Suanetia

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PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
ROYAL GEOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY
AND MONTHLY RECORD OF GEOGRAPHY.

Suanetia : *

By DOUGLAS W. FRESHFIELD, SEC. R.G.S.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, March 12th, 1888.)

Map and Illustration, p. 404.

THE Alps can never be exhausted—except to the tourist or the topographer. Yet they can hardly be to another generation what they were to their discoverers, to the men who thirty years ago joined to fill up a gap in the maps of Central Europe, to explore the fastnesses of Tyrol and Dauphiné, to survey the chain of Mont Blanc and the Graian Alps, the untrodden snow-fields of the Orteler, the Adamello, and the Ziller-thaler Ferner. The record of their work is to be found—not in the publications of this Society, which has at times passed over very lightly the geography of our own continent—but in recent Government surveys, in the articles of von Sonklar, Payer, and other distinguished geographers in ‘*Petermann’s Mittheilungen*,’ in Mr. J. Ball’s ‘*Alpine Guide*,’ and in the numerous publications of the Alpine Societies, which now number in Europe over 50,000 members, and dispose of an annual income exceeding 20,000*l*.

The task of Alpine exploration, when once seriously taken in hand, was vigorously pursued. Although scientific problems must always remain to be worked out in every great mountain chain, our knowledge of the Alps so far as mere topography is concerned is complete, or on the verge of completion.

A new recreation ground is wanted for those of our countrymen who, without being travellers by profession, find pleasure and refreshment in rough travel among primitive people, in mountain scenery and glacier air, in that sense of adventure and discovery which is afforded only by unknown countries, or virgin heights and an unmapped snowy chain. To such travellers—or vacation tourists—I offer the Caucasus.

* I have throughout as far as possible Anglicised and simplified the spelling of native names, avoiding the French *ou* and the German *sch* or *tsch*.

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Here, if they make a hobby of map-construction and correction, or of any branch of natural science, or of linguistic and ethnological studies, they will find a field for much useful work. At any rate they may enjoy themselves, and while they do so they can hardly fail to increase knowledge. The country has been brought well within the reach of vacation tourists, of every one with a two months' holiday. Professional geographers, perhaps, are apt to think slightly of vacation tourists: but even the African lion may be aided by a mouse! Mr. Galton himself once edited several excellent volumes of vacation tours.

Nineteen years ago I described to the Geographical Society the first journey of exploration made by mountaineers, in the technical sense of that word, in the Caucasus, the ascents of its two most famous peaks, Elbruz and Kazbek, and the general character of the snowy chain that connects them. It is not likely that any reader of this paper remembers what I then said and printed. But much of it has passed—mainly through an excellent article by Mr. E. Bunbury in the last edition of the 'Encyclopædia Britannica'—into handbooks of geography. Much has passed, but not all; for it is hard to uproot established errors, and the errors about the Caucasus were at one time both widespread and manifold.

In July 1887, in the company of M. de Déchy, an Honorary Corresponding Fellow of the Society, and with Alpine guides, I revisited this noble chain, twice crossed some of its greatest glaciers, climbed several of its peaks, and penetrated many hitherto unknown recesses. In the course of these wanderings the maze of the central group was unravelled, and several orographical problems which had puzzled intermediate travellers received their final solution. I have, in part from these personal experiences, in part from careful study and collation of the photographs taken by M. de Déchy in three previous journeys (1884-6), been able to form a tolerably close and complete picture of the region above the snow-line, of the "Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers," of the Central Caucasus.† The outlines of this picture I laid before the Society in March last. But I prefer to delay the publication of that portion of my paper until I am able to fill in several more or less important gaps in my own knowledge. During the next few months Alpine explorers will, I trust, make some fresh discoveries. These, together with the valuable new measurements in course of communication to me from General Shdanov, the Director of the Map Department at Tiflis, I desire to incorporate at leisure in a general sketch of the central chain, and particularly in the map which should accompany it.

For the moment, therefore, I propose to limit myself to some notes on the scenery and people of a single district of the Caucasus, the mountain-

* 'Journal R.G.S.,' vol. xxxix.

† M. de Déchy has presented to the Royal Geographical Society selected specimens from these photographs. See also his 'La Souanétie Libre,' Buda-Pest, 1886.

girt basin of Suanetia, and one or two sketches of travel among its glaciers and snow-fields.

Suanetia (excluding Dadian's Suanetia, of which more hereafter) is the upper basin of the Ingur, a river which flows into the Black Sea a few miles east of Sukhum Kaleh. It is about the size of the valley of Aosta, 40 miles long by 15 broad. It lies between 3000 and 7000 Suanetia. feet above the sea. On its north run the snowy ramparts of the Caucasian crest, enclosing in their complicated ridges four great glacier basins (those of the Zanner, Thuber, Gvalda, and Betsho glaciers), and sending down more directly towards the Ingur or its tributaries many ice-streams, such as the Adish, which would be ranked in the Alps as glaciers of the first class. These ridges are composed of crystalline rocks, which show the tendency observable in the Alps (e.g. in the Mont Blanc and Pelvoux groups) to arrange their summits in double lines, in the troughs between which lie vast névés. This structure has been grotesquely misrepresented in the small map, based on the 5-verst Russian survey, of the chain north of Suanetia published both in the French and English editions of Reclus's '*Géographie Universelle*.' On either flank of the rigid granites lie beds of friable schists, whose green rounded outlines afford a striking contrast to the snowy precipices of the great chain on which they abut.* On the south Suanetia is fenced in by the lofty slate ridge of the Leila, which, running parallel to the main chain, attains over 12,000 feet, and bears very considerable glaciers towards its western end. In this direction the river escapes, between high spurs of the two chains, through a narrow porphyritic gorge, which is not at present passable for horses. On the east a low grassy down (8600 feet), only 1600 feet above the highest villages, leads into a pathless maze of forests and flowers—the wilderness in which the Skenes Skali, a tributary of the Rion (the ancient Phasis) has its sources. But so circuitous is this outlet, that Russians and natives have both preferred the higher and much steeper Latpari Pass (9200 feet), which is the usual road into the valley. Within these ridges and gorges the inhabitants have lived for centuries isolated from the outer world, forgetting and forgotten.†

They are first mentioned by Strabo, under the name of Soani,‡ as a powerful nation; but Suaneti, as far as I could learn, is what they now

* For detailed observations as to the geology of the district see Abich's '*Voyages en Transcaucasie*,' Moscow, 1865, E. Favre's '*Recherches Géologiques dans le Caucase*,' 1875, and Iljin's papers in '*Petermann's Mittheilungen*' for 1884.

† I shall enter into detail as to the glacier passes in a subsequent article on "The Peaks, Passes, and Glaciers of the Caucasus."

‡ The statement in the received text that they could muster 200,000 fighting men must surely be a copyist's error. Even on the supposition that the Soani gave their name to a confederation of Colchian tribes the figures would be hardly credible. Strabo states that the Soani had a king and a council of 300, and used poisoned weapons in war. Procopius calls the country Souania.

call themselves. It is perhaps worth remarking that both Suanetes and Consuanetes appear in the catalogue of the Alpine tribes subdued by Augustus, inscribed on the Trophæum which still shows its "Roman strength" on the heights of Turbia. At the last census the Suanetians numbered about 12,000. Over one-third of the race, known from the native prince who ruled them as the Dadian's Suanetians, live on the upper Skenes Skali. They have been more or less merged in the surrounding Mingrelian populations. In the upper basin of the Ingur the remaining Suanetians found the Sanctuary of the Caucasus. I use Sanctuary in the sense, not of an abode of saints, but of a place of refuge for criminals. It remains for some competent student to write a monograph on the Suanetian communities, indicating the foreign elements mixed up with the original stock. I can only mention these facts. Among the people of Lachamuli, the lowest village, there are many Jews who carried on trade with the lowlands. At Betscho a few Mahommedan Tartars were established. At Mulach several Cossack families, deserters from their posts on the old frontier of Circassia, have found a refuge. The villages at the lower end of the valley fell under the control of a native family, said to have been of extraneous Kabardan origin, known as the Dadish Kilians; but the territory of the upper communities, was at the time of the Russian occupation and is down to the present day, distinguished as "Free Suanetia."

