

raids are not past, for we all would give the booty of Tamerlane and the treasures of Cortez for that proud moment of the modern 'conquistador' when with the last and highest step he plants his foot upon the glistening crown of an unconquered peak.

Well might I sing the praise of many another day, for there were many, and not one was blank for eye or ear or soul. The goblins of the sombre forests, the giants of the séracs, the elves that live in the Nakra flowers and the dryads that whisper in the birch glades of the Bal, the boisterous spirits of the banqueting hall with the songs of stalwart men and the rippling laughter of the girls—they are still with us in our waking dreams. But as Ushba is seen far and wide o'er all the Suanetian lands so the memory of Ushba stands ever-present in the scenery of our thoughts. Look how towards night it sheds its hood of cloud before the setting sun; see how it rises high above the pines of Gul—six thousand feet of rock piled upon ice, and ice piled upon rock. There it stands, the mighty union of the glowing, molten rocks upheaved and the frozen water embracing them from above; the awesome monument of the eternal battle between the fiery earth and the cold of the outer world.

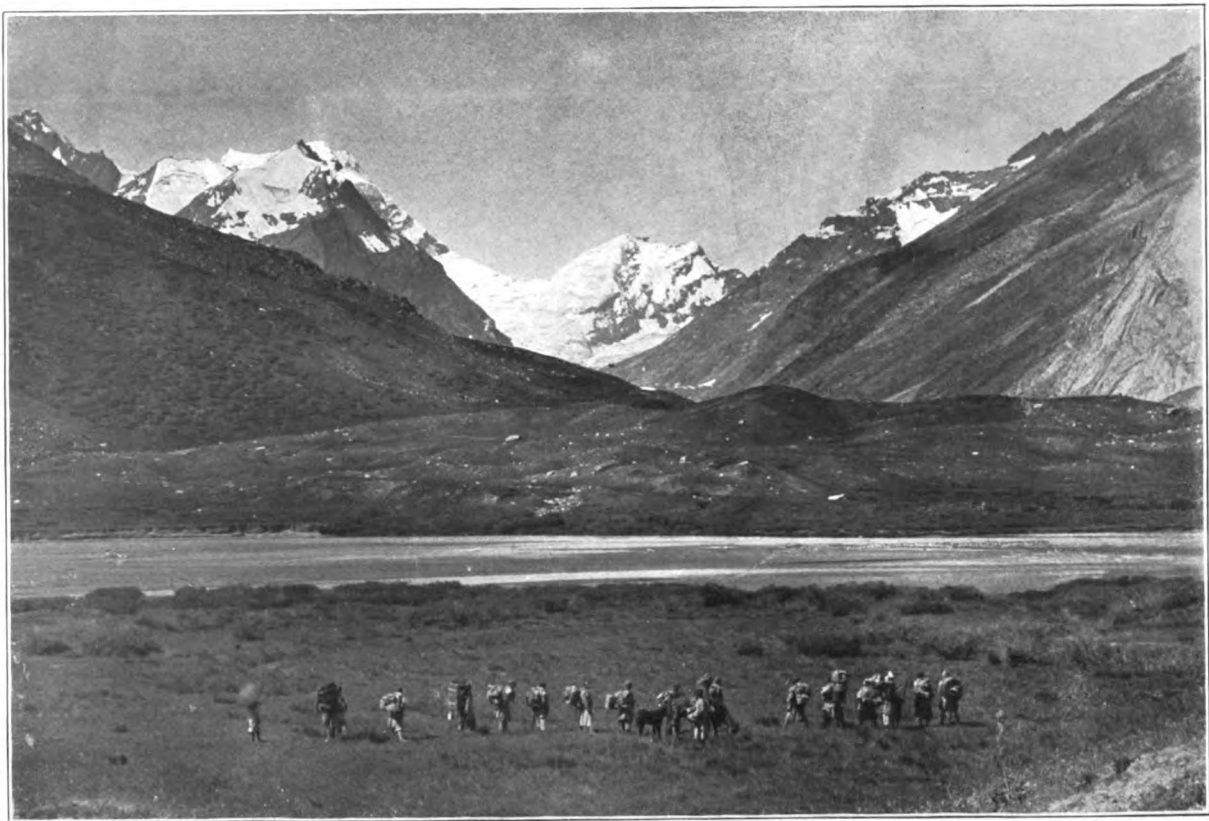
NUN KUN REVISITED.

