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The Caucasus. By C. Comyns Tucker. Read before the Alpine Club on February 2, 1869.

As Kasbek and Elbruz have now, I believe, become tolerably well-known names in connection with the Caucasus, I fear my readers will be somewhat shocked when I tell them that they will find little or nothing in this paper about either one or the other. I must begin consequently by apologising to those famous mountains for thus leaving them out in their usual cold, and to the Club for not dwelling at length on the only names with which they may be supposed to be familiar. My reasons for writing a general paper on the Caucasus in preference to giving a record of special ascents are various. Firstly, one ascent must of necessity be very like another—at any rate, on paper; and of mere mountaineering the Club hears enough, and some times to spare; secondly, the method of ascending mountains is by this time pretty well understood, while information, as to the general character of the country, and the precautions to be taken on entering it, may be useful as well as interesting. Finally, if these reasons be not considered sufficient, I must fall back on the hope that one of my companions will supply the omission in a separate paper, which shall describe in detail our successful assaults on those monarchs of the chain.

After a few words, therefore, as to the general structure of the range, I shall attempt to put before you our *every-day* experiences in the Caucasus, and the difficulties we met with in exploring it, whether arising from the general roughness of the country, the lawless nature of its inhabitants, or the

inherent obstinacy of its peaks; to point out in what respects it seemed to us superior and in what inferior to the Alps; and how, after all deductions made, it is in the highest degree worthy of claiming our attention and our efforts.

And first as to the general character of the chain: on the east and west it is cut off abruptly by the Black and Caspian Seas; on the north and south by four rivers, two on either side, beyond the valleys of which the mountain chain does not pass. These rivers are the Rion and Kuban, flowing towards the Black Sea; the Kur and the Terek flowing eastwards to the Caspian. The only exception to this rule is to be found in the low ridge of Suram, which divides the waters of the Rion from those of the Kur, and acts as a connecting link between the Caucasus and the Armenian mountains. With this trifling exception, the Caucasian chain is sharply and accurately defined. Of this tolerably straight and well-marked range, 600 miles in length, we explored a section—the highest and most important perhaps, but still only a section; and any further remarks therefore on the peculiarities of the chain must be understood as applicable exclusively, or at least mainly, to that portion. The scene of our explorations extends west from the Dariel road for a distance of about 120 miles. Kasbek is at one, the eastern, Elbruz at the other, or western end. The close approach of the four rivers to its N. and S. flanks, seemed to us to imply that the chain was in the main a single one, and this in the explored section we found to be the case. There is no room for great mountain masses off the main chain, such as the Oberland or Glarus groups in the case of the Alps. This singleness of the chain is proved by the fact that, from elevated points N. and S. of the range, the same peaks, generally speaking, are visible from this side and that; whereas an observer from Berne would have about as magnificent a view of the Pennines as an observer at Milan would have of the Oberland, i.e. none at all. Such ramifications as there are, are either gigantic buttresses of the main chain, and not more distant from it than are the Weisshorn or the Mischabel from the watershed of the Alps,—or parallel, and generally lower ranges, preserving pretty accurately the direction and characteristics of the chain itself. Of the former kind Kasbek and Elbruz are notable examples; of the latter, the range which shuts in the Upper Rion on the S., and the Laila Gebirge which perform a similar office for the Ingur, may be cited as instances.

Having thus briefly described the general aspect of the chain, I must now allude to the classification of difficulties