On the history, such as there is, of this people, I must not linger.* They are mentioned by Pliny and Procopius. Their country was reserved by Chosroes for Persia in his treaty with Justinian.

History. It was converted to Christianity before the tenth century, and covered with small chapels or churches. Seven hundred years ago it formed part of the kingdom of Queen Thamara, the heroine who occupies the place of Alexander or Charlemagne in Georgian legend; the greatest of their *kings*, as, anticipating the Hungarians' compliment to Maria Theresa, Georgian chroniclers term her. The Suanetians still chant ballads in her honour, recounting how she led them to victory over their neighbours the Abkhasians and Tartars, and what was better still, reduced their taxes to the nominal sum of an egg per household.†

Suanetia soon fell off from the Georgian kingdom. After a period during which it was connected with Mingrelia, it became, at some time in the last century, completely unattached. Since that time the district has enjoyed perhaps as complete a form of communal home rule as could be desired by the most enterprising politician in search of an example of decentralisation logically carried out to its extreme limits. Each com-

* The standard authority for Georgian history is the chronicle compiled between A.D. 1703-21 by order of King Vakhtang of Georgia. It has been translated into German by Klaproth, and is analysed by Dubois de Montpéroux in the second volume of his work on the Caucasus.

† Radde, 'Drei Langenhochthäler Imeritiens,' Tiflis, 1867.

munity is made up of several villages. The village, or cluster of fortified houses, consisted—according to Prof. Kovalevsky—of members of the same family or *gens*. Now the village generally includes several families. Members of the same family cannot intermarry. The community proved too large a unit. Thus when Dr. Radde in 1864 was at Ushkul some men of Murkmur shot at everybody who came down the path from Chubiani, two contiguous hamlets belonging to the same community. As if life were not already sufficiently exciting, public enmity was supplemented by countless private feuds and vendettas. Women and pasturage rights were the occasion of most of them. When a woman changed hands or husbands, the parties concerned could not always agree on the value in cattle—the Suanetians had no money—of the lady exchanged. Hence arose assaults of persons and batteries of towers. The affairs of the hamlet, so far as they were not settled by appeals to arms, were regulated by an assembly of all adult males, in which unanimity was required for a valid decision. The minority probably often saw good reason for yielding—such reason as the schoolboy sees who is asked whether he will do this or that, or “take a licking.”

The foreign relations of the Suanetians consisted for the most part in predatory excursions into their neighbours' pastures. They were arrant sheep-stealers and cattle-lifters. The great glaciers of the main chain, and passes of the nature of the Col de Collon, or the Col d'Hérens, were no obstacle to these sturdy thieves. The Tartars of the north side were forced to keep a guard to protect their flocks and herds on the upper pasturages. I saw myself, in 1868, stolen oxen being driven over the Dongusorun Pass (10,900 feet), and Dr. Radde recounts the robbery of a flock of five hundred sheep by the Suanetians of the Skenes Skali.

Strangers met with no hospitality. On the contrary, it was the custom to exact a payment from them for passage, and the custom still survives in petty demands made for halting in a remote village.

The Suanetians may fairly be described as reverted pagans. Some Christian rites, fasting in Lent, the use of the sign of the cross, they have doubtless preserved. But these survivals seem to me no more to entitle them to the name of Christians than our own midsummer-night fires constitute us sun-worshippers. Such at least was the view of the Russian Government and of Dr. Radde. He describes, in the work I have often quoted, how the *pagan* inhabitants of Adish were converted in 1865. The Russians treated them much as the legends of the Trentino assert Charlemagne to have treated the inhabitants of the Italian Alps—they baptised them wholesale.* The country is covered with small churches and chapels, dating probably from the 11th and 12th centuries,† built, unlike the houses and towers, of regularly squared blocks of limestone; the apse is sometimes ornamented

* Freshfield's 'Italian Alps,' Appendix D.

† See plates in M. Bernoville's 'Suanétie Libre.'

externally with carving, or an arcade of columns in low relief. The bells, as in Corsica, are suspended to a wooden frame outside the church. The altar-screens are arranged as in Greek churches. The interior is frequently frescoed. The architecture, such as there is, is Georgian—that is, Romanesque in structural features, Persian in decorative detail. The frescoes at their best resemble Giottoesques, at their worst are bad, barbarous Byzantine.

Long before Suanetia had obtained home rule, it had advanced to church disestablishment. The priests disappeared, and their place was taken by an hereditary caste of local elders, who superintended the funeral feasts and sacrifices. The ecclesiastical property was secularised; a village vestry assumed its control, and kept the key of the church, which, no longer reserved for pious uses, served principally as a treasure house. Inside in heavy chests were stored the sacred books and images, some of them beautiful works of art (figured in M. Bernoville's and M. Chantre's works), Persian silks, strange three-sided pieces of wood carved with old Georgian inscriptions, flint-headed spears and arrows, dozens of horns of the Caucasian *tur*. These things are still kept locked up, and it is almost impossible for any stranger to see them. My account comes chiefly from a gentleman who obtained access through travelling in the train of the Bishop of Poti, who last year ventured on a visit to this remote corner of his diocese.

The priests having been disposed of, services and sacraments naturally went too. Marriage consisted in sewing together the garments of the bride and bridegroom; baptism was travestied; the ancient funeral ceremonies were revived or continued. Of these Professor Kovalevsky furnishes me with the following description:—One of the nearest relations of the deceased follows the body to the grave, leading by the horns a fat ox. Immediately after the burial the ox is killed, and the heart and liver are placed on a wooden platter. This is taken by one of the local elders (who are not consecrated or in any way recognised as priests by the Georgian Church), who lifts up the plate, using at the same time the following words:—"O God, accept this our sacrifice." The portions so dedicated he keeps for himself. The rest of the animal furnishes the funeral banquet. A year after the death a commemorative feast is held at the grave. The relatives bring cheesecakes, portions of meat, and the spirit locally made from barley. These the ghost is supposed to need on its journey. They are blessed by the elder, and, as before, kept by him for his own use. Every year after the harvest there is, as in Roman Catholic countries on All Saints' Day, a general commemoration of the dead, and large offerings of food are made to the elders. I witnessed a similar festival among a Mingrelian population at Gebi, on the Upper Rion. There the ox was cut up in the churchyard outside a new church, and the offerings were blessed by a priest appointed by the Russian Government. This may well have been a renewal of some pagan sacrifice on the tombs of ancestors. Many graves surround the churches.

But others are found under particular trees. It is obvious that tree-worship survives in Suanetia.* In the centre of many hamlets there is a venerable tree or trunk—walnut (*Latal*), birch (*Mestia*), cherry (*Nenjar*)—under which stand two or three rude stone chairs. Doubtless these are old places of assembly.

The people are said (on the authority of a Mingrelian priest) to venerate the heavenly bodies.† As will be seen presently, the Suanetians who carried our goods over the chain appeared to pray to and praise the sun directly. They do no work on Friday, Saturday, or Sunday, thus partially making up for other shortcomings by keeping the Sabbaths of three religions.

The Suanetians had home rule, and church disestablishment with disendowment. They had solved another pressing problem. They had, without emigration, overcome the natural tendency of the population to increase beyond the limits their territory would support. They had even caused it to diminish. Their system was simple and effectual. They put a pinch of ashes at birth into the mouths of all superfluous female babies. They took a masculine view of superfluity. At the last census there were four males to three females in the Ingur valley.

Poetry where it exists, above all primitive poetry and local ballads, often gives a nearer insight into the condition of life and manners of a race than religious rites and beliefs. The one is indigenous, the others as a rule are exotic. Dr. Radde has fortunately preserved several very curious Suanetian ballads, such as are still sung under some ancient tree, or on the march along the mountain path. They celebrate the golden time of Thamara, past forays across the great chain into the lands of the Baksan Tartars (the name of a glen at the foot of Elbruz, Terskol, occurs in one), or among the Abkhasians to the west. The following ballad, which records the fate of a hunter—an early “mountaineering accident”—gives so lively a picture of Suanetian manners, that I cannot resist venturing on a rough translation.

