It must be understood that Shkara and Janga are not absolutely independent peaks, but are names of two portions of a continuous crest. They are divided by a rather deep depression, east of which Shkara, rising sharply higher than Janga, runs for about a mile to its highest point. In 1893 this gap appeared dangerous of approach from the south side. The ridge between the depression and the Saddle Peak may be two miles or more long, and is called Janga; it has three points a little distinguished above the rest, of which I ascended, on September 12, the eastern point nearest to Shkara. From above the Zanner Pass, 12,859 feet, the ridge runs roughly east for about eight miles to the eastern end of Shkara, something over 17,000 feet, whence it falls rapidly to the Dykhsu Glacier. From Gestola to the east end of Shkara, some six miles, the height of the ridge above the Bezingi Glacier varies from 5000 feet to 7000 feet. It is a most magnificent, wonderful wall.

I may describe here the view which we had from Janga on September 12, as in many respects it must be much the same as that from Shkara. The most surprising thing from Janga was the seeming narrowness of the snows. Although the breadth of permanent snow, where we stood, may be twenty miles, I had a feeling that the Caucasus was a kind of snow tight-rope, the cause of this being, I think, that on both sides we saw far beyond the snows. Just below us, to the south, the glaciers were all but entirely hid from us by their own steepness, and the eye plunged directly on green grass and vegetation, beyond which stretched ridge upon ridge of blue hills so far below us and so fused by distance that their undulations seemed hardly more marked than those of waves on the surface of the sea. Northward, through the gap of the Bezingi Glacier, we looked beyond the snows over high bare hills and lower detached summits far into the steppe, where the eye seemed capable by searching of ever widening its ken. The feeling of great height and remote distance was deepened by a solitary white bird poised high above us. To the north we saw no sign of man, but to the south Almer's quick eye caught sight of a church, and behind it some white objects,

which we guessed to be the whitewashed towers of a Suanetian village. After the bare Bezingi slopes it was a great pleasure to the eye to rest on the thick foliage of the endless Suanetian woods shining in the sun. Our point of Janga was a little lower—Almer in his disappointment said ten feet, but at any rate it was distinctly lower—than the western summit.[1] The Saddle Peak looked much more sharply marked off from the rest of the ridge than when seen from the Bezingi Glacier. But the one peak on the Bezingi ridge, from Shkara to above the Zanner Pass, that most clearly, as seen from the north side, has a separate existence, and deserves a separate name, is the beautiful cone of Gestola, which springs up so sharply as constantly to serve as a standard of measurement: even as far away as the neck of Ushba I guessed our height by the base of Gestola.

To return to our ascent of Shkara. After about five minutes, as the cloud became no lighter, we ran down to the level place, where we were a little sheltered from the wind. While here the cloud cleared, so as to show us the upper belt of ruddy rocks, and the top of Dykhtau backed by blue sky—a beautiful vision from our cloud of gloom and cold. I felt like a man, half starved, looking through a window at a warm fire. The cloud soon closed in thicker than ever, and we began the descent, going as hard as we could in order to clear the snow-slope below the ridge before dark. The short rock-bit with its ice gave us more trouble than in the ascent, especially a single step where one had to tuck in one's abdomen and throw the left leg round a corner. Just beyond this we picked up the wraps left in the ascent, and I was glad to have their additional warmth.

On the slope below the ridge it became dark, so that although I could see Almer above me I could only tell where Roth was below by the darkness seeming a shade thicker, or, when he had turned, by his voice. The slope was too steep to allow of carrying the lantern. Our morning steps were filled up with blown snow,

---

[1] M. Jukoff gives it as 42 feet lower (*Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society*, February 1892, p. 111, and Survey maps).—D. W. F.

and although Roth was very quick in recovering them we had a wearisome time groping and kicking for the steps before we crossed the lower of the two *Schrunds*. It is easy to follow straight steps in the dark, but not so easy when they turn; and Roth's 'The step is there,' uttered in a crescendo of virtuous surprise, made one chuckle, but was hardly directing. All things come to an end. At length we cleared the slope, and after lighting our lantern swallowed some biscuits and cold tea. Sitting or standing about the lower lip of the *Schrund*, three feebly illuminated figures of Father Christmas, we felt that a bowl of steaming toddy to complete the picture would not have been amiss. We easily followed our morning tracks by lantern light—there was something strangely impressive in the high walls and deep troughs of the ice-fall by the feeble glimmer—until we came near home, where the hard snow showed no tracks. Almer and I waited in patient weariness until a shout from Roth told us he had found our ledge, and we followed. It was about a quarter to ten. Home, sweet home! It had been a hard, cold climb. How we did enjoy the hot soup! I blessed the man who first thought of self-cooking soup-tins.

Owing to the shortness of September days, climbing in the dark or by lantern light was one of the most disagreeable incidents of our climbs. In eight out of thirteen expeditions I took part in we had more or less night work.

I thought more of Shkara, considered simply as a climb, than of Janga or Ushba. Janga, when once we had reached the sunshine, was a right pleasant climb, full of interest, with a fair amount of work, and crowned with a sublime view; but there was no strain about it. Ushba, on the successful attempt, was turned by a fall of fresh snow into an easy and reasonably safe, though fatiguing, snow walk as far as the neck. Shkara was a hard strain nearly all the time, between the cold and the labour. The guides had at least five, probably six, hours' step-cutting. It was the coldest climb I ever made. I was quit with both thumb-ends and the right finger-ends frost-bitten. The guides were all right then, but I believe our cold day on Shkara had a good deal to do with their

subsequent ailments. It was curious that the cold took away at the time all sense of fatigue; but we were tired enough afterwards.

Of the ways of reaching the crest of the Bezingi ridge I thought our route up Janga the best: it lay by the rocks to the right, in ascending, of the steep, narrow glacier, which falls from the depression between Janga and Shkara. There were some short bits of hard rock-climbing, but these, we found afterwards, can all be turned. We crossed the mouth of a ghyll, the high pitch at the back of which was crowned by glacier, from which ice-blocks may fall at times. From the depression between Shkara and Janga it would be well worth trying the ascent of the former. The first part of Shkara rises so sharply that Almer thought the direct ridge-climb might be impossible, and we could not see how the Suanetian slope lay; but if this point is once climbed or turned the rest of the way did not seem difficult. The depression seemed to indicate a pass into Suanetia, but I could not see what was the nature of the southern slope.[1]

I had no trouble worth speaking of with the Bezingi natives. They are, no doubt, given to petty pilfering; but when I remember how the tent was on our expeditions left unguarded, and what value they attach to knives, nails, matches, and other things, to us the commonest articles, I must give them credit for a fair amount of honesty that they did not strip us of everything.

On the morning after we had been up Janga I found Roth very unwell with pains all over, especially in the chest. Towards evening, however, he was smoking—a sure sign of recovery; but in the night Almer was taken ill. He was worse than Roth, hardly able to speak or move, and remained little better all the next day. On the 15th September Roth was well and Almer recovering; but a wind-storm began in the mountains, and its fearful cold kept us that day and the next, by day as well as by night, in our sleep-

[1] I have since shared in three attempts on Janga from the south side—in 1890, when Almer led my friend Holder and myself, and twice in 1893, in the company of Messrs. Woolley, Newmarch, and Solly. We found in the latter year that the pass between Shkara and Janga was too dangerous on the south side from *séracs*. Indeed, most ascents on the south side—except Tetnuld—are much more difficult and dangerous than the northern climbs.—J. H. C.

ing-bags in the tent. The cold developed an eager appetite for fat, and I felt in training for the candles, if need were. On the morning of the 17th the wind had fallen much, and we set off with six porters for Betsho. Fierce gusts that searched one's marrow blew at intervals as long as we were on the Bezingi side of the Zanner Pass, but once over we found all still, bright and warm. Everything on the Suanetian side seemed of a richer and pleasanter nature. The woods, clad in the most gorgeous of autumn

LOOKING DOWN THE BEZINGI GLACIER

colours, were inexpressibly pleasant to our eyes, which, for more than a month, had hardly seen trees except in the form of firewood. The wild crab-apples we found nearly ripe and sweet—a great treat. The two Mulakh men I engaged in place of the Bezingi porters were of a gentler and more obliging nature than the Bezingians. Food was more varied. We replenished our stock of salt; besides mutton and bread, we obtained readily eggs and cheese, and even some vodka; and never Irishman was better pleased than I with the taste of a potato.

We reached Betsho on the morning of the 19th, and found

the officer in charge very civil. He assigned us in the Cancellaria a good room with a fireplace. Chairs and a table and sofa were demoralising Capuan luxuries; and, worn and jaded as we felt, we stayed in the rest of the day, sending out Kosta, a Mulakh man whom I had retained, to forage.

While at Betsho I was amused by the people who came in to sell provisions. An old woman brought a very sickly-looking sheep; several women and girls each brought a single cheese; two men had each a bottle of native vodka. There are no stores. Each family has its own stock of provisions, and naturally will not sell so as to leave itself bare; so that it is a slow business on first entering a village to collect food from cottage to cottage. Afterwards, when the people realise that the traveller is willing to pay, they bring voluntarily what each can spare. Doubtless I had the benefit of the confidence inspired by previous climbers.

Next day we set out to look for a camp, and, following the path, found ourselves above the lower part of the Gul Glacier, which descends under the east slope of Ushba, and opposite to the gap between its two towers. We could see nothing for mist, but, listening for a long time, I heard no fall of stones or snow, and was satisfied that we need not fear the avalanches which Donkin in his letter to Holder had mentioned as turning his party back. We knew nothing of their unhappy fate, and when we came on a shallow trench and found bits of a Meiringen paper indicating where they had camped, we felt pleased as with a sense of companionship, and I was glad to see that the guides looked cheered and livelier. The water supply—glacier water trickling down a rock—had failed, and we judged that, in the more advanced and colder season we had now reached, we must camp lower.

On the 21st September, leaving part of the baggage at Betsho, we pitched the tent on a tongue of land, above the little valley on the lower side of which are the last trees, and distant about an hour's walk from Donkin and Fox's camp.

Next to the Matterhorn, Ushba is the most imposing mountain I have seen. There is a strong suggestion of likeness between

the south peak and the Matterhorn, and, though the latter is the more symmetrical, Ushba is much the greater. It is nearly a thousand feet higher above the level of the sea; and whilst the Matterhorn is not much over 9000 feet above Zermatt, Ushba towers 11,000 feet above Betsho. Its mass is double that of the Matterhorn. The upper rocks of the south peak to be climbed must be nearly 6000 feet, against little more than 4000 feet on the Matterhorn.

