

that quarter. Whether Elbruz should have been visible is rather doubtful as, on the map, a ridge is marked as intervening and rising at one point to a height of 11,380 feet. The general level of the plateau can scarcely be under 8,000 feet. Slight depressions in it form the beds of small streams, tributaries either of the Malka or the Kuban, according as they are east and west of the scarcely perceptible watershed between the basin of the Caspian and that of the Black Sea.

By the side of one of these we remained for an hour for our mid-day meal. Close by was a salt spring, at which a large herd of cattle was brought down to drink, while we were indulging in our siesta; the animals seemed to take kindly to the draught, fighting and struggling for precedence round it. We passed several encampments of herdsmen, and at all had friendly greetings from the men and the reverse from the dogs. At one of them, our Kunim friend found his expected acquaintances and therefore left us, there being no object in his going on to Utchkulan since the misadventure of the previous day to his horse; he bade us farewell with many expressions of regret and good-feeling which we thoroughly shared, for he had served us well, without fuss, and with invariable good temper.

A monolith

As we advanced westwards over this great pasture land we gradually opened out a view in front down a considerable valley trending to the northwest, very different in character to the glens with which we had lately had to do. These are entirely bare of timber; the valley in question,—that of the Khudes-Su, a tributary of the Kuban—, on the other hand appeared to be thickly wooded in its middle and lower regions. At 3.20, after crossing a wide plain in the middle of which was a solitary stone pillar with every mark of antiquity, we came to a low ridge immediately above a side glen of this valley. According to the map our route lay for a short distance down this glen and then over a ridge to the left into a parallel glen further south, in which we calculated on finding some sort of quarters for the night. Just below the col was a hut which turned out to be densely populated. From it emerged two men, three women and any number of dirty but not ill-looking children, who gazed at us with open-mouthed astonishment as we sat drinking copious draughts of milk which were produced for our benefit. Our men also got directions as to the route without however much advantage, for the path which, on resuming our journey, we followed down the valley, terminated abruptly in the middle of a thick wood, leaving us in doubt how to proceed.

The position was made more unpleasant by a sharp shower which broke at this moment and made the work of groping through the tangled undergrowth a very saturating business; nevertheless, the immediate surroundings were beautiful in the extreme; the wood itself was more than commonly picturesque, while the flowers through which we struggled,—tiger-lilies, azalea, and others,—were simply perfect. After wandering about rather aimlessly for some time, with no other result

than to take us to a much lower level than, as I felt sure, we ought to have reached, I insisted upon turning straight up the hillside on our left in which direction the proper path *must* be, unless the map were entirely wrong. The sequel proved the movement to be a judicious one, for after a sharp pull we got clear of the wood, and, doubling back on the direction we had been pursuing, very soon hit a well-marked track which led us, at 5.15, to the crest of the ridge above the southern branch of the Khudes-Su.

Chalet above the Khudes-Su

The valley into which we now looked was narrower and much more savage than the one we were leaving ; immediately below us it appeared a mere trench of great depth with very steep sides deeply scored by bare green ravines ; lower down it seemed to open out a little, and was covered with dense forest. Turning over the ridge, a good path led gradually down in a westerly direction to a group of empty chalets, clustered on the almost precipitous hillside in a striking situation. These we reached at 5.50, and agreed to make our quarters for the night which promised to be a wet and stormy one ; a watertight roof was therefore a desideratum, and this the substantial hut which we selected for our ' hotel ' possessed. Otherwise it was not an inviting place, with an air of dirt and squalor suggestive of recent occupation by animals of some kind, and the probable presence of hordes of fleas ; a sort of shelf, however, ran round two sides of the building, on which we arranged our bags and eventually made ourselves fairly comfortable.

Paul, as usual, devoted himself to preparing dinner, after some little difficulty in collecting wood for a fire ; the men were very calmly going to use for the purpose a part of the shelf aforesaid, but this we would not allow, and in the end sufficient for our purposes was found lying about in the neighbourhood.

The expected fleas, if they really existed, failed to find us out, and we passed a good night. Turning up at 4.0 a.m. on the 1st August, we found a misty morning after very heavy rain, and the general appearance of the weather scarcely presaged the fine day which, in fact, ensued and was the forerunner of many others. The horses, having been turned loose overnight to wander at will, had availed themselves of their liberty so thoroughly that a long time was consumed in finding them, and it was 5.45 before the baggage was packed and we were on the march again.

A pleasant Alp

A steep but good path led down to the stream in the valley at our feet, which we crossed just above a second group of deserted huts, and then followed down its left bank as far as a small torrent falling in from the south. This was also crossed, and then ensued a steep pull up through a glorious wood with occasional clearances affording a fine view of the snows of Elbruz seen at the head of the main valley. Above the steepest part of the ascent, the path wound up and round a succession

of spurs on to a lovely green alp, dotted with fir trees, and distinguished by what is a rarity in the Caucasus,—a little lake, which was probably at some period a good deal larger. Close by, were some inhabited châteaux, a circumstance which suggested to our men that their morning meal was about due ; we ourselves had no objection to dawdle away an hour in so charming a spot, and at the same time indulge in the luxuries of fresh milk and butter which were forthcoming from the natives, though at a rather extortionate price. Elbruz was no longer visible, but on the further side of the Alp a fine grassy hill, deeply furrowed by ravines, was a striking object.

Arrival at Utchkulan

After a halt which extended from 8.20 to 9.30, we resumed our way by a path of the same character as before, rising and falling, and commanding wide and beautiful views over green hills and glens to the west and north, and up and across the great trough which marked the valley of the Kuban, now close at hand, while, to the south, there was from the highest point of the way, a glimpse of some snow-capped peaks in the direction of the main chain. At 10.40, we began to go down in earnest into a picturesque ravine, densely wooded, at the bottom of which the path suddenly developed into a good road, which hugged the torrent,—called Ses on the map—, and at last emerged into the main valley of the Kuban, at a little distance from a large village—El-Tiaub—conspicuous for a big European-looking house rising from amongst the native hovels. We did not go to it as our route lay southwards up the valley, which is here very bare and burned, recalling reminiscences of the duller parts of the lower Rhone valley, while the road up it was a regular highway, on which one almost looked to meet a ‘Diligence.’ This we struck at noon exactly. In little more than an hour of leisurely walking, we opened out a valley of almost equal width, from the East,—that of the Khurzuk, whose stream flows straight from the glaciers of Elbruz. Crossing this stream by a good bridge, we reached at 1.30 the first houses of the collection of hamlets which, scattered over the flat plain between the Khurzuk and the Kuban, make up the community of Utchkulan.

There is nothing picturesque in the situation of the place, but it has one feature in the view of Elbruz which is obtained up the valley of the Khurzuk, where the mountain towers up in stately isolation. The height of the village, according to the map, is 4,671 feet ; our barometer reading (25.10), by our rough and ready system of calculation, would make it 4,800, but the figures on the map which are, no doubt, based on observations of Herr Radde who was here in 1865, are to be preferred.