BY DR. ARTHUR NEVE.

THE highest peaks in the Kashmir Himalayas are almost lost in the mists of distance and general inaccessibility, with the two notable exceptions of Nanga Parbat and Nun Kun. Both of these are on the great range of middle Himalayas, south of the Indus. And both dominate valleys, to whose fertility, doubtless, their own vast glaciers have greatly contributed, valleys which are now fairly populous. The Astor valley is the best known, for it is on the high road to Gilgit, the famous frontier fort of the Hindu Kush. But the Suru valley below Nun Kun, if less known, is no less accessible, and is decidedly more populous and fertile.

It is best reached by the Zoji route, the highway to Ladak, and Suru is but ten days from Kashmir.

In my account of the first exploration, published in this Journal for February, 1903, I gave a brief description of the position of the great peaks as seen from the Pakartse Pass, a few miles beyond Suru, and told how we forded the river, and ascended the Shafat Longma, and found a practicable



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THE SHAFAT VALLEY.

route to a high point on the eastern snow-fields of the highest peak. I must now bring the record up to date.

In the summer of 1903 a Belgian gentleman and his wife visited Kashmir for the sake of climbing, and in June they proceeded to Nun Kun. Mr. Sillem consulted me before starting, and I rendered what help I could in making the arrangements. They forded the river successfully, and, although hindered by occasional bad weather, succeeded in establishing a high camp at 17,500 ft., not far from the furthest point reached by the Rev. C. E. Barton and me. Difficulties in the matter of supplies also checked him, but on July 12, a brilliant day, with the snow in excellent condition, Mr. Sillem and two of the Kashmiri, with no special difficulty, ascended to the snow-field lying at a height of about 21,000 ft. on the saddle between the two great peaks.

He kindly supplied me with copies of some of the photographs he had taken at different parts of the ascent, and from the high snow-field, but unfortunately the clouds concealed the Dome Peak most of the day. His experience of the general climbing conditions was favourable, and he considered that there should be no very special difficulties in ascending any of the peaks, unless there was much ice on the arête leading W. Of course fine weather would be a *sine quâ non* at that great altitude.

In recrossing the Suru River, which had in the meantime become rather swollen by the melting snows, Mr. Sillem had some risky experiences, and his head porter was nearly drowned. However, next day a practicable ford was found and the whole of the party got safely over.

This adventure did not cause Mr. Barton and me any anxiety when we again reached Suru this year on August 1, but the event disconcerted us. At our old ford below the Shafat Chu we found nearly a foot more water than in 1902, and within a few yards of the bank I was soon lifted nearly off my feet, and, but for a rope, should have been carried away. However, we proceeded another mile or two, to above the junction of the Shafat River, and camped by a promising broad smooth stretch of river, hoping to ford early next day, before the snow water came down. At that point the river was about 150 yards wide, flowing in three streams, with narrow intervening pebble banks. The water fell only about four inches during the night. Mr. Barton led, roped with a strong porter and our Kashmiri cook.