The two peaks of Ushba are joined some 700 feet, as near as I can guess, below their tops, by a saddle or neck of rock covered with snow. Their crags on the east side of the neck are divided by a snow-slope of equal breadth for a distance which took us two hours twenty-five minutes in soft snow to ascend; then the cliffs of the north peak break off towards the north at nearly right angles to their former line, the rocks of the south peak still running down straight as above. From the neck to where the rocks retire, the slope, gradually becoming less steep, has no crevasses, but at the latter point an ice-fall begins, which keeps its original width, that of the gap, for a space which, climbing at a fair pace, we were two hours in ascending; whilst from the foot of the cliffs of the north peak descends for the same depth an ice-slope, towards which, where it touches the north side of the ice-fall, the latter presents a wall fringed with icicles and set in places with ice-caverns, which rises from 20 to 50 feet above the level of the ice-slope. A long *Schrund* runs across the foot of the ice-fall and ice-slope, and below it the glacier gradually sweeps round the base of the south peak. The illustration opposite will, I trust, make these details more intelligible to the reader.

On the 22nd we made our first attempt on Ushba, but after four hours' climbing Roth's illness obliged us to return. I found he had been unwell the day before, but had not told me, on the chance of recovering. Now he was writhing on the snow with pain, and plainly unable to proceed. Thankful that his pluck had not led him to hold out longer and until we were on the ice-slope, we slowly returned to the tent, where he was made as warm and comfortable as our poor resources permitted. His pains were in

the chest and legs, accompanied with a difficulty in breathing, and as these were much the same as those he had quickly recovered from at Bezingi, I thought that he would soon be well. On Sunday, however, though free in the chest, he was plainly in for a bout of rheumatism. This was a great disappointment, for Roth is a first-rate step-cutter, and I had seen that, in the icy state of the mountain, the neck between the two towers could only be reached by almost continuous cutting from the long *Schrund*. On speaking to Almer he agreed to try alone with me. I thought it very spirited in him not to be discouraged by his companion's illness, or by the certainty of an excessive amount of labour in step-cutting, to say nothing of the generally imposing and formidable look of Ushba. We arranged that Almer and I should try again next morning, and that if Roth felt no better, he should go down with Kosta, when the latter brought provisions, to Betsho, where he would at least be warm.

Almer and I left our tent at 3.35 on the morning of the 24th, and ascended on the left side of the glacier by easy rock and snow slopes, at first in a northerly direction, towards Mr. Freshfield's Gulba, and then west, until, after passing under a wall of rock, which seemed from the stones near its base to be sometimes dangerous, we came, at 7.37, to the long crevasse, where we breakfasted. The glacier below the crevasse was sprinkled freely with boulders, large and small. The ice-slope is exposed to the fall of stones, and also of great icicles from the cliffs of the northern peak. We found it all bare, roughened and pitted with previous meltings, and every stroke of the axe cut into real ice. It was much wasted, so that in places large smooth polished sheets of sloping rock were exposed. Altogether it was more formidable in appearance than any ice-wall I had seen, and Almer said the same. No doubt, earlier in the season, before the mountain has been cleared by frequent avalanches, this slope is very unsafe.

At 8.5 we found a way over the crevasse, and Almer cut our way slowly until, after an hour and a half, we had turned a sheet of smooth rock, and were able to approach the ice-fall. Its icicles seemed so small by comparison with the giant ones on the

wall of the north peak, that we did not fear them; but, to be more secure, I proposed that we should go on the ice-fall at an easy place. Almer agreed that it would be safer and better, but was afraid that we might be stopped by a crevasse. Unfortunately, I had persuaded myself that the crevasse could be turned by the rocks of the south peak, and so we went upon the ice-fall, and Almer had at first easier step-cutting in hard snow; then followed ice, and last, a short bit of soft snow. Finally, we found the crevasse could not be turned. I knew there was no chance now for that day, but wished to reach the top of the ice-fall in order to gain a clear view of the neck. Descending the soft snow, Almer had step-cutting again to a point where we could go down to the slope, which was ice, as below, except the last part, where it was lying in steep ribs with alternate channels. Here we were startled by the crash of an icicle from the north peak shivering upon the slope, as if all the windows in Regent Street had fallen on to the pavement. It was not too near, but near enough to make me appreciate Almer's remark: 'If that had struck us it would have hurt us very much.' Soon afterwards we were within a few feet of the base of the north peak, and at about 1.45 had gained the foot of the last snow-slope below the gap. Some stones whizzed from the north peak at the same time, so high that they could not have struck the ice-slope until near the long crevasse.

The lower part of the gap, where the slope is gentle, was soft snow, but above all was glittering ice with, just below the neck, some ribs of rock. We could climb, we saw, on to the north peak from the neck, but reckoned that with the best luck we could not expect to reach the top before dark, and passing the night there was more than we were prepared to endure.

We contented ourselves, perforce, with lunching and looking about us. The view was magnificent and startling. All the great central peaks served as a white background to the forests of Suanetia, the autumn colours of which were like fire in the sunlight.

On returning to the tent I found that Roth had gone down to Betsho. As Almer was very anxious and vaguely afraid that

Roth's illness might be something worse than rheumatism, I sent him down next day to say that I would start at once for Batum if Roth wished it and was able to travel; but that if he had nothing worse than rheumatism the best thing for him was to stay at Betsho, where he could be warm before a good fire within stone walls, whilst Almer and I again tried Ushba. I felt bound to make the offer to start at once, for although Kosta was very kind and attentive, it was no joke for Roth to be ill amongst strangers; but I prayed heartily that he might not accept it. I had a hard struggle for my dinner that evening; heavy rain was falling and a strong wind blowing, so that after much ado to light the fire there was worse trouble to keep it lit. In the night, waking and sitting up, my face touched something clammy, and I found the front of the tent had fallen in, the wet having put an extra strain on the stay-rope. On going out to set things right, I met the rain coming down in torrents, but its violence was reassuring, as it showed that snow must be falling above in such quantities that some must stick on the ice-slopes.

Next day Almer came back with the good news that Roth would stay at Betsho as the best place for him. Rain fell most of that day and up to eight of the following morning, when the sun shone out warm and welcome, and a fine day following we resolved to try again.

Almer and I left the tent at 3.8 A.M. on the 28th with small hope of success, for the sky looked anything but favourable, long filaments of cloud being drawn across it, and the only good sign was that the clouds never came low enough to quite touch the Laila range. The first step in snow told us that we were in for a heavy grind, but encouraged us to hope for good foothold. We toiled up the lower slope of rock and snow in the direction of Gulba, and then, passing under the rock-wall, came upon an immense mass of avalanche-snow, the upper part of the fresh snow lately fallen upon the ice-slope. We were now sure of a fine day, and took cheerfully the toil of walking on the avalanche, one moment standing on a frozen block and the next sinking up to our knees. We found the long crevasse choked up by the

avalanche, and passed it without halt at 8.3, having breakfasted below. We were satisfied from our former experience that little was to be feared from the icicles pendent from the ice-fall, and agreed that our best way was to keep close to the latter, so that if stones or icicles fell from the north peak we should have a chance of protection under the wall of the ice-fall.[1] Save for a few steps just above the crevasse and the clearing out of some of the old steps on the ribs of hard snow near the north peak there no was need for step-cutting, the avalanche having left plenty of snow well fastened on the ice-slope and covered up the sheets of smooth rock. Much encouraged by the shorter time we took to pass remembered points, we reached the top of the ice-fall at 10.5, having ascended the slope in little more than a third of the time we had taken when nearly everything was ice. We halted here forty minutes.

The following two hours and twenty-five minutes up to the neck were intensely fatiguing. I could have sworn in the ascent that the snow grew deeper as we ascended, but when descending the slight pain from the pressure against the knee-cap of the then frozen rim of the steps showed the depth to be up to the knees, and uniform nearly all the way. We laboured on almost unremittingly up the increasingly steep slope, turning near the neck to our left to reach a rib of rock, and then by a few steps in the ice on the rock, or by the rock, came at last to the saddle, the snow edge of which Almer broke through at 1.10, greatly to my pleasure, for there was to be a change in the character of our labour. We were near to the south peak, and both looked at its ridge rising from the neck; then Almer said that he was not going on that, and we at once turned to our right for the north peak. The south peak ridge rose steeply, straight as an arrow, and was coated over with hard snow and in places ice, the general evenness of the coating seeming to indicate that there were few

[1] The party of 1893 found, in confirmation of Mr. Woolley's experience of 1889, that it is safest to ascend the slope below the north peak in a line much more to the right and running up nearly to the outermost edge of the rocks of the north peak. The ice and snow in the Caucasus change much, far more than in the Alps, and Ushba is often very dangerous.—J. H. C.

breaks in the ridge. As we found it, I was no more minded to try it than Almer; but we were both inclined to think that when clear of snow and ice it can be climbed.

In order to reach the north peak Almer crossed the crest to its west side, where he had to clear away the snow and cut steps in the ice beneath it. While waiting in the steps on the east side I looked over and saw Elbruz half in mist, and nearer us, a fine snow-mountain, which I supposed to be Dongusorun. The rocks of the two peaks narrowed the view. On the east side there was a fine view of the mountains of the Central Group and of the valley and forest-clad slopes beyond Mestia. The woods were glowing red in the sun, and with their snow background were very beautiful. Over all was that look of peace peculiar to the great mountains, heightened, no doubt, in my case, by contrast with the personal sense of strain and effort. The west side of the neck was not at all a place to take views from; it was an ice-slope, broken with jags of rock, steeper than anything but the last bit on the other side. We crawled under a jutting crag so low that, although Almer wriggled through easily, it was a tight fit for me, and would have been a stout man's misery; then came more step-cutting, and at length we reached the rocks of the north peak after having taken about an hour to traverse the ridge.

We ascended, keeping below the rock-ridge leading up to the north peak, and at first had some delightfully easy walking. Then we came to a place which Almer said might do, if there was not a better. We tried first a spot I had marked as offering a way to the ridge; but Almer, after climbing up a few feet, reported smooth rocks, which, as we were no longer fresh, we had better not try. Returning, therefore, to Almer's route we found a rock-traverse with a nearly perpendicular fall below, the foothold being a narrow ledge, but good, except at one point, where it failed, necessitating a short leap just where the handhold was next to nothing. On the ascent we crossed without trouble. We soon came to an easy side-ridge, of not very sound rocks, leading up to the main ridge at a point a few yards below the top.

These few yards were snow, and the actual top was a snow-cornice hanging over the western side and rising not more than a couple of feet above the highest point we dared tread on. We reached the top at 3.45. We were in mist and saw little. The south peak was altogether invisible, and all that we saw to the north was an occasional glimpse of a snow-ridge, curving slightly as it fell to the north-west. All the upper part of this ridge was an easy walk; below it swelled out into a huge tower-like form, which rose from the glacier on the side we saw in ice-coated cliffs that looked impracticable.

We went down to the junction of the side ridge with the main one, and sitting down, tired but happy, cooked two Silver soup-tins, and opened for Almer's special delectation our last sardine-box, which he had reserved for Ushba and twice regretfully carried back unopened. We stayed till 4.22, the mist lasting all the time. Then, having put up a stone-man and deposited in it the sardine-box holding my card with our two names, we began the descent.