Cold reception

On the top of the steep river bank, just above the bridge was a white-washed bungalow which we should have liked to make our quarters ; we accordingly went to the door, to which came a greasy individual who was plainly a Russian and not a native, and who, we afterwards learned,

was a Government official stationed at Utchkulan to assist the Chief of the village in keeping his accounts. He told Paul without any circumlocution that we could not be taken in there, and allowed his manner to express pretty plainly what, no doubt, he thought, vizt: that we were rogues and vagabonds: in short we might go to the devil. Our Urusbieh men accordingly led us along a dusty lane between walls of rough stones, which looked as if their origin had been the river bed, into the village,—a collection of flat-roofed hovels,—until we came to the house of the Chief, a certain Tokmak Akbaief. His house was approached by a courtyard, at the entrance to which we were met by the Chief, a small, rather thickset, grizzled man with an unprepossessing face, which, as the event proved, belied his real character. By this time, of course, a small crowd had collected round us.

An agreeable change

Nothing could have been more chilling than our reception by the great man; neither Paul's (doubtless) flaming account of us, nor the confirmatory statement of the Urusbieh men, nor (strange to say!) our distinguished personal appearance seemed to impress him in the least. Our request to be provided with lodgings was answered by a wave of the hand towards a sort of pigsty, outside the gate; this having been indignantly declined, we were allowed admission into the courtyard and at last into the house which boasted of a room with a wooden floor, and a window. There we produced our Russian letter of recommendation, which was read out by Paul, but produced no effect until his version had been confirmed by the greasy official before mentioned, who had either been sent for, or had come up to see the fun. Then, at last, the Chief relaxed, placed the room in which we were at our absolute disposal, and promised his assistance in meeting our wants whatever they might be. The appearance of the usual tea and cakes, shortly afterwards, was the outward and visible sign of his good will.

So soon as we had settled down, we commenced enquiries about the Nakhar Pass to Soukhoun Kaleh, and were informed that to that place was a six days' journey,—three days to Lata in the valley of the Koder, where there was a Russian military station, and three days on. The pass was declared not to be practicable for horses. This was a disappointment, as from Herr Radde's account of his passage in 1865, we had inferred the contrary; in those days, however, there was probably considerable traffic between the two sides of the chain, which has ceased since the Abkhasian revolt of 1866 and consequent depopulation of the southern valleys; and the way was, no doubt, better cared for. From what we could gather, the difficulty for horses was not as much the passage of the ridge,—though on the north side there is a glacier to be crossed,—as in the absence of proper bridges; one stream in particular,—the Tshkhalta, a tributary of the Koder, was spoken of as a great obstacle which *might* necessitate a day's détour to cross. But as regards porters we were promised there would be no trouble at the rate of pay offered by us, vizt: 1½ roubles per man per day, for the journey to Lata.

Bargaining

Although we did not mean to start till the morning of Monday the 3rd, it was thought as well to commence the preliminaries in engaging the men at once, so Paul, in communication with Tokmak, set to work on the raw material which, in the shape of some thirty or forty of the male population, was collected in the courtyard. It was from the outset plain that an arrangement would not be easily concluded. First of all the three days' walk to Lata suddenly extended itself to four days ; upon our accepting this view of the case, and expressing our readiness to pay each man 6 roubles for the job, calculating it as one of four days, a fresh demand was made for pay at the rate of 2 roubles a day instead of one and a half, on the plea that the way was rough, and that, harvest being in full swing, the men who went would be greatly inconvenienced and risked the loss of their crops. The spokesman on the other side in all this was a tall raffish looking fellow with an inexhaustible flow of words, and considerable command of gesture. After a certain show of hesitation, on an assurance from the Chief that there *was* something in the harvest plea, we authorized Paul to concede 2 roubles a day provided Lata was reached in four days.

A mysterious ceremony

The concession was a fatal one ; it was at once seen that we were pressed for time and bent upon crossing the pass at any price, and the price was immediately raised to 10 roubles, the grant of which would, of course, have led to a fresh extortion. We therefore flatly refused it, declared 8 roubles to be our maximum, and for the time broke off discussion. The courtyard was now full of people, of whom the majority were all talking at once at the top of their voices. The uproar was deafening, but was stilled by Tokmak with some difficulty. A singular scene followed. He stood at one end of the court, with the people grouped round the sides, and in a grave tone, delivered a long speech, the purport of which, according to Paul, was a rebuke to the men for their unreasonable conduct and inhospitality to the strangers who had come amongst them. The raffish looking man made a speech in reply, which Tokmak answered in a few words, at the close of which a brass bowl full of water was brought, and the contents poured over his hands. After this ceremony, of which we could get no explanation from Paul, the crowd dispersed without further parley. We gathered, however, that the Chief's eloquence had been expended in vain, for when the place was clear, he declaimed to us with emphasis on the perverseness of his people, and stated that he would find us the porters we wanted from an adjoining village.

With this assurance we were compelled to be content, for of ourselves we could do nothing; so, dismissing for the time our anxieties, we devoted the rest of the afternoon to looking about us. As already observed, the position of the village is very tame, though commanding views east up the valley of the Khursukh, and south up the valley of

the Kuban ; both valleys are bounded on either hand by bare rocky slopes, and the only snow visible is the western peak of Elbruz at the head of the first mentioned. The mountain shows as a double-headed cone with faces of rock rising out of moderately inclined slopes of névé. The two peaks are, however, delusive, being merely points on the horse-shoe ridge which crowns the western (or highest) summit. The eastern peak of the mountain is from this point of view entirely concealed, precisely as was the western peak from Tau Sultra, a corresponding point on the other side, though vastly more lofty. There is little doubt that the mountain could be climbed from the head of the valley of the Khursukh. Radde in 1865 made an attempt from that direction which failed owing to his physical weakness, and not at all from any particular difficulty of the way.

A Russian Colonel

At about 8.0 p.m., just as, in accordance with the primitive habits we had acquired, we were thinking of turning in for the night, news was brought that a Russian Colonel had arrived in the village on business. He was putting up at the official bungalow by the river, and Tokmak suggested that it would be a good thing for himself, Paul, and me to at once go down and pay the great man a visit, with a view of invoking his assistance in our difficulty about porters. I was extremely unwilling at that hour of the evening to worry a man who, having just arrived, might be expected to be tired and little disposed to occupy himself with our affairs. The Chief and Paul, however, pressed the point so strongly that I yielded and sallied forth with them into the darkness. On reaching the Bungalow, Tokmak went in, and after some delay Paul and I were invited to follow. We found the Russian,—a big burly man—refreshing himself with tea, and evidently utterly unable to realize who I was or what I wanted ; he listened to Paul's explanation with an air of one greatly bored, until I mentioned the name of Colonel Stebnitzki of the Bureau Topographique at Tiflis, when he became interested, and, on learning that we had met that gentleman and were going to communicate to him details of our journey, finally thawed and promised to do what he could for us on the morrow. After a certain quantity of tea had been consumed, I took my leave with Paul, Tokmak remaining, and returned to our quarters, where I found my friends comfortably disposed of for the night, and much too sleepy to listen to my tale. Mattresses had been placed for us on the floor, but either they or the latter swarmed with fleas, who gave us a lively time.

