THE CAUCASUS IN 1874

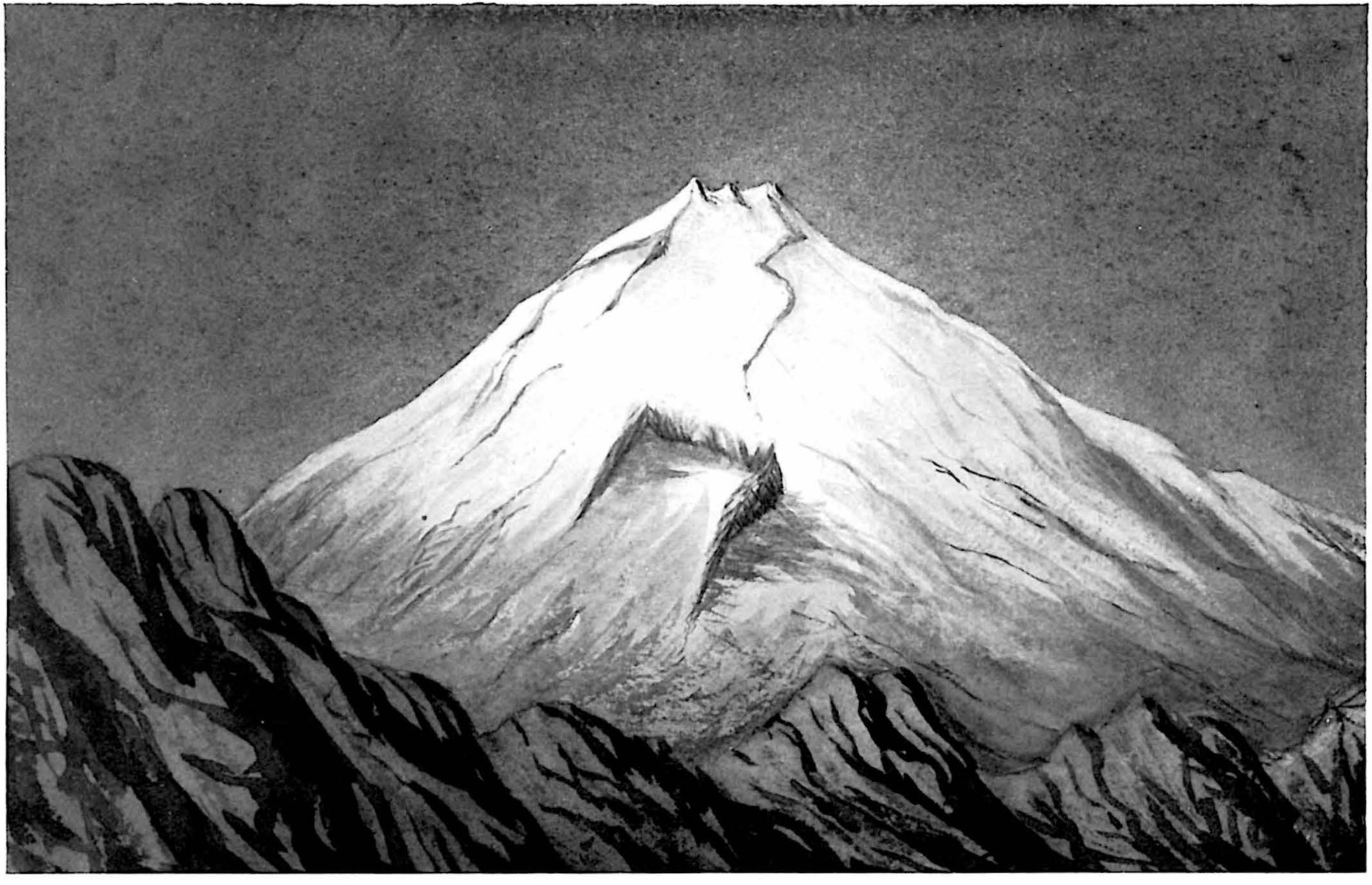
Continued from November 1955 JOURNAL, page 364

The Urban glacier

Preparations for departure were slow, as usual ; the bread was not ready, and it was found at the last moment that all the baggage could not conveniently be packed on one horse, for which Mahomed accordingly proposed to substitute two donkeys. These were so long in coming that it was at last decided to send Grove, Gardiner, Walker, and Paul on in advance, in order that they might see as much as possible before the weather changed, while I remained behind to bring on our train. It was 9.30 before I got off, after leaving our general luggage to the care of the Princess, who, just as I was starting, sent down as a present from herself three large loaves made of specially fine flour. Following our yesterday's path I joined the others at 12.10, seated on a stony alp at no great distance from the foot of the glacier which closes the valley. Great as this still is, it is but a shadow of its old self ; for miles below it, the valley is filled with old moraines ; the first of these, which is unmistakable even by an unscientific observer, is found about 1½ hours from Bezingi and the same distance from the point where the glacier now ends, though no doubt traces exist still lower down. The process of retrogression is still going on, as there is a vast amount of quite fresh débris below and on either side of the final glacier tongue ; the fact is noteworthy because the Dych-Su glacier in the adjoining valley shows no such signs, although the two glaciers are only separated by a ridge radiating from Koshtan Tau. The Dych-Su Glacier has a general direction from west to east, while the Bezingi or Urban glacier flows (roughly) from south to north.

The great chain was now in full view at the head of the glacier. On the extreme right, or west, was a conical snow peak ; then to the left, came a long wall very like the Vieschergrat as seen from Grindelwald ; and this was followed still further to the left by broken glacier backed by very high and steep rocks. The feature of this part of the chain is its great and uniform elevation ; the ridge nowhere sinks to anything like a well marked depression or pass.

After a halt of nearly an hour we continued our way over very stony ground on the left bank of the stream, gradually rising above the tail of the glacier, which is fairly sprinkled with moraine. The slope we had to traverse gradually became steeper and rougher, and the poor donkeys had hard work to keep their legs ; their exertions were indeed so painful, and were promoted by such an amount of whacking on the part of Mahomed, that we were heartily glad when we reached, at 3.20, the spot which had been predetermined on as our night quarters. This was a grassy hollow in the hillside on the left bank of the glacier, where



ELBRUZ FROM TAU SULTRA.

[*To face p.* 123.

a cascade streaming over the rocks supplied good water, and a small space enclosed by a wall indicated either a shepherd's refuge or the occasional shelter of a hunter. The barometer read 22·75, equal to a height of about 7,550 feet, or some 300 feet above the level of the end of the glacier, across which we looked up a savage gorge running deep into the mountains on the other side, itself filled by a second glacier much shrunk, and quite covered with moraine. This gorge must, we know, lead up towards Dych Tau, but the promise of the morning had not been fulfilled, clouds had risen, and that peak with its neighbours was already entirely concealed.

A wet night

Knubel went off to explore the best way on to the glacier below us, Paul devoted himself to his kitchen as usual, while we set to work to arrange our encampment as comfortably as might be. While thus engaged, the clouds swooped down upon us, and we were quickly enveloped in a damp, cold, fog, which we hoped and expected would prove merely a passing visitation, but which, in fact, grew thicker, damper, and colder as evening drew on. Under these circumstances neither Knubel's report of an easy way on to the glacier, nor the excellent dinner of cutlets and kabobs served to us by Paul, materially raised our spirits, and although when we turned into our bags for the night we arranged to be on the move at 1.0 a.m., it was felt by all that the arrangement was a farce, and that there was little chance of doing anything of the kind.

Dych Tau again

At about 11.0 heavy rain roused us from our slumbers, and brought the umbrellas into play; with them and the waterproof upper sheet fitted to the bags we were perfectly protected, as though in a tent, and we again agreed that the supplying ourselves with them had been a remarkably happy thought. At 1.30 rain was still falling though with less violence; it gradually changed to drizzle and finally ceased, but the fog might have been cut with a knife and made it useless to think of starting. At 4.30 on the 18th, there were signs of a clearance and we got up at once. The cold was severe, but this was hailed as a good sign. The mist gradually cleared out of the gorge opposite, and revealed a range of tremendously steep peaks; Dych Tau itself was not at first visible, but, later, it became so, a magnificent spearhead of rock and ice towering into the air from behind a minor ridge at the head of the gorge, which seemed to cut it off from the glacier by which the latter is filled; whether it does so in fact must be regarded as uncertain; the Russian map in these parts is very vague, and, as will be shewn hereafter, certainly inaccurate in regard to the position of Dych Tau. A walk up the gorge would have solved many doubtful points, and rather tempted us; but the exploration of the head of the great Urban Glacier was still more attractive and for this we started with Peter at 5.45. Paul and Mahomed were left to await our return, the question

whether we should not pass a second night in the same quarters in view to further explorations on the morrow, being left dependent on the results of the day.

'Djanga'

Descending slightly and then climbing over the moraine, which was high and steep, we made for the centre of the glacier, and pushed straight up it. The ice was moderately inclined and soon became clear of moraine, so that progress up it was easy and pleasant. As we advanced, the great wall in front gradually emerged from the clouds; several halts were made for photographic purposes. The part of the chain at which we were looking corresponds with that to which the name 'Djanga' is applied on the Russian map; its steepness is extraordinary, but the mountain is nevertheless covered from top to bottom with snow and séracs, little rock being visible; the summit ridge is very undulating, within narrow limits,—that is to say, it rises and falls but nowhere sinks to any marked depression, or varies much from the general level, which can scarcely be under 16,000 feet. The actual highest point is hard to determine. Over this tremendous barrier the map by a dotted line indicates a pass! The line of descent indicated on the south side would take one down the very centre of the magnificent icefall, some 4,000 feet in height, above the village of Adisch, which we passed close to in 1868; it may be regarded as certain that the officer responsible for this part of the map had never seen the localities, but heard rumours of a pass in this direction, and marked the line at a venture.

Up the Urban Glacier

The glacier we were ascending seemed to us to be about the same width as the Unteraar glacier below the Abschwung, but the bounding ridges on either hand are much higher and steeper; in this part of its course it receives no tributaries. For the first hour the crevasses were not numerous, but they gradually became more so, and at the end of two hours, we found ourselves in a labyrinth very like that of the Mer de Glace above the Montanvert. As progress in a straightforward line was no longer possible, in spite of the still moderate inclination, and as a zigzag course would have run into time without much compensating interest, we made for the left bank intending to follow the moraine. This, when we reached it, proved too much crevassed to be practicable, so we crossed it to the slopes beyond, which, after a very rough traverse for about 15 minutes, requiring discrimination on Knubel's part to pick the best way, led us to an old grass grown moraine between the hillside and the modern moraine. Along the crest of this we marched with delightful ease.

The western face of Koshtan Tau

So far our view had been limited to the ice-clad cliffs of Djanga in our immediate front, the range to the east and west of it remaining

concealed ; now, however, the chain to the east began to open out, disclosing, first, a wall similar in character to that of Djanga, but curving round so as to form a sort of bay, and then, to the left of this bay, a line of stupendous cliffs, almost bare of snow, crowned by a serrated but practically level ridge, terminated by a dome of snow, from which a beautiful arête, partly snow, partly rock, fell away steeply. A more glorious spectacle was never displayed to mountaineers, and so absorbed were we in its contemplation that we did not at once realize that what we were looking at was the mighty Koshtan Tau really Dych Tau, 17,096 feet, the second in height of all Caucasian peaks and European mountains.

The view, roughly speaking, was the converse of that which in 1868 I had had from the Stuli-evetsk Pass,—a higher and more distant point than our present one,—between the Uruch and Tcherek valley. We had then seen the mountain from the northeast ; we were now looking at it from the northwest, i.e., the exactly opposite direction. Minute examination was, for the moment, deferred, as the weather showed signs of an early change for the worse again, and we were anxious to get nearer the head of the glacier, and see something more of it before the gathering clouds concealed everything.