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

* There is in an otherwise bare landscape a very remarkable grove of ancient beeches, surrounding an ancient pilgrimage church near Forno, at the head of the Val Grande, the northernmost of the Valli di Lanzo in Piedmont. Probably research might lead to the discovery of other instances in the Alps where pagan groves have been sanctified by later use. The source of the Po is still an object of pilgrimage to thousands of Piedmontese peasants in the month of September. The signs of the village inns at Crissolo, the highest hamlet, illustrate the transference or rather confusion of worship. They are, “Ai Sorgenti del Po,” “Alla beata Vergine.”

† Bernoville's ‘Souanétie Libre.’

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

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

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

"The star Venus is my enemy!

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

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

In this strange and interesting political and social condition Suanetia appears to have remained for more than a century. Off the world's highways and the world's contests, the Free Suanetian communities went on turning, like the earthen pot, round and round in their own rock-girt pool, until they were swept at last into the stream of the nations.* In 1833 Russia assumed suzerainty over the district. As years went on, the suzerainty became more than nominal. The Suanetians at first did to their new rulers as they had been accustomed to do to their neighbours. A Suanetian prince, the Dadish Kilian of the Lower Ingur, in 1857, assassinated the governor of Kutais and three other officials. In 1869, the year after my first visit, the Governor of Mingrelia, Count Levershoff, made a tour through the district with

* May not some confused report of Suanetia be the origin of the fable of Hanyson (Soany?), the land of perpetual darkness and crowing cocks of Sir John Maundevile?

an armed force. The villagers collected to resist him, and it was only by tact and good luck that a collision was avoided.*

Captain Telfer—one of our best recent authorities on the Caucasus, although his work has been most unaccountably ignored abroad—has given a full account of his visit to the district with a Russian official in 1874.† In 1875–6 there were further disturbances culminating in a partial revolt, confined however to one or two villages, and the murder of a Russian officer. The Government inflicted an adequate, but by no means excessive retribution, made a great many good resolves as to new roads and other measures, and tightened to some extent, as it might well have done earlier, the reins of administration. It has appointed responsible headmen or *starchinas* in every commune, has sent more village priests, has established several schools, erected sheds or court-houses where travellers can find shelter, and has placed its representative at Betsho in a position to command a certain amount of respect and obedience. The framework of local government has thus been laid down. But the machinery is naturally still rude and ineffectual. Thus, at Ushkul the *starchina* does not understand a word of Russian, and the official documents he receives are carefully preserved, unopened and unread, in one of the church chests! A thief from Adish (formerly so notorious a robber's den that in 1864 Dr. Radde did not dare to pass through it by daylight) stole from our camp last summer what he could lay hands on under cover of night and storm. But this was an exceptional experience; Russian justice speedily overtook the culprit, and the offence is less likely to be repeated. I walked about last year alone and unarmed by day and night all over the hills, as freely as I should in Switzerland. A change is slowly coming over the people: schools, perhaps the only effectual civilisers, are doing their work. At Mestia I entered the schoolhouse. It was holiday time, and I could only notice the pictures with which the walls were decorated. Among these were a chart of the heavenly bodies, another of common objects of civilisation, novelties most of them to these young barbarians, and a woodcut of the murdered Tzar lying in state. Everywhere I noticed in the rising generation an absence of the wild-animal expression which was the characteristic of the Free Suanetians twenty years ago, and which all travellers have observed; and in several villages a small boy, by his knowledge of Russian, was able to serve as interpreter between the *starchina* and ourselves.

The Suanetians are not, as M. Chantre alleges, mainly a pastoral people. They keep a few flocks of sheep and herds of horses. Bullocks are used to draw sledges, and are eaten in winter. But flocks and herds are seldom found, as among the Tartars beyond the chain, on the high

* See Bernoville's 'Suanétie Libre' for a full and interesting account of this quasi-military promenade.

† Telfer's 'Crimea and Transcaucasia,' 1876. See also 'Edinburgh Review,' No. 297.

pastures, and consequently there are often no paths to them. To reach the upper glacier basins you must find and follow almost untraceable hunters' tracks. Pigs, the smallest breed I ever saw, and geese wander round the homesteads, which are guarded by dogs. The villages are surrounded by barley-fields fenced in with neat wattling. The paths between them are pleasant, and less stony than most Alpine mule-roads. The inhabitants have learnt to cultivate potatoes and other vegetables. They cut a certain amount of hay on the high pastures. Sometimes they cross the chain in summer, and let themselves out as labourers to the indolent Tartars, just as the Lucchesi do to the Corsicans. But there is no love lost between them. The Mussulmen look on the Suanetians with contempt as pig-eaters. I heard the Suanetians hiss "Cherkess" at our Kabardan Cossack; and the Cossack—a mild amiable creature, the reverse of the popular idea of a Cossack—despised and distrusted every Suanetian from the bottom of his soul. A race-hatred of centuries was recognisable in its ashes.

It seems to me difficult to say anything definite as to the prevalent type among the Suanetians. *Variety* is the marked characteristic. One Type of village headman (Mestia), huge and bull-like, was like a population. figure from an Assyrian monument. Of the three men who led our baggage horses from Ushkul one wore the clothes, and had something of the air and manners of a Persian gentleman. He walked in a pink cotton frock-coat, wore a turquoise ring, and had his ears pierced. Another was a splendid, good-tempered, fair giant. Fair men with tawny beards are common. The third was a tattered, dark, stumpy, noisy barbarian. The ordinary costume is the brown frock-coat with cartridge pouches on the breast of the Caucasus, and on the head either an Ossetian flabby wideawake, or a *bashlik*, or one of the tiny pieces of cloth, like kettle-holders, commonly worn in Mingrelia. The women at Ushkul have one rough sheet of sacking for clothing, and are shy. In other villages they wear the red robes common in this part of the Caucasus. At Latal they are very forward, and wear flounced petticoats, such as might be seen in a back street of Genoa. Some one may start a theory that the Latal ladies are the descendants of refugees from one of the Genoese colonies on the coast destroyed by the Arab invasion! One per cent. of the population are said to be goitred.

The Suanetian language resembles the Early Georgian into which the Bible was translated. It closely resembles also the dialects spoken by neighbouring highlanders, such as the Pshavs, Chevsurs, and Tushins.

Language. H.B.M.'s able and active Consul at Batum, Mr. Peacock, has prepared a limited vocabulary of the Georgian, Mingrelian, Laz, Suanetian, and Abkhasian dialects for the Royal Asiatic Society.* Even a hasty glance shows that the first four tongues have many words in common, while the Abkhasian seems to stand absolutely apart

* 'Journ. of the R.A.S.,' vol. xix. part 1. See also Dr. Radde's and Captain Telfer's works already quoted.

from all of them.* The problem that has been discussed is,—Are the Suanetians—so far as they are not merely a mixture of refugees who have found shelter at different times in this Mountain Alsatia—of the Georgian stock, or do they belong to some primitive Colchian race? The first view is taken by Radde and Kovalevsky, the second by Bernoville, whom M. Chantre copies in the short notice contained in the encyclopædic and splendidly illustrated work noticed in the last number of the ‘Proceedings.’ I have no doubt myself, and the linguistic argument seems enough to settle the question, that the former view is correct. Possibly the latter rests on a misapprehension, and there was no separate Colchian race distinguishable from the Georgian.