with which I began this paper. Those arising from the roughness of the country we encountered chiefly in the Zenis-Squali Valley; those connected with the character of the inhabitants, mainly in the Ingur district; those from the inherent obstinacy of the peaks we can scarcely be said to have met with at all. It is true that we found an ice-wall of the most formidable description on Kasbek, but we only did so because we ascended that mountain on the wrong or difficult instead of on the easy side, where no such obstacle exists. Such being the case, it would seem superfluous to mention mountaineering difficulties at all. I do not think so, however. The fact is, that Kasbek and Elbruz, if the most famous, are also perhaps, of all the considerable peaks, the easiest mountains in the Caucasus. Unless, therefore, gentlemen who may follow our footsteps are satisfied with doing what we did and *no more*, they will be instantly met by these same mountaineering difficulties (prudently, I think, avoided by us as first explorers) in a somewhat startling form. The principal peaks other than Kasbek and Elbruz, in this portion of the chain, are Adaï Choch, the Jibiani Peak, Tau Tötonal, Kosch-tan-tau, Dych Tau, Usch Ba (rain-peak), and Tung Zorun—all much over 15,000 ft. in height, one (Kosch-tan-tau) over 17,000. All these peaks seemed to us excessively difficult (except perhaps Tau Töto-nal). Adaï Choch presents arêtes more formidable in appearance than the ridges of the Matterhorn as seen from Breuil, or those of the Dent Blanche from the Col d'Erin. Usch Ba rejoices in precipices such as no mountain in the Alps can match. Some of these peaks are provided with slopes which, from their height, their steepness, and, I may add, their shiny appearance, suggest days rather than hours of step-cutting; others, at first sight less inaccessible, are fortified with bergschrunds to their very summits. It is evident, therefore, that a man who wishes to mountaineer in the frosty Caucasus, must take with him all the skill which he may have acquired in the Alps. From this, too, it is clear that, besides a mountain equipment complete in other respects, an efficient force of step-cutters is indispensable for success. There are as yet no natives trained to the work. Step-cutters must be brought, or you must do the work for yourself.

It was barely a fortnight since we had left Tiflis. We had triumphantly ascended Kasbek, had penetrated the upper gorge of the Terek, had crossed over to the Ardon, and reached the Mamisson Pass. We had encountered no great obstacles; it is true that our first set of porters—handsome and powerful Ossetes, hired at Resh—had robbed us of a cloak, an incident

which led to what the Americans call 'a free fight,' carried on happily with fists alone, and in which we did some execution, though our foes retained the prize; but no very serious attempts, except in the way of extortion, had been made on us; we had found the paths good and the passes easy, and we ought, by all the rules of well-regulated minds, to have been excellently satisfied with our progress. In truth, however, such was far from being the case. Kasbek was a success, but we already wearied of fighting him o'er again. We had crossed some fine pastures and seen some tolerable peaks, but we could not help confessing that the scenery of the N. valleys was ordinary, not to say dull, and certainly horribly bare. The vision, too, of the noble Caucasian was rapidly vanishing, and, picturesque as many of the costumes were, we soon lost our interest in people we were constantly suspecting of petty cheating, and knew to make the most inefficient and insolent of porters. On the whole we began to fear and occasionally to hint to each other, that 'le jeu n'en valait pas la chandelle.'

With the summit level of the Mamisson Pass, all this was changed. The enormous mass of Adaï Choch, its cliffs, its glaciers and its ice-falls, rose before us, half-wreathed in flying mist, it is true, but perhaps all the more impressive, for only revealing half its strength. Already glimpses of glorious wooded valleys opened upon us from below, and beds of snow-drop and wild hyacinth received us, as we leapt across the waters of the infant Rion. During the morning we had told Paul, our Mingrelian servant, that we should cross the Rion—his Rion—ere nightfall; and he, having in his mind's eye only the lordly stream as it flows from Kutais to the sea, had asked us innocently as to how we should get across, and whether we should find a boat provided for the purpose. He was now charmed to have discovered the Rion in such humble guise, especially as there is a belief among his compatriots that the source of the Rion is unapproachable. To them it is a very Nile, in the mystery of its birth. The descent into the valley more than confirmed our hopes, and at Gurschavi, the highest hamlet in the E. branch of the Upper Rion, and commanding a complete view of it to its junction with the western stream, we halted for two days, to reconnoitre and to rest. From the slopes above the hamlet, thickly clothed with coppice of beech and oak, and carpeted with dwarf rhododendron and luxuriant bilberry plants, we scanned the great chain long and anxiously. Adaï Choch was reluctantly pronounced hopeless for our small party, but Moore's fancy was much taken by a formidable gap of some 13,000 ft. in height, which he, for his part, felt quite

sure must lead *somewhere*—a fact which we did not attempt to dispute. In spite, however, of the alluring character of this pass, we descended the valley to the junction of the rivers, by an excellent path carried through the most splendid pine forests we had ever seen, and mounted the western branch to Chiora.