A stone which fell without any excuse came with a heavy jerk on the rope between us, and held it down until Almer could descend and release it. We came soon after to the rock-traverse. As the ledge sloped slightly downwards the bad step was a little longer, and it had also to be taken with the worse leg foremost. Not quite easily I worked myself into a position where I was sure of the step, and passed over. Almer then came, more neatly, but also with care. Probably the difficulty we found here was owing more to our being wearied by the steep slough of snow below than to the nature of the passage itself. We quickly came to the neck, and went as fast as we could down the soft snow in the gap, but were caught by darkness on the ice-slopes. This did not matter much, for though the snow was now freezing, it was still soft enough to take the foot with the heel driven in, and we got along famously until we came to just above the long crevasse, where a dozen or so of steps had been cut in the morning. Here we turned our faces to the slope, and partly by the steps, partly by anchoring with the axe and stubbing in

the toes, had descended the worst bit, when, as I was vigorously kicking away, I became aware that my right boot was coming off. When on the neck I had noticed that the lace had been cut and had worked itself loose, but as I was anxious to go as low down as possible before dark, and my frost-bitten fingers made me very slow in tying anything, I neglected to fasten the lace. The boot could not be attended to when I had my face to the hard slope, and finally, not driving the toe in, I slipped a foot before I could stop myself, the boot dragged off and fell away into the darkness. I groaned at my folly in not fastening the lace, but when Almer too began to blame himself for not having noticed that it was loose, I was forced to laugh at the notion of a boot that two men could not keep on. Then he came below me, and cutting a few steps, we reached softer snow again, where, cutting me a seat and holes for my feet, he unroped and went to look for the boot, crossing the crevasse, which turned out to be a very few feet below, and lighting his lantern. At first I felt very vexed, till it came into my mind that at any rate the climb was not bootless! Soothed by a chuckle over this comforting pun, I patiently waited. All was very quiet, the stillness broken only by the faint crunch of Almer's feet in the snow, and now and then by the fall of some small fragment of icicle from the wall of the ice-fall, making me look sharply round lest worse should follow. Some thousands of feet below on the opposite slope a couple of fires were lit, and a torch brandished, as if some woodman had caught sight of Almer's lantern and was signalling. After a time I called Almer back, who reported that as the boot would not have much way on before reaching the crevasse, it had probably fallen into the big hole not filled up by the avalanche at the corner of the ice-fall. I crossed the crevasse, and the good fellow then took off his leggings and fastened them round my foot. The deep foot-holes made in the soft snow of the morning enabled me to walk without slipping, and we travelled nearly as fast as if I had both boots on, until we reached the grass. Most of the stones here were as flat as I now felt myself, but a few woke me up sharply. We reached the tent at 11.20 P.M.

It will be seen from what I have said that Ushba, as we found it, was in the main a snow grind, fatiguing and requiring steadiness, and, I fancy, not free from danger; but on our successful ascent not difficult. On our second attempt the amount of step-cutting was in excess of anything I have known in the Alps, at least five hours'; and three hours' more cutting would have been needed to reach the neck. I have been asked if there are any rock-climbs in the Caucasus. Well, it is true that up to the present Mr. Mummery's way up Dykhtau is the only ascent effected that is all rock; but there are many others to be found. It seems to me that our natural instinct is to attempt first the highest or most conspicuous peaks, just as men did in the Alps, whether they are snow- or rock-climbs. The snow-climbs in the Caucasus are greater than those in the Alps; and there is plenty of call for the best ice-craft: they have, too, rock bits on some of them equal to any like lengths on the ordinary ways up any of the Zermatt peaks. Mishirgitau is a rock-peak, and though dwarfed by Dykhtau, is over 16,400 feet. Tiktengen is a rock-peak of over 15,000 feet. Several of the rock-peaks on the north side of the Bezingi Glacier must approach 14,000 feet, and there is one nearly level with Salynan Bashi. I saw many other rock-peaks—easy or difficult has to be found out. Whoever climbs the south peak of Ushba will not be dissatisfied with his prize. Caucasian rocks are much more freely coated with snow and ice than Alpine.

As to the natives, my impression is that travelling in the Caucasus is safe to any man who pays his way and treats the people civilly, but that it is only safe because of Russian rule. Petty pilfering is to be looked for from the Bezingi men. In a dispute between two parties of Suanetians at Kala there was a show of drawing knives, and a gun, most likely empty, was aimed, but the only violence was the shying of a stone that grazed a man's shin. Thereupon the two parties abused each other freely, and after a time retired, each side bursting into laughter as if it had done a clever thing.

The autumn colours of the Suanetian forests are the most

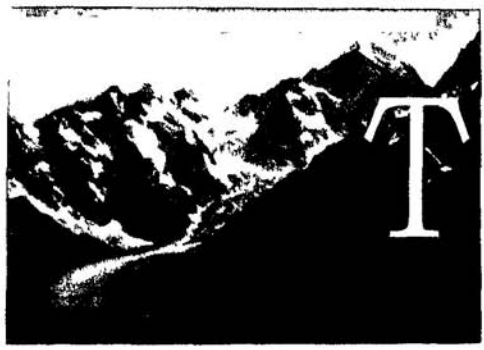
wonderful I ever saw, and I have been in Pennsylvania in October and November. The birch is plentiful and very beautiful; its leaves glitter in September like a shower of golden sparks, and at my entry into Betsho furnished the main colour. But during the week I was camped under Ushba red became the prevailing hue, chiefly from the mountain ash and wild cherry. Single trees of red foliage were not nearly so beautiful as the birch, but the massed effect of the red in the sunshine was wonderful, especially at sunset, and it set off the snows more strikingly.

The Skenis Skali Valley between Cholur and Lentekhi, the most beautiful combination of rock, wood, and water that could be dreamed of, is in danger of being despoiled of its trees, several clearings having been made by fire. When I passed last, great beeches were lying still smouldering, charred and black, an ugly sight.

CHAPTER XVI

SEARCH AND TRAVEL IN 1889

> And first the Vale of Search, an endless maze
> Branching into innumerable ways,
> All courting entrance, but one right, and this
> Beset with pitfall, gulf, and precipice
> The only word is 'Forward!'
>
> FITZGERALD



THE result of the summer's work of 1888, as known in England by the middle of September of that year, was that the great peaks of the Central Group had been climbed, with one exception. That exception was the keen snow-crest, lifted high against the sky on a broad rock-pedestal, which is seen foremost of the Central Group by travellers on the railway between the Caucasian Baths and Vladikavkaz. It is now named Koshtantau and given 16,880 feet, but all official and general maps previous to 1889 had referred to it as Dykhtau, and assigned it a height of 16,923 feet.

Mr. Clinton Dent had been obliged by temporary ill-health to return to England, but his companions, Donkin and Fox, with two Oberland guides, were still in the Caucasus, and known to be bent on attempting the ascent of this noble peak. One day, at the end of the month, Dent brought me in London a telegram from Naltshik, to the effect that Rieger, the German serving as dragoman to the mountaineers, had come down from Balkar to

report that he had not heard or seen anything of his employers for three weeks. The inference that a fatal accident had happened was only too clear to both of us.

The first question to arise was, 'Should we go out at once?' It was decided reluctantly that so late in the year it would be useless, since, by the middle of October, the region where search would, in all probability, have to be made, would be closed for such a purpose. What could be done below the snow-line, moreover, was being done by the Russian officials and an Englishman, Mr. Phillipps-Wolley, who knew the country and the officials well, and had generously given up his own sporting-tour in order to lend what help he could in the search.

Native evidence showed that the two mountaineers, with their Swiss guides, Kaspar Streich and Johann Fischer of Meiringen, had, in the last days of August, started from a camp at the head of a side-glen of the Bezingi Valley, known as Dumala, to ascend the Ulluauz Glacier, which falls from the northern slopes of Koshtantau. Fox had written thence to their interpreter Rieger, who with the luggage had been sent to Balkar, to expect them in two or three days at Karaul, a pasturage at the head of the Cherek Valley, south-east of Koshtantau, in a position, relatively to the mountains, which may be shortly explained to those familiar with the Pennine Alps by comparing it to Mattmark in the Saas Valley—Koshtantau taking the place of the Dom, Balkar of Saas, the Bezingi Valley answering to that of St. Niklaus, and Dumala to the glen leading to the Täsch Alp.

The autumn search, though carried out with all the energy and perseverance possible for men who were themselves without mountaineering knowledge, and had none but native hunters to help them, was unsuccessful. A further search, made, in consequence of a personal order of the Tsar, by a levy of the native population, was equally fruitless. The snows fell—had fallen, indeed, before the first search could be undertaken—and the climbers' fate remained involved in doubt and obscurity, at least in the public mind. Dent and I knew that our friends had died on the mountains—we felt it to be so certain that it was recorded

as a fact on a memorial brass in Eton College Chapel. But in face of the theories prevalent in the Caucasus, and adopted by men in authority, and with presumably the best means of judging of the state of the country, others could not reasonably be called on to share our conviction. Conjecture was accordingly rife, and it took a particularly painful form. Russians do not understand the use of the rope in climbing. The simultaneous loss of four men by an accident seemed therefore improbable to the minds of the Caucasian officials. The hypothesis of violence was consequently resorted to, and the people of the mountains were held, in high quarters, to be under very grave suspicion, and to be amenable to retributive measures. Less responsible critics, who did not accurately appreciate the local orography, at first suggested that the travellers had crossed into Suanetia, and been there waylaid and murdered. We gave no credence whatever to these suggestions. But even for us, who, from better acquaintance with the country and its people, were able to dismiss such crude imaginings, there were many matters of sad interest left open. How, or where, within several square miles, our countrymen had died; whether after or before climbing the great peak; whether on its cliffs, or among the ice-falls that cloak, or under the avalanches that sweep its sides; what relics of their last bivouac might be recovered; how far the snows had given them a natural burial—these were all questions which seemed to call for answer.

The obvious leaders of a search party were Mr. Clinton Dent, who had been with the lost mountaineers until forced by health to leave them, and myself. Myself, first, for old friendship's sake; next because I knew, as no one else in England or in Russia knew, the high mountains about the scene of the accident; and finally because I was able, by the assistance of the Council of the Royal Geographical Society, to obtain leave for an old friend of Mr. Fox's, Captain C. H. Powell, of the Indian Army, an excellent Russian scholar, to place his services as interpreter at the disposal of the search party. We owed very much to Captain Powell for the great ability and patience which he showed in all the needful communications with Russian officials and village notables, and his

knowledge of Russian added in many respects to the interest and pleasure of the journey.

Mr. Hermann Woolley, our other companion, had been one of the explorers and photographers of the Caucasian Mountains in 1888. Indeed, he and his friends on the day of the accident were within six miles—as the eagle flies—of the fatal spot. Yet so separated were they by icy ridges—the fact is significant of the character of the chain—that they heard nothing of what had happened until after their return to England. He brought with him two guides from the Bernese Oberland. Dent and I had with us Kaspar Maurer, of Meiringen, who had travelled in the Himalaya, and a young brother of Fischer, one of the lost guides—by profession a schoolmaster—who joined us as a volunteer.