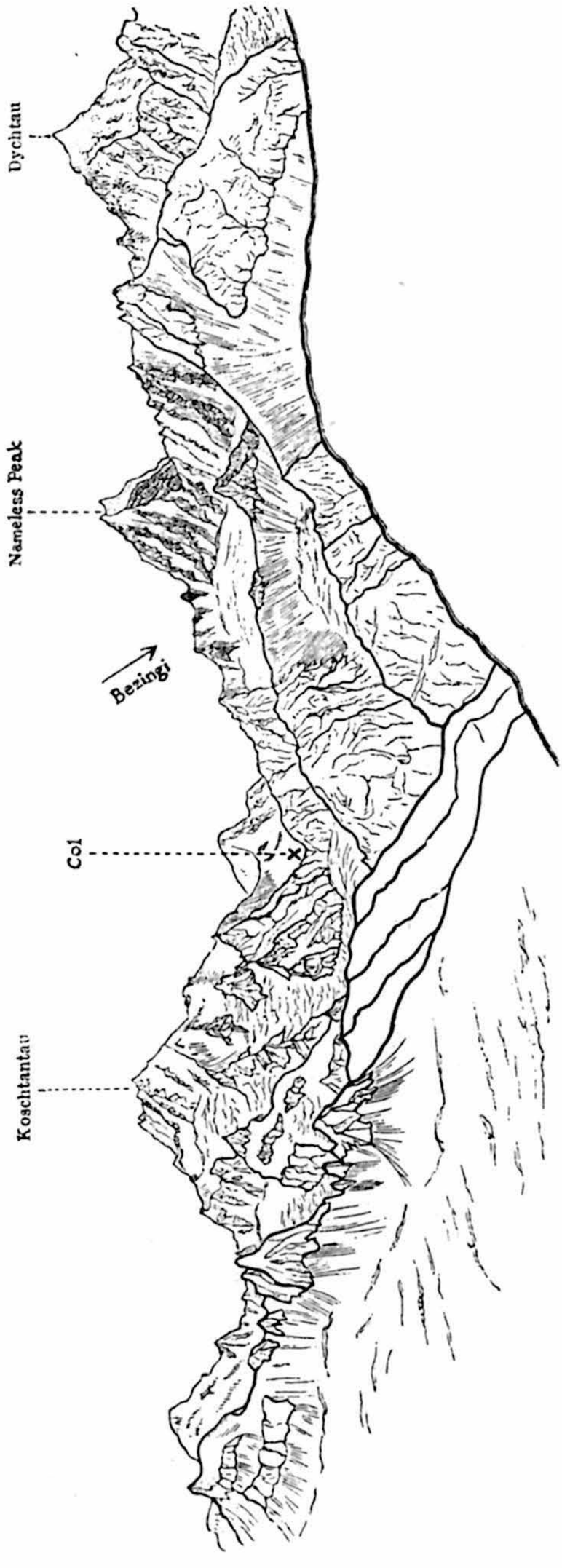
The head of the glacier

At 10.0 we once more left the moraine for the glacier which was again smooth and easy. So far we had been ascending a comparatively narrow icefilled valley ; but we had now reached a point where the bounding ridges on either hand fell suddenly back, and assumed a direction parallel, instead of perpendicular to, the main chain, thus forming two great bays entirely filled with névé meeting in a broad basin at the foot of Djanga. Close to the angle on our side and to the point where we left the moraine was an admirable site for a bivouac, a sheltered little hollow in the hillside with grass and water, where we certainly ought to have camped the previous night, and which we noted for future use in the improbable event of any of us revisiting these parts.

We now struck straight across the nearly level snow basin towards the base of Djanga which traversed in front of us literally like a wall ; the effect was as though on reaching a certain point we should be able to lay our hands on a face of ice rising perpendicularly for about 6,000 feet above our heads. This appearance was of course to a great extent delusive, but the mountain is, nevertheless, extraordinarily precipitous and is, of its kind, without parallel in my experience. At 10.45, being about two-thirds of the way across the basin, in which the snow was not very deep, we agreed that it would be useless to go further so sat ourselves down to refresh the inner man, and examine our position.

Speculations as to Koshtan Tau

As we sat facing due north, according to the compass, we looked straight down the Urban glacier and the upper part of the Bezingi



VIEW FROM STULI-EVETSK PASS.

valley, up which evil looking clouds were drifting rapidly towards us. It was at once obvious that, assuming the correctness of our compasses which there was no reason to doubt, the general direction of the glacier and valley is much more nearly north and south than it is represented on the map, where it approximates to east and west. Immediately behind us was the great wall of Djanga ; to our right rear the mass of Koshtan Tau, which was already cloud capped, bore southeast ; its northern arête falls away in long sweeping curves to a deep depression which is unquestionably that seen by us from the other side in 1868 at the head of the northern branch of the Dych-Su glacier. It is certainly the point from which an attempt to ascend the mountain might be made with the best chance of success. Access to it from the east by the Dych-Su glacier would not be easy, as the ice slopes on that side are very steep and, as seen in 1868, the bergschrunds below the col looked formidable ; but on the west side on which we were now looking the case is different ; slopes of névé, at a gentle angle and not much crevassed, stretch right up to the ridge from the basin in which the two great bays at the head of the Urban glacier meet. A party bivouacking at the spot suggested above might expect to reach the col in from three to four hours ; its height by comparison with our own position (Bar. 20·90 = 9,850 feet) we estimated at about 12,500 feet, or 4,596 feet below the top of the mountain. As to whether it would be possible to climb the arête beyond, we could form no trustworthy opinion ; a good deal of it looked very steep, serrated, and impracticable, but actual trial alone could decide its true character. As to what point of the summit ridge is the actual culminating point of the mountain must also be regarded as uncertain ; my own impression is that it will be found to be the snow dome at the northern end,—the end, that is, nearest to the col and that the southern end of the ridge is actually in the main chain, and is in fact where the spur comprising the peak of Koshtan Tau as well as Dych Tau is thrown off to the north, while the chain pursues its previous N.E. and S.W. direction at the head of the valleys of the Ingur and Zenes Zkali.

However this may be, I am satisfied that the map is quite wrong in placing Dych Tau due east of his slightly taller neighbour, and that the true position is much nearer north. Between the two also is a first-class peak not shewn at all in the map ; this rises immediately to the south of the Dych-Su Col, and, in 1868 from the Stuli-evetsk Pass, seemed to us to be little lower than Dych Tau itself. We failed now to get a good view of it owing to the clouds which in that quarter were already thick.

The western side of the glacier

Although the eastern side of the glacier absorbed most of our attention, owing to our particular interest in Koshtan Tau, we did not neglect the opposite quarter, which was indeed of more practical importance, being that in which lies the pass to the valley of the Ingur and Svanetia. This western bay is in fact the principal feeder of the glacier, which

descends from the upper névé in a broad icefall, which, however, is neither very steep nor very broken and could be ascended with ease. Little could be seen of the snowfield above it, but it must be of enormous extent, for it supplies not only the Urban glacier, but at least one glacier at the head of the Mujalaliz branch of the Ingur valley, and in addition, I have little doubt, the great icefall above Adish. With regard to Tau Tetnuld we could not make out anything; I do not myself believe that we saw at all the mountain known to me under that name, i.e. the great snow peak seen from Latyal in 1868, or that the not very imposing peak to the west of Djanga was it. An ascent to the snowfield would, in fine weather, solve this and many other topographical mysteries; had circumstances been favourable we should have devoted the rest of the day to this, but, during our halt, the bad weather spread rapidly, and at the end of an hour we were enveloped in fog, which was accompanied by a drizzling rain. Accordingly there was nothing for it but to be thankful for small mercies, and retrace our steps.

Return by the moraine

We started at 11.45 and, as far as the point where we had left the glacier for the moraine, followed our early morning route exactly; on reaching that point the fog was so thick that Knubel anticipated difficulty in finding the way through the broken part of the glacier, and therefore proposed that we should keep to the moraine as the surer route. So it was determined, greatly to the disgust of poor Grove, whose boots were not quite so stout as they should have been, and who judged rightly that the onward walk would try them severely. Except however that it certainly was rough, there was nothing to say against the line of march selected; the moraine, though crevassed in places, was generally practicable and, either by it, by the adjacent hillside, or by the no-man's land between the two, we progressed rapidly and at 3.35 regained our gîte, at a little distance from which we were joined by Paul who had come out to prospect on his own account, and was equally surprised and pleased at our re-appearance.

The rain was now falling heavily, and with one accord we agreed not to spend a second night out, but to make the best of our way back to Bezingi. Paul was started off at once to prepare the good people for our arrival, which would be unexpected, and at 4.10 we followed with Mahomed and the donkeys, the former shewing even more than the usual native indifference to bad weather. The donkeys, conscious no doubt that they were bound for home, travelled at a rare pace with which we could scarcely keep up, though their master did with ease. How Paul contrived to keep ahead of us I don't know; but he did so, and when we reached the village at 7.35 wet through and in wretched plight, we found everything ready for us, a fire lit, and tea, cakes, and some dried mutton sent in by the Princess, only waiting our appearance. Paul had not even changed his wet clothes, and could not be induced to do so until all our wants had been supplied; the consequences to

him were unfortunate, for during the remainder of our journey he was troubled with severe cold and cough.

Departure from Bezingi

The night was a wild one, and although the morning of the 19th broke fair, the aspect of the weather was not sufficiently assured to induce us to change our plans or delay our next march to the adjoining valley of Tchegem. Our parting with all the people was most friendly, Mahomed in particular, whom I had commissioned to get me one of the eccentric conical felt caps worn in this part of the country, assuring us emphatically more than once that he loved us like brothers ! To the invisible Princess we sent one of our many-bladed knives with 15 roubles to be distributed amongst her servants, and our heartiest thanks for the trouble she had taken on our behalf. She replied in a most practical way, just as we were about to start, by sending over a roasted lamb which we could not refuse to eat ; this made some delay, and it was 10.45 before we got off with our two men and horses from Kunim.

The valley of Tchegem

A good path led up and over the shoulder of the hill below the village into a broad grassy glen which extended to the ridge between the valleys of Bezingi and Tchegem. During the ascent we had an occasional glimpse of the snows of Djanga behind us, but otherwise the way was without feature. Some herdsmen, by the offer of sour milk to which we were becoming partial, tempted us to a quarter of an hour's halt, and owing to this and a generally leisurely pace we did not reach the col until 2.0 p.m.,—of course in a fog. The ridge is a grassy one ; the height about 8,650 feet (Bar. 21·80). The fog did not extend very far, and, after a short descent, we emerged from it and found ourselves in a very striking position. On our right the pastures were overhung by a line of precipitous limestone cliffs, the southern face of a mountain called Akhakaia on the map ; the height is not great, but the form is fine. In front, we looked down upon and across the main valley of Tchegem, in whose further side, exactly opposite, opened out the most wonderful ravine any of us had ever seen, an absolute fissure with seemingly vertical walls two or three thousand feet high, and extending an apparently endless distance to the west without any change of character. The whole effect,—thanks possibly in some degree to a particular condition of the clouds and light,—was extraordinarily impressive, and decided us to halt for a day at Tchegem, which we had not intended to do.

A steady descent down a glen similar in character to that on the Bezingi side followed ; near its mouth is the village of Dumala, in a very remarkable position on a high rock between two stony ravines, a good way above the main valley. The houses are in the Bezingi style, burrows with flat roofs, but the place has a much more prosperous and substantial look, and the people who crowded the roofs to see our procession pass seemed well-to-do. From the serpentine path which leads

down to the river, the appearance of the hillside on the south side of the glen opposite Dumala is curious ; at the angle above the main valley it is broken into a succession of green terraces one above the other, which are so regular that it is hard to believe they are natural, as they certainly are.

Arrival at Tchegem

At the foot of the descent, we crossed by a bridge to the left bank of the Tchegem, and turned down along it to the village of the same name which was in full view a little lower down with a prominent square tower in the middle of it. We reached it at 4.50, being escorted in by an excited individual who came out to meet us, and whom we concluded, from his demeanour, to be the village idiot. The situation is extraordinarily fine, in the very mouth of the gorge which had so impressed us from above, and at the base of a vast bluff of limestone, the upper part of which is as square and angular as if it had been quarried ; the opposite bank of the river is a picturesque mass of red crags ; below, the valley is a continuous gorge ; above, it is more open, green, and cultivated, but of no great width, and with glimpses of the snows at its head. We were, no doubt, the more impressed with the natural attractions of Tchegem, by comparison with Kunim and Bezingi which are positively ugly.

The village is on both banks of the Djilki-Su, the torrent which drains the gorge already mentioned, but the larger and more important part of it is on the north bank, the houses arranged tier behind tier up the slope of the ruinous hillside. A great crowd was collected on the bridge over the torrent, from which, as we approached, two tall, well dressed men came forward and greeted us in a ceremonious but friendly way. These were the Chief of the village and his brother, to whom as we learned through Paul, the Russian Commandant at Naltchik had sent up most particular orders on our behalf. We were led to the Chief's own house, which was solidly built and afforded us very good quarters, the sole objection to them being the usual one of a complete absence of windows and consequent darkness inside, the only channel for light being a small square hole in the wall. The barometer reading 24·65, makes the height of the place about 5,450 feet, i.e. some 300 feet above Bezingi.