A day of idleness

The next morning was cloudless, and the day so continued. It was too hot for much walking about to be pleasant, and we were not sorry for an excuse to remain quiet, within the precincts of our friend Tokmak's courtyard, where, strange to say, we were left undisturbed by the usual crowd of curious villagers. Our presence did not seem at all to disturb the family, for in the afternoon a lot of children were

brought out and scrubbed quite regardless of us, while the aforesaid children all day trotted about in a state of complete nudity, which, in the prevailing temperature, we should not have been sorry to imitate. Relays of tea and cakes were served to us at short intervals, and in the evening we were provided with the usual dinner of boiled mutton, oniony soup, and heavy, but palatable bread, washed down by excellent 'lait aigre' and some of the native beer, which last, however, was not much less nasty than the similar brew we had tasted at Urusbieh.

Tokmak Akbaief

We had heard from Paul that the difficulty about porters was settled, —whether, owing to the intervention of the Russian Colonel or not, I could not elicit—, and while our evening meal was in progress, Tokmak introduced the eight men who were to accompany us to Lata. They were a stalwart and, on the whole, good looking lot, headed by a tall, middle aged, bald headed man, with a short beard, who was described as being the Judge of one of the villages above Utchkulan. Tokmak, in our presence, explained to them the terms upon which they were to go, as follows : they were to accompany us as far as Lata in the valley of the Kodor, which was to be accepted as a four days' journey, receiving 2 roubles each per day ; the whole to be paid on arrival at Lata, *not* by instalments at the close of each day's journey ; the men to feed themselves. The men having declared that they understood and agreed to these terms, and that they went with us willingly, I on behalf of my party signified our acceptance of them ; there was a general handshaking, by way of ' sealing and delivering,' and our friends took themselves off, leaving us decidedly prepossessed in their favour, and inclined to accept Radde's description of the Karatchai Mahomedans as ' ein fleissiger, ernster, reinlicher, dienstfertiger Mensch ' (industrious, grave, neat, and obliging people) as substantially just. As will appear, so far as these particular specimens are concerned, we jumped at this conclusion too hastily. Of Tokmak Akbaief however, it is certainly true ; the more we saw of him, the more we were struck by his genuine good-heartedness, and simple and hospitable disposition. Though very unassuming in manners, he is a person of no mean consequence on the upper Kuban ; not only is he chief over several villages with a population of over 4,000 souls, but he is a banker of a wide district, and at this moment had in his custody deposits to the value of over £6,000, he is implicitly trusted by the Russians, and has had several marks of appreciation from the authorities,—amongst others, a handsome gold hunting watch from the Grand Duke Michael.

The only thing we had left to offer him in return for his kindness and exertions in our behalf was my flask,—rather pretty, but of small intrinsic value—which however he accepted with apparent pleasure, besides a moderate sum in roubles which, as usual, we explained were intended for the poor of the village.

The sunset at night was glorious, and for the first and only time in my Caucasian experience of 1874, its glories were reflected on a snowy

peak : Elbruz was bathed in crimson, and the subsequent after-glow was exquisite. So beautiful was the night, and so stuffy the room, which was our quarters, that I preferred lying outside in the balcony, and there, *on*, not *in*, my bag found myself very comfortable, and unharassed by the fleas, who had made the previous night hideous.

We rose at 5.0 on the morning of Monday the 3rd August, and started at 7.15 after a most friendly parting with Tokmak who, at last, became quite effusive in his demonstrations of good will. He presented us with a handsome boxwood stick with a long steel point, and handle of horn, and was anxious that I personally should accept a horse ! The difficulty of the pass before us luckily furnished me with a substantial excuse for declining. The stick, my companions were good enough to ask me to keep myself as some compensation for my Elbruz disappointment and the various troubles of the journey,—a good-natured proposal to which I was not sufficiently unselfish to say 'No !'

A bathe in the Kuban

Only a few of the porters left the village with us, the rest joining in as we went along, until we were at length a party of fourteen with five horses, upon which the bulk of the baggage was packed. Our route lay up the main valley which runs due south from Utchkulan towards the great chain ; the stream which waters it bears on the map that name but is, I believe, considered the real Kuban, though the length of its course from the glacier in which it rises appears to be less than that of the Khursukh, or rather of its principal affluent the Ulu-kol. The scenery for a long distance is tame and monotonous, nor do the few villages which lie above Utchkulan present any feature of interest ; we passed the last of them about 9.30, and shortly afterwards indulged in a bathe in the river, to which the tolerably clear swiftly flowing current irresistibly tempted both ourselves and our native companions. Knubel alone abstained, having, we imagined from this and other incidents of the same kind, registered a vow to limit the application of water during his journey to his face and hands only. The stream was breast high, and not too cold, the only drawback to the whole operation being that, as we stood on the bank drying, the horseflies had us at their mercy, and availed themselves of their opportunity.

At 12.30 we crossed to the left bank by a bridge and, shortly afterwards, halted in a shady pine wood for lunch, the porters prefacing their meal by a ceremonious performance of their mid-day devotions, all kneeling down in a line one behind the other headed by the Judge, and taking the cue for their prostrations from him. The scene was a strange one, and impressed us favourably—the more so, as it was the first indication we had seen in any of the Mahomedan tribes of outward observance of the tenets of their religion. We were destined however to experience, not for the first time, that outward displays of piety do not necessarily go for much.

The Nakhar glen

By this time the valley had closed in, and become well wooded and decidedly picturesque. Half an hour after resuming our march, we turned up to the right into what seemed like a side glen, the path at the same time becoming steeper and rougher. In the old direction a nameless pass is marked on the map up the glen of Gondarai to that of Gvandra, an offshoot of the valley of the Kodor ; this route, if it has any existence in fact, lies to the east of that of the Nakhar pass for which we were bound. On the map the latter name is applied to the glen we had now entered, to the pass at its head, and to a peak on the main chain to the east of the pass. The path up the glen led through pleasant scenery, woods and alps alternating, and the men dawdled along it in a style which kept me in constant dread of a premature halt ; we crept on, however, until 4.15, as far as a grassy plain on the left bank of the torrent, at the foot of a fine rocky aiguille, and in full view of the head of the glen, which was closed by a small snow-covered glacier. Beyond this the train declined to move, and as the situation was attractive, the height considerable (6,425 feet ; Bar. 23.60), and the distance to the foot of the glacier apparently not great, we did not care to press them. In fact, we were fairly well satisfied with the day's progress, and hopeful of a pleasant journey on ; we anticipated no difficulty with our men, and by way of offering them an inducement to speed, instructed Paul to give out that if, after all, they reached Lata in three days, they should still be paid as for four. This move was, I think, a mistake.