The material we had to direct us in the search may be concisely set out as follows. Before the party left England I had verbally, and also in writing, given suggestions to Fox for exploring the range of Koshtantau. I had recommended an attack on the northern ridge of the mountain from a side glen of the Bezingi Valley, known as Dumala. This was made, but, owing to uncertain weather and a late start, the party only reached the western base of the mountain. I had also pointed out that, failing success in that direction, a very interesting and beautiful pass could certainly be forced over the eastern ridge, and that from the glacier south of this spur, flowing towards the Cherek, Koshtantau might be again examined, adding, 'any attempt on this side, however, will be a serious undertaking.' Mr. Woolley has since justified my suggestion by successfully climbing, and that without meeting with any extraordinary difficulty, the peak by the route thus indicated, which Moore and I had first examined twenty years before.

Fox's instructions, written from the camp in Dumala from which the climbers sent back their tent, to his German servant and interpreter, Rieger, to meet him at Karaul, in three days, showed that they had my suggestions in mind; while the very singular prospective entry made in the diary Fox left behind with the tent gave us full insight into the details of their plans,

I print here the record of the last three days written up in this diary. It seems to me to give in the simplest form a very true picture of the character of mountaineering in the Caucasus.

'*Sunday, August 26th.*—Up 5.30 A.M. Fine morning, but windy and cold, and not promising for the night. Determined to start for high bivouac. Spent long time cooking meat for two days. Rhododendron wood for fire. Heavy loads. Streich has no faith in cooking soups. Determined to take up two fagots of wood. Left tent 9.45. Went up moraine on left bank of glacier to foot of ice-fall. Very long moraine. Halt for photograph. Charming *gîtes* by stream between moraine and mountain. Little streams with grassy dells. No wood though. Lovely camping-ground at foot of ice-fall. Large cave at top of ice-fall used by bouquetin. Saw two come out of it on our return. Flowers on moraine very beautiful, especially asters, small dark blue gentians, and London pride. Saw two or three kinds of Gnaphalia, but no Edelweiss. Halt on moraine for two photos. 10.40 to 11.5. Halt, grass valley at end of moraine, 11.40 to 11.55. From there we topped the ice-fall by grass banks and moraine on left bank. We halted under cavern for lunch from 1.35 to 2.25 P.M., and then pushed on to upper *névé*, always on the left bank. Snow came on thick, with thunder and lightning. Looked out for shelter. Found at last a *Schrund*; rock on one side, snow and icicles the other; got out of storm. Guides lit fire outside under rock and cooked soup. Very cold and damp; our hopes of ascending Koshtantau from this side had been dissipated. The obvious way up was raked with overhanging *séracs*, from which there was no escape.[1] Two ways only presented themselves: (1) to mount high snow-pass east of mountain, and ascend from the other side of what seemed all snow; (2) to climb col west of mountain, and get on to north route from there.[2] We chose the latter, as the east

[1] This obviously refers to the short north-eastern buttress which projects between the northern and eastern ridges, and divides the two upper bays of the Ullauz Glacier.

[2] These are the passes now known respectively as (1) the Ullauz Pass, (2) the Mishirgi Pass. The second pass is in fact north, not west of the peak.

col was a very long business. Fischer searched for sleeping-place and found a cleft—the rocks sloped upwards. A poor hole, but affording shelter from snow and wind somewhat. The top was so narrow that one could only just squeeze oneself inside; below it widened out a little. The angle was about 30°. We managed to rake down about a ton of rock and loose stones, with which the crack was filled, and made a sort of platform at the base, where Streich and Donkin lay. I hollowed out a seat above and made a footstool of my ice-axe below. We curled ourselves in our sleeping-bags, and tried to be thankful for shelter. Everything was wet and clammy, and a slow drip came over my knees. Position had to be changed every ten minutes, each change sending down a handful of pebbles on Donkin's head. The wind was boisterous. Gusts of snow pattered in, and whistled on the sleeping-bags. I was just dozing off, when I was awakened by a handful of stones from above, which clattered about my ears, followed by a large rock which I had thought secure. It came bang on my head, and made me see a thousand stars, so that for a moment the hole seemed full of light. In endeavouring to move it on one side I shifted the ice-axe, and sent a wheelbarrow of stones down on poor Donkin's head. His patience and endurance can only be likened to that of Job. I had to get down and share the platform. Fischer was already ensconced in another crack outside, so that room was found. The guides were pretty wretched, and had long abandoned all hopes of a mend in the weather. I reminded them of previous experiences, but gloomy thoughts prevailed. The stones were

ULLUAUZ BASHI FROM THE ULLUAUZ GLACIER

hard to lie on, but by this time we were fairly accustomed to hard beds.

'*Monday, 27th.*—Drowsiness came over us all in the morning. I was first to wake and see blue sky. Got Streich up. Alas! it was very late, 5.45 A.M., and the morning perfect. We got down, cooked chocolate, ate it in silence, and started off at 6.15 (three hours too late). Twenty minutes took us across the snow-field to foot of col, and we arrived at top of it at 8.20. A lot of fresh snow had fallen, making step-cutting difficult. It is a steep little pass. We mounted by rocks on right. At the top a beautiful view greeted us. We had made a new pass from Dumala Glacier to Mishirgi Glacier. At our feet was the latter; at its head the high buttress of rock leading to snow and rock north *arête* of Koshtantau. Beyond this a pass leading from head of Mishirgi Glacier to foot of Shkara. Beyond this the splendid precipices of Dykhtau. Shkara itself was well seen over the gap between Koshtantau and Dykhtau.[1] These latter practically met at this col, though there seemed to be a fine rock-peak on ridge west of Koshtantau before it descended to col. The *arête*, which we hoped to gain easily, was cut off by the buttress of rock which led to the corniced col we had seen from the Ulluauz Glacier. The final *arête* would go anywhere, but would prove a long business. The obvious way was to climb the rock buttress, which I was sure would go. It was certainly plastered with fresh snow, but nowhere very difficult. Streich's plan was to descend some 200 or 300 feet on to the Mishirgi Glacier, and mount thence to the *arête* by a long rock-rib. He stuck to his opinion, and we had to give in. Had breakfast hurriedly, but unfortunately did not take a photograph, and so missed a splendid and most valuable view, for when we returned it was lost in cloud. We left the col at 9.10. The descent took a long time, and there was much step-cutting. We then tried the rib, and found the rocks, as we had expected, quite smooth. We cut up between them and forced our way up

[1] Probably the gap between Mishirgitau and Khrumkoltau. See S. Sella's photograph, p. 105. This is not the Khrumkol Gap, which is farther east.

slowly, the fresh snow making everything most difficult, but at 11.40 had made little progress; and as it was obvious we had not time to make our peak that day (the *arête* alone would take at least four hours), and as clouds were gathering, we reluctantly ordered a return. The col was reached at 1.15 P.M., and then we finished our stock of provisions, built a cairn, and took a third photo. Our *gîte* of the previous night was reached at 4.5, the descent being somewhat troublesome with the snow softened by the day's sun. Packed up and off at 4.30. I got in with Fischer at 6.25, and got a pot of tea ready. Donkin's foot hurt him and he followed slowly. A hot and strong soup, made by that excellent Streich, and we turned in.

'*Tuesday, 28th.* A beautiful night. All slept like tops. At 4, heavy rain woke us up as it pattered on the tent, but we dozed off again. At 5.30 I woke up and read *Midsummer Night's Dream* till about 7.30, when the sun came out. We had a glorious tub in our little stream, and hung all our things out to dry, for we had descended last night in a thick wetting rain. The man was sent off for milk and cheese. Our Bezingi host's son, who had spent the night up here, entered into a long conversation with me about our plans, and I hope understood them thoroughly. *Weather permitting we hope to start again to-morrow very early, and take three or four days' provisions. Make the Dumala-Dykhsu pass*[1] *the first day, and camp near its head. Climb Koshtantau, if possible from the south side, the next, and descend to the Dykhsu Glacier. Thence to Karaul.* The man meanwhile to go round to Balkar with a note to Rieger to send him up to Karaul.[2] It depends on weather; at present it is fine, but, as usual, clouds are rolling up, and I fear we shall have rain before night. Guides are busying themselves nailing boots, drying clothes, cooking meat, etc. Donkin is practising with a revolver at imaginary enemies (11.30). The day has passed very peacefully. The man has gone for milk and cheese with a rouble

[1] Fox knew no separate name for the Tiutiun Glacier, and treated it as a part of the Dykhsu. An exact knowledge of the south and east sides of Koshtantau was only obtained in 1889.

[2] See *Alpine Journal*, vol. xiv. pp. 100 and 102.

note (much too high pay, but we do not want to be stinted). I have written up my notes. Donkin has worked out boiling-point observations.[1] We have read much Shakespeare. Gathered wood for to-morrow. Streich and I have had a good bake of bread. He would not believe in baking-powder until he saw its effects. The best bread we have eaten since leaving Batum. Feasted largely of it. Weather looks bad. Clouds down on to glacier (3 P.M.), will soon be over our camp. Hope for best. There is no understanding "Caucasian meteorology."'[2]

Thus the diary ends. It has been suggested that the party spent the next day in camp,[3] but the suggestion rests entirely on a statement of the native mentioned in the diary, transmitted through Russian channels. As that statement is shown by the diary to be wrong as to the day and time of the climbers' return, it can hardly be regarded as of much weight as to their departure. It is unlikely, if the weather was fair, that they would have rested another day in camp; and we know from Mr. Holder that the storm-clouds passed away, and that the next two days were fine, except that on the afternoon of the 29th mists interfered with any examination of the higher ridges—a fact of some significance in considering the climbers' subsequent movements.

As to the position of the 'Dumala-Dykhsu pass,' which the climbers meant to cross, no reasonable doubt can exist in any mountaineer's mind. I had myself pointed it out to Fox, and marked it in my photographs, tracings from which were found at the bivouac. It is visible from the meadow at the foot of the Ulluauz Glacier, where their camp was pitched. [See Initial Letter.] There is no other gap which could possibly answer, among mountain-climbers at least, to Fox's description, 'the high snow-pass east of Koshtantau.'

---

[1] Preserved in Donkin's notebook. Bashil Pass, 13,030 feet; bivouac opposite Koshtantau, 12,209 feet; Mishirgi Pass, 13,600 feet. This is the last entry.

[2] I have printed the Diary verbatim except for the transposition of the names Dykhtau and Koshtantau.

[3] *Alpine Journal*, vol. xiv. p. 102. The native is made to say that the party returned at 10 A.M. on the 28th, whereas the Diary fixes the day and hour as 6.25 P.M. on the 27th.