Passes from Tchegem

Over the usual tea and cakes we had much interesting talk with our dignified host about passes to the adjoining valleys. At the village of Bulungu, a little way above Tchegem the valley forks ; the stream in the eastern branch bears on the map the name ' Bulungu,' and must have its source in one of the glaciers of the main chain, but we could not hear of any pass in that direction. With the western branch it is different ; that, higher up, again divides into the valleys of the Bashil-Su to the west, and the Gara-Su to the east, and up each of these there is a pass to Mulach in Svanetia. These passes are known respectively

on the north side of the chain as the Bashil Tau and Gara Tau ; the latter was described to us as the easier of the two, but both, though traversing glaciers, were said to be practicable for horses, with which Mulach could be reached in two days. The glacier on the south side would no doubt be the Thuber, which Radde [1] speaks of as ' affording the most convenient and frequented pass ' from the valley of the Ingur ' to the north side of the main chain in the valley of the Tchegem.' The only other pass of which we could get any indication was one up the gorge of the Djilki-Su to the upper valley of the Baksan ; not much seemed to be known of this ; but it was said also to be over a glacier and to be long and difficult, the distance from Tchegem to the foot of the glacier being a full day's journey up a continuous gorge.

Up the gorge of the Djilki-Su

After some discussion it was decided that the morrow should be spent in a walk up the gorge, by which we were all more or less fascinated; personally, I was in favour of an expedition towards the head of the main valley as being likely to turn out, on the whole, more interesting, but the rest of the party agreed in preferring the other plan. At 7.30 therefore on the morning of Monday, the 20th July, after a very comfortable night on the good mattresses which were sent in for our accommodation we started off with Peter and Paul in attendance.

The usual fog and drizzle reconciled me to our choice of route, as we should have seen nothing of the head of the valley had we gone in that direction. We turned at once into the gorge by a faint track on the left bank of the torrent, and at a considerable height above it on the slope of débris which lies at the base of the cliffs. The further we advanced, the more remarkable did these cliffs become ; they are very high and very sheer, and broken by lateral clefts which are little less striking than the main ravine, and prevent the scenery becoming monotonous. After an hour and a half's walk we were on a level with the stream again which thundered alongside of us in a very narrow boulder-filled bed, varied by an occasional pool. One of these tempted us to a bathe ; the water was very cold, but clear as crystal and not at all suggestive of a glacier origin. We worked our way along the bank over very rough ground until 10.45, when a rude bridge, which was more natural than artificial, led over to the other side.

Capture of a live bouquetin

A curious incident here terminated our progress. Just above the bridge, on the left side of the stream, between the base of the cliffs and

[1] Dr. Gustav Radde, an honorary member of the Alpine Club and a well-known savant, was born in Danzig in 1831. In 1852 he went to Russia and remained there until his death in 1903. One of the early explorers of the Caucasus, he travelled widely in the Russian Empire. His work was recognised by the Royal Geographical Society and he was awarded the Patron's Medal in 1888. For an account of his career, see his obituary notice in *A. J.* 21. 414.—D. F. O. D.

the water was a little patch of dry beach, on which was an animal which we at once recognized as a young bouquetin. Paul, with wonderful sharpness, exclaimed : ' It has got there, and cannot get back again ; let us catch it !' and, darting off, contrived somehow to cross the water on to the beach where the animal was running up and down in an obvious state of alarm and perplexity ; it made a desperate effort to climb the rocks which hemmed it in, but failed, and was promptly knocked down by Paul, who threw himself upon it, and managed to hold it until he was joined by Knubel, when the pair tied the poor little wretch's legs together, and brought it over to us. The capture of a live bouquetin was a novelty, with a vengeance, and had such a disturbing effect upon us that we voted that the weather was too indifferent to make it worth while continuing our walk up the gorge, which showed no signs of opening out, and that after the usual midday halt we would return to Tchegem with our prisoner.

Carrying down the bouquetin

We started down at 12.0 and reached Tchegem at one, following in the lower part of the gorge a rather better track than that taken in the ascent. The carriage of the captive was not easy, as the poor little beast kicked furiously, as was not unnatural ; Paul first tried to carry it on his shoulders, but this proved impossible, and ultimately it was slung head downwards on Knubel's iceaxe and so carried between the two men. We should have killed it and carried it down in the shape of butcher's meat, had it not been for the risk of offending the religious prejudices of our Mahomedan host who would most certainly have objected to our cooking in his house an animal slaughtered by infidel hands in an infidel manner. Great was the excitement when we re-entered the village, and deafening the babel of exclamations with which Paul's narrative of what had happened was received ; everyone wanted to look at and touch the victim, to which the ' happy dispatch ' which was shortly executed upon it in orthodox fashion must have been almost welcome.

Politics at Tchegem

Our dinner at night was a rather sumptuous one, the ménu being bouquetin cutlets and roast lamb ; the former, though not tough, as might have been expected, were tasteless and unappetizing. Over the meal, I managed a good deal of talk with our host, through the medium of Paul, who was less indisposed to interpret than we usually found him. The subject was a dangerous one,—politics, both parties being interested in the systems of government of the other. I explained to the best of my ability our parliamentary system, and the objections to it especially when radicalism was in the ascendant. Our host on his part spoke with great freedom of the Russian Government, in regard to which his tone was that of modified discontent. We could not, however, make out that the native chiefs, of whom he was a type, had any

very substantial present grievance except, perhaps, the being compelled to pay their servants, in consequence of the abolition of serfdom which had lately been extended to the Caucasus ; on the contrary, a moderate house tax was the only impost mentioned, while the sole other public liability,—that of each village to keep in repair its share of the paths and bridges giving access to the plains,—could not be considered onerous. But our host professed to fear that the Government had in contemplation some measure in regard to the land which would amount to confiscation of it from its present proprietors ; my profession of scepticism as to this was met by a positive assurance that a beginning had already been made with Ismail Urusbieh, and that he and his brother were at the moment at Vladikavkaz discussing the matter with the Governor of the province. This last part of the statement was quite correct, as we found two days later on arriving at Urusbieh ; but from our enquiries there, we were rather led to believe that Prince Ismail's grievance was nothing more serious than an attempt on the part of the Russian administration to place some restriction on the wholesale cutting of timber in the forests of the upper Baksan valley which, if not checked, will leave that district, in a few years, as bare as is the greater part of the northern Caucasus.

A delicate business

An early start in the morning was necessary, as, before retiring to our mattresses, we expressed to our host our thanks for all his politeness, and forced upon him a certain number of roubles as a practical mark of our feelings. At no place which we visited was this always delicate business more delicate than at Tchegem. In all the Mahomedan villages, in this part of the country, the traveller is received as a guest from whom no payment is expected, though a present of anything except money will be taken readily. Now we had nothing with us suitable for this purpose, except a few many-bladed knives which, though highly appreciated as novelties, were of small intrinsic value, so that one of them could not be regarded as anything like adequate compensation for the trouble given and expense incurred in entertaining us. We were therefore compelled to offer money which, as a rule, was taken with little more than a show of reluctance ; but, in some places the objection to receive it was real ; this was notably the case at Tchegem, and, it was only after a deal of talk in which I explained our feelings and repudiated all idea of making a payment, or of doing anything more than placing at the Chief's disposal a trifling sum which he might distribute amongst the poorer members of his village, that the matter was settled in the way we wished.

At 6.30 a.m. on the 21st, we commenced the penultimate stage of our journey to Urusbieh, which was to land us by evening somewhere in the valley of the Baksan. Rain was, of course, falling when we started, but it soon ceased, and, in spite of subsequent showers, the day, by comparison with its predecessors, ranked as ' fair.'

The valley of the Koktash

Our way lay down the valley by a path which shortly crossed to the right bank of the stream by a bridge in such a shaky condition that its practicability for horses was doubted ; our baggage animals, however, led across singly, and as though treading on eggs, passed safely. On the other side a landslip at one spot obliged both them and us to make a wide détour, which led us through some meadows remarkable for a crop of the most gigantic mushrooms I ever saw ; a goodly quantity was gathered and carried all day, but, when they came to be cooked in the evening, the courage of everyone, except Walker and myself, failed, and even we were too little confident that our brobdingnagian prizes were the genuine thing to make a hearty meal off them.

For some distance below Tchegem the valley is a rather picturesque gorge on a smallish scale ; but it gradually opens out. At 10.0 we re-crossed to the left bank, and, shortly afterwards, winding round a spur, turned into a side valley—the Koktash, according to the map. This, just above its confluence with the Tchegem, is bounded on either hand by curious, arid, limestone cliffs, fissured and broken up so as to present a most ruinous appearance, not picturesque, but with a certain character of its own. At 11.0 we came to a large farm,—the first habitation seen since leaving Tchegem ; it was densely populated by people and dogs, by whom we were quickly surrounded, the latter being vicious, and the former friendly, both as usual. We indulged in sour milk and our two horsemen in conversation with the inhabitants, whose curiosity was manifest, but whose reception of the remarkable strangers compared favourably with that which has been experienced by at least two of the aforesaid strangers in more than one village of the county of Surrey.

From Tchegem to Baksan

On the map, the valley of the Koktash is depicted as made up of two glens, one ascending in a westerly, the other in a north-westerly direction ; up the former of these a track is marked over to the valley down which the Koanta stream flows into the Baksan a short distance above a small village called Osrokova ; up the northwestern glen, which also communicates with the valley of the Koanta, but at a much lower point, no track is marked. Nevertheless it was the latter direction which, in my belief, we now took ; certainly we did not follow the track delineated on the map. The way lay over magnificent pastures, and, judging by the number of people we met, is a frequented one ; by each successive passer-by our horsemen were greeted as friends, and engaged in talk, possibly about their affairs, but more probably about ours. The incessant stoppages were irritating, so we walked ahead and reached the col at 1.0 in advance of our train, the arrival of which was the signal for a violent altercation between Paul and the other two men on the subject of the delays en route ; each party indulged in uncomplimentary remarks about the parentage—on the female side—of the

other, and the discussion waxed so warm that our intervention was necessary to prevent a recourse to blows.

The height of the col is about 7,200 feet (Bar. 23·10). We arrived at an unlucky moment just as a heavy shower came on, so got no view except of the valleys on either side, beyond which in a northerly direction a broad trench indicated the position of the Baksan. The descent on the west side, which we commenced at 1.45, was over pastures into a narrow green glen, where the limestone cropped out here and there on the hillsides ; this, at 3.20, debouched into a wider glen, with a direction from south to north, equally green and secluded as the first, and, just above the point we had struck, bounded on either hand by smooth slopes of turf, beautifully timbered, and suggestive of an English park. Turning down the stream, we followed its course through the scenery which, as we approached the point where the glen opened out into the broad valley of the Baksan, became more and more dreary, and at the junction attained the *ne plus ultra* of desolation ; on all sides were bare volcanic looking cliffs and arid slopes, while dense thunder clouds, which were rapidly collecting, had the effect of enhancing the natural grimness of the landscape.

Arrival at Osrokova

Although there could be no doubt that the great valley in which we found ourselves was that of the Baksan, our horsemen did not seem to have the faintest notion where we were, or whether our further route ought to be to the right or left, up or down the stream. The course of our march did not in the least correspond with the map, but, putting this and that together, I made out that the glen we had descended must be that of the Koanta, and that therefore Osrokova, our destination, must be down the main valley a little way to the right. So in that direction we turned, putting our best legs foremost in order to get in before the impending storm broke. The path, high above the stream, traversed several ravines, and at 5.0 brought us to a wretched village, perched on the further side of a shaly gorge, down which a muddy torrent flowed to join the Baksan. This was Osrokova.

A small crowd quickly gathered round us, but no member of it seemed at all disposed to receive us into his habitation ; the chief of the village was said to be away, and, in his absence, no one would assume the responsibility of doing anything for such a very disreputable looking party, whose arrival on foot in a country where everyone goes mounted and where ' beggars on horseback ' are literally an everyday sight, was quite unintelligible and rather suspicious. The reading of our Russian letter of recommendation had no effect at all, and we were at a loss what to do, when an individual in ragged costume came forward and introduced himself to Paul as a man of Gebi, who chanced to be in the village on business, and had heard reports from his own people of four mysterious strangers with well lined pockets who were travelling about the country ; were we they ? On receiving an affirmative answer, he harangued the crowd to the effect, I imagine, that Osrokova

was entertaining angels unawares, and himself led the way to a house which, whatever its other demerits, had a fairly watertight roof. It was, in truth, a dingy den but we were well enough content to have any sort of shelter from the furious storm which was shortly raging, and, when the villagers brought in eggs and milk for sale at a moderate price agreed that there was nothing to complain of in our quarters, which were at a lower elevation than we had been at since leaving Gori in the Rion valley, vizt: 3,750 feet (Bar. 26).

Up the Baksan valley

Our programme for the next day, the 22nd July, was a simple one ; we had merely to walk straight up the valley of the Baksan to the village known to our party of 1868 as ' Urusbieh,' but of which the real name according to the map is ' Urushena,'—' Urusbieh ' being the name of the family to which it belongs. We commenced our walk at 8.0 a.m. under most discouraging circumstances, in a perfect deluge of rain which seemed entirely to falsify a prediction which I had ventured upon overnight, to effect that the thunderstorm might prelude a change of weather.

