

CLIMBING TO SEE WHERE THE ARK CAME TO LAND.

Ascent of Mount Ararat by a Cosmopolitan Party—Noah and His Cargo of Man and Beast Must Have Met a Mighty Cold Reception When They Disembarked Following the Great Deluge.

(Special Correspondence.)

CONSTANTINOPLE, Nov. 11.—“Ararat! and did you see the ark?”

Yes, and here is a photograph of it, obtained at bitter cost.

Ararat is not a mountain that is climbed every day, or every year. Seventeen ascents have been recorded and there is no reason to suppose that any have escaped notice. After the Hon. James Bryce, unaccompanied, made his remarkable ascent in 1876, of which he has written in a most entertaining book, he was told by everyone whom he met in the vicinity of the mountain that the top had never been reached, and that was more, that it never could be. Jinns and fiends and giants had prevented the rascally Koords from even attempting to scale the terrible mountain, and, according to the indignant Armenians, a jealous God had not, since the famous “bump,” allowed mortal man to trespass on the sacred heights. Had not St. Hagop tried again and again to reach the summit in order to silence the skeptics about the ark? But he found himself each morning, on waking, quietly deposited at the base whence he started. Finally an angel presented him with a piece of the ark for his pains, but told him to cease his attempts to reach the forbidden ground. That was in the fourth century of our era but the piece of the ark is still to be seen at the monastery of Etchmiadzin where dwells the catholicos of the Armenian church.

That Russians or a stray, lone Englishman had really reached the top of Ararat was not to be thought of.

SOMEWHAT DIFFERENT NOW.

Times have changed in the last 30 years even at the base of Ararat; the railroad now goes skimming along the great waste of the Garden of Eden; the catholicos or head of the Armenian church, who dwells in glorious sight of the snow-domed mountain, is an enlightened man (who presses electric buttons, turns switches, and gives audience near a table covered with tanglefoot fly-paper from a certain Michigan town); and the Koords, though they will not venture their worthless hides more than two miles high, are willing to admit that other people have braved the Jinns for the third mile and the still more difficult surplus.

Mt. Ararat is 17,000 feet high. Unlike its lower relative, Mt. Blanc, it rises out of a plain, the ex-Garden of Eden of course, 2,700 feet above sea-level. A dry enough statement, but what a picture it could tell if only thoughts of heights could give sublime effects! Take the mountain at twilight time, all purple except for the cold white of the snow dome, with a crescent moon in the yet blue sky. Then do not think of crags and points and rough masses heaped up; that is not Ararat. But think of long flowing lines that lift themselves along the sky north and south to form two peaks, Little Ararat and Big Ararat.

TWO BIG PEAKS.

The peaks are seven miles apart, the lesser rising but to 13,000 feet, a pyramid of volcanic material that seems a mole hill in comparison to the vast bulk of the greater structure. The top of Little Ararat just escapes being covered perpetually with snow, for in the dry atmosphere of Armenia snow remains the year round only on the last 3,000 or 4,000 feet of Big Ararat.

We were a party of five that left Constantinople, camping on the deck of an Austrian Lloyd steamer for Batoum. It was a voyage of five days because of the stops at various Black sea ports, as Kerassund, whence Lu-

cullus first brought cherries and hence the name for them; Samsoun, which sends several million pounds of tobacco-leaf to America yearly; Trebizond, where Xenophon encamped after seeing “The Sea! The Sea!” and where in the middle ages flourished a rich Byzantine court.

From Batoum Mt. Ararat is 30 hours distance by the comfortable, cinderless and, except for a strong whiff of kerosene now and then, smokeless Russian trains. At Tiflis, where the cholera was giving the outside world some anxiety, though the city seemed unconcerned enough, we added three more to our party: A Russian, a German and an Englishman. We already represented Scotland, Switzerland and America. The Swiss was an Alpinist of repute who had climbed most of the difficult peaks of his fatherland.