Here Moore broke into open mutiny: we had done no mountaineering except one ascent; we knew as little of the real composition of the chain as when we started; if we did not take care, we should lose our power of going up mountains altogether. He spoke to no unwilling listeners, and leaving Paul to superintend the baggage at Chiora, and if possible to get it moved higher up the valley to Gebi, we made a dash across the chain to the head waters of one branch of the Uruch Valley and back to the Rion next day near Glola. The first, a glacier pass of 11,250 ft., and not unlike, according to Moore, the Trift Joch, was not wholly easy; the pass by which we returned, 12,250 ft., was wholly difficult. Its glorious ice-fall, up which we were well led by François Devouassoud, was some 4,000 ft. in height, and took us six hours of arduous work. The descent, too, was not easy to find, and we had to bivouac a second night 'sub Jove,' which, being interpreted specially for our case, must be translated 'under a birch tree.' Our provisions were low, and we had to go on half rations; the weather too, which, during our two days' march, had favoured us with glorious views, changed in the night, and a heavy thunder-shower proved somewhat a trial for the cheerfulness of our little party. These two passes are worthy, in every respect, to be matched with the finest in the Alps, and merit a more detailed description than can be given of them here.

At Gebi, decidedly one of the most picturesque villages in the Caucasus, perched on a brow overlooking the ravine through which here flows the Western Rion, we halted two days, detained partly by unfavourable weather, partly by the necessity of making more elaborate arrangements for our tour through the tangled wildernesses of the three-headed Zenis-Squali River. As it was between this place in the Rion and Jibiani in the Ingur Valley that we chiefly encountered the difficulties arising from the roughness of some portions of the Caucasus, and as it is impossible, in the course of a paper like this, to describe at length our laborious progress, I will attempt to give a sketch of one day's proceedings, to serve as a specimen and type of all.

The time is 5 o'clock A.M. The scene, a grassy glade

lying in branch No. 1 of the Zenis-Squali. Within this glade is pitched our tiny tent, the centre of attraction for clouds of black flies, and mosquitoes which have been giving the unhappy inmates a restless night enough. Close at hand, under rugs and sheepskins, our servants and eight Caucasian porters are stretched round the remains of their bivouac fire. A black cloud is sweeping up along the white range above, and growls of thunder portend a juicy day. Moore, in the character of the 'Early Village Cock,' which he, I must admit, represented *à merveille*, now sounds the alarm, and Paul and Devouassoud are summoned, directed to arouse the porters, cook anything there may be to be cooked, and generally to look alive. We next proceed to devote ourselves to our toilet. This is not a lengthy operation, and consists in each drawing forth and fitting to his person the coat, the revolver, cartridge-pouch, and Alpine boots, which constitute his pillow, more luxurious, it is true, than that of a Spartan, but hardly up to the standard required by the modern Sybarite. About this period I summon up courage to suggest a wash, but am instantly suppressed by my companions, with an unanswerable quotation from Galton's 'Art of Travel,' to the effect that the bath is a luxury which civilised people can afford, but a proceeding wholly at variance with the habits of the true bush-traveller. I regret to say that I acquiesce in the verdict without a murmur.

After tedious delay, the fried ham is brought and eaten, the tent struck and rolled up, the packs arranged on the unwilling backs of our Gebi men, and the cavalcade slowly gets into motion. A torrent has to be crossed, and then a ridge, involving 2,000 ft. of ascent, to the next branch of the river, down which we hope to win our way for many miles ere the day closes. The torrent does not stop us long; though rapid, it is narrow at one place; the Caucasians rapidly fell an alder-tree across, and the necessity of wading is avoided for the moment. The forest is thick, but we follow the dry bed of a stream upwards towards the ridge, and make fair progress. The slopes soon, however, grow excessively steep; our porters, after every ten minutes' toil, sit down for a ten minutes' rest, and receive our remonstrances with calm contempt. By dint of perseverance, however, we finally get them to the top of the ridge, which falls away with equal steepness to branch of the Zenis-Squali No. 2, which appears ominously wooded, and, as far as we can see, without either path or habitation. During the descent the Caucasians are rather nervous, but we reach the valley without mishap, and though the rain is now falling

in torrents, plunge in Indian file into the lush grass, four feet high, through which our route lies. Then ensue four or five hours of hopeless work enough. Now we push through masses of hemlock and nettle, burdock and tiger lily, streaming wet; now force our way through matted forest, clambering over piles of alder trunks, or creeping among the network of their roots, often ankle-deep in water, and acutely conscious that not only ourselves but also our beloved chattels are getting hopelessly and irretrievably soaked.