The path, at a lower level than the one by which we had entered the village, soon led us to the Koanta just above its confluence with the Baksan ; the stream is a considerable one, crossed by a bridge which however was in a damaged state and impracticable for laden horses ; the baggage had, therefore, to be unloaded and carried across, when the horses were able to follow. A long line of bullock wagons, on their way up the valley, was crossing the stream at the same time ; the scene was a busy one, and, with a gleam of sunshine would have been picturesque, but, under the actual conditions of gloom, rain, and mud, it did not materially raise our depressed spirits.

Urusbieh once more

As far as the small village of Korhujan, abreast of which we were at 11.30, the valley is straight and uninteresting, enclosed between monotonous slopes, here and there on the left bank broken by rocks. Outside the village our melancholy company sat down on the baggage arranged for the purpose, and spent the best part of an hour in the indispensable midday meal. The resumption of our journey was marked by an improvement both in the weather and the scenery ; the rain gradually ceased, the clouds became thinner, and at last the appearance of a bit of positively blue sky was hailed with enthusiasm ; simultaneously, the valley became narrower, the uniform slopes gave place to picturesque wooded cliffs, and, as the sky cleared the distant mass of Tungzorun, in form not unlike the Breithorn as seen from some points of view below Zermatt came into view.

Exactly at 5.0 p.m. we entered Urusbieh over the more than usually substantial wooden bridge by which the path is there carried from the right to the left bank of the Baksan. The village is situated on the latter bank, at an elevation of about 5,150 feet (Bar. 24·90) just at the

point where a rather considerable torrent, the Kwirik, flows into the Baksan from the north, and opposite to a glen which runs due south towards the great chain, and whose torrent bears on the map the name of 'Adul-Su.' In 1868 the position of the place had not seemed to us to have any natural attractions; now, whether owing to the country being fresher and greener after prolonged bad weather, or because we approached from a different direction, we thought differently. We voted the immediate environs by no means ugly, and there could be no question as to the fascinating character of the glimpse of the snows of the main chain seen up the glen of the Adul-Su, or the striking nature of the view up the long straight valley of the Baksan closed by the huge mass of Tungzorun. This mountain which is, in fact, a spur of the great range, thrown out from it to the north between two lateral glens, must be between 15,000 and 16,000 feet in height, but is not even indicated on the Russian map, in spite of its prominence from all points in the Baksan valley which, unlike other parts of the country, was as accessible at the time when the map was constructed as it is now. Its appearance varies greatly according to the light; during our stay we saw it under all aspects; sometimes it looked quite insignificant, at others, glorious; it is best seen from the bridge over the river. The village itself is a squalid place, not unlike the Swiss Zermatt without its hotels; many of the wooden houses have flat roofs thickly planted with grass, and, upon more than one occasion we witnessed a singular spectacle,— that of the family cow grazing on the roof of the family mansion.

Friendly reception

On our way up from Osrokova we had met several horsemen going down, each of whom had stopped and greeted us in a friendly way, which foreshadowed our reception in the village. A crowd quickly gathered round us, by some members of which Paul and I were soon recognized as old friends, and the word 'Minghi Tau' from many lips gave evidence that the ascent of Elbruz in 1868 had not been forgotten. We were first led to an inviting looking wooden house, quite bare of furniture, but clean and seemingly now to be occupied for the first time; it had, however, a defect which was fatal to comfort; the walls were pierced for windows, but there was neither glass nor shutters, and the consequence was a draught which would have made the place uninhabitable; a bivouac in the open would indeed have been preferable. It was, therefore, a relief to learn that, our probable arrival having been notified by the Governor of Vladikavkaz, quarters had been prepared for us in the house of the Chief of the village, who is not to be confounded with the Princes of the Urusbieh family to whom the whole place belongs. So far as we could make out, most of the people are cousins more or less distant of the Princes, and the present Chief was a comparatively near relation, but filled his position partly by popular consent, partly by the will of the Government, to whom he was responsible for the due collection of taxes, and the general conduct of

the village business. This position of Chief of a village did not seem, in any place we visited, to be an object of ambition, but rather the reverse ; at Urusbieh, where the lords of the soil were powerful and resident, it may well have been particularly delicate.

' Le plus grand frère '

Certainly the holder of it, who soon came and took us to his house, did not carry the cares of office lightly ; he was a meek and unassuming little man, of depressed demeanour, and very shy and nervous ; not so his elder brother, described by Paul as ' le plus grand frère avec le plus grand moustache,' who was a splendid specimen of humanity, a tall, fair, slightly built fellow, with small hands and feet, and an appearance of delicacy which, as we saw later, was delusive, as upright as a lath, and with a certain swagger about him which, combined as it was with a desire to be as attentive to us as possible, was not unpleasant. Prince Ismail and his two brothers Hamzat and Mahomed were away from home, but Ismail's son, a jolly boy of 15, was a good representative of his father, and devoted himself to us during our stay.

We were quartered in an excellent room in the Chief's house, provided at the further end with a raised platform, which was entirely given up to us ; the rest of the room was open to the public, who were not slow to avail themselves of their privilege, and usually crowded it watching our every movement. Tea was sent in soon after our arrival, and was followed by some roast meat which we were informed was a mere snack to pass the time pending arrival of dinner ; in fact it was a substantial meal, which turned out just as well, for the final course did not appear until 10.30 long after Grove and Gardiner had retired for the night to the comfortable, but not altogether insect-free, mattresses which had been brought in for us. Walker and I sat up for politeness' sake, and, from the same motive, did our best to eat heartily of the orthodox boiled mutton, heavy bread, and oniony soup which composed the repast. The tedium of waiting was relieved by a visit from Djapojef Djatchi and Sotaef Achia, the two hunters who accompanied us to the top of Elbruz in 1868 ; both professed themselves pleased to see me, and Achia, when he learned that the ascent was to be attempted again, declared himself ready to repeat the expedition. Djatchi was silent. Achia is a remarkable looking man, of average height, spare in frame, with a grave and rather melancholy countenance, very taciturn, and reserved in manner ; by general consent, he is the most accomplished hunter in the valley, and the respect in which he is held by his fellows was evidenced in various ways.

Caucasian etiquette

In the course of the evening we had a curious illustration of Caucasian etiquette ; when the ' snack ' appeared, we invited the Chief of the village, our host, to partake of it with us, but were told by Paul that we must also invite the elder brother, in whose presence, the Chief, though in his own house could not, otherwise, sit down ; great,

therefore, was our astonishment when, later on, this same elder brother engaged on the most familiar terms in a game of cards with his own servant !

Upon turning out at the dissipated hour of 8.0 on the morning of the 23rd July we were greeted by a cloudless blue sky. As will be remembered we had, at Tiflis, arranged with our friends Messrs. Kwitka and Bernoff, that they should meet us at Urusbieh on the 26th, and that in case of need we would wait till the 28th, before starting for the ascent of Elbruz ; we had, therefore, three, and perhaps five days to spend before that expedition could be commenced. The question now arose, how was the interval to be employed ? In the hope of finding a solution of it, we, after breakfast, attended by the young Ismail and others, strolled up a grassy hill which rose behind the village to a height of some 1,500 feet.

A reconnaissance

From here we had a fine view. Straight opposite was the long, savage, glen of the Adul-Su with, at its head, a great peak of the main chain, rising up like a wall from the glacier at its base, and with a remarkably serrated summit ridge ; the Schreckhorn as seen from the Lauteraar Glacier, in a snowy season, is not unlike this mountain, but not quite so precipitous ; it will be understood therefore that an ascent did not look very feasible, and we had little difficulty in deciding that for our party, in bad mountaineering condition, to attempt it would be waste of time. On the west side of the Adul-Su, an extraordinarily rugged group of aiguilles towered up to a great height, they form the southern flank of this part of the Baksan valley, and the highest of them (? 15,000 feet) did not seem inaccessible ; but the lower slopes were precipitous, and covered with dense forest, the ascent would be extremely laborious and might not be capable of accomplishment within a single day, while the peak was scarcely of sufficient importance and interest to be made the object of a two days' excursion. Far away up the main valley was Tungzorun, a glorious mountain certainly from this point, but, when examined through the glass, showing no obvious line of ascent ; on the contrary, the face exposed to us seemed quite inaccessible, the upper part being cut away from the lower by a line of cliffs, crowned with séracs which obviously could not be climbed direct, and must be turned by a flank movement which might, or might not, be practicable.

In search of a panoramic point

What we wanted was a high point, sufficiently isolated, and within the limits of a day's walk, which might command a view of the main chain and of Elbruz ; and, turning round to the north, we got a glimpse of something which promised to meet our requirements. In that direction, we looked up the valley of the Kwirik, which is formed by a principal and two secondary glens ; over the ridge at the head of the most westerly of these glens a dome of snow just showed itself ; how

far behind it lay could not be very clearly made out, but, on the whole, we inclined to estimate the distance as not very great, and, as the peak appeared to be at least 12,000 feet in height, favourably situated for a view, and, in its upper part at any rate, free from difficulty, I had little trouble in bringing my companions to agree with me that it should be made the goal of any expedition on the morrow. Gardiner would have preferred an attack on the forest-girt aiguille opposite ; but the rest of us were not disposed for anything heroic. Our selection we afterwards found was known in the country as Tau Sultra, but the name finds no place on the map.

The glen of the Adul-Su

By one o'clock we were back in the village. The afternoon was spent by all of us, except Grove, in a stroll up the glen of the Adul-Su. The path into it mounts steeply on the left bank of the torrent, but, after the first ascent, crosses to the right bank along which it is carried through picturesque pine woods in which the axe is making sad havoc. It from time to time affords exquisite glimpses of the great wall-like mountain,—the Tau Tvalda of the map—at the head of the glen, as well as of the rugged range on its western side, which is tremendously steep. After about 2 hours, just as we emerged from the woods on to more broken ground, we suddenly came upon a little fellow, with nothing on but a shirt, and in colour like a burnt brick. Although our apparition must have been a startling one, the child did not show the least discomposure, but, beckoning us to follow him, led the way to a rough sort of shanty a little way off, where we found (as we supposed) our small friend's father, a goatherd who had his quarters there. He quickly set before us milk, which was all he had to offer, and shook his head when, before starting back, we tendered him a small coin, which, with much pantomime expressive of friendly feeling, we therefore made over to the boy, who was too much astonished to refuse it.

Strolling back, and gathering many strawberries by the way, we reached Urusbieh again at 6.0. Dinner this evening was signalized by a novelty in the shape of a vast pie filled with mince, and was further made memorable to my companions by the appearance for the first time of a jug of the sort of beer which is made in this part of the country, and is described by Klaproth in the early part of the century as ' resembling London porter.' I had warned my thirsty friends that this description was misleading, but had failed to prepare them for a beverage as nasty as it actually is, so that the disappointment was severe. Our ordinary dinner drink was sour milk, almost in a state of curds, ' lait aigre ' as we called it ; this we had learned to like ; it is certainly an admirable relief for thirst and, according to our experience, not unwholesome.

An early start

We were astir at 2.30 a.m. on the 24th, and started for Tau Sultra at 3.45 having waited some time for Achia who had promised to

accompany us but failed to appear, such an early move being, no doubt, a novelty at Urusbieh. The morning was glorious, the air fresh and exhilarating ; we however were rather torpid, and our progress up the western glen of the Kwirik by a cattle track, which Knubel had explored overnight, was very leisurely. While strolling along above the first rather steep ascent, we were caught up by Achia, who, in his short native tunic tucked up, with a white sheepskin ' busby,' and his gun slung over his shoulders, was a striking and picturesque figure. He at once went to the front, with the good effect of improving the pace, which, thenceforwards, was quite as rapid as was agreeable to us. At 5.30, we came to a fine alp in which were many cows ; beyond, the ground was a good deal broken and became steeper and stonier, the further we advanced. A low shaly ridge closed the glen, the last ascent to which was rather toilsome, but presented no sort of difficulty. We reached it at 7.45, and found ourselves just above a little ice girt lake formed by a glacier, which came down from a conical snow peak on our left and filled a broad bay between it and a second peak opposite. This last was the mountain we had observed yesterday, but very much changed in appearance now that we were comparatively close by ; it had no longer anything of the dome about it, but showed as a long ridge surmounting a wall of snow and rock,—arranged couloir pattern—of very moderate inclination. Whether it was really higher than the conical snow peak seemed a little doubtful, but the balance of opinion was in its favour, and it therefore was retained as the goal of the expedition.

Ascent of Tau Sultra

On the ridge the barometer read 20·40, which would indicate a height of about 10,600 feet, which must be at least 300 feet in excess of the truth ; the lake, which is on a level with the tail of the glacier, was not much below us, the comparatively high elevation at which the ice comes to an end being, no doubt, accounted for by the relative smallness of the snowfield by which it is fed.