After its natural beauties, its peaks and forests, what first strikes the traveller in Suanetia is the local architecture. The castellated

Architecture. villages which lawlessness has produced are as prominent in his eyes as the castles of the robber barons are to the Rhine

tourist, or the towers of San Gimignano—to take a closer parallel—to those who wander in Italian byways. Nothing more strangely fantastic can be imagined than these towered hamlets. Mestia alone has seventy towers 40 to 80 feet high; Ushkul about fifty, and two castles besides. Let me try to describe from a sketch a street-scene in Chubiani, one of the hamlets of Ushkul, 7000 feet above the sea. The house is a square block built of irregular pieces of slate and slate-roofed. The only windows are small holes, high up, and unclosed. The smoke escapes through the roof. Birchbark torches are used at night. A wooden passage, capable of being cut down in case of emergency, leads to the tower of refuge. Let us enter the house: it consists of one large ill-lighted room; two or three rude stones form the hearth; there are a few rough wooden benches and stools on the earthen floor; in the corner is a raised wooden platform with skins and cushions, the family couch. Groping up a dark passage, we reach the tower. Ladders, easily removable, lead from storey to storey. The ladders are short, and to gain each storey one is compelled to scramble up projecting stones left in the wall. Skulls of wild goats (*Capra Caucasica*),† and other odds and ends, lie about on the landings. On the top storey are loopholes for firing. These towers, unlike the churches, are built of untrimmed black

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

† Dr. Radde saw *thousands* in the church at Ushkul.

slates, generally whitewashed. At Ushkul, however, there are two castles, one 50, the other 500 feet above the village (attributed of course to Queen Tamara), in which the black slate has been left its native colour. In the lower castle I found a ruined chapel. The higher castle commands a view of the pass to the upper Skenes Skali, and must have been the defence of this entrance to the valley. I was fortunate in meeting at Ushkul a very intelligent man, M. Bussarion Nichoradse, a native of the place, who has been educated by the Government and is now a schoolmaster at Kutais. He told me that in ancient times all the families in a village were bound to assist their neighbour who was building a tower, but that no new towers had been raised, though many had been repaired, within his memory. A somewhat similar custom existed in the present generation at Chamonix, as François Dévouassoud, my Alpine guide, reminded me. When any member of the commune was building a house, his neighbours after mass on Sunday would contribute each a few hours' labour to his erection.

Scenery, perhaps, ought to have come before architecture, the landscape before the incident in the foreground.

'Savage Suanetia,'* the title chosen by an enthusiastic sportsman for the most recent description of this district, although in one sense appropriate, seems to me, so far as nature is concerned, singularly unhappy. Smiling—sylvan; such are the epithets that come naturally to the traveller's lips as he suddenly emerges from the icy recesses of the Caucasus into a region of wooded hills, gentle slopes, sunny meadows, and neatly fenced barley-fields. Compared to the warrens or stone-heaps which serve the Tartars of the northern valleys for dwellings, even the towered villages have at a distance a false air of civilisation. North of the chain the traveller is frequently reminded of the sterner valleys of the Pennine Alps, or even of Dauphiné. Here the hill-shapes recall Savoy—Contamines and Mégève; but the forests show softer and more varied foliage than we are accustomed to in the High Alps; the pines—and what pines!—no longer predominate, but appear as dark cones of shadow amidst the fresh green of early summer, of beeches and alders, of copses that a few weeks earlier must have been ablaze and fragrant with blossom. Suanetia in June, in the flower-time of the rhododendrons and the azaleas, and again in October, when the azalea leaves are red and the birches golden against fresh autumn snows, must be one of the wonders of the world. The villages, as a rule, stand in open valleys or on slopes with a southern exposure, but the vegetation and flowers are most luxuriant on hill-sides facing north. The difference cannot be accounted for by varieties of soil. It may be attributable to the snow lying longer unmelted and serving to protect the ground from the hard frosts of spring.

* 'Savage Suanetia,' by C. Philipps-Wolley, 2 vols., London, 1883.

Spaciousness, sunniness, variety are the constant qualities of Suanetian landscapes. The great basin of the Ingur, 40 miles long by 10 to 15 broad, is broken by no ridges that approach the snow-line, and the long undulating grassy or forested spurs that divide the glens, in place of narrowing the horizon, furnish in their soft lines the most effective contrast possible to the icy peaks and rigid precipices of Shkara and T'etnuld, of Ushba and the Leila. From the varied beauty of forests and flowers the eyes are carried at once to the pure glaciers, which hang like silver stairs on the green lower slopes of the snowy chain. The atmosphere has none of the harshness of that of Switzerland in summer. The breezes from the Black Sea bring up showers and moisture to soften the outlines and colour the distances; the wind from the steppe suffuses the air with an impalpable haze, through which the great peaks glimmer like golden pillars of the dawn.

I made my way in and out of Suanetia four times last summer. The panorama from the Latpari Pass (9200 feet), by which the valley is generally entered from the south, is a brilliant introduction
 Scenery. to the district. Opposite the spectator, beyond the trench of the Ingur and a range of foothills—broad green downs, unbroken by crags or wood, clothed in deep flowery grasses that fall only to the sharp scythe of October frosts *—rise the great granite precipices of the central group of the Caucasus. To the left, T'etnuld—a mountain I climbed—shoots up in a keen pyramid of spotless snow. Behind it and more distant is Gestola, the sister peak, ascended from the north by Mr. Dent and Mr. Donkin in 1886. The frozen cascade of the Adish Glacier seems to pour from under it. The ten miles of cliffs of snow and ice beyond are Djanga and Shkara. At their base lie the sources of the Ingur. My catalogue can, I fear, give but a poor idea of how noble these great peaks look, glowing in the sunshine of a cloudless summer noon. Alpine travellers may lend some distinctness to their vision by picturing the Macugnaga face of Monte Rosa, doubled in breadth, and the Weisshorn and Dent Blanche set up close beside it.†

Farther west, the eyes overlook the labyrinth of green hills and glens, of forests and pastures that is Suanetia. The twin towers of Ushba ‡ indent the western horizon; the flat crest of Elbruz barely

* The peasants mow large spaces for winter fodder; but much more remains unmown and ungrazed. The great alp at the source of the Ingur I found a virgin field of flowers.

† See 'Alpine Journal,' vol. xiii., for an illustration of this and other views from my sketches. See also plates in M. Bernoville's 'Souanétie Libre.' The description of the view in the English edition of Von Thielmann's 'Travels in the Caucasus, &c.,' is defaced by inaccuracies in translation, and the author's recognition of the peaks is not in all cases to be relied on.

‡ M. Bernoville and others have thrown doubt on the meaning Storm- or Rain-peak which I gave to the word Ushba in 1869. It may be as well therefore to mention that the translation has the authority both of Dr. Radde and Captain Telfer.

shows over their north-eastern shoulder ; the broad snows of Dongusorun (14,600 feet R.S.) and the shapely peak (Stabler?) between the Nakra and Neskra glens appear further to the left ; when the traveller descends, the long spurs of the Leila come into view, turning, as the sun falls, their shadowy sides towards him. Far below, the waters of the Ingur flash in their deep gorge. Passing through rhododendron banks and azalea copses, that bloom in June, the path zigzags between weathered birch-stems, the branches of which frame the great horn of Tetnuld, pure white between the green earth and blue sky. What malicious sprite moved M. Reclus' pen to write that the Russian soldier finds his familiar birch only as an "arbre chétif" in the Caucasus? * The birch is the tree, above all others, characteristic of the highland scenery. ‡

The first time I penetrated Suanetia last year I came from the north over the great chain from Urusbieh, on the Baksan. My companion, M. de Déchy, having organised a train of Tartar porters, we crossed, on July 26th last, the Adyr Pass, only rarely used by natives of the country, and unknown to travellers. We camped where five glaciers meet at the head of the valley on the northern side. There was a shepherd's *kosh* among the birches below the ice in a position not unlike the Fée Alp. *Kosh* is Tartar for a chalet, only here there is no chalet; the shepherds are content with a little birch-bark shelter, and their *bourcas* or sheepskin cloaks. Their milk is always sour, but they make excellent Devonshire cream. The glaciers we had to climb were extensive, the pass was high—over 12,000 feet—and the ascent to it steep in places. ‡ Our porters, who declined to be roped, steered their course through the concealed crevasses of the upper névé with the instinct of chamois. I inquired more than once, and was told that there was no tradition of a life having been lost in a crevasse, though accidents from avalanches were not uncommon. We ascended, for some six hours, from our bivouac at the lower end of the glaciers (7500 feet), every step over ice or snow. Then we stood on the crest of the Caucasus, and saw to the south, across an enormous glacier basin, another range as high and infinitely steeper, clad in icy armour, delicately fluted by the channels of the snow that had fallen during the recent warm, showery weather. §

* 'Géographie Universelle,' vol. vi. p. 81.

† It is only in Val Maggia, the beautiful but neglected valley at the head of Lago Maggiore, and the neighbouring glens, that the birch plays a conspicuous part in Alpine scenery, and there it is not, as in Norway and the Himalaya, one of the trees that grow nearest the snow.

