

THE SEARCH EXPEDITION TO THE CAUCASUS.

BY CLINTON DENT, PRESIDENT.

THE following lines are intended only as a brief summary of the results of the Search Expedition organised to ascertain the fate of Mr. W. F. Donkin and Mr. H. Fox, together with their guides, Streich and Fischer. It is almost impossible, without the assistance of a map, to give a really clear idea of the intricate topography of the district. Through the kindness of General Shdanoff, of the Topographical Department of Tiflis, and of Messrs. Djukoff and Bogdanoff, who have been engaged in the survey of this part of the Caucasian chain, good materials are to hand for the construction of such a map, but it has been impossible to prepare it in time for publication in the present number of the 'Alpine Journal.' At the meeting in February next, it is hoped that the map will be ready, and a fully detailed account of the search will then be laid before the Club. Meanwhile, the sketch-map already published in the 'Alpine Journal' * may give some rough idea of the mountain chain.

It is unnecessary here to set forth the grounds on which the general plan of the search was arranged. Suffice it for the present to say that we assumed that the party had carried out the intention expressed in Fox's diary of crossing the Ullu-auz Pass—as the depression on the E. ridge of Dych-tau, at the head of the Ullu-auz Glacier, may now be called—of camping out high on the southern side, and of then attacking Dych-tau again by the eastern or southern ridges. On August 27 they had, as we learned from the diary, attempted the ascent of Dych-tau by the northern ridge and had been repulsed, having started too late in the day for the expedition.

July 25.—Reached Karaoul, and were fortunate in finding M. Bogdanoff, of the Topographical Department, who was at work in the district, encamped there. He entertained us very hospitably.

July 27.—Heavy rain had fallen during the night, and there was some fresh snow on the mountains. Kaufmann, Woolley's second guide, ill with dysenteric symptoms. Did not like to leave him alone in camp for possibly several days, and consequently postponed our start. Woolley went off to explore the Tutuin-su glen with Jossi and Maurer,

* No. 101, August 1888.

while Freshfield and Powell, accompanied by Fischer, started up the hill N. of Karaoul. Woolley on his return reported that the Tutuin stream branched a short distance up the glen. Freshfield from his view-point was enabled to see that the two streams came from different glaciers, and that of these the southern was the one that led towards Dych-tau. He reported also that the glacier had a formidable ice-fall, of which drawings were brought down. The Ullu-az Pass was visible, immediately beyond a great buttress of rock. This reconnoitring walk was most valuable. The worst way to reconnoitre a mountain is to go actually on it.

July 28.—Original intention of starting at 1 A.M. abandoned owing to a communication received from Baron Ungarn-Sternberg late in the evening of 27th. Left at 5 A.M. Kaufmann remained at Karaoul. Freshfield and Powell rode down the valley towards Balkar to catch Baron Ungarn-Sternberg, returning after some hours, while we conveyed the baggage some distance up the Tutuin-su glen. Camped out in the open by the side of the Tutuin Glacier at a height of about 9,300 feet. The glacier is obviously advancing.

July 29.—Started at 4.30 A.M. Weather perfect. Ascent by rocks on right bank of Tutuin Glacier for an hour. Crossed glacier through ice-fall (which was not so bad as it looked, but we were lucky in hitting off a good line) to left bank. Scenery very grand. Pinnacles of rock in all directions resembling the Chamoni Aiguilles. Upper snow in good order. Soon came in sight of a col comparable to the Allalin-joch in its relation to the Alphubel, our pass being represented by the latter. Had it not been for the survey of July 27, we might have tried the wrong pass and lost a day. On rounding the buttress of rock already mentioned, came in sight of the true Ullu-az Pass. Height of final slope from névé to summit of pass from 1,500 to 1,800 feet. A broad ice-gully leads up the whole of the way, but two ribs of rock on the right offered the best means of access. Chose the left-hand rib, it being rather broader and also running further up. If we had gone up the other we might have missed the bivouac altogether. Rocks fairly easy, but still requiring attention. We were climbing steadily up when, just about mid-day, Maurer, who was leading, half shouted, half gasped, ‘Herr Gott! the sleeping-place!’ A hurried glance up and we saw, some six or eight feet above the leader, a low wall of stones. In a moment we were all together within the little enclosure, or on the narrow ledge by its side. The

suddenness of the discovery was for a few moments overpowering. We had felt certain that some such bivouac existed. We believed that we should find it. We knew for an absolute certainty that nothing more than evidence of a fatal accident could be obtained, and yet the blow came as if freshly inflicted.