A gleam of sunshine occurs about midday, and we make a delicious lunch off cold sheep's-brains, which we finish, much, I fancy, to the disappointment of Paul, who in his heart has entertained hopes of the reversion thereof. The valley now narrows to a gorge, and we are forced to mount high on the hill-side. It is impossible to keep the level. Ravine after ravine, giving fine glimpses of the short hanging glaciers of this part of the chain, has to be crossed, and their crossing involves tedious circuits and descents. The weather, too, again becomes determinately bad, and the porters are getting tired. Short spurts are all now that they will do, and in the intervals they sit, munching the long green stalks that grow around, with a gravity which is truly provoking. What potatoes are to an Irishman, these succulent weeds are to the Caucasian porter, and the constant excursions made by him to secure a fine plant are a source of tedious delay. I should think that each Caucasian cuts, peels, and devours some ten or twelve pounds a day of this green rubbish when he is on the march. I have tasted fragments occasionally, and have found them to resemble inferior celery. This is an experiment, however, to be made with caution, as I believe several kinds, scarcely to be distinguished by the eye of a novice from the edible sorts, to be highly poisonous. We are now approaching the junction of our stream with the Zenis-Squali branch No. 3, up which lies our to-morrow's route to Jibiani; but no place offers itself on the steep hill-side where it is possible to pitch our tent, and we jog on gloomily till nearly dusk, when, crossing the spur which divides the rivers, we see below us a group of fine pines, which afford us hopes of level ground and partial shelter.

One enormous tree leaning over a steep bank presents an admirable gîte for the porters, but all situations suggested for the tent seem equally undesirable. The poles are swollen with the wet, and refuse to fit into their sockets—the canvas is soaked and flops inwards uncomfortably; our mattrass is in a similar condition—we ourselves are wet to the skin, and prospects of dinner are afar off. It is not surprising, therefore,

that one of the party, who shall be nameless, about this period exclaims with a groan, 'What a fool I was to come to this beastly Caucasus!' and that it was with a look of settled despair that a second sits stolidly down to write his notes, an ironical proceeding soon put a stop to by the heavy plashes of rain which descend on the open page. The ridiculousness of our position, and the thoughts of the curious figure we should present could any of our friends in England look in upon us now, at last rouse us to action, and it is in a somewhat Mark Tapleyish spirit that we set to work to lay pine branches under the tent to drain off the water which runs down on us from above, and dig a trench to carry it off to the sides. The rugs had been saved by their position inside the mattrass, and we discover with delight that our changes of trousers and socks are not the worse for wear. Paul, too, who always showed best under difficulties, soon sends us in a brew of soup, and before long all our troubles are forgotten in sound and refreshing sleep. Such are the experiences to be expected by the traveller in the Zenis-Squali Valley. It is to be remarked, however, that this day, distressing as it was, was chiefly rendered so by the miserable weather, and that, even under these damping circumstances, the wonderful contrast between the rocky and ice-crowned chain and the bright vegetation which runs up almost to its base, formed a scene which it is impossible to forget.

I must hasten on, however, to the valley of the Ingur. The upper basin of this river, some 50 miles long by 15 wide, and lying between the great range and the chain of the Laila Gebirge, is divided longitudinally by various spurs, among which the streams, which descend from the mountains on either side, wander often for many miles before they can make up their minds to unite their fate with that of the Ingur. The most important of these streams, and nearly equal to the Ingur itself in size—the Mushal Aliz—is especially coy, and maintains an independent and almost parallel course for some 20 miles before it finally overcomes its reluctance, and joins the main river near Latal. The excellently made paths down the valley ordinarily run along the crests of the spurs, and their beauty is almost indescribable. The path wanders at will, now on this side of the ridge and now on that, as if itself doubtful whether the more enchanting spectacle be offered by the broad vale of the Mushal Aliz, dotted with towered villages, and backed by the long and finely curving glaciers of the main chain, or by the deep pine-clad gorge on the southern side, across which the Laila Gebirge raise their snowy crests.