‡ A pass named the Mestia Pass, and probably but not certainly the same which we crossed, is given in a table of measurements communicated to me by General Shdanov as 12,012 feet. According to our own measurements, taken with two aneroids and a mercurial barometer, the height of our pass was over 12,100 feet.

§ See illustration from photographs by M. de Déchy, taken a few hundred yards beyond and about 100 feet below the pass. Midsummer is a rainy season in the Western Caucasus, the late autumn is the finest part of the year. See the 'Meteorological Statistics of the Russian Empire' in the R.G.S. Library.

From our feet stretched, in a trough parallel to the watershed, and between us and the southern range, a glacier larger than the Glacier du Géant—a glacier no civilised man had ever seen before.

The scenery was sublime. In front, as we descended, towered the great twin brethren of Suanetia, the peaks of Ushba. Behind us, Tetnuld raised its horn over the intervening ridges; glaciers streamed down from every side to meet the main stream. At last, where a great tributary flowed in from the west, the united streams turned south, and we left them for the green slopes. I flung myself upon the first bank of Caucasian rhododendron; its creamy flowers, often delicately stained with pink, whitened hill-sides overgrown with *Anemone narcissiflora*, ranunculus, gentians, forget-me-nots. Such colour and such luxuriance in the lap of eternal frost! Presently our porters saw, or thought they saw, a *tur*, and there was a little stalking, with no result; then we had to go down again on to the moraine-covered ice. Very bad walking we found it, and glad enough we were to return to an old moraine thickly overgrown with copse, and beautiful with larkspurs, lilies, wild rose-bushes, and many strange blossoms. Once more a ravine and the torrent from an upper ice-field drove us back on to the ice. When we left it finally, the pine forest and the snouts of our own and another glacier were in sight.* A narrow foot-track ran along the hill-side. Nowhere yet since daybreak had we seen a path or a bit of ground level enough to pitch a tent on. I ran on; presently I came on the line of an old grassy moraine 200 feet above the present ice; between it and the natural slope was a tiny dell, a stream passed close by; bushes and grass were cut for a floor, our Whymper's tents went up with their accustomed speed, and the porters fell together in a heap. In the night I heard heavy pattering, a shower was falling, our native companions had retired to the neighbouring pine forest, where the blaze of their camp-fire betrayed their refuge.

Such is a day on the glaciers of Suanetia. We had taken fifteen hours to cross them. Granted that an ordinary Alpine party crossing a known Alpine pass might have saved three or four hours, still we had been over as much ice as lies between Grindelwald and the Grimsel, or Zermatt and the Val de Lys.

I must leap over several days and much of interest to reach Betsho, the Russian post, where the hospitable Nachalnik and his very modest army of ten men are quartered. Imagine a valley like that of Breil, but ringed with gentler slopes and softer forests,

* These glaciers probably descend lower than any others in the Caucasus, terminating at about 5500 and 5700 feet respectively. They must have met not many years ago. Abich very strangely omitted to visit them when he measured the more eastern glaciers of Free Suanetia. His figures are—Zanner Glacier, 6600 feet; Adish Glacier, 7500 feet; Kalde Glacier, 7912 feet; Shkara Glacier, 7935 feet. The three latter have comparatively limited névés. The Thuber, according to M. de Déchy, terminates at 7000 feet. M. Favre visited the base of the Mestia Glaciers, but did not measure the altitude. The Suanetian glaciers are advancing after a period of retreat, like the Alpine.

USHBA.

(From a Photograph by M. DE DÉCHY.)

where ash and elder, and beech and birch mingle their branches, and in the place of the Matterhorn an enormous double-headed peak, Ushba. From Betsho the mass is so foreshortened that it does not do itself full justice. But I only say this, perhaps, from an exaggerated fear of exaggeration. It is a prodigious mountain propylon. Its greater glaciers fall north and east; on this side there is only a comparatively small one.* I went up this glacier—and climbed on to the highest of the rock-needles that separate it from the basin of the Ushba Glacier. The peak was about 12,000 feet high, and a stiff climb—at least my arms and shoulders were very stiff next day. The upper névés were unfortunately in a very peculiar and dangerous condition. Wherever the slope approached 40° the whole surface began to slide away when you set foot on it, and often before. The stillness of the glacier region was broken by a low perpetual hissing as the upper layer of snow glided downwards. Consequently we had to attack the southern sunny cliffs, which were very steep, but not dangerous to practised climbers. The summit was a double-topped granite needle. We were rewarded by one of the most wonderful mountain views I have ever seen. The great towers of Ushba, so close one seemed almost able to touch them, still shot up 4000 feet overhead; as many feet below spread the torn ice-falls of the Ushba Glacier. Beyond it rose two great spires of snow—Shichildi Tau and Little Ushba. Other sports have their excitement; but can there be anything so delightful as

“to sit upon an Alp as on a throne,”

particularly a throne no one has ever sat on before, and gaze on splendours that have been waiting since the creation for some one to worship them? The Sleeping Beauty waited 100 years. How many thousands have these Caucasian virgin summits dwelt—“remote, serene, and inaccessible”—in their frosty solitude!

In descending we rode down in fifteen minutes, on little avalanches of our own starting, what had cost us two hours to climb. In better conditions of the snow, Ushba itself may probably be ascended; but it will require above all things mountaineers of sound technical judgment. It is a delightful walk or ride from the Gul Glacier down to Betsho. I left the guides and walked on alone, meeting on the way Prince Wittgenstein, a Russian officer (since deceased), who spoke English as well as I do. He was out with a native prince prospecting for gold. As every schoolboy knows, the Golden Fleece was bathed, and caught its glitter in the waters

* The illustration, from a photograph by M. de Déchy, is taken from the hill-path connecting Latal and Betsho, and shows the southern side of the peak. Gulba is on the extreme right. “La roche prédominante de l’Ushba est un Granit blanchâtre à petits cristaux de Feldspath, &c.; il est intimement lié avec d’autres variétés de Granit qui s’approchent beaucoup de Gneiss à gros grains de Quartz” (Abich). Ushba and Little Ushba are both, like Tetnuld, on short southern spurs of the main ridge or watershed. Dychtau, Koshtantau, and the peaks north of the Uruch form part of a separate parallel granitic ridge.

of the Ingur. The camp of the princes showed a very interesting survival of old habits. Four solid trunks had been fixed in the ground, and the camp followers were building in a roof and walls with lesser branches. Persian rugs and saddle-bags were lying about, and gave colour to the picture. If a thunderstorm had not been obviously imminent, I should have envied the princes their arbour. As it was, the court-house of Betsho and a hammock attached to the bar, which I fear I dislocated (not, I trust, to the inconvenience of future practitioners), seemed preferable.

Some days later I started with my Alpine guides to climb Tetnuld. This great mountain and Ushba preside over Suanetia, as the Jungfrau and Wetterhorn do over the Oberland.* Perhaps the most

Tetnuld. beautiful of all the views of it is from Mestia, where the forests of the Mujalaliz frame its shining crest. Its summit is a snowy pyramid, formed, like the Weisshorn, by the convergence of three ridges.† It stands about a mile south-west of the main chain, and three great glaciers flow from its three flanks—the Tetnuld, the Zanner, and the Adish. The névés of the two latter join on the high ridge at its rear. The ends of the two former unite at the base of the western spur of the peak. Below their junction, a steep, narrow, densely forested, and almost trackless gorge gives passage to the torrent of the Mujalaliz.

I was determined to attempt the ascent before I left Mjaj. My companion, M. de Déchy, was more anxious to recross the chain. We agreed that I should start with the Alpine guides a day in advance, and should endeavour to rejoin him on the second night at a bivouac somewhere on the side of the Zanner Glacier. There was one man in the village who said he had crossed the glacier to Bezingi twenty years before. Of the conformation of the snow-fields we knew absolutely nothing. All the detail of the map given herewith is subsequently and personally acquired knowledge. The upper part of the peak I had studied with field-glasses, and in one of the photographs taken by Count Levershoff's expedition in 1869, and had thus laid down a line which we exactly followed.

The two glaciers had once pushed together some way down the gorge. They had retreated quite a quarter of a mile, and now only just met. Abich gives for their termination the height of 6500 feet. Judging from a photograph taken in 1869 their end is now at least 300 feet higher. We crossed them, and climbed up the snow-beds and banks of rhododendron which lay between the ice and the cliffs of the western spur of Tetnuld. The glacier fell beside us in a long ice-fall, overhung by the castellated ridge which looks down on the pasturages of Adish. At about 9000 feet

* I reserve any final statements as to their heights. They cannot fall much short of 16,000 feet.