A row about mutton

The first sign of trouble was an intimation from Paul that the men had brought little or no food with them, expecting to be fed from our supplies, and that they now demanded a sheep. It had, in fact, been clearly stipulated that they were to feed themselves, but we were not anxious to contest the point, and had, moreover, no objection to increase our own stores which were not too great for the journey before us. Accordingly, a man was sent off to some shepherds, known to be in the neighbourhood, to purchase a sheep for the general good. He returned in due course with a moderate sized beast for which 2 roubles had been paid. The animal was slaughtered by orthodox hands in orthodox style, and Paul then handed the two shoulders over to the men, who, to our utter astonishment, refused them and insisted upon having either the whole, or at any rate, the parts which Paul had reserved for us. Paul's reception of this demand can be imagined. In plain language he desired them to go to the Devil. Then ensued a lively scene. The whole party, headed by the Judge, poured out upon Paul the most violent abuse, and, as they became more and more excited, at last turned upon us ; we were liars, thieves, pigs, dogs, and the sons of dogs ; we had broken all the promises made to them through Tokmak ; instead of feeding them properly, we were starving them with the scraps thrown from our table ; instead of sitting and eating with them

we kept ourselves apart and aloof from them ; words failed them to express their disgust at our conduct ; they would have nothing more to do with us ; let us pay them at once for their day's work that they might return home.

As soon as the purport of this astonishing outburst had been elicited from Paul, I told him very quietly to reply to the Judge that he and his comrades seemed to have gone mad ; that we declined to argue the matter with him, or to pay one single copeck on account of that or or any other day's journey until we reached Lata ; that they could return home, if they pleased, at once or next day ; that we should, of course, be obliged to return also ; and that they might judge the sort of reception they might expect from Tokmak, and the view which the Russian officials would take of their conduct.

The men continued to storm and gesticulate, but finding that we took no further notice of them, at last retired to their own corner, followed by the unhappy shoulders of mutton which had been the pretext for the disturbance, and which Paul threw after the malcontents with various abusive remarks by way of seasoning, which we vainly tried to repress, not wishing to prolong the scene. He, however, was boiling over with well justified indignation not only at the business as a whole, but at some specially foul epithets which had been lavished upon him and his family antecedents. The natives kept up an angry discussion amongst themselves for a long time, but at length seemed to have talked themselves out, and tranquillity was restored. We meanwhile, after the evening meal of boiled mutton which Paul prepared, and the usual subsequent copious draughts of tea, stretched our bags upon the grass, and turning into them as soon as it was dark, quietly went to sleep.

The Nakhar Pass

We turned up at 3.0 next morning, and were rejoiced to find a cloudless sky promising a fine day for our passage of the chain from Europe back into Asia. A heavy dew had fallen in the night, and the air was keen. The men were sulky, but silent, and made no reference to the affair of last evening. The baggage was repacked on the horses which were to be taken as far as possible, and at 4.45 we moved off. The valley was now narrow and stony, with, on its east side, a cirque of aiguilles amongst which was a small glacier with a steep moraine. We past [sic] one sheep alp and at 6.15 came to a second, the highest in the valley, where it was decided to leave the horses, the much debated question whether an attempt should be made to get them over the pass being at length determined in the negative, owing to the uncertainty which prevailed as to the state of the bridges in the Kodor valley on the south side. The decision was that of the men, uninfluenced by us, who, naturally were in no position to express an opinion. Half an hour was spent in apportioning and arranging the loads of our friends,—a matter which also we left entirely to them,—and we then turned to the ascent which commenced at once. Slopes of grass, and snow of

moderate steepness, presenting no difficulty to bipeds, but which would have been awkward, though not impracticable, for laden animals, led up to a small shrunken glacier which died out gradually on smooth iceworn rocks. Wherever, so far, the ground was bare of snow, there was always a sort of track. Once on the glacier, which we struck from the left bank some way above its termination, nothing remained but to wind slowly up the snow-covered slopes which stretched upwards to the summit ridge. The inclination was not great, nor was the snow in bad order, but the men crawled along with such frequent stoppages that our patience was sorely tried. Grove, at last, could stand it no longer, and substituted a volley of objurgations for the 'suaviter in modo' by which I had been trying to secure some sort of progress. His words and gestures were sufficiently significant, but whether they were much more effective than my milder method, I doubt. However this may be, the really inconsiderable ascent was at length accomplished, and at 8.35 we stood on the ridge of the Nakhar Pass. The height by the map is 9,617 feet, which agrees well with the barometer reading: 21'.

The actual ridge was not only quite bare of snow, but was gay with grass and flowers. The view was very much restricted. On the north, there was nothing noteworthy, nor was there any sign of Elbruz or any considerable peak of the main chain on which we were standing. On the south, we looked down an almost precipitous slope, into a deep basin, the head of the glen of the Klitch, through which we were to reach the valley of the Kodor. This basin was very much more wild and savage than the one we were leaving, surrounded by steep aiguilles of rock, seamed by hanging glaciers, one of which was of some size, and descended to a level which we estimated at about 7,300 feet, on the west side of the glen, in which direction a pass ('Klukhorskii') is marked on the map to the valley of the Jeberda, a tributary of the Kuban. It must be a very rugged route.

The glen of the Klitsch

We sat for half an hour on some convenient rocks just below the col, and at 9.5, commenced the descent. This was extremely steep,—very much more so (to give a familiar illustration) than the Italian side of the Monte Moro, which in character it rather resembled, and, although there was no kind of difficulty, quick going was out of the question. As before, there were signs of a track on the slopes which were everywhere bare of snow; the general direction was from right to left as far as the foot of the steepest part of the way, and then to the right to where the comparatively broad cirque contracted to a narrow glen down which the Klitch torrent pours. At 10.45 we were fairly in the glen, having come down, if Radde's figures may be trusted, about 2,600 feet. In spite of the still considerable elevation, the change in the character of the scenery was already remarkable, and the heat was great; we were in a jungle recalling to my mind that of the upper Zenes Zskali traversed in 1868, from which myriads of horseflies emerged to the attack.

Throughout the rest of the day we were descending the glen of the Klitsch, through scenery which beggars description. The way lay along the left bank of the torrent through a continuous forest which filled the ravine from side to side and stretched far up the cliffs on either hand. This forest was no mere monotonous pine wood, but a glorious tangle of every sort of tree and shrub, but principally of laurel, holly, firs, and beeches, with an undergrowth of hemlock and other weeds reaching high above our heads. Nor was the ravine itself by any means a mere cleft without variety or interest ; on the contrary, it was frequently broken on the right bank by side glens of similar character, up which were wild and striking glimpses of the snows in the direction of the great chain. The principal one of these opened out into the main glen, at a point which coincided with a clearing in the forest, whence there was an extraordinary view in three directions, north south, and west, of a combination of rock, wood, and water, which has remained, for savage picturesqueness, without a parallel in my experience.

The track we had to follow was everywhere faint and obscure, and in places so overgrown that it was necessary to go almost on all fours to get along. The Judge, however, led the way along it steadily and well. The passage of the col seemed to have changed the mood of him and his fellows, and led them to think that their best game was to get their job over as soon as might be. At all events, they made nothing of the really considerable difficulties of the route, or of the heat, which was stifling, or of the flies which hung about us in a dense cloud. In the face of the unused appearance of the track, which (so the Judge said) had not been traversed by any one from the north side for two years, we were surprised to see traces occasionally of the recent presence of both men and horses ; shrubs here and there had been freshly cut, while in more than one place the signs of a horse having passed were clear,—tho' how it had contrived to get along we were at a loss to imagine.