The results of the search made by the Surveyor, M. Jukoff, and Mr. Phillipps-Wolley, so far as they went, confirmed the inferences we drew from this documentary evidence. The searchers found tracks in the loose ground on the left bank of the Ulluauz Glacier. Its upper snowfields and ridges they were unable to reach.

There was only one piece of evidence which it was hard to make fit in with the rest. The Starshina (headman) of Bezingi had reported to the Government that his hunters had found the travellers' foot-marks on the snow, and traced them over a pass leading out of his district into that of Balkar, and this statement had been embodied in a report published in the Vladikavkaz newspaper. What the assertion was worth, and to what motives it may fairly be attributed, will, I think, be clearly shown hereafter.

It followed, to the best of our judgment, that we ought to look for traces of the lost party at the head of an unknown glacier, now called the Tiutiun, the torrent from which joins the Cherek, or Balkar, river. There, if they carried out their plans, they would probably have bivouacked on the night after they left their tent at Dumala.

The base chosen for our search was therefore Karaul, the pasturage at the head of the Cherek Valley, four hours above the villages of Balkar, and two long days' ride from Naltshik, where a bridge over the great tributary of the Cherek, the Dykhsu (here some two miles from its parent ice) gave, in the old days, a convenient opportunity to set a guard against cattle-lifters from the south side of the chain. This guard is now represented by one or two amiable old Tartars, who live in a stone hut, the only permanent habitation within many miles, and are happy to provide milk to parties temporarily residing in their neighbourhood.

Karaul (5560 feet) was in 1889 our home for nearly a week, and Mr. Woolley's for a much longer time. It was from this base that, after the work of the search-party was concluded, he made his brilliant ascents of Ailama and Koshtantau, and explored the upper basin of the Dykhsu Glacier. Karaul lies, as it were, at the Caucasian cross-roads, where the ancient and much-frequented track

from Gebi to the north and the summer path from the Urukh to Balkar meet the High-level Route of the future, of which this will be the starting-point and Urusbieh the terminus.

The great pass which leads hence to the Bezingi Glacier between Shkara and Mishirgitau is without serious difficulty for mountaineers, but it traverses an avenue of snowy peaks unrivalled either in the Alps or Caucasus. Nor is there any lack of easier expeditions and walks suited for travellers who are content to explore where there is no need to climb in the strict sense of the word. They

GIULCHI

have only to study the map and Signor Sella's panorama to discover the available points which are destined to be the Gornergrat and Mettelhörner of the district.

Our camp was pitched on a grassy terrace at the mouth of a wild gorge. Grey granite screes scantily clothed with azalea bushes and birches, and green flowery grass, sloped down on all sides with extreme steepness, enclosing in their midst a flat open meadow, a mile perhaps in length by half a mile in breadth. Our tents were erected on the little triangle of land above the junction of the two roaring torrents, the Cherek and Dykhsu, side by side with those of M. Bogdanoff, of the Russian Survey—six in all.

Three vistas opened in the mountain circle. First, south-west of

us, up a granite gorge, the mouth of which was not 100 yards off. Its upper crags bend forward in great beaks and noses, and a snow-peak shines high above them. This is the gorge of the Dykhsu, and it leads directly to the great glacier which flows from the northern and eastern slopes of Shkara (17,038 feet) and Ailama (14,854 feet). To the east rises the splendid peak Giulchi (14,678 feet), the corner-stone of the granitic range north of the Urukh—

MINGRELIAN HAYCUTTERS ON THE MARCH

one of the many ridges that confute the old belief that the Caucasus is a narrow single range. To the north, the deep defile of the Cherek leads down to Balkar, and at its angle a white patch of boulders shows where the Tiutiunsu rolls down the pale granites of Koshtantau. For us it indicated the entrance to the Valley of Search.

In front of our little camp passed from time to time, in single file, large parties of natives, Mingrelians of the south side,

who had come across to mow the hay-harvest on the northern steppe, and were now returning home over the old glacier pass, still called the Pasis Mta, a Caucasian St. Théodule, which leads down to Gebi, at the source of the ancient Phasis. Picturesque processions they made as the men, clad in parti-coloured shirts and head-pieces made up of *bashliks* of every colour, tied into all possible shapes, marched by in single file with their scythes over their shoulders, at a quick swinging step, like that of Italian Bersaglieri. Presently a party of Tartars from Balkar would arrive on horseback, men of a sturdier build, headed by a quaint fussy little Mollah in a white turban, who made us the most polite Oriental speeches, and presented us with a tender lamb or half of an exceedingly tough mountain goat. Then a moving mass of brushwood, a Caucasian Birnam Wood, would advance towards us, exhibiting on near approach twinkling feet and ears, and resolving itself finally into a party of donkeys carrying down fuel for the lower villages. Next a Cossack from Naltshik might be seen riding up the river bank, bringing, in the folds of his brown coat, our letters—forwarded by the courtesy of Colonel Viruboff, the Nachalnik—and perhaps, tied behind his saddle, some large black Russian loaves, a welcome change from the thin native cakes, which had disagreed most disastrously with our Swiss followers. One night at dusk our Ossete horseman, Alexander (whom we had just paid, and sent home, as we thought), appeared at the tent-door, wringing his hands and bewailing the loss of his horses. Powell was prepared to write one of his admirable despatches to the Balkarian Starshina to denounce the larceny. But we waited; and, just when it became convenient for him to do so, Alexander found his horses, which, I believe, he had hidden away in order to enjoy a few days more in our camp, where he was treated—or rather treated himself—as an honoured guest.

After a day's rest we were ready for our work; all but Kaufmann, one of Woolley's guides, who was ill and incapable of any exertion.[1] Dent did not like to leave the sick man until his

[1] Of the travellers and guides in the Caucasus in 1888 two travellers and three guides

symptoms were more determined. He remained therefore in camp, while Woolley with two guides undertook to reconnoitre the entrance to the Tiutiun valley; for M. Bogdanoff, the Surveyor, had not then heard of any path or access to it. I, who knew most of the mountains, and was therefore likely to be best able to piece in any new additions to our knowledge, undertook to climb, with Captain Powell and the schoolmaster Fischer, as high

THE MILKMAN, KARAUL

as time and weather allowed on the spur east of the Cherek valley that forms part of the sky-line of the basin of Karaul.

We made a late start. The slopes faced south and were exceptionally steep and monotonous. The sun beat full on us, the mountain-tops were for the most part veiled in white clouds; but the freshness of the breeze that played beneath the sunshine invigorated us to persevere, and gave some hope that perseverance might be rewarded. At last the tedious slope was broken by a rocky spur crowned by one of M. Bogdanoff's stone-men. The keen upright ridges of the great peaks began to pierce the shining

(including Signor Sella's guide, Maquignaz) suffered severely with dysenteric symptoms, while Fischer temporarily lost the sight of one eye, apparently from after-results of snow-blindness on a constitution weakened by exposure.

billows of cloud. The 'silver spearhead' set so high against the heaven opposite us I knew well—it was Koshtantau itself.

Captain Powell sat down to sketch. The hillside had become steeper and wilder; we could climb instead of trudge. Disregarding the cries of a Tartar shepherd who was feeding his flock on the highest herbage, Fischer and I moved rapidly, incited by the keen air of 10,000 feet. We gained a rocky crest overlooking the defile of the Cherek and the entrance to the Tiutiun valley. We followed it to the highest of a family of M. Bogdanoff's stone-men, on an eminence of about 11,500 feet, or 6000 feet above our camp. The clouds were by this time parting and sinking below the circle of peaks; the whole course of the Dykhsu Glacier was in view. Its moraines flowed towards us in beautiful curving lines from the base of the great chain. The Agashtan Glacier poured in a broad gentle stream from the watershed between us and the Skenis Skali, spreading out its lower skirts among green alps and wooded knolls, and draping the cliffs above the Cherek with an icy fringe. Ailama was conspicuous on the left by its white Capuchin's hood. Shkara—that majestic mountain—shot up in a vast white wedge against the upper blue. Beyond it the mists were melting from Janga and Gestola. But the peak that first caught and last held our gaze was Koshtantau. It was the nearest and also the most remarkable in form. It shows on this side a broad white crest, the lines of which meet in a fine point. Its pure upper snows soar from a broad pedestal of ridges of light-coloured granite, mountains themselves 15,000 feet in height. My companion looked with brimming eyes on the scene of his brother's death, exclaiming as he looked, 'What a mountain! I am glad they rest on so noble a peak.'

From the peak itself a splintered crest descends towards the Cherek, bending northwards as it trends away from the summit. This, the Kashtan crest of Russian maps, separates the Ulluauz and Tiutiun valleys. The gap by which we believed the climbers to have crossed was in view, defended on this side by precipitous, but not inaccessible, crags. At their base lay a long snow-basin, its floor, some 12,500 feet in height, filled with the gently sloping

névé of a glacier which poured over in an ice-fall, terribly torn, and about 3000 feet in vertical height, into the Tiutiun Valley. From our viewpoint it was difficult to feel any certainty as to whether this ice-fall was passable, or how far the very steep slopes on its right bank—on its left were precipices—would prove of service. Subject to this doubt—only to be resolved on the spot—our route was clear. The lower part of the Tiutiun Valley was hidden, but we noted that it bifurcated near its entrance and that the northern glen fell from an extensive glacier plateau lying under the Kashtan crest. Still farther north, and altogether separated by miles of waste from the Tiutiun and the supposed pass, we looked on steep slopes of broken rock and snow-patches, forming the sides of the Kashtan glen, a name transformed to Koshtan by the surveyors in the case of the highest peak, to which they have lately applied it. My reconnaissance had been fully successful. I had obtained that general distant panorama of the ground about Koshtantau which was essential if we were to avoid subsequent blunders and misdirected wanderings.

It was warm on the lee side of the crest, where the fine-weather east wind did not reach us, and we sat long watching the magical effects of mist and mountain, and light and shadow, as the sun sank westwards. The atmosphere of the Caucasus has more depth, more transparency, more lucidity, than that of the Alps: like that of the Westmorland Lakes, it seems to refine the forms and soften the harshness of the mountains, while it adds to their apparent height. It must have been six o'clock before we started down by a more direct ridge; and I never was in greater danger of a tumble than for the first twenty minutes. It was impossible not to have one's eyes fixed constantly on the upper air, watching glory-coated mists as they whirled up suddenly from the valley, to be caught in the swift breeze and shredded into a thousand fragments, which danced in prismatic colours before the great peaks, hid them for a moment, and then left the deep blue of heaven as pure as before.

Suddenly these visions ceased; we plunged into the cloud-roof that arched the lower world, and ran—the slopes were so steep that we could hardly stop when we had once set off running—

down to the great meadow, over 5000 feet below, in less than an hour. On our return we found that our companions had got back before us. Woolley had entered the vale of the Tiutiun, and discovered a glacier to which he had seen a way over grass-slopes so precipitous and slippery that he thought we might have to rope to pass them. This glacier proved next day to be the wrong glacier, that of the northern glen, the Ghertui; but Woolley's work had been none the less serviceable, as he had found also a fair path up the main Tiutiunsu.