† See plates of it in my 'Central Caucasus,' in the 'Alpine Journal,' No. 98, and in Bernoville's 'Suanétie.'

we found the highest quarters properly furnished for a bivouac. A large boulder overhung sufficiently to give protection from any shower; there was grass for a bed and rhododendron stumps for a fire. With sleeping bags and rugs we suffered no hardships.

Half an hour past midnight I was awake by the moon looking over the eastern crags. In fifteen minutes we had all laced our boots, shared the contents of one of Silver's Self-cooking Soup tins, and shouldering our day's provision, left the rest of our goods to the mercy of the mountain goats. The shadows of the crags diminished as the moonlight flowed down the channels between them. Presently there was no more *terra firma*, and we had to take to the glacier. It was not easy to see the best way over the narrow ridges between the ice trenches in the white uncertain moonshine. Our first attempt failed, but at the second we gained easily the centre of the glacier. Above us the ice turned to *névé*. A vast white curtain, a mile broad, poured down before us, and high overhead, crowned with stars of astounding brilliancy, for the moon was passing westward, glimmered the pure white virgin peak of Tetnuld.

The ascent among the *séracs*, or broken masses of *névé*, was very long. But it did not seem so to me. The actual pathfinding was sufficiently difficult to be amusing, the situation was stirring. The scenery was more fantastically lovely than a child's dream after a pantomime. Huge towers of milk-white snow shone against the dark blue heaven—blue is not here a conventional epithet; green icicle-hung vaults yawned between them. The planets were something more than mere points of light, they were glowing balls. Slowly they faded, and a light played in the sky behind Tetnuld; arrows of daylight flew round the edge of the world high in the air above us; other arrows seemed to rise to meet them from the sea. It was very long before the light touched earth. But at last the great dome of Elbruz, the snowy heads of Ushba, flashed out, first red, then golden, above all the lower heights. In a few minutes the frosty Caucasus was flooded with golden light; the shadows crept away under the loftiest peaks. Only the Black Sea basin lay still sombre in the western hollow beyond the grey crests of Abkhasia.

The clefts and caverns in the snow had grown frequent and troublesome, the bridges over them frail and awkward, and for a few minutes our progress seemed barred. In this kind of snow-work the boldest course is often the best. Strike at the slope where it is steepest, and the chasms have been choked by pieces fallen out of their own sides. We did so, and were rewarded. Shouldering our way up among some huge tumble-down ice-pits, we gained a wide snow-plain lying under Tetnuld.

Our next stage after crossing the level was to ascend another long crevassed slope to a broad terrace under the cliffs of the peak, which rose towards its southern end until it nearly touched the ridge that falls in the direction of Adish.

It took us eight hours to reach that ridge from our bivouac, for the snow was soft. There was one steep bank of ice intersected with crevasses and masked with snow which would have stopped raw climbers; but difficulties, in the strictest Alpine sense of the term, there were none. It was rather cold in the shadow, and, strange to say, one of the Chamonix men was badly frostbitten in the foot without knowing it at the time. At 9 a.m. we heaved our leader over the last crevasse—the “Bergschrund”—and he tugged us up a short bank, on the top of which we sat down in the warm glorious sunshine. We were on the southern spur of the peak, on a little saddle very conspicuous from the Latpari Pass.

This was the decisive moment of the day. I looked up the long, lovely snow-ridge which curved down to us from the still far distant summit. It was broad enough, and no ice glittered on its crest. “That will do,” we all agreed. And then we feasted our eyes on the view. For the first time the sources of the Adish Glacier, hemmed in between Djanga and Tetnuld, were revealed to human eyes—a shining tableland never before looked down on save by the heavenly host. We gazed along the face of the great precipices and icefalls seen opposite from the Latpari Pass. At our feet—very much indeed at our feet—lay Adish.

The rest of the climb was only a question of a good head and perseverance. The Edge (as a lakesman might have called it) fulfilled its promise; the snow gave firm hold, but was too soft for speed. Our leader had consequently to be frequently changed. Now and then steps were cut; once we were forced on to the flat top of a snow cornice—a cornice, however, which we had carefully observed from below, and which would have borne an elephant. All the way the views were sublime. The sensation of looking down by itself was almost more than enough! Those who know the downlook from the top of the Wetterhorn will understand what I mean when I say that all the way up the final ridge of Tetnuld you enjoy the same sensation. The snow drops steeply for a few yards, and then, between your boots, you see the sledge-path of the Jkumer Pass, 7000 feet below. In the west Elbruz loomed larger and larger at every step, till all the minor heights sank to footstools before the great white throne. So three hours and a half passed; the aneroid turned 16,500, and still in front rose the sharp-cut sugarloaf. At last the peak got a little steeper and narrower; the converging ridges were no more seen; there seemed little but air about us. Twenty minutes later, soon after 1 p.m. the crest ceased to rise; our heads overlooked it, our feet trampled it—and another great peak of the Caucasus was climbed.

Illimitable shining fields of space, waves upon waves of distance clothed in tints that grew softer and more aerial as they curved to the enormously remote horizon, to the north the level lines of the steppe, to the south tossed Armenian and Turkish highlands, east and west snowy bays and silver pinnacles, glaciers descending in broken shining stairs

to the green valleys and river sources, a silence that might be felt; such were the impressions of the first few moments on this noble virgin peak.*

I am afraid I enjoyed the next hour more than a Secretary of this Society ought to have done. I might have been boiling thermometers, and making all sorts of observations. But I would put in a plea for the makers of first ascents. May they not enjoy the poetry of the mountain tops? They have opened the way, it is easy for others to follow them. Mountaineers are not the camp-followers—as some pressman impertinently remarked the other day—but the pioneers of science. “*Fiat experimentum in corpore vili*”: I admit to the full the proverb. Where the vile body of the mountaineer has opened the way, the worthy army of surveyors can follow at their leisure. If I had tried to measure precisely, I might not have been believed, and I should only have given more skilful successors the satisfaction of showing how far I was wrong. General Shdanov, of the Caucasian Survey, sends me a height, 15,947 feet, as trigonometrically ascertained for a peak, which must be either Tetnuld or Gestola; and of these peaks Tetnuld is the higher by from 100 to 200 feet. I do not believe 16,000 feet will be far wrong as an approximate estimate for the height of Tetnuld. My aneroid actually gave 16,700 feet, but from other observations and comparisons taken next day I have good reason to estimate its error at the time and place at over 500 feet. Mr. Dent’s aneroid, on Gestola, gave 16,550 feet. Tetnuld is certainly higher than Mont Blanc, and one of the great peaks of the Caucasus.

We saw many interesting details from our space-searching summit. The broad snow-fields of the Zanner, over which next day we must force a way, the great peaks of Koshtantau, 17,092 feet, and Dychtau, 16,925 feet, and Shkara, possibly higher than either, a northern valley (Chegem), and the distant steppe, the sunny lowlands of Mingrelia, a floor of sea-haze, remote ranges beyond Kars and Trebizond. Ararat itself I tried hard to find. General Chodzko, the late head of the Caucasian staff, is positive that he saw Elbruz when encamped on the top of Ararat, at a distance of 280 miles; and General Chodzko is likely to have been right.

The most beautiful moment in the descent was when a procession of sea-born vapours, which came up like the ocean nymphs in the ‘Prometheus Vincitus,’ passed lightly round us, melting away into the sky before sunset. We regained our rhododendron bank and boulder at 7 p.m., and had again every reason to be satisfied with our accommodation. But no sign of our companions could be seen on the opposite glacier, nor did the expected beacon fire answer our own.