An eligible halting place

At 4.0 we reached a point where the torrent made a grand fall, fifty feet in height or so, and the body of water great. Close by was a very palatable, slightly acid mineral spring. The men were very anxious to stop here for the night, alleging that no flat ground for a camping place would be found further on. This was absurd, and I had all along fixed in my own mind that we would get in the day at least as far as a certain bridge, marked on the map, near which I knew from Radde's narrative of his passage in 1865, a night could be passed ; once there, we should know exactly where we were. So on we went. First came a long ascent through forest, as before, and then a descent of the same character where the track was more than usually blind, and the Judge, for the first and only time in the day, was for a moment at fault. This brought us to the expected bridge, which we crossed, and at 5.50 halted on a little grass plot on the further side, than which a better site for a camp could not have been desired. The height is about 3,150 feet (Bar

26·70), more than 6,400 feet lower than the pass. As was to be expected at so comparatively low a level, and in such conditions of vegetation, the flies, midges, and mosquitos were in great force, and the use of veils was necessary. In spite of these annoyances, and of the fact that one effect of the day's work had been to reduce our supply of bread to a sort of fine powder, supper was a cheerful meal, and we retired to our bags, happy in the reflection that, barring accidents, our arrival at Soukhoun Kaleh, well within the limits of the time at our disposal, was assured, even should we fail to get quite as far as Lata in course of the morrow's journey.

The valley of the Kodor

The dew in the night was extraordinarily heavy, and perfect streams of water rolled from the mackintosh upper sheets of our sleeping bags when we threw them off on rising in the morning. We started at 4.30 by a path which was an improvement on that of the previous day ; it was not only better in itself, but led through less difficult country, the forest, though still thick as a rule, being broken by more frequent clearances alongside the stream. The glen of the Klitch merged almost imperceptibly in the main valley of the Kodor, which we had fairly entered within about an hour and a half of our start. It is a magnificent valley in the style of that of Aosta, only bigger, broader, and even more picturesque. In this part of it, the southern or left bank was thickly wooded from the crest of the hills right down to the river ; our bank, the northern, was more bare, with wide spaces of waste grassland which, once upon a time, before the depopulation of the country after the Abkhasian revolt of 1866, was probably under cultivation. Signs of former inhabitants, in the shape of isolated cottages in various stages of ruin, were not infrequent, while we found it hard to believe that the varieties of fruit trees, amongst which the path led, owed nothing to man's fostering care. I noted down at the time, vines, raspberries, currants, apples, strawberries, cherries, walnuts, filberts, peaches and plums. The latter were about half ripe, and were eaten with avidity by the men who seemed to fear no evil consequences.

The immediate effect certainly was not to increase their speed or dispose them to continuous progress ; on the contrary they crawled along at a snail's pace for ten minutes, and then squatted themselves down for at least an equal period ; objurgations and blandishments were alike thrown away ; threats of condign punishment from the Russians at Lata were received with stolid indifference, while suggestions of the pecuniary advantage which would ensue to them if that place were reached by nightfall only provoked the rejoinder : ' of what use is money, if life be lost in the earning of it ? ' The heat, as the sun got up, was great, and no one had any desire to press them severely, but they pushed a policy of dawdling beyond all reasonable limits, and our march was in consequence a continued wrangle.

Above the Tchkhaltá

The path was for a long way approximately level, and then mounted steeply to the crest of a spur high above the junction of the river Tchkhaltá with the Kodor. The view from this point was glorious in all directions. In front we looked down the main valley; right and left, up the scarcely subordinate side valleys of the Tchkhaltá and Bramva, which debouch opposite one another into that of the Kodor; while behind us, we could trace the Kodor nearly to its sources in the snows of the great chain. Nor are any of these valleys mere troughs without interest or variety of form; in all, rock and wood combine to form perfect pictures, while in both the Tchkhaltá and the Kodor glimpses of snow suggest even greater glories unrevealed. The former stream is the most important of all the affluents of the Kodor; at its head, the Marukh Pass leads to the central course of the Kuban, and is, I believe, the only pass across the chain west of the Nakhar of which anything is known; it is approached from the lower Kodor, not by following up the Tchkhaltá (which would be very circuitous) but by a cross country route striking that stream near its source.

A Russian camp

A sharp descent now led us down to it, at a point a little way above its confluence with the Kodor; the stream flowed in two channels, over the first of which there was a very shaky bridge, composed of a single tree slung between two others as hand rails; over the second, or main, channel the bridge was better, but scarcely practicable for horses which would, we understood, have had to make a *détour* of half a day's march in order to get across, the river here being big and strong and quite unfordable. From 11.0 to 12.20 we halted on a stony beach between the two channels, for a midday meal, meagre as it was, made an end of all the solid provision we had with us, except our very fragmentary bread. Then we climbed the steep opposite bank, and were pursuing our weary way over the meadow land beyond, following slowly behind our groaning porters, when we suddenly came upon a small encampment, which proved to be that of a Russian officer of Engineers, engaged in survey operations.

Parting with the men of Utchkulan

The officer, who had with him in this out of the way corner, his wife and her sister, quite understood who we were and received us in the most friendly way, giving us, in reply to my first question, the welcome news that he had in camp a man and two horses who, at the moment, were unemployed and could take our baggage on to Lata, thus enabling us to get rid of our friends of Utchkulan. This I proceeded to do at once. Of course, having engaged them for a four days job, we felt compelled to pay them the amount agreed upon for that period vizt: 8 roubles a man, although we were dismissing them—really on account of bad behaviour—after only two days and a half. Paul did not at all share this view, and could only with difficulty be persuaded to hand over

to each man his full wage as he received it from me. Nor, from what followed, do I fancy that the men themselves had the slightest expectation of such treatment. The Judge, in particular, seemed quite overcome. For a few moments he was speechless, and then, standing between Paul and a servant of the Russian officer, addressed to both of them an impassioned harangue for translation to us. This proved to be an abject and complete apology on his own part and that of his fellows for their misconduct during the journey, and especially for the violent scene of the night of the 3rd. Every conceivable phrase was employed to express his sense of their unworthiness and stupidity and our nobleness and wisdom. Curious as the exhibition was, it was made, I think, in perfect good faith. Nothing was to be gained by it; the men were paid; we were clearly not going to make complaint to the Russian officer; and they were in the act of starting homewards, with little chance of ever seeing or hearing of us again. I believe the outburst was an expression of genuine penitence for proceedings which had been wholly without excuse or definite object, worthy indeed of pettish children. I told Paul to reply, in effect, that we had been astonished and disgusted at the way they had treated us,—so different from the other Mahomedan tribes amongst whom we had been; that we were glad they had had the good sense to recognize their own folly; and that we hoped future travellers would have no such cause of complaint against them. They then moved off, after shaking hands with me,—a performance which they insisted upon, but which my companions and Paul managed to evade; personally, I could not screw myself up to refuse to reciprocate this semblance of good feeling at parting. I could not help greatly wondering in what condition the men would arrive at their homes, for, to our knowledge, they had no food with them, and had no possibility of getting anything until they reached the sheep alp on the north side of the pass,—two long days' march distant.