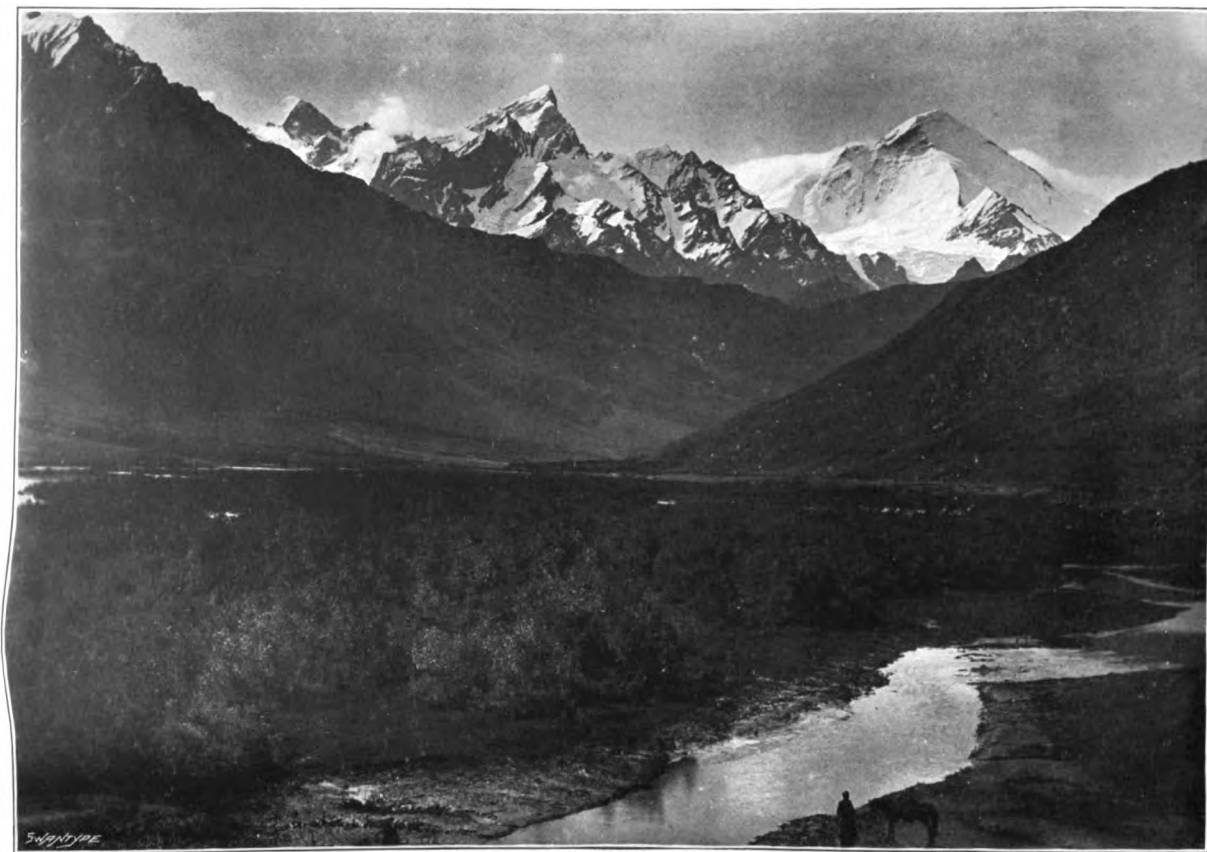
He easily negotiated the first part, but half-way across the second and broader part the swift current turned them

slightly down into a deeper reach, where they were all three carried off their legs. For a few moments they even disappeared from view, but finally scrambled out on the other bank, and drew out the half-drowned cook. It was impossible for us to join them, or for them to stay there without food or clothing. So Barton, although badly bruised and bleeding from cuts, after a short rest rushed into the river higher up and waded down to mid stream, where I was able to join him and give him a rope. The natives refused to face the river again. So they set off along the bank on the further side, while we went up the valley looking for any ford by which they might rejoin us. None was found in the Rangdum valley, till a few miles beyond the monastery on the way to the Pense Pass. Travelling almost all night the two waifs succeeded in getting across the Pense stream in the early morning, and returned to camp the next afternoon.

Mr. Barton's injuries precluded the idea of his climbing on Nun Kun, nor had we any spare time to go round to the mountain by the head of the valley. So we turned reluctantly, he riding on a hill pony.

Below Pakartse there is a natural bridge, where the whole river has cut its way deep between two granite cliffs, and the boulders of the Tongul Glacier have jammed across the gorge and become covered by *débris*, thus bridging the river, which disappears from view for over a hundred yards. At Tongul we procured a riding yak, a behemoth which walked calmly over almost any sort of hillside, with Mr. Barton upon its back. For surefootedness it seemed to rival a goat. So we decided to have another look at the W. and S. side of Nun Kun, in continuation of our previous exploration of the Sentik La and upper Bhot Kol Glacier. I spent one night out in a *tente d'abri*, on a narrow ledge overlooking the extreme head of the Bod Zoj Nai. As on the previous occasion it rained in torrents, and at night froze hard, and it seems probable that the rainfall is at least three times as much on the S. slopes as on the N. slopes of the mountain. There did not appear any good line of access to the upper glaciers and snow-fields.

Starting at 5.30 next morning, I recrossed the Barmal Pass, and then, to obtain a better view, I ascended D 41 to the height of about 19,200 ft. This is a beautiful snowy cone continuous with the western arête of Nun Kun. There were two of our best porters with me. At first the snow was in splendid condition and we made rapid progress. We all wore crampons, and so needed to do no step-cutting. They were



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NUN KUN FROM BELOW SURU.