Having spent ¾ of an hour in looking about us, we resumed our way at 8.30, rounding the lake, and then striking straight across the glacier towards the base of our peak ; we were roped together, not because the precaution was really necessary, but as a matter of principle. Achia declined to be tied with us, not from distrust of the rope, but because he preferred to follow a more circuitous route of his own, by which he would avoid a good deal of snow ; he had never forgotten his experience after Elbruz in 1868, when he had been perfectly blind, and, as he had no proper spectacles, his caution now was natural enough. We reached the foot of the peak at 9.15, and after skirting it to the left for a short distance, turned straight up the face,—rather contrary to the inclination of Knubel who was disposed to follow a much more roundabout way. In truth, nothing could have been easier than the rest of the ascent ; a gentle slope of snow led to a rib of broken rocks, up which, moving cautiously to avoid detaching loose stones upon each other, we climbed to the ridge, and then, turning along it to the left, reached the summit

at 10.30,—a point of rock which would ordinarily be bare of snow, but, at the moment, was pretty well covered.

We were able to estimate our height pretty accurately, for to the north of us, on the other side of a wide glen,—another branch of the Kwirik valley—, was a peak which could be nothing but that marked on the map ' Tau Balik-Dashi,' 12,908 feet, and which we agreed in thinking was about on a level with us,—or perhaps a little higher. An estimate of 12,850 feet will not be very wide of the mark. Our barometer reading 18·65 would give 13,100 feet; but that is certainly too high, assuming us to have correctly identified the Tau Balik-Dashi of the map.

View of Elbruz

Words fail to give an adequate notion of the superb view which our position commanded. To the west, beyond an intermediate ridge below our own level, rose the Eastern peak of Elbruz in graceful snow-slopes showing only a few isolated patches of rock. The mountain, seen at a distance of about 10 miles as the crow flies, hardly at first looked to overtop us by 6,000 feet, as in fact it did; but the more we looked, the better we appreciated the true proportions of what we saw, and the more impressive in its absolute isolation did the Monarch of the Caucasus and of European mountains appear. Although in 1868 the upper part of the peak had been nearly bare of snow the general form of the mountain was in complete accord with my recollection; the details of the summit ridge were, indeed, unmistakeable, and the three points on it which we had visited one after the other were plainly to be identified. Of a second peak to the northwest, 92 feet higher, as marked on the map, there was not a sign, and, so far, the view confirmed the conclusion we had been forced to in 1868 that the double summit which the mountain shews from the usual points from which it is seen is an optical delusion. As, however, will appear in the sequel, this is not the case; the western peak, whether or not it exceeds the eastern in height, *does* exist.

The main chain from Tau Sultra

On the north we looked down into a broadish valley,—a branch of the Kwirik—into which descended two rather large glaciers, not, I think, from the main snowfield of Elbruz, but from the secondary ridge, already spoken of, between us and it. Beyond this valley was Tau Balik-Dashi, and beyond it again, a sea of green hills stretching away towards the Steppe.

But, after all, the great feature of the view was to the south, where about 16 miles off at the nearest point, lay extended before us the main chain of the Caucasus for a distance of 100 miles or so, a long line of peaks and glaciers, not to be matched for inaccessibility of appearance, in the Alps, or perhaps anywhere else. The most striking part of the range was certainly that to the south of Urusbieh and the upper Baksan, where the double-headed Ush-Ba,—the Caucasian Matterhorn,—

showed its truly marvellous outline and terrific precipices; but it is flanked right and left by satellites not unworthy of it, while the glaciers which stream into the numerous tributary glens of the main valley, and in particular into that called in the map 'Adil-Su' (not to be confounded with 'Adul-Su') are of the first class. By these, the watershed could, no doubt, be reached at many points, and at one there is certainly an easy and tolerably frequented pass to Mulach, or Betsho, in Svanetia, but we could not make out where it was; the glaciers as a rule showed formidable icefalls, which, though no doubt practicable to an Alpine party, must be scarcely passable by the natives who have neither appliances nor aptitude for icework.

Away to the southeast, Djanga, Koshtan Tau, and Dych Tau rose up grandly, and still further in the same direction we must, I think, have seen Kasbek, though I have no special note of it. As we sat in the unclouded sunshine, in a delicious temperature, taking in, or trying to take in, the main points of the unparalleled panorama which I have not even attempted to describe, we agreed unanimously that, for once in our ill spent lives, we had done the right thing, and that we were amply repaid for the vexatious disappointments of the earlier part of our journey.

At 12.20 after nearly two hours of unmixed bliss we turned to descend. Walker and Gardiner regained the glacier at the base of the peak by a glissade; Grove and I preferred a more leisurely progress by the rocks; thenceforwards, we retraced the morning's route exactly, and reached Urusbieh at 4.50, after having spent an hour at the cattle alp in the consumption of various milky compounds, which were found by some of the party to be by no means so wholesome as they were pleasant. Deducting halts, the ascent and descent of the peak had occupied respectively $5\frac{3}{4}$ hours and $3\frac{1}{2}$ hours, leisurely going. The expedition, therefore, is one of very moderate compass, and there cannot be a doubt that, in the future, when Urusbieh is a recognized haunt of tourists, Tau Sultra will be climbed by every fairly energetic or competent walker, and will hold a place similar to that filled by the Buet at Chamouni and the Cima di Jazzi at Zermatt.

A row in the house

We found Paul busy preparing dinner, but in a moody state of irritation, the cause of which had to be extracted from him by degrees. During our absence he and our host, the Chief of the village, had had a quarrel, which had resulted in the latter washing his hands of us so far as regarded the supplying us with provisions whether for our daily wants or for the impending Elbruz expedition. The materials for our evening meal Paul had managed to procure in the village, but some arrangement as to further supplies was indispensable. While we were somewhat disconsolately discussing the position, in came 'le plus grand frère' in a rather excited state, and after some words with Paul desired that worthy to assure us that he, on his honour, would provide for everything; we need not trouble ourselves; we had only to say

what we wanted, and he would undertake that it should be forthcoming. This was satisfactory, for the time, but I could not help feeling doubtful whether our friend's disposition would last, and whether there was not considerable chance of our out-staying our welcome.

Plans for Elbruz

The result of an hour's solitary reflection in which I indulged, sitting on the bridge over the Baksan in contemplation of the glories of Tungzorun which, this evening, asserted itself with more than ordinary splendour, was to satisfy me that the sooner we made our start for Elbruz the better. Apart from possible domestic difficulties, there was the ever-present anxiety about the weather. We had, it may be remembered, agreed with our friends Kwitka and Bernoff at Tiflis, to await them at Urusbieh up to the 28th July, they on their part undertaking to arrive there not later than the 26th, in view to their taking part in the ascent. We were now only on the 24th, and the idea of a further delay of four days was intolerable,—the more so, because I could not avoid thinking it more than probable that after all the appointment would not be kept. In any case it seemed to me that we might very well decide to start on the 26th, and spend two days in reaching our final bivouac on the mountain on the night of the 27th. If our friends should arrive any time in the course of the 26th, they, as they would certainly be mounted, would have no serious difficulty in catching us up before nightfall on the 27th; if, on the other hand, they did not arrive till that on the following day, the misadventure would be to some extent their own fault;—both parties would have deviated from the understanding.

On returning to our quarters I propounded my new idea to my companions; by Grove and Gardiner it was received with enthusiasm; they persuaded themselves easily enough that there was little likelihood of either Kwitka or Bernoff turning up; Walker alone was doubtful. The opinion of the majority naturally prevailed, so the 'plus grand frère' was made acquainted with our decision, and was adjured to have ready for us a supply of bread which *he* declared would suffice for a journey to Constantinople. The village all the evening was in a ferment over a wedding, in consequence of which we enjoyed the unwonted luxury of our own company, free from the usual gaping crowd.

The Adul-Su again

The 25th July was a day of unclouded sunshine and also, to all of us except Paul who had extensive cooking operations to get through, one of comparative idleness. We had agreed to explore once more in a leisurely way the fascinating glen of the Adul Su, and accordingly started in that direction at 8.45. At the foot of the first steep ascent into the glen was the corpse of a luckless cow which must have fallen from the path during the night; on our return in the afternoon we found it flayed,—a by no means pleasing spectacle.—The carcase being seemingly discarded as valueless. As not uncommonly happens

when no particular plan is in course of execution, our party soon became scattered ; Gardiner and I kept company for some time, but at last we also separated, he to look out for a favourable spot for a bathe, I to find some point commanding a good view where I might take my ease for awhile. After a pleasant stroll of $3\frac{1}{4}$ hours in all, I turned out of the path of the hillside, and threw myself down under a tree on a grassy knoll, from which I looked up the glen to the serrated wall of Tau Tvalda, and across it to a broad lateral glen filled by a somewhat crevassed glacier streaming down from the shoulders of a beautiful snow peak. Although a mere offshoot of the main chain, and unnamed on the map, it cannot be much under 15,000 feet in height.

A wild goose chase

I spent a delightful hour and a half in solitude on my perch, happily unconscious that Achia and the young Ismail had passed up the glen in search of me ; they, supposing naturally that I was in front of them, went nearly to the head of the valley, and did not get home till late in the evening, puzzled and a little alarmed at my mysterious disappearance. Meanwhile I had reached Urusbieh again by 4.0 p.m. having promised Paul to be back early, in case of his wanting anything.

Choice of routes

During the afternoon one of the few remaining undecided points in connection with our future proceedings was settled. After Elbruz we were bound for the village of Utchkulan in the country of the Karatchai at the head of the valley of the Kuban ; the map indicated two routes as open to us ; one, over the glacier clad ridge which connects Elbruz with the main chain, and down the valley of the Khursukh ; the other, up the valley of the Kwirik, and round the northern spurs of Elbruz, along the head waters of the Malka and the Khudes-Su, the latter a tributary of the Kuban. From Urusbieh the distance by either route would be a three days' march, but in the event of the glacier pass being chosen, it would not be necessary to return to the village after Elbruz, and from a bivouac on the upper Baksan Utchkulan would be reached in two days. This plan had attractions of various kinds ; the drawback to it was that a train of porters would, we feared, be required to carry our baggage ; the northern route on the other hand, did not cross either ice or snow, and was, in fact, a tolerably frequented horsepath.

My recollections of the head of the Baksan valley had induced me to hope that it might be possible to get horses across the glacier pass between Elbruz and the chain, especially in a snowy season like that of 1874, and my enquiries of Achia on this point had not been met by a decided negative, though he shook his head in a rather discouraging way ; the general verdict, however, as collected by Paul, was in the end unfavourable ; some said one thing, some another ; but no one, when pressed, would undertake to cross with laden horses. We on our part were decided not to attach ourselves to a string of porters, who would

certainly refuse even to attempt to get over the pass in bad weather which might, of course, come on at the critical moment : a failure, involving a return to Urusbieh and adoption of the alternative route after all, would probably mean missing the steamer of the 10th August from Soukhoum-Kaleh. So the Kwirik-Malka-Khudes-Su line of march was finally resolved upon ; along it we should be independent of weather, while, if less exciting than the glacier route, it was not likely to be devoid of interest of some kind.

Waiting

On the morning of the 26th,—the day which was to see our departure for Elbruz—, there was every indication of a continuance of fine weather. We were up betimes, because although it was not proposed to proceed in the day beyond the head of the valley, an early start was on various grounds thought expedient. It was however soon plain that no such start would be made. The requisite supply of bread which had been promised did not appear, and the result of Paul's frantic enquiries was to implant grave doubts in my mind whether its manufacture had even been commenced. The ' plus grand frère,' when appealed to, shrugged his shoulders and deplored the idleness of his servants who would only work at their own good will and pleasure, and, being no longer serfs, could not be coerced as in the good old days ; but he promised to do his best. Paul was in despair and vented his choicest maledictions on all the natives without regard to rank, age, or sex ; my companions tramped up and down our room like caged beasts ; Knubel sat in a corner, meditating, I fancy, on the—to him—specially dismal prospect of having to ascend Elbruz on short commons ; for myself, I say nothing, save that I seemed to be living over again an old passage in my life ;—as it had been in 1868, so it was in 1874.

At last, thanks perhaps to a few roubles which, at Paul's suggestion, were made over to him for distribution amongst the Chief's servants, half a dozen loaves came in. With this small instalment of what was wanted, the main body of the party started at 12.30. Paul and I remaining to bring up the further supply which was promised momentarily. Achia and two other men who had been engaged to act as porters went with them, and they were also accompanied by a certain number of the village notables on horseback—amongst them the young Ismail, who was ardently desirous of ascending the mountain with us ; to this, in his father's absence, we could not agree, and he started on a clear understanding that he was in no case to go beyond the point which might be selected for our second bivouac. The instructions to Achia were that the party in his charge were to camp for the night in some convenient spot as near the head of the valley as possible.

