Note on Major Minchinton's Paper.

By FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND.

MAJOR MASON'S Shaksgam Expedition accomplished its main object. It extended the accurate triangulation of the Himalayan region across the main watershed north of K_2, and it determined the source of the Shaksgam River and its approximate course from its source to the junction with it of the Urdok glacier valley which I ascended in 1889. But, without jeopardizing the main object of the Expedition, the members were not able to descend the river to the Urdok glacier and this evidently caused Minchinton much disappointment. I have looked up the river to their furthest point and they have looked down the river to my furthest point, but we have not actually touched hands. Again, they followed down a tributary—the Zug Shaksgam—nearly to the junction with the Shaksgam, and I crossed it at its junction, but here also we do not actually touch.

There therefore remains an interesting little piece of minor exploration still to be done—a rare chance for a subaltern with a few months leave. In both 1887 and 1889 I was on the Shaksgam in September; and I am inclined to think that that month is the best time to be there, because the water is then at its lowest. I may add that in 1887 I did not use a tent: my men and I slept in the open the whole way from the last village in Turkestan to the first village in Baltistan, namely Askoli. At that season it is therefore quite possible to travel very lightly. A light tent might be taken over the Karakoram Pass as far as may be, but then, for a dash down the Shaksgam, if the worst comes to the worst, it might very well be discarded.

How far the adventurous subaltern should go will depend on time and opportunity, but he should try at least to reach Durbin Jangal and explore from there up the Zug Shaksgam to Mason's farthest point so as to connect up. He should note that the very prominent peak he will see from Durbin Jangal is Staircase Peak and not K_2, as I thought. (The existence of Staircase Peak was not known in my day, and I presumed therefore that the peak I saw was K_2.) And he should at all costs rack his brains to breaking point to find words with which to describe what he sees. For he will be in the very

midst of what is perhaps the grandest scenery in the whole Himalaya ; and what we unfortunates who now have to stay at home want is a good description of those glorious mountains and not long and weary accounts of everything else except the one distinctive feature of the region.

I have spoken of exploring rather than climbing ; but there is, of course, climbing *ad lib.* to be done in that region. At Durbin Jangal there is—or was thirty-eight years ago—plenty of scrub for firewood and a fair amount of grass, and from the heights above it must be views of K_2 and the Gasherbrum peaks which must exceed in grandeur anything else in the Himalaya—and therefore in the world—except perhaps the view of Everest from close by it on the southern side which no one yet has seen.

Les Écrins and Mont Pelvoux.

An unpublished letter from the late Miss Gertrude Bell.

[We offer our grateful thanks to Lady Bell and to Sir Ernest Benn for the privilege of being allowed to publish this letter, which does not appear in 'Letters of Gertrude Bell.'—*Editor, A.J.*]

La Grave,
Monday, Sept. 4, 1899.

DEAREST FATHER,—I have been looking forward for the last twenty-four hours to the moment when I should be able to pour into the ears of my family a full account of my adventures. My tour has been brought to a most successful conclusion, so now for the longest letter in the world ! The truth, the whole truth, and—well, perhaps a little more than the truth, shall we say ! I wrote to Elsa from La Bérarde on Thursday morning.

I spent a peaceful afternoon reading Whymper's terrible account of the first ascension of the Écrins and left about 5 for the Refuge du Carrelet in order to try them myself. We turned up a valley to the right and followed up the stream for an hour and a quarter. The valley was narrow and desolate beyond words, your view headed off in all directions by glaciers. All the valleys on this side of the mountains are wild, narrow and inhospitable, bare of verdure and uninhabited. The Refuge