The sleeping-place consisted of a wall of stones, carefully built, about two feet high, and of horseshoe shape. The circle was completed by an overhanging rock at the back. The enclosure measured about six feet across, and some eight feet in length. Carefully arranged in this space, and almost entirely covered by the snow which had drifted and fallen into it, we could just make out the sleeping-bags with two mackintosh coats spread over them. A little distance off, and buried also, was one of the green ruck-sacks we had used last year. On the rocks just below were traces of a fire; all the wood gone. A cooking-pan half full of water was placed ready for use under a stone, and, close by, a loaded revolver hung from a projecting splinter of rock. There was a good store of provisions. No rope was to be seen. Donkin's camera too was absent. He had doubtless, according to his usual custom, taken it with him, intending to carry it as far as possible. I think none who were present will ever lose the power of recalling the scene in the minutest details. As we stood there the explanation of what had happened eleven months before was as clear as if we had found a written description. That they intended to return to the bivouac was evident. The party had unquestionably attempted to ascend Dych-tau by the eastern ridge, *i.e.* the ridge leading directly towards the summit from the Pass, for if they had proposed to try the route from the head of the Tutuin snowfields they would have carried down their baggage. This route—the one taken this year by Mr. H. Woolley—they never saw. The great rock pinnacles on the actual crest of the ridge allowed no passage, and it would have been found necessary to traverse on the face. The northern face is a series of forbidding ice-slopes. The southern face consists of cliffs traversed by small slopes and steep ledges covered with ice and snow. It is highly probable that a fall occurred while the party were on one of these slopes: if so, death must have been almost instantaneous. Falling stones could not have swept away so large a party, nor is there any particular danger from this source at the spot. Want of time alone must have prevented the party from reaching the summit by the very

difficult route adopted. We therefore came to the conclusion that they were lost in ascending.

Freshfield and Woolley, with Jossi, went on, after a while, to the top of the pass and found a stone-man, but no record. Powell remained to sketch the scene, and the rest of the party set to work to dig out the various articles. Some of these were brought down. A packet of maps and sketches was found frozen in beneath the sleeping-bags, the bundle being carefully wrapped in mackintosh. On two or three of the drawings were indicated routes up Dych-tau. The height of the bivouac is about 14,000 feet, probably rather over than under, and that of the pass about 14,300 feet. The cliffs on both sides were carefully scanned with the telescope, but no traces of the calamity were visible. We returned to our sleeping-place at 7.30 P.M., and the following day to Karaoul.

The actual ascent of Dych-tau did not appear necessary as far as the search was concerned, and the idea of this expedition was therefore abandoned. A visit to the upper snows of the Kundium Mishirgi Glacier from the Bezingi side seemed, perhaps, desirable in order to ascertain why Donkin and Fox's first attempt on the mountain had failed.

With this expedition the search was over. It is necessary to mention this, as a paragraph that appeared in the 'Standard' newspaper of September 18, which was extensively copied by the press, while ascribing to me some remarks that I never made, erroneously stated that some members of the party remained to conduct further search.

It has been assumed in some quarters that as none of the bodies were found the expedition failed in its main object. This rather morbid view has unfortunately, though perhaps not unnaturally, found expression in certain newspapers. Let me speak plainly, in the hope that it may be the last word on the subject. Such a discovery we feared, but did not hope to make. If we had found remains, we could not have brought them down through the ice-fall, not at any rate without much additional aid, which could not have been obtained from the natives. We wanted convincing evidence of the nature of the accident; this, in our judgment, we have brought to light. We wanted to clear the inhabitants of the district from the grave suspicion (one that we ourselves had never for a moment entertained) under which they lay; this we did, for no native could have even reached the bivouac. And, lastly, we wanted, on behalf of the Club, to redeem a promise and to discharge a duty. There are very

strong reasons indeed for concluding that our friends lie in the upper névé, buried beneath the avalanche snow that fell during the last winter and spring. Those who know the mountains best will recognise that, in ignorance of the exact spot, further search in the snowfields at the base of the cliffs would have been utterly futile; none was made, at the time or after. Save for some chance discovery, we must wait until, twenty or thirty years hence, the downward movement of the glacier may conceivably reveal that the story we have founded on this circumstantial evidence is accurate. For my own part, I hope that the secret may be preserved.

EXPLORATIONS AND ASCENTS IN THE CAUCASUS IN 1889.

[N.B.—Since 1887 the three great peaks of the central group of the Caucasus have been referred to constantly in these pages by the names given to them in the 5-verst map. M. Djukoff, of the Russian Survey, has, however, recently ascertained that the Dych-tau of the 5-verst map (and, consequently, of European literature) is locally called Koshtan-tau, and he has so called it on his new map, not yet officially issued. For this change there is much to be said. But M. Djukoff has further transferred the name of Dych-tau to the '5-verst' Koshtan-tau (Mr. Dent's Guluku). This appears a very unfortunate proposal. That peak stands quite outside the Dych-su basin, and the peak called Dych-tau by the Tartars is naturally that at the head of the Dych-su Glacier, the Shkara of Suanetia. Until a new nomenclature is definitely sanctioned by the Topographical Department at Tiflis that of the 5-verst map will be retained in these pages, with such explanation as may be needful.]

ON July 14 Mr. C. T. Dent and Mr. D. W. Freshfield, with Captain C. H. Powell, of the 1st Ghoorkhas (to whom, in order that he might be able to place his knowledge of Russian at the disposal of the search-party, extended leave of absence from his regiment had been generously granted, at the request of the President and Council of the Royal Geographical Society, by the Secretary of State for India), joined Mr. Hermann Woolley, who had already arrived with C. Jossi, J. Kaufmann, K. Maurer and A. Fischer, at Vladikavkaz (see p. 445).

The united party drove over the Mamisson Pass, sleeping at Allagyr and Teeb, to the Kasarma, 1,100 feet below the top on the southern side. Thence it is but a short walk of 1 to 1½ hour to the brow of the high pasturages to the W., which command a noble and topographically instructive view of the Rion basin, the gorge through which the river breaks through the hills, and the S. face of the Adai Choch group with its glaciers.