The Russian and his two companions insisted that we should not continue our journey until we had had some tea; in consequence, it was 2.45 before we were on the move down the valley with our new attendant,—a tall, leggy individual of not very prepossessing appearance, and two horses on which our baggage was packed. It was understood that we could not possibly reach Lata by nightfall, and would halt at the camp of another division of the survey party which was at work some two hours above that place.

Nothing more exquisite can be imagined than the scenery through which this afternoon's walk led us. The valley is a series of densely wooded gorges, broken by lateral ravines; the path, execrably engineered, makes no attempt to keep to the level of the stream, or wind round the successive spurs, but climbs over each, and descends into every side glen. The result is a succession of panoramic views over the valley, of which each one seemed to us more beautiful than that which had gone before. On such enchanted ground fatigue was impossible. As the afternoon drew on, and the sun got low, the scene

became more and more striking, and the last view we had, about sunset, of the whole upward course of the valley, closed by a solitary snow peak, all suffused in a haze of purple and gold, has ever since remained impressed on my mind as the most wonderful natural effect I have seen in the course of many wanderings.

A misleading short cut

Our horseman travelled well,—quite as fast as we cared to go. Unintentionally he once let us into a position which for a few minutes threatened to be embarrassing. At one spot the river had encroached upon the path. To save us a wetting he directed us to go by a short cut track over the shoulder of the hill, while he himself with the horses passed through the water by the regular way. Our track went well enough for a time, and then, after the fashion of its kind, died away to nothing, and left us planted in a specially thick covert on very broken ground, where it was not easy to make out the best line of march, or to keep to any particular direction. We were soon fairly puzzled which way to go, and lost both time and temper before, after going through a good deal of water, we once more hit the main path, our leader by that time being so far ahead, and for a long time so deaf to our shouts for him to wait for us, that the more suspicious of the party were inclined to credit him with a plan to leave us to wander while he eloped with the baggage. I believe myself he was quite innocent, and merely made the mistake of forgetting that we were strangers and therefore wholly ignorant of a track which was to him perfectly well known and therefore easy.

It was 7.50 and quite dark when we reached the Engineer's camp, my approach to which I signalized by walking into a stream alongside the path, mistaking one for the other. The camp was pitched on the hillside in a slight clearing of the forest, and was tenanted by one officer and a few soldiers; the former alone had a tent,—a very small one—in which we found him prostrate with fever. He received us very civilly and with many apologies for the absence of any accommodation he could offer us. We on our part, after a laborious day, were quite content to stretch our bags haphazard amongst his men and horses, and await the excellent brew of soup which Paul, as usual, in due course produced for our benefit. The midges and mosquitos were, as might be expected, numerous and fierce, but our common blue veils protected us fairly, and we escaped almost unscathed.

Arrival at Lata

Starting at 5.30 on the morning of the 6th August, two hours of easy going by a path of the same up and down character as before, though with less severe gradients, brought us to Lata. Very welcome was the sight of the scattered, clean looking, whitewashed cottages which, with a large building—half office, half schoolroom—compose the station, and keenly did we appreciate the hearty greeting which we received from the Commandant, Captain Ivan Andrevitch Samoelenko, who,

observing our approach, rushed out to meet us with exclamations of 'Moora ! Moora !' which showed that he was prepared for our arrival, and that no formal introduction would be necessary. He had in fact been warned from Tiflis of our probable appearance, and had been on the look out for us every day for the past month.

Lata stands only 1,142 feet above the sea (according to Radde) in a beautiful situation on the bank of the Kodor, from which on either hand the hills rise clothed from base to summit with chestnut woods. In former days it was the principal village in the valley, and residence of the Abkhasian Chiefs. Of one of these there is, in an enclosure adjoining the village, a memorial in good preservation, in the shape of a handsome tomb, ornamented with a carved inscription and gilding, and a headstone crowned by the representation of a turban. The place is now a station for 200 Russian soldiers. The drawback to it is its pestilential climate. As a hotbed of fever its reputation is worse than that of any other place on the notoriously unhealthy eastern shores of the Black Sea. The young soldiers, on arrival, die in great numbers but the survivors become acclimatized in three years. We failed to obtain any intelligible explanation why it is considered necessary to keep a garrison in a spot so deadly in a depopulated valley leading practically nowhere.

To the eye, nevertheless, Lata is a very pleasant place indeed, and appeared to us much more of a paradise than a purgatory. We passed a day of delightful indolence, broken only by a visit to Captain Samoelenko's bees, of which there were many hives, by a bathe in the rapid stream of the Kodor, and by short forays after blackberries which grew all about in astonishing profusion, as big as mulberries, and were exactly in the proper stage of ripeness. Not that we were reduced to support life upon these, or that our gallant host was in the least neglectful of our wants,—quite the reverse ; he regaled us with tea on arrival, with excellent beef steaks at noon, and with more tea in the afternoon, while supper was promised for the evening. That meal turned out to be rather a late one, so much so that Grove and Gardiner were in despair ; all through the journey they had hugged to themselves the amazing delusion that we were undergoing considerable hardships from short commons ; now, as it seemed to Walker and me, the exact reverse had been the case, our daily life having a been constant business of eating and drinking,—the fare plain and monotonous, it is true, but certainly plentiful. However, it was impossible to disabuse our friends of their 'idée fixe,' and, upon this particular occasion, their anxiety, as time passed without any sign of the promised meal, would have been positively comic, had it not been so genuine.

Waiting for supper.

The real fact was that, all the afternoon and evening, the gallant Captain Samoelenko was absorbed in matters to him of much greater consequence. It so chanced that the day of our arrival coincided with that on which he expected a periodical visit from a superior officer to

inspect the post, examine the state of the troops, receive and investigate complaints, and so on. This officer, whose name we made out to be Colonel Savatski,—a most benevolent-looking old gentleman—, arrived during the afternoon, and had a great deal of business to get through. We gathered from Paul that many of the soldiers had preferred complaints against their commander, and that the latter was not free from anxiety as to the result ; it must, however, have been quite satisfactory to him, for when we *did* sit down to supper, at about 10 o'clock, in company with the Colonel and two Engineers from the upper valley who were down with fever, he was in excellent spirits.

Uncomfortable night

We passed the night in the big schoolroom on mattresses provided for us. In spite of its size the place was like an oven in temperature, and the danger of malaria necessitated the closing of all the windows, so that our slumbers were not very profound. We turned out at 4.0 in the morning for a bathe in the river, and had then no difficulty in realizing the unhealthiness of the place, so heavy and unwholesome was the atmosphere.

At 6.30 on the 7th, after more tea and a hearty farewell to our hospitable entertainer we resumed our journey. Our destination for the day was Zebelda, a post about midway between Lata and Soukhoun, formerly a Russian frontier fort, now a hospital for fever patients from Lata. We were attended by two soldiers of the garrison who, for a consideration of 2 roubles each per day had consented to convey our baggage on their horses to Soukhoun : I say 'consented,' because that is the way it was put to us by Colonel Savatski, neither he nor the Commandant appearing to be in a position to compel any of them to undertake the job if they did not fancy it.