All had been arranged for a very early start next day (the 28th July), and we had closed our tent-curtains, when Captain Powell was summoned down to the Surveyor's quarters, and a note addressed to me from Baron Ungern Sternberg, a geologist on the staff of the Governor of the Caucasus, was handed to him. It was dated from 'the Cherek Valley,' and was in the following terms. I abridge:—

'I have crossed to-day, with my Tyrolese guide, the pass from Ulluauz to Balkar. There is no second pass. The descent is very difficult. There are three stone-men on the crest, which, as my native guides tell me the pass is not used by their people, I believe to have been built by Fox and Donkin.'

My first impression on reading the Baron's letter was to believe that he had crossed the Ulluauz Pass. For it seemed strange (since he had with him an Alpine guide) that he should deny the possibility of any pass nearer Koshtantau than his own, unless he had crossed this notable gap. But on second thoughts such an interpretation seemed untenable. It was not credible that a mountaineer of no great experience should have got through the *séracs* I had just seen and not have particularly referred to them. Hence I argued the Baron must have crossed the chain farther north. Granted this, however, the stone-men he described remained to be accounted for. The Baron was camped not far off, the Cossack who had brought the letter said 'across the first bridge.' We hastily took this to mean the Tiutiunsu bridge. I offered to start at dawn and interview the Baron, leaving the rest of the party to catch me up.

Before sunrise I was off on horseback alone under a cloudless sky. In an hour and a quarter I had reached the roaring Tiutiunsu, and led my horse down the steep pitch beyond it. I rode on for twenty minutes, to a spot whence I could look far down the valley, but no tent was in sight. I resolved to return and wait for my companions. On their arrival, Powell and I rode on, pressing what pace we dared out of our horses on a path which in many places was little better than a broken staircase. After a long hour's ride, we saw a bridge over the Cherek, and beyond it, on a level meadow, a light silk tent.

Baron Ungern Sternberg received us with all the hospitality possible under the circumstances. He reported to us that he had crossed from the foot of the Ulluauz Glacier into the Kashtan Glen, that he was confident he had discovered Fox and Donkin's pass, and that since, though difficult, it was not a dangerous pass for such skilful climbers, he was confirmed in the belief held, he stated, by Colonel Viruboff, the Nachalnik of the Naltshik district, that our countrymen had been the victims of foul play. He reported various petty tales to the disadvantage of Rieger, their interpreter. He told a story of how a native had been found with a wound which might have been inflicted by an ice-axe. The suspected man had proved an alibi, but alibis were easily proved in the Caucasus, and the old chief of Bezingi felt convinced that murder had been committed—though, of course, after the travellers had left the particular district he was responsible for. He had averred it even with tears in his eyes.

Nothing of all this carried weight in my mind. I pointed out to the Baron that we had in Fox's Diary explicit instructions where to search; that I had myself shown Fox, as I was then showing him, by means of M. de Déchy's photographs, the position where I believed a route to lie. The Baron confidently denied the possibility of passage at the spot I indicated on the map and photographs. He had, he said, spent three days on the Ulluauz Glacier, and was certain no such pass could be made. I could only reply that the point was one for an expert's opinion, and that my experience convinced me that I was not in any risk of being mistaken.

There remained the question of the stone-men found, and the footmarks alleged to have been seen by the second search-party, the previous autumn, on the Baron's Pass. Fortunately a Bezingi native, a member of that search-party, was present. He was questioned through Powell, 'Can you say who built the stone-men?' 'No; our searchers, or surveyors, may have built them.' 'Were the footmarks found those of nailed boots like mine?' 'I cannot say; *our Starshina told us* they were the tracks of the Englishmen.' The one puzzling point in the evidence seemed now in a fair way to be cleared up. The native search-parties of the previous autumn (subsequent to M. Jukoff's) had not gone on the right track at all; they had wandered off to a hunters' pass to the Kashtan Glen, and the footsteps they saw—if they really saw any except those on the Ulluauz Glacier—were not our friends', but those of the Surveyor's party. The Starshina, having been ordered to search till he found something, had made haste to find footmarks *leading out of his district.* M. Jukoff subsequently informed us that his staff had built stone-men at the spot in question.

Captain Powell and I rode back in noontide heat up the grand defile of the Cherek. Stiff as tent-poles we dismounted from our Tartar saddles and forced our muscles into a new form of activity. For the first half-hour it was troublesome enough. Some 800 feet up the hill we found our heavily laden comrades, the sick man's place taken by a sturdy young Cossack who was carrying more than his fair share of our packs.

The stream from the Ghertui Glacier was soon left far below. A donkey-track, much used by natives collecting brushwood, zigzagged steeply up amongst beautiful birch-trees and mossy crags, which completely concealed all that lay above. Beyond a brow it went down steeply to the foaming torrent. A few hundred yards of gentle ascent beside the tumbling water, and we looked into a long level upland glen closed by a rocky barrier, hung with snow and ice, at the foot of which the snout of a large glacier pushed forward its grey lines of moraine among the bright hues of the grass and flowers. Flowers covered everything. Our path was buried in

them. Dense beds of cream rhododendron in full bloom clothed the lower slopes, the river banks were painted blue and white and yellow with blossom—gentians and forget-me-nots, daisy-like pyrethrums, primulas, and many other less familiar blooms. The ground below the glacier was so densely carpeted that walking was made very difficult by the complete concealment of the uneven surface. Over the head of the ice-fall gleamed the white crest of Koshtantau, the granite towers and two great obelisks on its eastern ridge thrown up against the crowning snows. We struck up on to the old moraine and walked along its edge. The ice had resumed its advance, and was wrinkling up the loose ground before it in all directions. The top of the moraine presently grew too narrow and broken to serve conveniently as a path, and we left it where a little plain (or slope so gentle that amongst these vast mountains it might be held a plain) spread out on our left, seamed by the water-courses from a small glacier high above. The ice-fall of the great glacier was now full in view opposite us, a superb pile of frozen ruin. The lower part was clearly impassable, and so were the rocks on its left, but on our side there was no difficulty in climbing up steep grassy crags to at least half the height of the fall. At the very base of these slopes we found two deserted Koshes or shepherds' quarters—one under the moraine, the other 500 yards off under the hillside. Each consisted of a low wall built round a pen or pound; the first was floored with manure and partially inundated by the meltings of an adjacent snowbed; the second and more eligible was a thicket of gigantic broad-leaved weeds wet with recent rains—about as convenient quarters as a rhubarb-bed in an English kitchen-garden. We laid low the weeds with our ice-axes until they were reduced to the form of a carpet; then our sleeping-bags were spread, and a fire lighted with wood 'conveyed' from the first Kosh—for we were above the tree-level. We enjoyed the fire until dark, when we got into our bags and pretended to be comfortable. In truth, the ground was lumpy, and the air began to tingle sharply enough with frost to make us bury our heads in the flannel. When I awoke the mountain outlines were black as blots upon

a heaven alive with light, and over the crooked granite teeth of the cliffs beyond the glacier the morning star was swimming up slowly on the front of the dawn. I watched it, wondering vaguely what the day would bring forth, until the pale lemon light grew stronger on the horizon and touched the tops of the eastward peaks. Then I played the odious part of an alarum. Two of the guides had found a hole in the rock only accessible by a narrow funnel. Stones had to be heaved into it in order to arouse them. Fischer had sought solitude somewhere, and was hidden (like one of Doyle's elves) among the gigantic vegetables. The Cossack, however, was within reach, and was prompt in creating a cheerful fire.

It was broad day (5 A.M.), and there was not a cloud in the sky when we set out. The first hour's climb up to the glacier was steep but easy, and there was little moraine to cross. We ascended the slippery slopes of avalanche-snow, fallen in spring from the cliffs on our left, for some distance before we plunged into the heart of the ice-fall. First we found a way through a narrow gate between frozen blocks, then we picked a path under a row of ice-cliffs among the fragments which, from time to time, had tumbled over. Hurrying past these dangerous neighbours, we mounted once more between deep trenches where the ice-axe had often to do its work. One vast, far-stretching chasm, or rather network of branching vaults, seemed to sever us effectually from the corridor under the opposite rocks, by which we hoped to turn the final line of ice-towers. But it was bridged, and this obstacle crossed, we felt certain of success in reaching the upper snowfield. We entered the trough under the further cliffs, drank some water which trickled from them, and found near at hand magnificent primulas growing solitary in the frozen waste at a height of about 12,000 feet. A little more step-cutting in hard ice, raked once or twice a season by falling *séracs*, landed us in safety on the smooth fields of *névé*. Close beside us rose a stupendous mass of blocks and towers of opaque ice, like polar icebergs, on the edge of the frozen cataract. But straight in front an even-floored, gently sloping, broad white corridor stretched

into the secret heart of the mountains—so secret that even the Surveyors had missed it entirely. On all sides pale grey granite cliffs, or the steepest ice, overhung the untrodden snows. At the head of the glacier a steep ridge, seamed by two precipitous gullies, closed the view. Only to their right (as we looked) was there any semblance of possible exit by a practicable snow-slope in this direction, and that exit led to the summit of Koshtantau. Behind us, however, easy slopes trended back to a comparatively low ridge. I recognised it as a false col leading to the Ghertui Glacier.

'Where are we going then?—up those ice-chimneys?' asked our Swiss, impressed by the scale of the virgin solitudes, distrustful of my local knowledge, and despondent as to the chances of any discovery in so vast a field of search. I could only assure my companions that to me our route was as clear as that to the Strahleck might be to them, that behind the next buttress of the northern range we should see a pass, and be able to climb to it up steep rocks. We were now approaching the spot where it was reasonable to begin to look for traces of the lost party, if they had fulfilled Fox's intention and 'attempted Koshtantau from the south side of the pass.' But the few possible sites bore no signs of a bivouac.

We tramped steadily up the snow-banks in the blazing sunshine, until, about 10.30 A.M., we stood opposite and under the gap I had seen and sketched twenty-one years before, as well as on the previous day. It was high above us, 1200 to 1400 feet, in an inward bend of the range on our right hand. A broad sheet of snow swept down from it; a narrower white tongue ran up more than half-way. The rib of rocks separating the two snow-troughs supplied an obviously serviceable, if steep, ladder. Maurer, indeed, suggested some rocks more to our right, but they had no claim to be preferred. We crossed a half-open fosse or *Bergschrund*, kicked a few steps in the snow above it, and then grappled with the rocks. They were precipitous, and had to be climbed with hands and knees; but they would not be reckoned difficult among men accustomed to Alpine work.

That is to say, there was good handhold wherever footing was scanty. This was fortunate, for we could now see that the snow on our left lay very loosely on hard ice, and a broad stream of water was flashing down its centre, so powerful are the rays of a Caucasian sun even at 13,000 feet.