Up the Baksan valley

The remainder of our supplies did not arrive till 2.0, and it was 3.0 before Paul and I got off with the remainder of our train, in which were ' le plus grand frère ' and three or four other dignitaries,—all mounted ;

they pressed me urgently to ride also, but I declined, not having very pleasurable recollections of the native saddles, or much confidence in my horsemanship ; on foot brandishing an iceaxe, I was an object of awe and admiration to my attendants ; the sight of me mounted might have promoted in them sentiments not so flattering to my vanity. The last hour's delay had been made tolerable by a huge mince pie, which was sent in for my midday meal, and once fairly on the move the anxieties of the morning were soon forgotten. At 4.30 we came to an old moraine which crosses the valley, and at 6.0 to some chalets at the junction of a considerable glen from the north, where a general halt was made for sour milk. So far the scenery is not remarkable, the valley being bare, and the slopes on either hand rather monotonous, but higher up it improves at every step ; the forest becomes comparatively thick and continuous, while the side glens on the south afford glimpses of precipitous snow-streaked peaks, leaving on the mind that impression of hopeless inaccessibility which is the attribute of most of the Caucasian summits. The general effect of this part of the valley seemed to me far finer than from my recollections of 1868 I had expected. At 8.30, when we were beginning to think we must somehow have passed the other party in the forest, we came upon them in a clearing close to a dilapidated hut, just finishing supper round two roaring fires. It was already quite dark, and my friends who had been getting anxious at my non-arrival, were as rejoiced at my appearance, as I was that our preliminary difficulties had at last been vanquished. They had not got so far on their way without a struggle, as Achia, discontented at being separated from me to whom he considered himself in some sort specially attached, made a desperate effort to pitch the camp at about an hour's walk from Urusbieh !

A bivouac

Our evening meal was soon over, and the party,—over twenty strong —soon after disposed itself for the night in a big circle round the two fires, we in our sleeping bags, our native friends in their thick ' bourkas.' The scene was to us a novel and striking one ; the blazing fires, the picturesque costumes of the villagers, and the thick belt of forest which surrounded us, combined to make an ' ensemble ' of a kind impressive to all of us ; nothing less like an Alpine bivouac could well be conceived ; though the materials may not appear very different, there was, indeed, a romance and a spice of adventure in the situation such as in the Alps is no longer possible. The height of the position was about 6,850 feet (Bar. 23·30).

Tungzorun

Some clouds which the previous evening had caused us a little anxiety dispersed during the night, and, when the camp began to stir at 4.0 a.m. on the 27th, the sky was cloudless and the air very keen. At 6.0, our cavalcade was in motion up the valley. We gradually opened out on our left the glen which leads up to the Nakra Pass by which our party

of 1868 crossed from Svanetia. The eastern side of this glen is entirely filled by the huge wall of Tungzorun which projects like a wedge from the main chain towards the north. The western face of the mountain, which was fully exposed to view, is very precipitous, and seamed with couloirs stretching down to a flat glacier hemmed in by a big moraine. The summit ridge is crowned by a long line of séracs which must constantly descend in avalanches to the glacier below and would render very hazardous any attempts at a direct ascent of this face. The eastern side of the mountain plunges into a glen parallel and similar to that of the Nakra, and does not look more accessible than the western face. From the northern end of the mountain a beautifully clean and much crevassed glacier sweeps down towards the Baksan valley, and descends to a comparatively low level. A way could, no doubt, be made up this glacier, but whether the summit ridge could be reached from it seemed anything but certain. Altogether, what we now saw confirmed the opinion we were inclined to form when on Tau Sultra, vizt: that the most hopeful line of attack on this fine peak would be to get to the extreme head of the glen to the east of it, and then turn to the right along the ridge which extends without interruption to the top of the mountain ; exactly where the top is and the character of the ridge are points upon which nothing certain could be said without much closer examination than was within our power to make.

From the spot we had now reached the view up the Nakra glen was the most striking and beautiful, but the prospect in other directions was also interesting. In front the main Baksan valley was closed by a ridge, from which rose, midway, a low double tooth of rock, flanked on either side by glaciers ; that on the north ends in a curious way high up on the hillside in that direction ; the southern glacier, which is in two branches, descends low into the valley. To our right the cone of Elbruz showed itself, much foreshortened, at the head of a glen which opens into the valley nearly opposite to that of the Nakra. Only the actual peak is visible rising from behind the shoulder of an intervening hill, and its appearance, though not insignificant, certainly does not suggest a height of anything like 18,500 feet.

By the glen up which it is seen we had, in 1868, approached the point where we had then bivouacked before the ascent ; Achia now, however, suggested that we should reach the same point by what he considered a better route up another glen a little further on. We acquiesced and accordingly followed the valley as far as a rough sort of shanty, close to a group of dead trees, at no great distance from the foot of the Baksan glacier, and at an elevation of about 7,950 feet (Bar. 22·38).

Stalking a bouquetin

It was now 7.45 and we had been on the move for less than 2 hours ; we were therefore not a little surprised when our native companions, after dismounting, announced their intention to make a good long halt, and have a meal. Protest would have been useless, and, although we chafed in impotent impatience, there was really no special reason for

objecting, as three or four hours at most would take us to our night quarters. We therefore sat down and made the best of it. While the sheep, on which our friends were going to banquet, was in course of cooking, Achia,—like most hunters always on the lookout for game—caught sight of a bouquetin high up on the slopes of the north side of the valley. Girding up his loins he at once started off with his gun, and returned after about an hour and a half with the quarry over his shoulders. I had been quite unable to follow his movements, but Grove, keener sighted, declared that the game had been stalked in a masterly manner. The animal was a small one.

By 10.15 the hunter had returned, the sheep had been eaten, and all was ready for another move. Horses had here to be left,—a circumstance which decided the bulk of the villagers to go no further. 'Le plus grand frère' however, and another young man, persisted in the adventure, and with our four selves, Knubel, Paul, Achia, and three porters, formed the party who now commenced the serious part of the ascent of Elbruz.

Elbruz

We at once left the main valley, and after scrambling over a small lateral torrent, began climbing extremely steep grass slopes on the east side of the ravine by which it had been determined to reach the upper regions. The way required care as the grass was slippery, and the hillside was broken by smooth faces of rock which would have made a fall unpleasant, but the most troublesome part was soon left behind. As we rose the ravine developed into a bare upland glen closed by snow slopes connected, no doubt, with the great glacier plateau which surrounds Elbruz, but not, I think, giving birth to a glacier themselves; in this respect the glen differs from the parallel one to the east into which a grand cascade of séracs streams down from the snowfield. After attaining a certain height the route lay along the side of the buttress between the two glens, rising gently but continuously; it was too much shut in to be at all interesting, so Walker, I, and Knubel, after a time, decided to turn straight up and gain the ridge at once, from which we might hope to see something. Nothing intervened but steep slopes of shale, and at 12.15 we stood on the crest and were face to face with a panorama even more striking than we had expected.

In the north in superb isolation towered up Elbruz, shewing—as ever from this direction—two peaks apparently quite distinct, one over the shoulder of the other. As we gazed I could not help entirely sharing the difficulty felt by Walker in believing that this appearance was an optical delusion, and that the two peaks were really one. In spite of our experience of 1868, I could not but fear we had then, in some utterly incomprehensible way, deceived ourselves. Should it be so, there could be no doubt that the peak we had then climbed was the seeming eastern one of the two, and that the ascent of the western peak, to which the map assigns a superiority in height of 92 feet, remained to be accomplished. The problem would have to be solved on the

UNNAMED SNOW PEAK : OFFSHOOT OF TAU TUALDA.

morrow, and to settle the matter Walker and I agreed that, instead of steering for the eastern peak first as we had done in 1868, we would make for the western. If the two, after all, again resolved themselves into one, there was an end of the question ; if not, the unfinished work of 1868 would be completed, and both peaks would have been trod by English feet.

Across the deep trough of the Baksan valley we looked to the main chain ; exactly opposite was Tungzorun, with to the eastward a long line of peaks and glaciers, amongst which the terrific Ushba reigned supreme. At the head of the valley the line of the glacier pass to the Karatchai and the Kuban river was now plainly to be made out ; the pass is not all steep, on this side, and seemed to present no difficulty for pedestrians, but the extent of snow to be crossed is great, and its practicability for laden horses, I should say, very questionable. The height can scarcely exceed 11,500 feet.

Arrival at bivouac

After half an hour devoted to enjoying the view and to attempts at photography,—of which only one, of Elbruz—was really successful, we resumed our way along the broad crest of the ridge, which was strewn with boulders of basalt, but nevertheless offered an easy path. At 2.30 we came to a flat plain of considerable extent which I at once recognized as the point at which we had, in 1868, struck the same buttress from the opposite direction, and where I had remained while Freshfield, Tucker, and Dévouassaud sought an eligible spot to pitch the tent, with which we were then provided, at a higher elevation. It was obvious that, upon the present occasion, we could go no higher for night quarters ; on the plateau itself snow was lying in patches, and the ridge above was entirely covered ; it was equally obvious that any number of very tolerable gîtes could be constructed where we were, while water was abundant ; the height too was respectable,—about 11,450 feet (Bar. 19·70).

The rest of the party arrived soon after us,—our Urusbieh friends looking a little astonished at their position, but in good spirits. Knubel went off to reconnoitre the mountain, and the rest of us turned with zest to our old Alpine amusement of making burrows in the rocks into bedrooms suited to our several anatomies. Walker and I preferred a place where there was room for two, and succeeded in so arranging matters that in our bags and with umbrellas fixed overhead we trusted to get through the short night fairly well. Of the single gîtes, that constructed by Grove was perhaps the most successful ; it certainly put me rather out of conceit with my own quarters.

A surprise

By about 5.30 our labours were over, and we were lolling about in a happy state of expectation of the morrow's work,—the one piece of mountaineering to which we had now to look to redeem the barrenness of

our journey from a climbing point of view,—when a 'bourka'-clad native suddenly appeared up the hillside from the glen at our feet, and handed me a scrubby bit of paper. It was a note from Kwitka and Bernoff.

15/27 July 10 antemerid.

My Dear Sir

We are just arrived, my freind Bernoff and y at Urusbieff to make with you the ascension of the Elbrouss. We beg you most eagerly not to start up the Elbrouss without us.

We leave Urusbieff after having taken some rest, and hope joining you and your freinds this evening.

Beleive us

Very truly yours

A. Kwitka

A. Bernoff.

Our horror may be imagined. Here were our two friends, to whom we had pledged ourselves not to leave Urusbieh for the ascent before the 28th, already at that place on the 27th, while we were halfway up the mountain. True, they had undertaken to arrive at the village on the 26th, and had failed to do so; but the consequence of this failure would have been trivial, but for our breach of engagement which promised to be fatal to their project of making the ascent with us, and consequently of making it at all. We clearly could not justify ourselves to them by explaining that we did not expect them, and as little by alleging our impatience to get on and our anxiety about the weather. What was to be done? The immediate course was to send back the messenger to hurry our friends, with a re-assuring message that they could arrive in time to join us, as the way up from the valley could be traversed in the dark. We then sat down and reflected.

What is to be done?

Much thinking was not needed to satisfy us that the two Russian officers could not be left in the lurch, and as little that, at whatever hour of the night they might arrive in camp, it would be quite out of the question for them to attempt the ascent on the morrow without rest. On the other hand postponement of the expedition for a day involved great risk of a break up of the weather, which was already assuming an appearance not altogether favourable, and a consequent failure not to be repaired in the time at our disposal. I, therefore, announced to my companions that in my opinion the only practicable course was for them to carry out the programme and start for the ascent as already arranged, and for me to remain behind to receive Kwitka and Bernoff, and try the mountain on the following day with them and Knubel, if the latter worthy was equal to repeating the ascent,—without him, in the opposite contingency.

By this plan, we should at any rate keep faith with our friends ; of course, I risked losing the ascent, but that could not be helped ; the risk was one of the penalties of my position as leader of the party, and to have allowed the chance of it to be imposed on one of my companions,—either by lot or in any other fashion—would have been unreasonable : I had already once made the ascent, and could therefore better afford to be disappointed, if so it must be.

This course was so obviously expedient that it was adopted with little discussion, though I am quite sure that the reluctance with which Walker, Grove and Gardiner accepted my inevitable absence from the crowning triumph of our journey was entirely sincere. Personally, I had good hopes of being able to follow in their footsteps, and accordingly looked forward to the event with tolerable equanimity, especially as Walker assured me that, in case of Knubel being either unable or unwilling to make a second ascent, he would try and do so.

