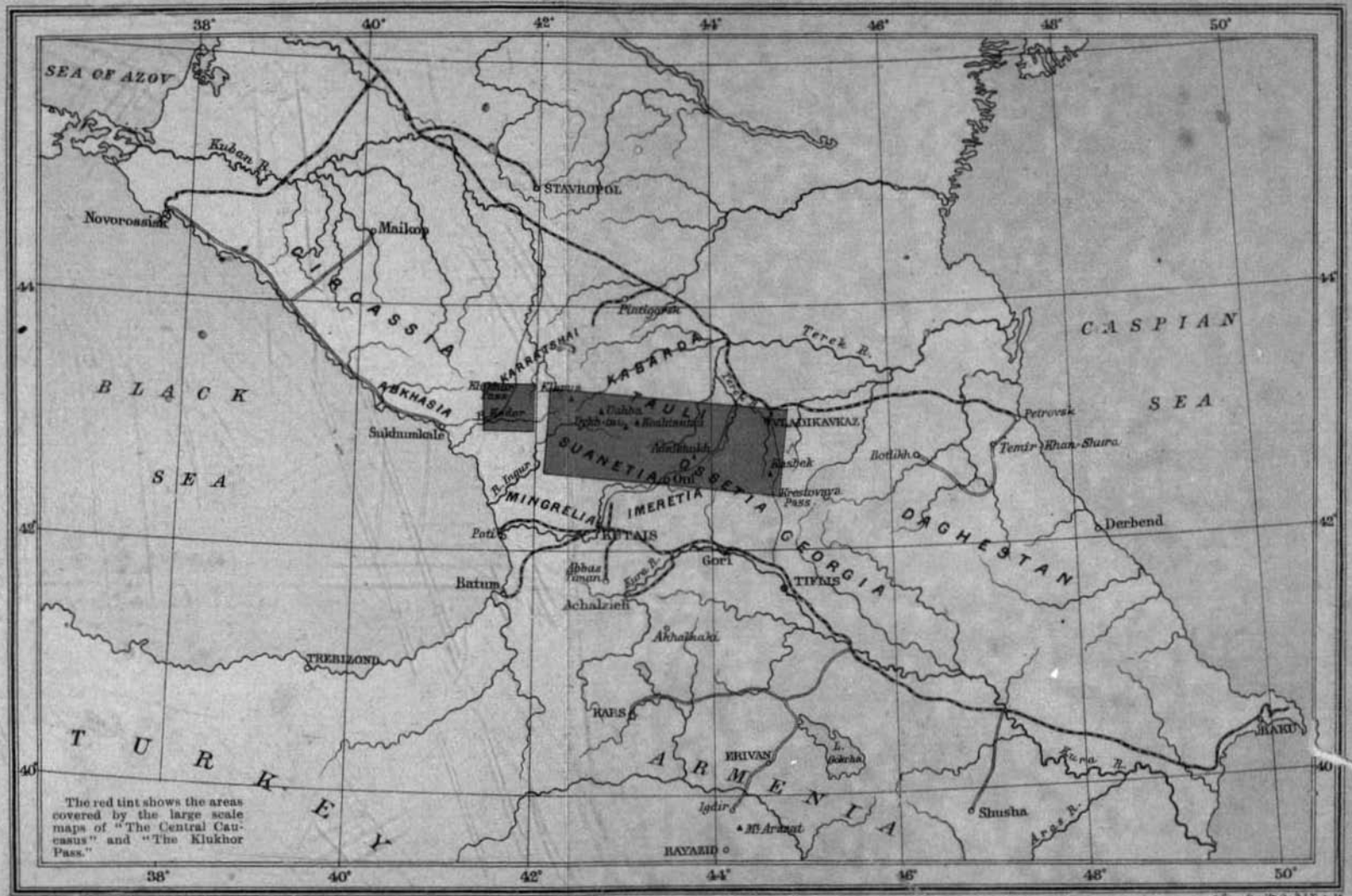
A SKETCH MAP OF THE CAUCASUS.



* Stanford's Geog.l Estab.t