Here we stroll along for miles on delicious green sward, now beneath a shade of birch and laburnum, now between banks of white or lilac rhododendron, now amid the golden branches of the azalea, or thickets set with the humbler blossoms of the hollyhock and campanula, lupine and tiger lily. The greatest sensation, however, was perhaps experienced when, on the fourth day after leaving Jibiani, and after a long ascent, rather dull for the Ingur Valley, we suddenly turned a corner and found ourselves face to face with the astounding pyramid of Usch Ba. Rising from a broad base, itself perhaps 8,000 ft. above the sea, this glorious peak rears itself to a height of 16,000 ft., in two gigantic precipices, and the glistening cap upon its summit, cut off by their grey walls from all connection with the snowy plains below, seemed to smile upon us with a sense of proud security which we were scarcely likely to disturb. There are other beauties to be met with, almost without number, by the most casual explorer of the Ingur Valley; among which I may mention an ice-fall, probably the finest in the chain, and far superior to anything of its kind with which I am acquainted in the Alps. It is a single and continuous fall of 4,000 ft., and is composed of the purest ice. It pours from between two noble peaks, and bristles with every form of pinnacle and spire. At the foot of the fall, with scarcely more disturbance than is indicated by a few wavy lines, the glacier remakes itself in graceful fan-shell form, far purer than, and almost as regular in shape as that of the famous glacier of the Rhone. Up the centre of this fall the Ordnance map, with its usual happy discernment, marks a known pass, a piece of stupidity which would be most fitly punished by requesting the cartographers to mount by their own route. They would groan more loudly, I suspect, than ever the wretched Perillus did when inclosed within the brazen bull of his own workmanship.

When I turn from the scenery to the inhabitants of the Ingur Valley, all the remarks I have made must be taken *au contraire*. It may truly be said of this fairy retreat, that 'every prospect pleases, and only man is vile.' Position, history, and the superstitions without the reality of Christianity, may have combined to degrade him still further, but I cannot help thinking that the Suanetian must have been 'a bad lot' from the beginning. If we are to believe Herr Radde, the enterprising German savant who penetrated this district before us, and who, I imagine, was not happy till he had quitted it, each man in this valley has committed several murders—for murder with them is a praiseworthy act. They are virtually

independent of the Russians, and village fights against village, with all the animosity and twice the barbarism of the Italian towns of the middle ages. Divided among themselves, they will readily combine against defenceless strangers, and in fact they only possess one estimable quality—that of a profound respect for an English revolver. I may say with confidence, that it was our heavy armament alone which in this valley saved us from robbery and open violence.

At Jibiani, which, after our rough work in the Zenis-Squali, we looked on as a haven of rest, we found the inhabitants insolent and aggressive. Several small articles were stolen, and unblushingly offered us again for sale. Moore created a momentary sensation by firing off his revolver, but it soon passed off, and we saw we should be lucky to escape without a fight. A horseman who had agreed to convey our baggage down the valley, seemed in league with the villagers, only brought one horse, and would not allow us to place upon that more than a few insignificant parcels. Lastly, in the hurry of starting, Paul and François were left behind, and instantly shut up in the empty barn we had quitted by a rush of natives. Freshfield dashed back, banged the door open with his ice-axe, and planted the muzzle of his revolver against a burly Caucasian who stopped the way. He fell back in dismay, and our men got free. We then began to drag the horse out of the village by a sunk lane, on either wall of which stood crowds of ruffians, shouting and brandishing their weapons. A few copecks were thrown as a sop to Cerberus, and as they were scrambling for them we got outside the enclosures, whither, being no longer able to surround us, the cowardly horde were afraid to follow. The line we had adopted of shouldering our saddle-bags ourselves, and marching out in hollow square, revolver in hand, had thoroughly puzzled them; and being scarcely aware of the real capacities of our weapons, they had not dared to begin a fray in which they might have been ultimately successful, but in which they would probably have suffered severely.

This was by no means the only taste of Suanetian qualities which we experienced. During our progress down the valley our horseman, Islam (of whom let all travellers beware), on two or three occasions drew his pistol on us in an access of rage, but feeling himself in a minority, suffered himself each time to be laughed out of his tantrums. At Latal, when extortionate demands were made upon us by an usurious native, Moore frightened him out of his wits by flourishing an old Foreign Office passport in his face, and telling him to beware, as he