This point settled, we dined—not luxuriously on cold chicken and pâté de foie gras, as in 1868—but on rather uninteresting cold mutton, and, shortly afterwards retired to our respective burrows. Walker and I found ourselves fairly comfortable, though rather cramped, the temperature, though not tropical, being only moderately cold. After sundown, the wind, which had been blowing fitfully all the afternoon, increased in violence until it blew half a gale ; one squall carried away my umbrella, which had been arranged as a roof to our lair,—somewhere, as I supposed in the direction of Tau Sultra miles away ; no attempt at its recovery was possible, and I regarded it as hopelessly lost, but in the course of the next day it was picked up and brought into camp by one of the villagers who came up to our position for some purpose or other.

An unpromising start

Walker and I, in the intervals of broken sleep usual in such situations, exchanged muttered vaticinations of evil for the morrow, and things looked little more promising when, shortly after midnight, preparations for departure began. The wind was blowing with fury ; the sky, however, was clear, and the cold not very severe. At 1.0 a.m. on the 28th July my three friends, with Knubel, started on their adventure, with a last injunction from me to be sure and make the apparent western peak their objective point. As the sound of their mackintosh cloaks flapping in the wind died away, and I realized that I was to take no part in the day's work, and in the solution of a question so interesting to me, a feeling of intense melancholy and regret overpowered me. I could not but recall to mind how, when at Gebi, I had said : ' I foresee that at the end of our journey we shall have been up nothing but Elbruz, and perhaps not up that ' ; one half of this prophesy had already come to pass ; would the second also be fulfilled ? As I listened to the roaring of the wind, I feared it might be so, in my own case at any rate.

Arrival of Kwitka and Bernoff

I was just dropping off to sleep again when a sudden clatter announced the arrival of Bernoff and Kwitka. They had found their way up under the guidance of two men of Urusbieh, and had been much impressed by the unpleasant character of the first part of the ascent from the valley. I daresay that, in the dark, the grass slopes were not the most comfortable going, especially to men in native shoes, with which, to my horror, I found my friends were equipped. A very few words explained to the two Russians what was the situation, and, of course drew from them loud, and doubtless sincere, expressions of thanks to me for having given them a chance. They had brought nothing with them in the shape of supplies ; I therefore started off Paul at once to go down to the village, and bring up whatever he could lay hands on, otherwise, *our* attempt on the mountain would have to be made on empty stomachs after a day of short commons.

Kwitka and Bernoff turned into my bivouac along side, or rather on top, of me, and we so lay, more or less in a heap, until 5.0 when I could stand the discomfort no longer. I therefore extricated myself, and, having handed over two of the sleeping bags to my companions, betook myself to Grove's gîte close by. The morning was cloudless, but the wind was still very strong, and the cold, now, intense. For the next hour I suffered severely and did not dare to go to sleep ; my extremities got completely numbed, and most vigorous thumping was required to restore circulation. The acuteness of the cold, passed off and from 7.0 till 9.0 I slept soundly, awaking to find the sun shining straight into my lair, a comfortable temperature, and the wind much less violent. Such being the state of affairs, I had no sort of anxiety about the success of Grove and his party ; as they had, obviously, been able to struggle on through the night, or they would have been back by this time, I regarded it as a foregone conclusion that they would get up the mountain. None of the Urusbieh men had gone with them ; Achia, when the moment of departure came, pleaded a headache, and elected to await my attempt on the next day, while ' le plus grand frère ' and his companion, of course, took the cue from him. The fact was that they laboured under a delusion that my presence on the expedition would be essential to success, and, finding that I was not going with the others, did not care to expose themselves to what they believed would be a fruitless toil.

Hours of idleness

At 10.0, after a meagre breakfast, I strolled, with the ' young man of Urusbieh,' to the top of the rocks above our camp, and at the edge of the snowfield sat down for an hour to enjoy the wonderful view of the two cones of Elbruz, on the one side, and the chain, on the other. The great mountain looked quite near at hand but, without a glass, no trace of the climbers could be discovered The snowfield looked tempting for an excursion, but smooth and unbroken as it appeared to the eye, I knew from past experience that it had crevasses, and to have ventured

on it without a rope, and after the sun had acquired some power, would simply have been to incur danger without an object.

When I returned to camp at 11.30 Kwitka and Bernoff were still asleep and so remained till the afternoon was well advanced. 'Le plus grand frère' was just rousing himself, and looked as if he had felt the night severely,—in fact I never saw anyone present a more dilapidated appearance; Achia, on the other hand, seemed quite unconcerned and comfortable in a huge 'bourka.' My recollection of how the day passed is rather vague, so much so that I think I, like the others, must have done a good deal of sleep. We had several visitors from the valley,—amongst others the Chief of the village and the young Ismail,—tempted up by curiosity of which I suspect that their compatriots, rather than we, were the objects. They made no long stay, the account given of the experience of the night being probably such as did not tempt the new arrivals to undergo it themselves.

Return of the successful party

I was lying on my back in the sun in a state of extreme apathy when, at about 4.0 o'clock, a 'jodel,' of which the cheerfulness was unmistakeable, announced the return of my companions and their success. In a few minutes they appeared in person. Their story was soon told. They had made straight running for the western peak and reached its summit at 10.40 without encountering any difficulty, but with considerable suffering from the cold and from the rarity of the air, which affected all the party except Walker. The view was cloudless, and the existence of a separate eastern peak conclusively established. They had seen it clearly, at no distance from the summit on which they stood, but separated from it by a depression of probably 1,500 feet, and so apparently equal in height that, by the eye, it was impossible to assign superiority to either peak. This being so, the Russian triangulation which gives the western summit a height 92 feet in excess of the eastern, may well be accepted as correct. The peak ascended by our party of 1868 had been found to be a horseshoe ridge enclosing a small snowfield, which fell away steeply towards the east. My friends described *their* peak as a precisely similar ridge, but with a snowfield breaking away to the west. It is certain therefore that the points reached upon the two occasions were different, and, equally so, that the honour of the first ascent of the reputed highest peak of Elbruz falls to the party of 1874, not to that of 1868.

This result, though not unexpected, was a blow to me; but, naturally, made me look forward to my ascent on the morrow with increased interest. On the spot, I might be able to understand how we had been deceived in 1868. It had then seemed to us quite impossible that the by no means excessive amount of cloud which prevailed could entirely conceal a second peak which must be within a mile of that on which we stood. But so it must have been. Certainly we did not wilfully deceive ourselves. We had never doubted the existence of two peaks or the superior height of the western, nor had we expected to attain the

latter first ; on the contrary, the scheme of our ascent had been to reach the eastern peak first and pass from it to the western. Our astonishment, on gaining the summit ridge, to find ourselves on apparently the *only* peak of the mountain, was extreme, and at the time we exhausted all our ingenuity in suggesting some explanation of the doubleheaded appearance which the mountain presents when seen from either the north or south ; that that appearance was an optical delusion seemed to us certain, although I remember well that, when taking a last look at the mountain from the edge of the snowfield on our descent, we could scarcely bring ourselves to believe that such could be the case.

Knubel remains

So soon as they had satisfied my curiosity, my friends resumed their descent, naturally preferring a night in the valley to one in our exposed position. Paul went with them. Knubel remained with us in order to take part in the morrow's expedition,—not very willingly, as he had found the day's work fatiguing ; but he yielded eventually with tolerable grace, a result which I attributed to a conversation he had apart with Kwitka, the burden of which I suspect had something to do with roubles. As soon as his remaining was a settled point, he very judiciously retired to a corner and was soon asleep.

Towards evening the supplies which Paul had ordered up from the valley arrived, so that our anxieties in regard to the commissariat were removed. The last thing before retiring for the night I collected my followers and made them understand that they would be roused half an hour after midnight, and that we should start from the camp not later than 1.0 ; after that hour I should wait for no one, as it was necessary for me to be back from the mountain as early in the afternoon as possible, as I had promised the others to get down to Urusbieh in the course of the night, so that we might leave that place on the morning of the 30th for the next stage of our journey. The Urusbieh men and the Russians alike promised to be ready, though the latter frankly confessed themselves unable to see the necessity for so early a move :— 6.0 or 7.0 in the morning seemed to them a far more suitable hour.

Start for Elbruz

I greatly improved my gîte by roofing it with a mackintosh cloak, and, when ensconced in it in my bag, was very snug and comfortable. Anxiety, however, prevented my sleeping much, and when the appointed hour,—12.30 a.m. on the 29th July—, arrived, I was very wide awake indeed. The others were quickly on the move, and, after swallowing a few mouthfuls of bread, our party started at 1.0 precisely, in a strict adherence to programme which impressed the two Russians immensely. We were roped together at once, to avoid a halt on the exposed snowfield. The order was as follows : Knubel, Bernoff, myself, Kwitka, 'le plus grand frère,' the other Urusbieh man, and Achia.

Retreat of the Russians

The weather which at 12.30 seemed perfectly fine, did not look quite so settled half an hour later,—that is to say, a few clouds had risen ; but there was nothing very alarming, while the wind, though perceptible enough, was neither so strong nor so cold as it had been the morning before. The snowfield was soon reached, and from its edge the mountain first came into view,—both peaks enveloped in clouds. I could have wished it otherwise ; but, remembering how in 1868 at the same hour the state of things had been precisely similar, and that the clouds had for the most part dispersed at daybreak, my equanimity was not greatly disturbed. We tramped slowly and silently over the gently inclined névé, the wind becoming stronger and the cold more severe as we advanced, the cloud on Elbruz also appeared, in the moonlight, to grow in density. We had been going for about $2\frac{1}{2}$ hours when Kwitka, who had once or twice asked me how we were getting on, in something of the tone in which a sick passenger on a Channel steamer enquires of the steward whether the haven to which he is bound is near, suddenly called a halt, and said, in effect, that he was already becoming exhausted, that he felt he should never be able to reach the summit, and that therefore he preferred to turn at once. I made no attempt to dissuade him, as his unfitness for the expedition was palpable. He was therefore detached from the rope. As we were approaching a small open crevasse in the névé, I thought the moment opportune to suggest to Bernoff direct, and through him to the natives, that anyone who did not feel tolerably sanguine of being able to persevere to the end, should follow Kwitka's example, in order to avoid the risk of individuals having to turn later and traverse the snowfield alone. All however loudly protested their anxiety to proceed, and their confidence in their powers of endurance. Kwitka accordingly went down alone, and we resumed our way towards the cloud-capped mountain in front.

After crossing the little crevasse, the slope was decidedly steeper, and we had not gone many hundred yards, when Bernoff fell prone on his face and began to retch violently. His hour was obviously come ; so he too was untied and started downwards, Achia—not very willingly —escorting him as far as the crevasse in order to see him safely over. This rapid disintegration of our party did not seem at all to affect the spirits of the Urusbieh men, who, by various gestures, gave me to understand that *they* were all right. On Achia's return we pushed on at an improved pace, as the cold, as usual about dawn, was intense. My spirits gradually sunk [sic] to the level of the thermometer, vizt: to about zero, when, after daybreak, I was able to realize the state of the weather ; the sky, overhead, kept clear, but the wind was becoming every moment more violent, while the cloud on the mountain developed its true character ; it was no morning mist, but a fierce 'tourmente,' into which no human being could venture. This became more and more obvious as we advanced over the ever steepening snow slopes, which are broken, some distance from the base of the final peaks, by two

patches of curious smooth black rocks. We had passed the first of these, and were nearly abreast of the second, when ' le plus grand frère ' and his comrade, who so far had both gone exceedingly well, sat down on the snow and indicated by decisive gestures that they should go no further. Achia, I gathered, was willing to go on. It was now 5 o'clock, just four hours from our start, and from the manner in which we looked over the main chain to the south of us, I estimated that we were at a height of at least 15,000 feet.

In every direction, except over the mountain the sky was clear, though the appearance of the heavens to the southward above the wooded hills and valleys of Mingrelia and Imeritia presaged speedy bad weather in those quarters. Words failed to describe the magnificence of the great chain as it lay stretched out before us for, perhaps, a hundred miles. Of single peaks, Ushba, Koshtan Tau, and Dych Tau were, of course, the most conspicuous, but it was rather the effect as a whole than isolated details that impressed us.

A full stop

It was necessary now seriously to consider the position and what was best to be done,—in other words whether I should continue the expedition with Knubel and Achia as long as possible, or accept the defeat which I could not help seeing was practically certain. We were already on the very outskirt of the ' tourmente ' which was raging over Elbruz ; snow was falling where we sat, though not heavily ; and the cold was scarcely endurable. Our jaws were so stiff that articulate speech was difficult. I therefore asked Knubel for his honest opinion, telling him that, personally, I wished to go on if he thought there was a fair chance of our being able to reach the summit, but that, in the other case, I preferred turning at once, as there was no object in exposing ourselves uselessly to extreme discomfort and perhaps danger. He replied that we might be able to advance for possibly another hour, but that we should then certainly have to retreat, unless there was a complete change, which was not probable ; on the upper part of the mountain, in the then state of the weather, no human being could live. This answer which, I am satisfied, expressed Knubel's deliberate judgment, unbiassed by any considerations of personal fatigue, was decisive, and we commenced the descent at once.