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quite new to the use of a rope, but handled it intelligently as we twisted round or scrambled across the numerous schrunds. These drove us out to the sunny arête, and there, as we ascended, the snow became very soft. Some new snow had also fallen during the previous night, which made the going rather slow. We had left the névé at the head of the glacier at 9 A.M. at a height of over 17,000 ft., and at noon we began to overlook the col between D 41 and the Dome Peak, and were several hundred feet higher than a similar col half a mile S.E., over which we looked down one of the glaciers at the head of the Fariabád Wardwan valley. Heavy clouds were now sweeping up from the Kashmir side, and we turned and descended, none too soon, for as we reached the glacier snow began to fall. By 2 P.M. we crossed the Sentik Pass, and it was very noticeable how abrupt was the transition in the snow level from the vast snow-fields extending down to 14,000 ft. on the Kashmir side, while on the Ladak side but little snow was visible below 17,000 ft. At our base camp no snow had fallen during those two days. Mr. Barton had climbed the ridge on his yak, and secured some good photographs with a full-plate camera.

Our return journey *via* the Umba La was quite uneventful and very pleasant. But from the Zoji Pass I carried out a long cherished project of visiting the Amarnath cave, a famous place of pilgrimage. Hitherto this has always been approached from the Lidar valley. Early in the summer it is also possible to go there from Baltal in the Sind valley, following almost exclusively up the vast snow-bridges, which at that time fill the otherwise impassable gorge. It was supposed that no pass existed from the Ladak road, which crosses the Zoji at a height of 11,500 ft., to the cave, which is over 13,000 ft. and only 5 miles S.E. Three years ago I reconnoitred from the Amarnath side. This year on our way to Nun Kun we had explored from the Zoji Pass up to the head of the Kani Patthar nullah, which, according to the Survey map, overlooks the cave. But we found the map in error, and from the col at the S.E. (14,600 ft.) overlooked the adjoining Gumber valley.

So on my return journey it was up the Gumber nullah that I turned near the seventy-first mile-post. Half a mile on was a large shepherds' encampment, at a point where avalanche snow still filled the nullah to a depth of 200 ft. Another mile on was a large flock of goats with a cave dwelling. We asked the goatherds if they knew the path. No, there was no path. Did they know that the famous cave of Amarnath

was in the next nullah? No, it might be in the Sahib's maps, but no one had ever been this way. Were there no goatherds in the Panjitarni valley? Yes, but there was no communication except by the Pailgam route. I had two men with me, one a local and decrepit man from the first village beyond the Zoji Pass, and the other a Kashmiri. Both were sceptical. The goatherds refused to accompany us, but an easy line was plainly visible on the lateral moraine along the E. of the glacier. At a bend in the head of the valley we kept up the rocks to the left, and came out on an easy snow-slope leading on to a snow-field over a mile broad each way. The height about 14,800 ft. In half an hour we crossed the snow-field (S. by 20 W.) and looked right down to the grassy knoll over the cave. We made our way down a steep couloir, a descent of 1,800 ft., and were quickly at our goal. The re-ascent took 1½ hrs., on snow and scree, and we found an easy line to the W. of the couloir, crossing the ridge about 200 yds. W. of a curiously perforated cliff. There is one large circular aperture through which the sky is seen. From the top it is necessary to turn E. for half a mile. There we met our ancient porter, who had remained there.

The whole return journey from the cave to my camp on the Zoji only took 4½ hrs. It is a route quite suitable for laden coolies.

It is my firm conviction that Nun Kun is a climbable mountain. It is by no means difficult of access, and a base for supplies and coolies is comparatively near. Some of the Suru coolies have shown themselves fairly capable and willing. They follow where well led and when their few wants are cared for. They are content with two pounds of 'satu,' parched flour, a day. They mix this with cold water, and eat it cold. Tea and tobacco are their only luxuries.

The best time of year would be about midsummer, before the monsoon has reached Kashmir. At that time at least four fine days a week might be expected. The river would then be crossed by snow-bridges, at narrow places above or below the Shafat. The party should consist of at least three climbers, and they would need about 20 porters. The expense for such a party for the journey from Kashmir would be about 20*l.*, and for every week on the mountain 5*l.* extra. In 1906 I might be able to render some personal assistance.