knew not whom he was offending; a safe remark, and one that had a great effect. In like manner ten porters, hired at Pari to cross the chain to the northern side, when they had got us well into the forest, struck for higher pay, and that too down on the nail, intimating that it would be better for us to comply, lest they might tie us up and take our baggage from us. We could only reply to this threat by requesting them to 'try it on.' Lastly, it was while crossing this pass that we met four Suanetians driving eleven cows before them that they had stolen from the industrious Mahometans on the N. side of the chain, and had succeeded in lifting over a snow pass of 10,800 ft. Add to this that, though probably capable of great physical exertion, the Suanetians, like the generality of Caucasians, are the most indolent of races, and, in spite of persuasion and remonstrance, it is impossible to achieve anything like a respectable distance in the day. Thus an ordinary walker would easily pass from Gebi to Jibiani in three days, from Jibiani to Pari in three days more, and another three days would see him safely at Uruspieh. Owing to the sluggishness of our porters we took twelve days, exclusive of halts, instead of nine, to complete the entire distance.

No Englishman, however, need fear anything but a hospitable reception from the Tartar race which occupies the valleys of the Baksan, the Tchegem, and the Tscherek. Mahometans themselves, they lean to the Turk, and mistrust the Russian, and consequently hail the English as the patron of the former and the enemy of the latter Power. At Uruspieh in the Baksan Valley we were kindly received by Prince Ismail and his brother, installed in the building set apart for guests, regaled with delicacies two or three times a day, and provided with porters for the ascent of Elbruz. These Uruspieh porters are the raw material of first-class guides, are not afraid of ice, thoroughly appreciate the use of Alpine Club paraphernalia—ice-axes, cord, and snow-spectacles, and indeed use 'crampons' themselves. Lastly, they will walk as fast on either mountain or plain as even a member of the Club will care to lead them.

We had now had a month's pretty continual work in the mountains, upon somewhat poor food, bad accommodation, and attended by much unavoidable anxiety. We were therefore quite ready to enjoy the luxuries of Pätigorsk, the Capua of the Caucasus, and the fashionable retreat of invalided Russian officers. It took us, however, two hard days to reach it from Uruspieh. On the first day we rode down the Baksan Valley, to the Tcherkess village of Atashkutan, a march of near fifty

miles. The second day we cleared about the same distance, in somewhat casual fashion, now walking, now taking turns on the single horse we had succeeded in hiring, now taking a lift in the *charette à bœufs* we had chartered for the baggage, and for the last eighteen miles into Pätigorsk packing ourselves into the well-known and much detested Russian post-cart. We reached the little town in a sleepy condition about 11 P.M. and found the hotel in a truly magnificent building, adorned with a classic portico. We had arrived exactly at the fashionable supper hour, and though we created some consternation among the elaborate swells at table by our dusty apparel, peeled faces, and thick shooting boots, we were accepted by the Italian young lady who presided at the bar as a decided novelty, and promptly regaled with that supper and bottle (or bottles) of champagne we had so often yearned for during the progress of our tour.

A detailed description and historical sketch of the watering places of the Caucasus I omit, though the subject is an interesting one, partly because this paper is long enough as it is, and partly because it will be done greater justice to in the published account of our wanderings, which I have every reason to believe will appear in the course of the season.

We had now but one task, and that a comparatively easy one, to accomplish before our return to Tiflis. After four pleasant days at Pätigorsk and its vicinity, spent in visiting the various springs, replenishing our exhausted commissariat, and regarding with a lazy interest the great dome of Elbruz, sixty miles away, that had so lately been beneath our feet, we started for a last plunge into the Caucasian range, before we finally quitted it. We reached Naltchik without other difficulties than those caused us by a heavy flood, which by sweping away the bridge of the Lower Baksan, obliged us to abandon our carriage, and continue our journey on horseback. The Tscherek and Uruch Valleys, in which we spent a charming ten days, if not so gorgeous in colouring, or so choked with vegetation, as the valleys of the Zenis-Squali and Ingur, are rendered even more impressive by reason of the lofty forests, the rugged cliffs, and the almost unfathomable gorges with which they abound. No gorge in the Alps—Via Mala or other—can compare with the cleft cut by the Tscherek through the limestone range which bars its journey towards the Northern Steppe. On every vantage ground of ledge or cranny hang great oaks and beeches, and stretch their arms over the fearful chasms which, through the breaks in their thick foliage, are here and there revealed to the traveller in all their depth.

