mountains—in fact their fame is amongst the Clubs; but we found our lighter fare by no means unsatisfactory. We were, perhaps, fortunate in visiting Beddgelert when the usual crowd of September tourists had so greatly diminished in number, but no one could have been more kind and considerate than our host and hostess at the 'Royal Goat.' All was quiet and restful. The one excitement of the day was the arrival of the *Daily Mail* at the village post-office in the early morning.

Discoveries in Central Asia.

(By kind permission of the Royal Geographical Society.)

A COMMUNICATION has been received at the Royal Geographical Society from Sir Aurel Stein, giving some account of the further work of his official expedition to Central Asia from April to November 1914. The letter is dated November 22 from Turfan, at the E. foot of the Celestial or Tian Shan Mountains, some 200 or 300 miles W. of the province of Mongolia. Sir Aurel Stein's main object was to continue the work of investigating the remains of the old wall which he discovered, and traced for a very considerable distance, and among the ruins of the forts of which he found so many interesting relics.

The expedition started in April from Tunhuang, where the expedition had halted for a short time to recover from its trying winter campaign in the Lop-nor desert, between Turfan and the northern boundary of Tibet. Sir Aurel Stein paid another visit to the cave temples of the Thousand Buddhas near Tunhuang and was richly rewarded. He followed the wall for close on 250 miles eastwards. Along almost the whole of this distance the wall, with its watch-towers and small military stations, had been built across what already in ancient times was absolutely sterile desert. The wall itself was a very remarkable construction, built of carefully secured fascines of reeds or brushwood, with layers of clay or gravel between them. It was specially adapted to withstand that most destructive of natural forces in this region, slow-grinding but relentless wind erosion. This, with the absence of human interference during all these centuries, has left a rich store of remains for the explorer. In many places there remained on the wind-worn surface clear evidence in the shape of pottery, coins, metal fragments, and other hard *débris* which indicated with accuracy the position of the posts once guarding the Chinese border.

As the expedition proceeded beyond the sharp bend made

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by the Su-lo Hu valley the physical difficulties greatly increased, largely from want of water, but there was reward in the ample finds of ancient records on wood, of furniture, and implements of all sorts which were brought to light at the ruined watch stations. Conclusive evidence shows that all these had been left behind by the Chinese soldiers who, during the first century before and after Christ, had kept guard over this most dismal of frontiers.

Sir Aurel Stein was very much impressed by the engineering skill which was required to adapt the defensive line of the wall to different local conditions. In May he started on a fresh line of investigation, the object of which was to follow the united course of the rivers of Suchou and Kanchou down into Southern Mongolia, and to explore what ancient remains might be found along it and in its terminal delta. The early history of this region attracted him greatly, as he has no doubt it formed part of the wide dominions held by those earliest nomadic masters of Kansu, the 'Great Yuehchi,' or Indo-Scythians, and the Huns, whose successive migrations westwards so deeply affected the destinies of Central Asia as well as of India and the West.

While Sir Aurel Stein carried out his explorations to the northwards, his surveyor, Lal Singh, proceeded in another direction to carry out surveys of practically unexplored regions. He still found remains of the wall to the northwards, and the observations which he made upon the hydrography of this now practically desert region are full of interest. He found traces of extensive irrigation which for some reason had been abandoned long ago. He examined the ruined town of Khara-Khoto, and the position and remains proved to his satisfaction that this could be no other than Marco Polo's 'City of Etzina,' where in ancient times travellers bound for Karakoram, the old Mongol capital, had to lay in victuals for 40 days in order to cross the great desert, where there was no habitation or baiting-place.

Here Sir Aurel Stein collected many valuable relics—Buddhist manuscripts and prints, many fine stucco rilievos and frescoes, miscellaneous records on paper, and household utensils. Finds of coins, ornaments in metal and stone, &c., were abundant. Everything pointed to the conclusion that the abandonment of the settlement must have been caused by difficulties about maintaining irrigation. In the course of these journeys Sir Aurel Stein met with an unfortunate accident which hampered him very considerably, though after a short rest he continued the work of the expedition.

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Altogether, before the expedition arrived at Turfan, many valuable additions were made to the previous work of the leader, both archaeological and geographical. Around Turfan there are many ruined sites of Buddhist times to which Sir Aurel Stein proposed to devote a few months, while his surveyor would find ample work in mapping the extensive and little-known desert ranges of the Kuruk-tagh between Turfan and Lop-nor depressions.

IN MEMORIAM.

PÈRE GASPARD.

PIERRE GASPARD, commonly known as Père Gaspard, the famous vanquisher of the Grand Pic de la Meije, has gone to his rest.

What Jean Antoine Carrel was to the Cervin, that was Père Gaspard to the Meije. The one dallied overlong with his mountain to see it conquered by strangers, but instantly repaired his error by storming it from a far more difficult side, an expedition that remains almost without rival in Alpine history. The other, more fortunate, saw his several attempts finally crowned with success fully merited by his own skill and endurance as well as by the persistence of his young employer, thus securing for France the honour of vanquishing one of her most difficult peaks.

Gaspard was born at St. Christophe on March 29, 1834, and died there on January 15, 1915. For the last eighteen months of his life he was paralysed and bedridden. His father was a certain Gaspard Hugues, from a village—St. Georges-d'Entraunes—in the Alpes Maritimes,[1] who migrated as a young man to St. Christophe, where he married in 1832 and died in 1883, aged eighty-three.

He was probably one of those travelling 'bergers de moutons' who annually lead their flocks from the parched plains of Provence to the mountain pastures and who are a feature of interest to the traveller in the Franco-Italian borderland.

The son, who took Gaspard for his surname, followed in his father's footsteps, but also became a *chasseur enragé de chamois*, the acknowledged leader of every hunting party. He appears to have commenced to act as guide or porter in 1873, when he accompanied Lord Wentworth's party on an ascent of the Écrins. In 1876, as the local chamois hunter, he was taken by Dr. Coolidge on an ascent of the Aiguille du Plat ('A.J.' viii. 98). Later in the same year he was engaged by M. Boileau de Castelnau, and with that enthusiastic young climber made two magnificent seasons, 1876 and 1877, including the first ascents of the Tête de l'Etret, the Tête des

[1] Père Gaspard's second son, Maximin, showed, as a man of thirty, every sign of his Southern descent.

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