* I have, I find, unwittingly plagiarised. Conrad Gesner, one of the great naturalists of the Renaissance, and the first modern mountaineer, wrote in A.D. 1555, in his ‘*Descriptio Montis Fracti*’ (an ascent of Pilatus):—“*Oblectabit ipsum denique solitudinis silentium. . . . Hic in profundo et religioso quodam silentio ex præaltis montium jugis ipsam ferè cælestium, si quæ est, orbium harmoniam exaudire tibi videberis.*”

At 5 a.m. next morning we started in pursuit; two hours later we found their camp; three hours more and we caught up the motley troop on the upper basin of the Zanner Glacier. The Suanetians had most of them blacked their faces in order to avoid sore eyes and sunburn, which gave them a most repulsive appearance. Our progress was now slow, for the men were overburdened. About noon we reached a vast expanse of undulating snow-field. Light clouds drifted over. The snow got terribly soft. Our men walked for five, and sat down for ten minutes. The sun was falling. I went to the front and tried to force the pace. Suddenly I felt myself alone, my companions were hidden by the mist. I retraced my steps, and found the motley troop squatting on their haunches and praying at the top of their voices. They seemed to have a form of common prayer suitable for the occasion. I did all I could to cut short the ceremony, but they were imperturbable. At last the mist lightened, a rift of blue opened, the rocky ridges stood out. The groans changed to a chant of exultation, a triumphant welcome to the reappearing deity.

It was 6 p.m.—that is, we had been out thirteen hours on the ice and snowfields—before we stood on the crest of the Caucasus at a height of over 13,000 feet, and looked down on the great basin of the Bezingi Glacier and the mighty peaks that encircle it. The scene that burst on my view as I made the last step on to the frozen and overhanging wave that formed the Col was of overpowering grandeur. There is nothing in the Alps to compare to the gigantic line of peaks and precipices which rose before me. Mr. Donkin's photographs give but an imperfect idea of the mountain proportions. We looked up a long glacier avenue, with the northern front of Shkara to our right, and Koshtantau, a great rock-peak, opposite. No green valley was visible, there was nothing but this vast amphitheatre of ice and snow; the only glimpse beyond was into the equally wild head of the Dychnsu Glacier. Evening shadows were already lengthening from the peaks, and warning us to seek some less uninhabitable spot before nightfall.

The further side of the pass was barred by a cornice and a snow-wall fifty feet high, with a moat at the foot of it. To get down directly would have been difficult. But a few hundred paces to the left it was possible, and even easy, for any one accustomed to snow-climbing, to descend by the aid of a rib of rocks. Our Suanetians were all making a great hubbub, alternately peering over the wall, and either praying or swearing, it was difficult to say which. We thought it best to set an example by starting ourselves. In less than ten minutes we were over the Bergschrund, and on the comparatively level glacier below. But our troop still declined to follow. They jabbered, they screamed, they gesticulated, they did everything but what we wanted them to do—come on. At last three of the men tied themselves together with the Kabardan Cossack, who by the courtesy of the Russian authorities had been

placed at our disposal, and set out. They got on pretty fairly at first, then they lost their heads and their footing, and completed the descent in a series of flying bounds, in one of which they fortunately cleared the crevasse. The rest followed with ridiculous precautions. The whole affair cost us an hour of precious daylight. It was dusk before we were off the little glacier. By good luck the hillside below it consisted not of granitic cliffs or boulders, but of slopes of soft pulverised schist. We ran or rather slid down them, until we found the first level on which to set up our tents (11,000 feet) high above the great Bezingi Glacier. Our Suanetians were soon themselves again; they chanted a ballad in honour of their eleventh century queen; "Thamara, Thamara," rang the refrain. Fancy Sussex labourers singing of Harold and Senlac! But within these mountain walls the historical echoes that are lost in wider plains and world-trafficking islands, roll on from generation to generation.

Helpless you see these mountain people had proved at the first shadow of what Alpine climbers call difficulty. And helpless Caucasians and Himalayans will as a rule be found by future glacier explorers, except on passes where they are accustomed to go themselves. For ice-craft in distant countries, travellers must depend on what they import, or have in themselves. The Urusbieh Tartars are promising raw material. A leader of men may make something of them: but sandals stuffed with hay are poor things on an ice-slope! Of course the natives' limit of the possible is what they can do themselves, and all but the best-informed Russians readily adopt it. No ascent made without them will be credited in the country. There are people in other parts of the world foolish enough to make the opinion of such simple folk their own. Their borrowed simplicity furnishes an inexhaustible source of amusement to those who know better.

But here, high above the noblest Caucasian ice-fields, I must cut short my climbing reminiscences and reflections,* and reserve for the autumn the heavier portion of my paper. This sketch of Caucasian travel will serve its purpose if it incite some competent mountaineers to carry on in the next and future summers the work of mountain exploration, and so to add to our knowledge of the high places of the world. Our globe must be explored, as the German professor puts it, vertically as well as laterally. The mountain heights as well as the ocean depths must yield up their secrets. If we are to make geography—the picture of the earth—complete, we can no more do without mountaineers than we can do without sailors. The art of mountaineering, which has been developed in the Alps out of the rude instincts of the crystal-seekers of Savoy and the chamois-hunters of Canton Bern, must

* A more detailed account of the expedition here referred to, and of some subsequent explorations, will be found in the 'Alpine Journal,' Nos. 100 and 101 (May and August, 1888).

be kept up and put to use elsewhere. It must above all be introduced into Asia. The border chain of the Caucasus will serve as a good training-ground for the Himalaya and the Tien-shan, where English and Russian mountain explorers may some day meet in friendly rivalry. Meantime it is a great pleasure to me to be able to state that there is every prospect that the friendly co-operation between mountaineers and surveyors which has borne so much good fruit in the Alps will continue in the Caucasus. I am under great obligations to the present Director of the Caucasian Survey for the valuable material he has placed at my disposal, and his promise that in every way consistent with their duties his subordinates shall co-operate in extending our scientific knowledge of the mountains holds out a promise of speedy and valuable results which would otherwise be hardly attainable for many years.

NOTE.—The accompanying sketch map of the central group of the Caucasus is a small portion and a specimen of the map of the chain from Kazbek to Elbruz, which I hope before long to be in a position to publish. The positions of Shkara, Dychtau, and Koshtantau, and (with some exceptions in the upper glens) the topography *below* the glacier region, are borrowed from the 5-verst Russian survey. For the basin of the Bezingi Glacier Mr. Donkin's map ('Alp. Journ.,' vol. xiii.) has been mainly followed. The rest of the chain is laid down from photographs by M. de Déchy and from sketches, observations, and bearings taken by myself from points on all sides of the group, as well as from the summits of Tetnuld and Uku. The map, without pretending in any sense to the accuracy of a professional survey, will, it is believed, be found the first approximately correct representation of this intricate cluster of peaks and glaciers, the details and connection of which, so far as they are indicated at all, are most erroneously indicated on all previous maps, including those appended to Dr. Radde's and M. Bernoville's volumes. Many details in the valleys shown by the official survey have been purposely omitted. The heights are from the Russian survey, from communications kindly made to me by General Shdanov, the present head of the Staff at Tiflis, and a few from the observations of M. de Déchy, Herr Abich, myself, and others. The Suanetian heights in Captain Telfer's work, I may here mention, are throughout some 700 feet in excess.

The nomenclature of the great peaks in every chain is always a difficult problem to the first travellers and cartographers. I have adopted the names used by the Russian Staff in the 5-verst map, with three additions: Uku, Mala Tau, Mishirgi Tau. Uku, M. de Déchy assured me was the name given to the second summit I climbed, or at any rate to the portion of the range comprising it, by the people of Bezingi, from whose homes the peak is visible. Mala Tau and Mishirgi

Tau are names I venture to propose in accordance with the principle, or, let us say, common practice, by which glaciers are named after the valleys or pastures they flow towards, and peaks from the glaciers they dominate. Familiar instances in the Alps of this practice are the Matterhorn and Piz Palu in the Bernina group.

With regard to the 5-verst-map nomenclature, although I think that having been in use for more than twenty years it would be very inconvenient to attempt to alter it, there can be little doubt that the peaks designated as Dychtau and Koshtantau are not distinguished by the people of the country under these names. Tau—like Tauern in Tyrol—is applied more often to a range than to any individual top. Dychtau is the name given in Balkar to the part of the chain round the glacier that feeds the Dych-su torrent, and is rather applied to Shkara than to the Dychtau of the map. Shkara is the name of a pasture above Ushkul, so is Nuamquam. Tetnuld is the *massif* south of the Zanner glacier with its crowning peak.