We found the hospitality of Baksan more than equalled by the kindly Mahometans of Balkar, by whom money remuneration was accepted with reluctance, while the photographs of the party, which, taken at Constantinople, were of course highly orthodox, were hailed with great delight, and I have no doubt will be exhibited to the next English traveller who penetrates these unfamiliar scenes. A reconnaissance of the splendid Kosch-tan-tau group at the head of the valley, resulted in our presently 'passing by on the other side,' from a very different motive, however, to that of the proud Levite. If accessible at all, the great peaks of this neighbourhood must be assailed from Bezeengi, in the W. branch of the Tscherek Valley. Crossing a fine col of some 10,000 ft. in height, baggage-horses, and all, to the Uruch Valley, we were met by a Cossack, who had been sent up to aid us by the direction of General Loris Melikov, Governor of the Vladi-Katkaz District, an act of attention on the part of the Russians which, as our horsemen hired at Naltchik showed signs of insubordination, was fully appreciated by us. We left the Uruch Valley by a gorge almost as splendid as that of the Tscherek, rode through the dripping forests of Tuganova, and fording some ugly streams, soon reached Ardonsk, from whence two stages (in the second of which our crazy Russian cart, as usual, came to pieces) brought us in safety to Vladi-Katkaz on the line of the Dariel road. A day's halt was here necessary, till the Tiflis road, broken by the floods, was again open to traffic. We stopped an hour or so at our old quarters, the station-house of Kasbek, where we were received with enthusiasm, and pushing on reached Tiflis without mishap. Our journey in the Caucasus was over, for our homeward route by Borjom and Achalzich, on the Russo-Turkish frontier, scarcely finds a proper place in a paper on the Caucasian chain. Suffice it to say, that owing to the fortunate accident of a glorious day in crossing the mountains that bound the Rion to the S., we had the privilege of identifying the whole of our route from Kasbek to Elbruz, and could now attach both names and ideas to the snowy peaks eighty miles away, which a few months before had seemed to us clothed in mystery such as we could scarcely hope to solve.

I would add a few words as to what, in the section of the Caucasus explored by us, is still left to be accomplished, and a few hints may not be out of place as to how to set about it. From what has been said previously it might be concluded that there were no considerable peaks in the chain which are not also immensely difficult. This is not, however, entirely the case;

there are, I think, a good many interesting points of view which may be reached without serious difficulty. Such are Zilga Choch, situated on the watershed, just where the ridge of Kasbek abuts on the main chain; Tau Burdisula, a bold peak projecting between the E. and W. branches of the Rion, and thus in one of the finest positions for a view in the whole Caucasus; a fine panoramic point, Schoda, rising in the chain on the opposite or southern side of the West Rion, and easily accessible from Gebi; and Tau Tötonal, the glorious snow cone above Adisch, in the Ingur basin, are all undoubtedly feasible for the practised mountaineer. A tour that should include these peaks, and should miss little or nothing of the beautiful scenery visited by us, might easily be arranged. The best starting-point, for many reasons, is Tiflis. The fullest information attainable, and the officials who have the greatest power to aid, are to be found there. It possesses the most comfortable hotel, the Hôtel d'Europe, and by far the best shops, in the Caucasus. It is the residence, too, of a Russian artist, some of whose Caucasian pictures we were glad to secure; and finally, the indispensable Ordnance map is only to be purchased in the Staff-department of that place.

While availing himself of governmental aid as much as possible, the traveller will do well to avoid putting himself into the hands of Russian officers in the matter of making bargains with the natives. Whether the Russians themselves pay high, or think that Englishmen are made of money, I know not; but the inevitable result of his trusting to them for making arrangements with horsemen or porters, is that he will have to repudiate the bargain altogether, or pay three times the sum at which he might have hired them for himself. It is also better to engage Caucasians by the job than by the day; their imagination is excited by the idea of a round sum, though less than half what they would get from the aggregate of days; and secondly, it becomes their direct interest to hasten instead of to waste the traveller's time.

In conclusion: throughout this paper I have addressed myself as to men who may, and in some cases undoubtedly will, visit the scenes I have attempted to describe. The Caucasus is too glorious a country to be left to the savage races who, as a rule, are its only inhabitants, or to Russians who cannot understand its beauties. If this paper has heightened the desire of a single member of the Alpine Club to follow in our footsteps, or has removed a single difficulty from his path, it will have accomplished the object for which it was written.