For two hours our path lay along the bed of the valley through chestnut woods on the right bank of the stream ; it then turned up to the right, and ascended by absurdly easy zigzags to the crest of a spur, separating the main valley of the Kodor from that of a considerable tributary, made up of several streams flowing from the north, blessed with hopelessly impracticable names. There is, I believe, a direct path to Zebelda along the Kodor which is liable to be damaged by floods and is, in practice, rarely used. The scenery near the top of the ascent is very picturesque, bare limestone cliffs rising from above the trees in a striking way. In spite of the shade of the woods the heat was intense, and the pace in consequence very slow. We did not reach the highest point of the way till 11.10, and were then glad to take refuge for half an hour under an overshadowing rock.

Greek Colonies

From the ridge we looked down into the basin of the above-mentioned tributary of the Kodor, called by Radde 'Amtmitkal' or 'Amtkjal,' and across green hills beyond it towards the Black Sea,

which is, however, entirely shut out from view. Deep on our right, buried in trees, was a neat looking village, one of several Greek colonies which the Russian Government have planted in the deserted land of the Abkhasians. The soil is given to the colonists for a purely nominal price, and exemption from taxation is guaranteed for a certain number of years ; but the settlements, we understood, do not thrive, in spite of liberal treatment on the part of Government and the boundless fertility of the country. The climate no doubt is the main obstacle to success of the experiment, but the absence of any market for produce may also have something to say to the failure.

An execrable path, leaving the village wide on the right, led us round the base of the limestone cliffs, and down through nutwoods and a perfect paradise of ferns to the bank of the stream, which a little way to the north emerged from a narrow gorge densely wooded, and with very precipitous sides. The water was of a pale sapphire hue, and the gently flowing current tempted irresistibly to a bathe, the delights of which have never since been obliterated from the memory of either Walker or myself. A little further on, a second stream, broader but shallower than the first, presented itself. At the point where the path struck it there was no bridge ; one was reported higher up, and some of the party made for it, but the lazy members, including myself, preferred to a *détour* the moderate wetting which wading across involved, the water not being much above the knee. From the further bank a gradual ascent led up to the old fortress of Zebelda, which we reached at 3.30 in the afternoon.

Zebelda

The fortress is represented by a white house surrounded by a low battlemented wall, while outside the enclosure is a one-storied sort of bungalow, which is the hospital, and a cantine for the sale of general notions likely to be in demand amongst soldiers, principally, however candles and 'Vodki.' The situation is one of great beauty : a grassy plain at a height of about 500 feet above the beds of the Kodor and Amtkjal, whose streams unite just below, commanding charming views right up the course of both rivers, and particularly up that of the Kodor. No snow is visible, but the tangle of green wooded hills and ravines constitutes a landscape which is the reverse of commonplace. On the west, i.e. towards the sea, the ground rises in gentle undulations to two conical forest clad hills, from the reverse slopes of which several small streams drain westwards with independent courses, the Kodor, after its junction with the Amtkjal, abandoning its previous east and west direction, and being deflected sharply to the south thence as far as the sea.

The height of Zebelda is 1,568 feet, four hundred feet above Lata ; to this greater elevation, coupled with its distance from the rivers, and the comparative absence of forest, is probably owing its relative salubrity.

Surveyors from the Marukh Pass

Shortly after our arrival Grove and Gardiner mysteriously disappeared, and were eventually discovered in the cantine where, true to their assumed character of half starved travellers, they were indulging in a delicious meal of biscuits and a rancid fat which was sold under the name of bacon. For dinner in the evening we combined with Colonel Savatski, who had come down from Lata, and, like ourselves, was quartered in the hospital, he having a room inside while we, by preference, took possession of the verandah, where our bags could be stretched comfortably. Our contribution to the meal was soup, of which we still had a fair supply, while the Colonel added mutton and potatoes; so, on the whole, we did well. The usual tea-drinking followed, and was supposed to be concluded, when there was a sudden irruption of strangers, who turned out to be the members of a survey party, just arrived from the Marukh Pass, which, under orders of Government, they had been examining in view to the construction of a military road from the district of the Kuban on the north of the mountains to that of Soukhoun on the south. It was, I believe, the identical party which we had been invited to join (see *A. J.* 60. 315); if so, the coincidence was curious. The result of the survey did not seem to have been very promising, and it appeared to be in contemplation next to investigate the capabilities of the Nakhar, our account of which did not strike the officer in charge of the party as at all encouraging. They had had a very hard day's journey, and devoted themselves with energy to tea as a restorative; we joined in for company's sake, and before the orgie [sic] came to an end, such an inroad had been made upon Colonel Savatski's private stock of sugar as to make that gallant officer look rather blank.

A fine day had been succeeded by a cloudy and intolerably close evening; later heavy rain fell, and there was every appearance that our last day's walk into Soukhoun would be a wet one. The morning of Saturday the 8th August, however, though dull, was fair, and the day turned out brilliant. We started at 6.0 and followed a cart track which, leaving on our left the two conical hills before mentioned, led us over undulating green slopes to a small village,—another Greek Colony—lying at the head of the little river Machara, one of several which flow from the western slopes of the hills into the Black Sea. At the village the cart track developed into a good, and evidently newly constructed, road, which followed first the right, then the left side of the pretty limestone gorge through which the stream flows for some distance, until it opens out into a sort of 'down' country of no particular interest or beauty.

Intense heat

At 10.30 a spring by the roadside tempted us to halt for our mid-day meal and to rest the baggage horses, but at 11.15 we were again on the move, having meanwhile been passed by Colonel Savatski and his party who were all mounted. We shortly left the main road which, I believe, follows the Machara to its mouth and then turns along the coast. Our

way, after fording the stream, lay to the right over broken ground, rich in ferns, to the bank of the Kelasuri, much more of a river than the Machara. The heat, while we were traversing this bit of country between the two streams, exceeded anything within my experience or that of my companions ; it was suffocating, and the feeling of all of us was that we were perilously near to being knocked over by sunstroke ; at one moment I, personally, felt as if I must drop. Oddly enough, the soldiers selected this trying moment to increase their previously rather sluggish pace.

On the left bank of the Kelasuri is another Greek village, of which the inhabitants watched our passage of the river with interest, especially that of our friend Grove, who, holding his trousers, of which he had divested himself, in one hand, and his boots in the other, certainly did present a rather uncommon spectacle. There was no difficulty in the passage, the water not being much over our knees, but the current is rapid, and we gathered from Paul that it is sometimes not easy to get across.

Arrival at Soukhoun Kaleh

On the other side the soldiers turned down along the bank for some way, and then diverged to the right, apparently in some doubt as to the proper line of march, until we came upon a very fine isolated walnut tree which they evidently recognized as a land mark, and under whose wide spreading branches we were only too glad to throw ourselves for a few minutes' rest and shelter from the blazing sun. A little distance further on, from the brow of a hill, we suddenly and, at the last, when we were least expecting it, found ourselves looking down upon the town and bay of Soukhoun Kaleh,—the haven where we would be ! Anxiously as we had looked forward to this moment, it was with somewhat mixed feelings that we realized that the journey was within an hour of its conclusion. Personally, a certain melancholy came over me, as I reflected how far short our performances had fallen of the very moderate programme with which we had started from England, interesting and enjoyable in many ways as our route had been. My own failure on Elbruz of course affected my view of the matter, which I do not think was shared by my companions, who at all events showed no depression of spirits as we walked into the little town, after encountering one last obstacle in the shape of a broken bridge, which compelled a slight *détour*. At 4.20 we came to a final halt at the door of the Hotel Poti, on the thirty-fourth day after leaving Kutais, the whole intermediate distance having been traversed on foot.