Failure !

The moment was one of the bitterest of my life. The dream of the past six months was dissipated, an unlooked for opportunity gone, never to recur. The reflection that I had led my party to victory, though an active share in it had been denied me, consoled me not one jot ; as little did it comfort me to think that by sacrificing myself, in order to keep faith with the two Russians, I had ensured the success of the others, and redeemed the journey from being for them the utter and complete failure which it must now be for me, from a mountaineering point of view. Nor were my feelings of mortification and disgust

made less acute by the fact that the honours of the first ascent of the highest peak of Elbruz, which Freshfield, Tucker, and I had confidently believed to be ours on the 31st July 1868, had been wrested from us, and that I had taken particular pains to bring about that result.

Return to camp

By 7.0 we were back in camp. Our last view of the mountain from the edge of the snowfield was of a rolling cloud, which had already extended below our highest point. The great chain was still clear.

To Kwitka and Bernoff our appearance was a surprise. They entirely failed to realize the nature of a ' tourmente.' If anything could have consoled me for my disappointment, it would have been the cordial and unaffected sorrow at having been themselves the cause, which they expressed when they once understood that the weather, and the weather alone, had beaten me. The line taken up by my Urusbieh friends was amusing. On my observing, by way of consolation to them, that if we had persisted in the ascent *we* should most certainly have perished, they replied : ' Then we also should have died, for we would never have left you.' If, however, gestures have any meaning their minds were thoroughly made up that, beyond the point at which Knubel and I had our consultation, they would not go. I except Achia, who I firmly believe was willing, and rather desirous, to persevere.

There was nothing now to do but regain the valley and Urusbieh as speedily as possible. We accordingly collected our belongings and started down at 7.50. The latter part of the descent was steep and required care even from me who was properly shod ; to Bernoff and Kwitka in native shoes, to which they were utterly unaccustomed, it was positively dangerous. They slipped about in a painful way, and, as it was not possible to give them any effective help, I was relieved from a real load of anxiety, when they were safely down, and we were all collected at the little châlet, where we had halted so reluctantly two mornings before. This we reached at 9.30. The spot seemed to be associated in the native mind with feeding, for, as before, a meal was considered necessary before going further ; a sheep, obtained I know not how, was quickly cut up and roasted, and I cannot honestly say that my objections to the delay for this purpose were either very strongly urged or very genuine. I certainly ate my share.

A silent walk

At 10.45 we resumed our way, the whole party, except Knubel and myself, being mounted. We naturally were soon left in the rear, and a dreary walk we had. The sky was by this time overcast, and ere long heavy rain began, and lasted for about an hour, when it ceased. Knubel is naturally taciturn, and I was little disposed to make conversation : in fact, I think I only screwed myself up to three remarks, which were (1) that it was going to rain, (2) that it *was* raining, and (3) that it had stopped raining. We reached the village at 4.20, not much behind the horsemen, having travelled fast for the last half of the way, thanks to

picking up a native, very long in the limb, who was in the humour to race ; I should have been sorry to be committed to the task of walking him down.

I was received with befitting melancholy by my companions and with hearty greetings by an old friend of 1868, in the person of Mahomed, the youngest of the three Urusbieh princes, a splendid specimen of humanity, who insisted on my coming off at once to his house and being regaled with tea by the gallon and cakes by the pound. As I had subsequently to dine heavily, and, later, to drink more tea, the evening has always lived in my memory, as one of the most severe from a gormandizing point of view, that I have ever gone through.

Leave taking at Urusbieh

It had been settled that next morning at an early hour we should start on our three days' journey to Utchkulan in the country of the Karatchai at the head of the great valley of the Kuban,—the penultimate stage of our route to Soukhoum Kaleh. After dinner, therefore, the delicate business of making to our hosts some return for their hospitality had to be got over. This was not accomplished without an enormous amount of talk. After much discussion amongst ourselves, we had decided that our thank-offering should take the shape of my revolver, the last two of our stock of many-bladed knives, and 15 roubles in cash. These I instructed Paul to present to the ' plus grand frère ' in a neat and appropriate speech, which he was clearly to explain was *my* speech, not *his*. The room was, of course, full of people. Paul, assuming the best grace possible in the discharge of a task which was particularly distasteful to him, gave, I doubt not, a fairly accurate version of my words. The ' plus grand frère ' in reply made a very long speech, of which Paul gave us the purport, according to his wont, in three sentences, vizt: that we had been welcome guests from whom nothing in the shape of payment was expected or desired ; that the revolver and knives would, nevertheless, be accepted as remembrances of us ; but that money they could not take. I replied that we understood and appreciated their friendly sentiments, and did not offer the money in any way as payment for all their kindness ; that we should never have thought of tendering to such noble minded-men for their personal acceptance a sum so trivial in material so base as paper ; but that, doubtless there were poor members of their community, to whose benefit they would have no difficulty in applying our gift. In the end the money was taken, but I do not think that the objection to receive it was at all assumed. Then came a general and vigorous handshaking, after which the room gradually cleared, and we were able to retire for the night.

Start for Utchkulan

We rose at 5.30, and at 7.20, on the morning of the 30th July left Urusbieh, which had been our headquarters for a week. Wonderful to relate the necessary supplies were all ready for us, and the two horses

which were to carry our effects to Utchkulan appeared at the appointed hour. I do not think that this 'speeding the parting guest' was the result of a desire to get rid of us, but that we had succeeded in making it understood that we were really pressed for time and anxious to get on. Our attendants with the horses were a man of Urusbieh, and our friend of Kunim; the letter begged as a favour to be allowed to go with us on the next stage of our journey, declaring that he would gladly serve us for nothing, so much did he like us; furthermore, on his way back from Utchkulan he would have an opportunity of visiting some friends who were in the country in that direction.

Our parting with all the villagers could not have been more cordial, and we were pleased to think that all the hand shaking and embracing *did* express a certain amount of really good feeling. Not less hearty were the farewells exchanged with Kwitka and Bernoff who were to start on their return to Piatigorsk in the course of the day. Right good fellows they were, and I have often since wondered how they fared in the stormy times of 1877/8. Of Bernoff, a strange story reached us which I am loth to believe without verification: that, for some disrespect to his Commanding Officer, he had been reduced to the ranks and sent to serve in Central Asia.

Our route lay up the valley of the Quirik, which opens out immediately behind the village; its lower part has no sort of interest, commanding no view, while the hillsides, though green, are bare and monotonous. The track up it is good. We had been going for about 2 hours, when the Kunim horse, which from the first had shewn a disinclination for work, lay down and declined to get up again until its very moderate load had been removed. Enquiries elicited that the poor brute had been ill for some days; we therefore decided to send back and replace it at once. As the owner was still anxious to go on with us, the Urusbieh man charged himself with the duty of taking the disabled steed back to the village and engaging another for our service. *We* halted for nearly 2 hours, and then went slowly on, but had not gone far when the fresh horse arrived, escorted by a most truculent looking old gentleman, who however, like his comrade, must have been a stout walker, to have caught us up so soon. The further we advanced, the more bare and stony did the valley become, and a view of the glaciers of Tau Sultra and the snows of the eastern peak of Elbruz, which at last disclosed itself, was not sufficiently striking to redeem the dullness of the way: possibly, under a bright instead of an overcast sky we might have been more favourably impressed.

Pass to the Malka

At 1.0 we came to a point where the valley,—here broad and open—forked; our way lay to the right in a northerly direction up a dreary glen, filled by mist the level of which we soon reached. The ascent, though nowhere steep, was continuous and long, and we did not attain the ridge which separates the tributaries of the Baksan from those of the Malka until 3.0, the fog having meanwhile developed into sleet. Naturally

nothing was visible, and we made no longer halt than was required to look at the barometer, which however—still suffering, probably, from its exposure on Elbruz—gave a reading so obviously incorrect that it was not thought worth recording. It indicated a height of over 12,000 feet, which was absurd ; the col, nevertheless, is by no means a low one, almost certainly in excess of 10,000 feet.

The valley of the Shaukam

A waste of stones led down into a narrow green valley on the north side of the ridge watered by a stream called on the map ' Shaukam,' one of the feeders of the Malka ; on this particular afternoon it was also watered by a perfect deluge of rain, through which we pounded along the rough track in a state of dogged disgust, wondering a good deal how we were likely to fare for the night. The men had talked during the day about certain shepherds, and the precise locality where they were likely to be found now became a question of interest. Our enquiries left a decided impression on my mind that our Urusbieh friends had no definite ideas on the point at all ; when, therefore, they began to lead up the hillside, we declined to follow without a close cross-examination, and when the result of that was to elicit nothing more decided than a hope that the shepherds might be ' up there,' we refused to be led on a wild goose chase and determined to keep on down the valley. An attempt to persuade us that a slightly projecting rock, which gave no shelter at all, was a desirable halting place having failed, we continued along the side of the stream till 5.15, when, to our infinite relief, we came in view of a flock of sheep on its further bank, and, a little further on, of something which looked like a refuge for human beings, on a grass slope some fifty feet above the river

Our approach was heralded by furious barking from the sheepdogs by whom Paul and one of our horsemen, who crossed the stream to find out from the shepherds whether they would put us up, were furiously attacked. We shared the same fate when, the result of the parley being satisfactory, we followed, fording the river on the baggage horses ; there was perhaps more bark than bite in this canine demonstration, but it was sufficiently alarming, and I should certainly not have cared to be amongst the brutes alone and on foot. They were quieted with difficulty by their masters, who received us very hospitably and made over to us the only shelter they had ; this was a low felt tent, exactly like one of the booths seen at an English fair with cakes exposed for sale ; it was quite open in front, but being set up with the back to the wind, and constructed of material almost impervious to wet, was quarters not at all to be despised. There was just room for the four of us lying side by side, and, after we had got out of our wet clothes and into our bags we were snug enough. The indifference shewn by the shepherds and our two Urusbieh men to the deluge of rain which was coming down and which continued during the greater part of the night, was truly admirable, and it was emulated by Paul who went about his cooking operations with the alacrity and cheerfulness he always showed

when circumstances were specially adverse. Knubel, having a sleeping bag like ourselves, was well off with no ground of complaint.

Trout and sheep's milk

Dinner was signalized by a novelty in the shape of a dish of trout, caught by the shepherds in the stream below but made over to us in exchange for some of our bread which had unluckily turned out sour and scarcely eatable. This was the first and only time in the course of our journey that we came across fish of any kind, though it is hard to believe that all the mountain streams are barren of them. Another delicacy, quite new to me was sheep's milk, which we all found decidedly palatable.

On rousing ourselves at 4.0 a.m., after a soaking wet night, we were relieved to find a fair morning and tolerably clear sky, enabling us to get a glimpse of the green valley of the Shaukam, which seemed to be closed by snow and rocks but no glacier. Leaving the shepherds well content with a very moderate remuneration for their hospitality, we started at 5.15 for a twelve hours' march across the northern spurs of Elbruz. Pursued by our canine foes with ferocious barkings we descended to a bridge which crossed the stream a little below the alp, and then mounted by a gentle ascent to the crest of the hills on the opposite bank. The hillsides in all directions were covered with sheep, goats, and cattle in large numbers, and, as we later saw, the uplands on the north side of Elbruz are, in fact, a vast grazing ground. From the top of the ridge, which we reached at 6.15, there was a cloudy view of the mountain on the south, and a clear one over the country to the north in the direction of Piatigorsk and the steppe. On that side the prospect was a very curious one, across a wide expanse of green downs, broken by steep sided but not deep ravines, rising occasionally into isolated hills of a conical shape, like huge tumuli, and closed by a long line of perfectly flat-topped bluffs—apparently of limestone.

A rough track led down into a glen similar to the one we had left, and up the further side to a shepherds' encampment at the foot of one of the strange grassy cones above spoken of. There can be no doubt that these owe their origin to volcanic agency, that they are indeed reproductions on a small scale of the gigantic cones of Elbruz itself. From the bottom of the glen, both peaks of that mountain were in full view, the snow and ice appearing to come to an end at a high level on a flat plain.

Watershed between the Black Sea and Caspian

After a halt of half an hour, from 8.0 to 8.30, with the shepherds, while our men breakfasted, we pursued our way in a westerly direction by a cart track which, at first excellent, died away in a mysterious manner. No track, however, was required over the gently undulating plateau which we now followed for several hours. To the north there was always the same wide stretching view, but on the south the clouds were lying low and concealed whatever there may have been of interest in