As a general rule, single mountain peaks, unless they are conspicuous from the lowlands, or exceptionally isolated, do not receive separate names until they are “discovered” by educated travellers. The Bernese Oberland stands pre-eminent and almost alone in the noble and poetical names of its icy crests. Elsewhere mountains, when they have names at all, generally derive them from some obvious characteristic, or some homely resemblance. In the Pennine Alps, the peasants ring the changes between Dent Blanche, and Weisshorn, and Rothhorn, or in the Mischabel and the Silberlast (the old name of the Lyskamm) suggest that the shapes of the summits remind them of a farmyard fork (Mischgabel), or a pack-saddle. Again, the literary and permanent names of many summits are miscopyings by strangers—travellers or surveyors—of local language. Thus, the Aiguille Verte and the Montanvert are the Aiguille and Mont-en-vers—at the back. The Pointe de Rosablanche and the famous Monte Rosa on either side of the Val d’Aosta represent the native names Roesa-bianca and Monts Roeses; Roesa, or Roese, or Ruize (cf. Ruitor), in local dialect meaning ice- or snow-field.

But I must not allow myself to be led into a treatise on mountain nomenclature. My individual feeling, or prejudice, is strong in favour of, wherever possible, obtaining or giving a name in the language of the country, and of in no case superseding a native name. In cases, however, where no native name exists, or can suitably be adopted, I should agree that a peak may fairly be named in commemoration of any individual to whom from his connection with the exploration or mapping of the range such an honour would be obviously appropriate.

[At the conclusion of the paper, Mr. FRESHFIELD exhibited, by means of the dioptric lantern, a series of sixty photographic views, of which about two-thirds were taken by his companion, M. de Déchy, of the high

peaks, passes, glaciers, villages, and people of the Central Caucasus. These views represent only a small portion of M. de Déchy's collection. The views of the peaks round the Bezingi Glacier and of the Tartars of that valley were taken in 1886 by Mr. W. F. Donkin.]

Mr. J. BRYCE, M.P., said that he had crossed the Caucasus by the Dariel Pass, and in Trans-Caucasia he took the opportunity of making inquiries about the antiquities, history, geology, and botany of the country; but most of what he learned was at second hand, and therefore not as valuable as the information supplied by Mr. Freshfield. The lowlands to the south of the Caucasus were no less than the valleys of the chain of the highest possible interest. They were the seat of many races, languages, religions, habits, customs, and fragments of civilisation which had never ripened; and in all probability, in some future time, when the East was awakened from its torpor, those countries with their great natural resources would become a route for traffic from the Black Sea into Central Asia, and again be the homes of flourishing populations, and perhaps powerful kingdoms. Every mountain range had a character of its own, and a sentiment of its own, and the Caucasus awakened quite different emotions from the Alps. Even in Europe the snow-capped Pyrenees and the superb peaks of the Tatra were wholly unlike the Alps; and in America, a traveller who visited the Rocky Mountains, or the magnificent extinct volcanoes of the Cascade Range on the shores of the Pacific, was still more struck by their total dissimilarity from the scenery of our greatest European mountain-land. For instance, in the Alps there were 3000 or 4000 feet of pasture between the higher woods and the region of perpetual snow, but on the shores of the Pacific there was only an interval of about 1500 feet between the enormous forests and the snow mountains themselves. It was an extraordinary thing that the Suanetians, who, by the last census, were 12,000, should have preserved their separate national identity from the time of the Emperor Augustus to the present. From what he was told at Tiflis he was under the impression that the Suanetians considered themselves still Christians. They fasted, and made the sign of the cross; but Christian doctrine had practically disappeared from among them. Mr. Freshfield had referred to their praying, and he wished to know what they prayed to.

Mr. FRESHFIELD said, that as far as he could gather through a Cossack interpreter, their prayer was addressed to the sun, and according to M. Bernoville, who gives as his authority a Georgian priest, they worship the sun and moon.

Mr. BRYCE said that was a remarkable and almost unique fact. There were a certain number of races that were formerly Christian but had become Mahomedans; but that a people who had reached the level of Christian monotheism should fall back into heathenism, was almost without a parallel in history. He hoped that other English explorers would follow Mr. Freshfield's example, and not leave the honour of discovery entirely to the archaeologists of Russia.

Mr. C. T. DENT considered that Mr. Freshfield had done a great deal towards clearing up the topography of the glaciers, doing in one season almost as much as had been done by others between 1868 and 1887. The five-verst map, while wonderfully accurate generally, was very misleading above the snow-line, the glaciers and high glens having been put in almost at hap-hazard. He hoped that there would be some uniformity in the nomenclature of the peaks. It was impossible accurately to map the glacier regions without a certain amount of mountaineering craft, and without utilising that store of knowledge which the Alpine Club had amassed. A mapping party in such high districts should contain several mountaineers.

The PRESIDENT, in proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Freshfield, said that he

desired on behalf of the Society to acknowledge that it was through the courtesy and by the friendly intervention of His Excellency the Russian Ambassador that facilities had been afforded to Mr. Freshfield to pursue his investigations. It must be a matter of considerable interest to Englishmen that they had within easy reach these magnificent mountains—great glaciers, extremely difficult peaks to climb, magnificent forests, beautiful alpine vegetation, and many very interesting peoples. Mr. Freshfield's observation as to the comparatively recent recognition of the existence of true glaciers on these mountains, led him (the President) to remark that a similar doubt had long prevailed as to the presence of glaciers in the Himalayas—a doubt which he had assisted in removing some thirty-five years ago. As a matter of fact, many of those glaciers, including those in Tibet, were two or three times as large as any known in other parts of the world, excluding, of course, the Arctic and Antarctic regions.

Exploration of the Solomon Islands.

By C. M. WOODFORD.

(Read at the Evening Meeting, March 26th, 1888.)

Map, p. 404.

IN October 1885 I left England with the object of paying a visit to the group of islands known as the "Solomon Islands," for the purpose of making collections of the fauna, and, if possible, penetrating to the mountains of the interior of some of the larger islands, which had not yet been visited by white men.

The Solomon Islands are a group lying about 500 miles to the eastward of New Guinea. They extend for 600 miles in a north-west and south-east direction, and are situated between the parallels of 5° and 11° S. lat., and the meridians of 154° and 163° E. long. They were first discovered by Mendana, the Spaniard, in 1567, who gave them the name of the Islands of Solomon, in order that his countrymen, supposing them to be the islands whence King Solomon got his gold, might be induced to colonise them.* There are seven principal islands and

* Identity of Island of Jesus.—In the notes to the very interesting translation made by Dr. Guppy of the Journal of the Spanish discovery in his book 'The Solomon Islands and their Natives,' he suggests that the "Island of Jesus" (an island discovered by the Spanish some days before they sighted the Solomons) may be yet re-discovered in or near the position assigned to it. But with our present knowledge of that part of the Pacific I think it hardly possible for an unknown island to exist in that position. There appears to me little doubt but that Gallego's Island of Jesus was one of the more northern islands of the Ellice group. Three or four of these islands are within the limit of the usual error of Gallego's latitude, which he computes for the Island of Jesus at $6\frac{3}{4}^{\circ}$ S. The Island of Jesus was described by Gallego as a low island, and with many reefs around it, and with quite a bay of the sea in the middle. Evidently this refers to an island of coral formation with lagoon, such as the Ellice Islands are. He estimates the distance of the Island of Jesus from Callao at 1450 leagues, and from the Island of Jesus to Candelaria 165 leagues. But Gallego was considerably out in his reckoning—the distance from Candelaria to Callao being in reality about 7200 miles, whereas he makes it only 5600. He was, of course, unaware of the very strong current running

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based on photographs, drawings & observations
BY M. DE DÉCHY, D.W. FRESHFIELD & W.F. DONKIN.

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English Miles

Russian Versts

Kilomètres

Mr Freshfield's routes in 1868 & 87
Heights in English feet

DÉCHY Phot.

A SPUR OF THE CAUCASUS.

RANGE SOUTH OF THE GVALDA GLACIER, FROM THE ADYR TA

A SPUR OF THE CAUCASUS.

SOUTH OF THE GVALDA GLACIER, FROM THE ADYR TAU PASS.