The hotel was a dingy looking place, but belied its appearance ; we obtained three bedrooms which though sparsely furnished turned out to be free from vermin, while the food was varied in kind and excellent in quality. One evening dinner really deserved the name of a banquet, and, as it afterwards turned out, so impressed a pair of Russian officers who chanced to be dining at the same time, that it became the subject of conversation throughout Soukhoun. We were indeed entertained

next day by hearing from Colonel Jogel,—an acquaintance of Telfer's who called upon us within an hour of our arrival,—a minute account of the menu and of the number of portions in which we had indulged of each item, as reported by the on-lookers. After dinner we went and sat on the little jetty, which constitutes the landing place, where was collected the rank, fashion, and beauty of Soukhoun, mainly represented by a number of stout 'militaires' all enveloped in greatcoats in spite of the absolutely tropical heat which prevailed. I believe that after sundown this precaution against the climate is really necessary, and it may well be that to our neglect of it, we owed the severe attack of fever from which we all subsequently suffered.

We had completed our journey in time for, throughout Sunday the 9th, rain fell more or less continuously. The first thing in the morning, after our bathe which we took from a spot at the extreme north end of the beach, a little beyond the very unsavoury public bathing place, I went off and recovered from the Steam Company's Office our heavy luggage from which we had parted at Kutais. While so engaged I quite unconsciously dropped my passport in the road, and never discovered my loss, which would have been a serious one, until the document was brought me later in the day by a droshky driver who had picked it up. Otherwise, with the exception of a lounge through the uninteresting bazaar, we passed the day in strictly Sabbatic repose, to which I was more particularly inclined as I was somewhat out of sorts,—the change of climate and of living having, as usual, disagreed with me.

Goodbye to Paul

On turning out at 6.0 in the morning of Monday the 10th August, we found the steamer 'Grand Duke Michael' which was to take us to Odessa lying in the bay. Until, however, the steamer in correspondence from Poti arrived, and the amount of available accommodation was known, we could not either get tickets or go on board, and were consequently kept all day in a somewhat irritating state of suspense until late in the afternoon when the Poti boat appeared. There was plenty of 'first class' room, and we got a roomy cabin to our three selves; but the 'second class' was crowded, so that Knubel, to his no small disgust, had to go as a deck passenger. We managed, however, after the first night, to get him into the 'second class' saloon. We went on board at 7.0 in the evening, after a hearty farewell to Paul who was bound to Poti by the return boat. As in 1868, his services had been quite invaluable to us, and to him we were certainly indebted for such success as we had had. His unimpeachable honesty, and his linguistic and culinary talents make him quite a phenomenon amongst Mingrelians, and I do not suppose that, in the whole extent of the Caucasian provinces, there is another man with the same accomplishments.

Homeward bound!

The steamer started in the night, and landed us at Odessa at 10.45 on the morning of Saturday the 15th, after a dilatory but on the whole

favourable voyage which was made the more pleasant by agreeable company ; in addition to Colonel Jogel, a new friend, we had on board several of our outward passengers,—amongst them Mons. Salzmann, of Tiflis. The steamer remained at Kertch for 24 hours from 11.0 a.m. on Wednesday till the same hour on Thursday. The bay impressed us more than ever as a sewer, the stench being such that we were afraid to sleep with open ports ; it was, therefore, with some surprise that we heard Mr. Barrow, the English Consul, upon whom we called, describe the place as rather healthy than otherwise. There were besides short halts at Theodosia, Yalta, and Sebastopol, as on the outward voyage ; the first mentioned place we had then passed in the dark, so we now landed for an hour ; built along, and at the base of, an amphitheatre of sandhills, it has no great natural attractions, but the bathing is said to be the best on the Crimean coast, and the place is a growing one.

At Odessa our party was further broken up, Walker and Gardiner going to Constantinople by the afternoon boat, as they intended to return home by the Mediterranean. Grove and I, who had no time to spare, after a first rate dinner at the Hotel de Londres with our friend Mr. Hunt, of the Consulate, to whom we were indebted for a speedy settlement of the police formalities necessary before leaving the country, started in company with Knubel by the evening train (9.0 p.m.) for the west. The crowding and confusion at the station were frightful, but we managed to get and keep two seats alongside each other, and thereby secured sleeping berths for the night. Retracing our outward route precisely, we reached Woloczyska, the frontier station, at 4.0 p.m. on the 16th, and Krakau, after a comfortable night in a sleeping carriage, at 8.0 next morning.

Here Knubel left us. The one piece of mountaineering which he had had to do, he had done well ; doubtless had fortune not limited our ascents to that of Elbruz, he would have justified our selection of him,—but as a guide, pure and simple ; unlike François Dévouassoud, he had been useless out of his own line, while he had, I believe, regarded the journey throughout as a penance, and counted the days to its termination. In short, out of the valley of Zermatt he had been out of his element. But according to his lights, he had done his best.

Conclusion

Travelling from Krakau, as before by Myslowitz and Breslau, we reached Berlin at 5.15 a.m. on the 18th, were detained there till noon, arrived at Cologne at 9.15 p.m., went on at 10.50, and at 5.45 p.m. on Wednesday the 19th August, after a magnificent passage from Ostend, were once more at Charing Cross station. The next day, I discovered that I had not passed unscathed through the malarious country near the Black Sea ; symptoms of a severe attack of fever showed themselves, and for the next two months I was an almost constant sufferer from that debilitating disease. Grove, Walker, and Gardiner were also victims, and, strange to say, the symptoms appeared in the two latter at Athens,

Petersburgh $\frac{12}{24}$ December 1875

Moins. 28.



Dear Sir

I hasten to acknowledge the receipt of your honoured letter of $\frac{4}{16}$ Nov. and of Mr Grove's description of your ascent of the Elbing and to beg you to receive my most sincere thanks for your friendly remembrance of myself. The most interesting account of your Caucasian journey gives me the greatest pleasure, and I feel much gratified in thinking that I could in any way contribute to the success of so keen an enterprise as the ascension of the Elbrus effected by yourself and your friends.

Believe me to be, dear Sir,

Your faithful servant

Baron Nicolai

on the very same day as in Grove and myself in London. Knubel alone escaped altogether. In spite of this untoward finale to our expedition, I shall ever look back upon it with pleasure, hurried and marred by bad weather as it was. I can scarcely expect to visit the peaks, passes, and valleys of the Caucasus a third time, but, nevertheless, occasionally indulge in day dreams of another trip. Should they ever be realized I trust it may be in company as good as on the journey the story of which is now concluded.

Finis

Note.—The cost of this journey to me personally was £125, out of which sum £16 was spent in purchasing curiosities and presents, not properly chargeable as travelling expenditure. It extended over 62 days