The crags beside the glacier having yielded us no traces, we felt that the next step was to go to the pass itself, where we might look for a stone-man, and possibly a record. But we were fully occupied with the practical details of climbing and in no immediate expectation of any discovery, when about noon the leader, at the rope's end, suddenly stopped short, and gasped out, '*Herr Gott! the sleeping-place!*'

Before our eyes rose a low wall of large loose stones, built in the form of a semicircle with its convex side to the precipice below, and enclosing a shelf on the face of the cliffs, some six feet across in either direction, and partially overhung and sheltered by a projecting eave of rock. In a moment we were all overlooking the wall. The first object to catch my eyes was a black stewpan, half-full of water, in which a metal drinking-cup floated. A revolver in its case hung under the rocks. The space inside the wall and between it and the overhanging crag was filled with snow and ice to a depth of several feet. The hard-frozen surface was broken here and there by projecting portions of *Rucksacks* and sleeping-bags. The bags were not empty. A momentary shudder passed through more than one mind: 'How are they filled?' But a second glance showed us that there was no terrible discovery to be feared—terrible because it would have meant a lingering fate to our friends. Everything was there—most things at least—except themselves. That they were lost we had long known; yet this sudden discovery of their personal belongings, just as they had left them eleven months before, the consciousness that we stood on their last halting-place, sent a fresh thrill through every heart. Even in the common haunts of men familiar relics move us. How much more so when found in solitudes, which have seen no previous visitors except those whom they hide somewhere in their icy caverns. Surrounded by

so many memorials of the missing, so many objects that spoke of individual traits of character and habit, it was difficult to believe in the catastrophe. It almost seemed natural to expect that our friends might at any moment be seen coming quickly over the crags to regain the bivouac where all still lay exactly as when they quitted it for their last climb.

After the first keen moments of discovery, the necessary work of digging out relics and searching for records was set about in earnest. It was no light task, for on this sunward shelf the snow had often melted and frozen again. The bags were embedded in hard ice mixed with stones, against which our axes often rang ineffectually. The little camp hung like an eagle's nest, on the edge of a cliff of at least 1000 feet. Any object, such as the still well-stocked meat-bag, thrown over its wall fell vertically for some fifty feet into the lesser snow-gully, and then slid swiftly to the level snows far below. Space allowed only three men to work at once inside the wall; outside it no step could be taken without the greatest caution, and Powell found with difficulty a tiny ledge, whence he could safely sketch the eyrie.[1]

Woolley and I, with one guide, went on to the pass, still some 300 feet above us. The ascent took us more than half an hour. The first part was hard climbing, up an icy chimney, and then along a rib of rock, steep and narrow. From its top we turned to our left across a broad frozen slope, the head of the great *couloir*, or snow-trough. There the snow covered ice, but was sufficiently adhesive for safety at the moderate angle at which the part we had to cross lay. With due precaution we traversed it to the pass, a ridge broken by crags, on one of which we could see a small pile of stones. As the crest fell before our eyes we looked over it, first to the flashing lines of the rivers in the distant steppe, next on the meadow of Dumala,

[1] Captain Powell's sketch gives a most correct impression of the spot. The shelf of rocks by which we ascended was invisible from where he sat. The crack above, and to the right of the bivouac, is that by which Mr. Woolley and I climbed on to the pass. The only liberty taken has been in the foreground. Captain Powell actually sat on the little bracket of crag directly below the crack, or chimney.

the last camping-ground of Donkin and Fox. The Baron had had little reason for his incredulity; there was no serious difficulty for mountaineers with a rope in the descent on that side. Broad crevassed slopes fell towards the snow-basin which feeds the south-eastern branch of the Ulluauz Glacier. Across this basin the great peak and its precipices were full in view. The summit still rose 2500 feet overhead, and another 1000 feet above the snow-plain of the Ulluauz—the height, that is, of Mont Blanc above the Grand Plateau. Its face was a pile of rocks and ice-cliffs and steep slopes, seamed by gaping chasms, one so large and so blue that Mr. Woolley was able subsequently to recognise it through a field-glass from one of the stations on the Ciscaucasian Railway, a distance of at least fifty miles. We descended a few yards on the farther side of the pass, and carefully examined the eastern ridge; its northern face is so sheeted with ice as to be perfectly unassailable, and no man in his senses would attempt to traverse it. The crest itself between us and Koshtantau was broken by high towers or thin Needles, and equally impracticable. It was obvious that mountaineers longing to get at the smooth upper snows from the ridge we stood on must make their attempt, if at all, by the ledges and gullies on the Tiutiun, or southern, side. They would not touch the crest till beyond the great tower. There it was corniced, but at this spot, where the eastern ridge abuts on the southern, there is, as Mr. Woolley subsequently proved, space to spare, and no one need, and no experienced climber would, run any risk of falling. Close to the top of Koshtantau a crevasse runs round the peak, and above this on the south lies a bank of small loose rocks, on which a stone-man would most certainly have been built by successful climbers; but a powerful telescope established the absence of any sign of a cairn or stone-man—and here again Mr. Woolley made assurance doubly sure by his subsequent ascent.

We carefully pulled to pieces the little stone-man on the pass, but found no record within it. We then rebuilt it, and inserted a memorandum of our visit. The scene we looked on as we lingered on the rocks beside it was strangely beautiful and

impressive. The silence of the upper snows was broken only by the constant ring of the axes and the voices of our comrades which rose clearly through the thin air as they still laboured in their sad task of seeking all that might be found under the icy coverlet. Their figures were thrown out on the edge of the crags against the surface of the Tiutiun snowfields, as are those of sailors on a masthead against the sea, when seen from some high cliff. The day was cloudless, the air crystalline, space was for a moment

LOOKING EAST FROM ABOVE KARAUL

annihilated or shown in a scale by which we each seemed to stand, not six feet, but 14,000 feet high! The many passes and heights of the central ridge of the Caucasus lay literally at our feet. We looked over them and past the clustered peaks and vast snow-reservoirs of the Adai Khokh Group to innumerable indefinite distances, amongst which I recognised the horn of Shoda, green heights of Racha, blue mountains of Achalzich, opalescent Armenian ranges fading into a saffron sky, on which hung the far-off amber cloudlets which often mark the position of Ararat. Every detail was distinct as on a mapman's model, yet the whole was vast and vague, wonderful

and strange, creating an impression of immeasurable shining space, of the Earth as it might first appear to a visitant from some other planet. The splendour of nature on this day of days seemed not out of harmony with the sadness of our errand. It affected the mind as a solemn and sympathetic Music. While I gazed, four white butterflies circled round the little monument, and again fluttered off. An ancient Greek would have found a symbol in the incident.

Our eyes might wander for a moment, but our thoughts soon returned to our immediate errand. Sitting on the rocks beside the melancholy little stone-man, the story of the catastrophe seemed to unfold itself. The mountaineers, all heavily laden, travellers as well as guides, had reached about noon the crest of the range at the point where we stood. They had given up all thoughts of an attack on the great peak from the side of the Ulluauz, and, following the suggestion made in my notes, and the intention so clearly expressed in Fox's Diary, meant to go down to the Tiutiun snowfield, and 'climb Koshtantau from the south side.' As they descended, the southern cliffs of the ridge they were on came partially into view. For a short distance these were practicable; beyond they became more formidable, but, owing to foreshortening, how formidable must still have remained for them a matter of speculation. Afternoon clouds probably played about the crests and obscured their features. They saw frozen gullies which might be cut across, ledges that might lead far. A month later in the year the broad sheets of ice, which now would have rendered such an attempt too obviously hazardous, had probably in great part disappeared under the sun of August. They had in their minds the smooth upper snows, that pleasant ridge which, once the great towers passed, leads in continuous curves to the crowning peak. They had never examined from any distant vantage-point the full breadth and height and formidable nature of the crest that separated them from the last tower. Its passage, they persuaded themselves, was worth the attempt, a *mauvais pas* to be faced and surmounted. The alternative was to descend many hundred feet to the Tiutiun *névé*, to lose all this height for the morrow, to carry down the wraps and provisions they had laboriously raised so far. They may naturally

have been biassed by the fact that they had tried a similar descent from the Mishirgi Pass two days before, and the result had been failure. They had, of course, never seen the broad snow-slope which runs up from the head of the Tiutiun Glacier. It was altogether concealed by the buttresses close at hand. It was easiest at the moment to stay where they were; and the feeling of the moment weighs, particularly with guides and heavily laden men.

The ledge was found, and the fatal decision made. The loads were laid down, and all went cheerfully to work. Fox doubtless set the guides to wall-building, and laboured hard at it himself; Donkin looked to the fire, adjusted his camera, made his boiling-point observations, unpacked and repacked some of his instruments, meeting the occasion, after his manner, by nice adaptations of homely articles to purposes for which they were never intended. Thus we discovered some delicate instruments done up in the neatest possible parcel in a sock and glove, and all tied together with a bootlace. The red flames of the little fire (we found remnants of firewood) shone for a short time on the icicle-hung rocks, and then the mountaineers rolled themselves close together in their wraps.

Their start next morning was certainly not a hurried one. All loose objects were carefully stowed inside the sacks—except a revolver, which was left hanging on the rocks. We may infer from their leaving it thus partially exposed, that they saw little risk of bad weather before their return. They roped and started, Donkin as usual carrying his light camera on his own shoulders. They cut across the great trough. But here our evidence ends and conjecture begins. The fresh snow mentioned in Fox's Diary may have added to the danger of shelves and ridges difficult at all times. Somewhere the snow slipped with them, or—but what use speculating how the end came? It is enough to know that it must have been swift, simultaneous, painless; that anything that falls on those cliffs falls far, and that in all likelihood the blue ice-vaults at the crags' foot gave to the climbers an immediate and a sufficient tomb. The whole of the ground under the cliffs was carefully searched with strong glasses by us, and ten days later Mr. Woolley

and his guides passed twice along it in his successful ascent of Koshtantau, when he made certain that the peak had not been climbed—that the accident, therefore, happened on the ascent, or on the return from an unsuccessful attempt.

There were only two ways in which our search could have been pushed farther; by attempting to follow the climbers' probable track across the cliffs, or by conveying an army of diggers to the upper snowfields.

The first, *in the condition in which the rocks were at the time of our visit*, would have been highly dangerous. I emphasise these words because in the Caucasus, even more than in the Alps, conditions change from year to year, and from month to month, and I would not be thought to impute to our friends any intentional rashness. A full month later in the year the crags may well have been far less ice-coated, and, therefore, less obviously dangerous. In some snowless year a passage may be found across these cliffs; after the experience of the Alps, it would be rash to call any cliff impassable. But they lie off the proper line of ascent to Koshtantau, the broad snow-slope at the head of the Tiutiun Glacier, which was attacked by Mr. Woolley;[1] and their passage could, I think, hardly lead to any further result than the possible recovery of Donkin's camera—if he left it behind in some niche, a supposition which, to those who remember his habits best, seems not very probable.

As to the second idea—even if we could have got a regiment of diggers to the spot (which was impossible), their work would almost certainly have been thrown away. A large sleeping-bag which we left at the foot of the cliff had entirely disappeared ten days later—under some fresh fall, or by sliding into the *Bergschrund*—when Woolley returned to the Tiutiun Glacier. What chance would there have been of finding anything buried under a winter's fall and the accumulations of eleven months?

We had learnt all we came to ascertain—in what way and, within a very few hundred yards, where our friends met their

[1] See next chapter.

death and lie buried. To disinter them had never been any part of our plans or wishes. We were well satisfied to leave the mountaineers in their high tomb, warded by the frosty walls and watched only by the stars, with the brightest peak of the Caucasus for their perpetual monument.

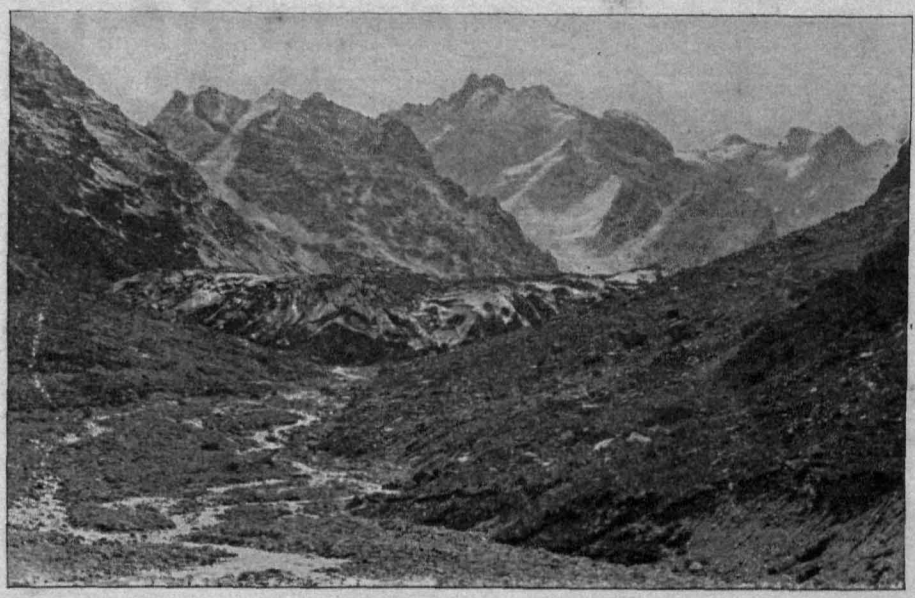
Though within cry, it took us forty minutes to regain our companions, for we had to move carefully on the steep rocks. Some few relics were collected, sufficient to satisfy friends, and to prove to the natives and officials what we had discovered. The revolver with all its barrels loaded, some notes and sketches made by Fox, an instrument or two: these were the principal objects brought down. We carried away a self-cooking soup-tin, and on a match being put to the spirits of wine they burnt up at once, and the contents proved unspoilt. One or two objects, accidentally dropped, fell directly to our tracks on the *névé*, 1000 feet below.

I have written in vain if I have not made it clear that this part of the range is, from its steepness and its crevassed glaciers, inaccessible to all but mountaineers, and that this gap we call a pass has never been reached but by the lost party and ourselves, and is never likely to be visited by native hunters, unless led. Yet it is a pass that will always be recognised as such by men familiar with the passes made of late years in the Alps. There is but one way to it, and that is straight and narrow. These were our chief advantages in our task: we recognised easily from previous experiences the direction in which to look; and that point determined, our field of search was comparatively limited.

As far as the top of the ice-fall all went smoothly; there our leader missed for a moment the morning's track. A little further one of the snow-bridges over a crevasse had fallen since we passed, and several flying leaps were called for. But we suffered no check of any consequence; nothing but what in another mood we might have laughed over; and by dusk we were again in our Kosh. Early next day we returned down the valley of flowers to Karaul.[1]

[1] During the three days of our absence no cloud had crossed the sky or touched a mountain peak. Such weather is rare in the Caucasus, and only prevails when a north-east wind is

After our discovery of the bivouac, I made a subsidiary exploration of the Upper Mishirgi (or Kundium Mishirgi, as M. Jukoff has named the eastern branch of that glacier), which enables me to explain the topography of the first attempt on Koshtantau, the miscarriage of which was so deplorable. It may be most convenient to describe it here. Accident on this occasion deprived me of my companions. After leaving Karaul we had had three days of desperately dull weather. The northern valleys were smothered in



THE MISHIRGI GLACIER AND UKIU

wet mists. On the fourth morning we were camped hard by the foot of the Bezingi Glacier, and the clouds were lying lower than ever, when, through a sudden break, the white wall of Katuintau shone out, backed by blue so pure that I succeeded in convincing myself that all might be clear on the heights. I had not faith enough in

---

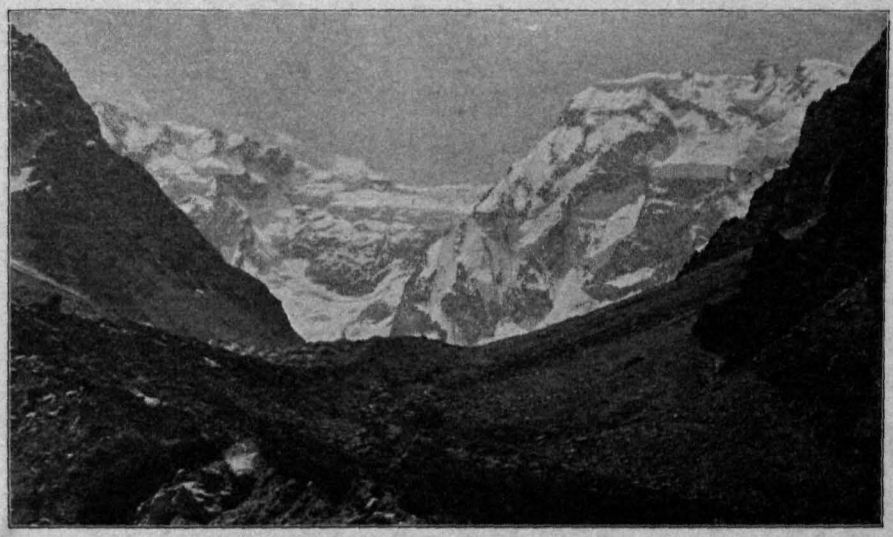
blowing. I enjoyed, however, ten days of it in 1887. The atmosphere at such times is often marvellously clear; I saw the crevasses in the high glaciers west of the Klukhor Pass clearly from the deck of a Black Sea steamer off Ochem-chiri (forty miles distant). But there is more colour in Caucasian skies than in Alpine. And after several clear days a thin transparent haze (the dust of the steppe?) softens without hiding the outlines of the great peaks, and gilds their snows.

my own belief, however, to persuade others, and the consequence was that I started alone with Fischer. When we got to the foot of the Mishirgi Glacier we almost gave up hope. But yet another window was opened in heaven. We plodded on up a flowery dell beside the glacier. Then we came on a piece of moraine: gigantic unstable boulders, which gave severe exercise to eyes and limbs. Weary of gymnastics, we struck out on to the ice and tramped doggedly up the glacier. There was a rapid lightening and a twinkling in the mist; then the fog settled down again so thickly that for a few minutes I quite lost sight of, and had to shout for, my companion. And then, in one moment, the vapours parted, and we almost held our breaths while the sheer height of Dykhtau, 8000 feet of snow-cliffs, burst suddenly in all its glory upon us. Not only Dykhtau but the whole circle, the bare cliffs of Missesstau—a Caucasian Lo Besso—the triple head of Mishirgitau, the great buttresses and icy crest of Ulluauz Bashi, the granitic ridges which Ukiu dominates. It was a sight never to be forgotten, one of those magical revelations which Nature reserves for those who are her old and proved lovers.

The mists of the valleys were forgotten: we were received into an unsullied upper world of blue and white. But what we had come to see still remained hidden. We were almost at the junction of the upper glaciers, but we could not yet look into the basin of the Kundium Mishirgi. I had no doubt what to do next. Looking at the time at our disposal, we should obviously see most by pushing up between the tracks of the avalanches that fall from the cliffs of Dykhtau. As we hurried up the steep banks of riven snow, first a great crag and a broken crest, then the peak of Koshtantau and its long northern ridge came into view. On this side the peak is precipitous and broad, resembling the Weisshorn from Zinal, but on a larger scale. Its northern ridge looks, and I do not doubt that it is, practicable. The problem is, the proper access to it. This is apparently either by forcing the rock-tower close to the Mishirgi Pass that guards the lower end of the ridge, as was proposed by Fox,

or by cutting or treading steps up the snow-slopes from the Kundium Mishirgi, and striking the ridge where it grows steep. The first may, or may not, be possible; the second, if the snow is found in fair condition, would certainly be practicable. It might also in different conditions, like most Caucasian slopes, be dangerous, but this would be an exceptional state.

The relics we had brought down from the bivouac were sufficient to satisfy all men of the results of the search. Henceforth, on our



THE NORTH FACE OF MISHIRGITAU

arrival, in any mountain village the following scene was repeated. The chief received us at the guest-house, and, the customary compliments paid, inquired as to the results of our journey. What we had done was shortly explained in Russian by Captain Powell to the chief, then the village was summoned and the story repeated more at length, and at the proper moment the articles found, the bags and revolver, shown. This exhibition invariably drew forth a deep exclamation of sympathetic interest from the assembly, who followed the tale, as translated to them in Turkish by their chief, with the closest attention. At the end a more or less

formal, but evidently heartfelt, speech would be made to us to this effect:—

'We were deeply grieved by the loss of your countrymen, whom we knew and honoured as brave men. We were also grieved that they should have been lost in our country, and that thus a most unjust suspicion should have been cast on our good name. You have never believed, you tell us, in this charge made against us, and you have come from far to remove the suspicion and its consequences from us, and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. No one but Englishmen could have gone where Donkin and Fox perished, and where you have been. We know and admire English energy, and every Englishman will be welcome among our people. Your friends will always be doubly welcome.' And then the speaker concluded in the traditional forms of Oriental courtesy, 'We are brothers, and all we have is at your disposal.'

There can be no doubt that a heavy burden of suspicion was taken off the shoulders of the Turkish mountaineers who live between Elbruz and Ossetia by our discovery. They are, as far as I know them, a race with many good qualities, though it must be admitted that they have some unamiable traits, which are the first to strike a stranger. They are hard dealers in business matters, and great arguers, with—so long as they are at home—no sense of time. But once on the road they improve wonderfully; they walk splendidly, wherever a man in leathern sandals stuffed with hay can walk; they have a great respect for feats of activity, and soon make friends with English mountaineers. Their traditions are hospitable, and their goodwill once won is long retained. A boy of fourteen will do the honours of his Kosh, bring out milk and cream in lordly bowls, and decline payment afterwards with a grace rare, to say the least, in the Alps.