There is only one train a day from Tiflis to the Persian border, and that drops you before the journey's end at the nearest point for Ararat about nightfall. The mountain is still 18 miles away across the plains, and it is necessary to sleep in the fever-ridden Tartar village of Komarloo. The generous hospitality of the Russian officials of the place made this as slight an inconvenience as possible; indeed one of the pleasant associations of the trip is the new idea received of the courtesy and good entertainment of the Russians.

REGION NOT SAFE.

From Komarloo the party set out early in the morning, fording the ancient Araxes river and driving a few miles to the village of Aralykh. Here two hours were consumed in making up the cavalcade for traversing the blazing plain. Cossack horsemen formed the advance and rear, and there were six pack horses. The plain is a desert of sand and ashes—prehistorically Mt. Ararat was a volcano. Camelthorn and a few other desert shrubs dot the waste. The heat is suffocating; the sand, the stones, the air, everything is scorching; and so was everybody on arriving at Takeltoo, a military post at the base of the mountain. From there the path rises somewhat abruptly to Sardar Bulakh or the Sirdar's Well, an elevation of 8,000 feet. The order was given to proceed in close file and not to stray, for the region is not safe. Toward dusk the cavalcade entered the fort of Sardar Bulakh, where there is a strong Russian garrison. It is in the saddle which separates Little Ararat from Big Ararat. Only six miles away is the meeting point of Russia, Turkey and Persia! The spot is marked by a simple square pillar of masonry.

The following day was consumed in making preparations for the ascent and in visiting the Koordish encampments in the vicinity. These Koords have led a nomadic existence for centuries, planting their tents on the mountain in the summer, descending into the plain for the winter. They are half savages, their religion is a poor kind of Mohammedanism, their language a kind of Turkish. They are a dirty, pitiless, fierce and at the same time, cowardly lot. Since such people had to be the “guards” of the party and the porters of supplies to the night encampment higher up the mountain, their chief, Mehmed Beg, was invited to dinner. He was an exception to his fellows, a man of superb build, dressed in the long Georgian coat with tubes for cartridges at the breast, and a tall fur bonnet. For generations his family had ruled over the wandering tribes of Ararat. Then came the Russians, who left the chieftainship in the same family but exacted a strict loyalty.

CHATTERING KOORDS.

The departure for the morrow, Aug. 11, was set at 6 o'clock. The Koords

arrived duly, but immediately began disputing about the weight of the packages and refused to carry anything over 12 or 13 pounds. It was necessary to repack several of the bundles. This arranged, the beggars squabbled to see who should get the lightest packages. Finally, towards 8 o'clock, the march began. But at the end of 10 minutes the Koords dropped their burdens, threw off their blankets, and lay down for a chatter and smoke. A quarter of an hour further on, there was a brook. Bang! Down went the bundles, off came the blankets, and then the noise and cigarettes again. Never can you hear in civilized lands such a provoking sound as that of these chattering Koords. This monotonous business went on throughout the day, or rather until the middle of the afternoon when, at a height of 11,500 feet, the Koords threw themselves down on a grassy spot and refused to go farther until the morning. There was nothing to do but to accept the decision of these amiable friends. Marching orders were given for sunrise.

At three o'clock on the morning of Friday, August 12, Venus came out of the eastern horizon like a sun. It was time for the camp to be stirring. At 4:30 the Swiss was waiting, his pack on his shoulders, alpenstock in hand; at 6 o'clock he was still waiting. Then he started off with the Scotchman and an American. At 9:30 they had reached a height of 13,000 feet. The weather was superb. It was the day for a record, and setting aside thoughts of a second night's encampment with the rest of the party and the Koords, it was decided to make for the summit.

ALTITUDE AND LUNGS.

The ascent was by the southern ridge of rocks. Every few rods it became necessary to lie down in order to regain breath. It was not the legs, but the lungs trying in vain to get enough air, that were tired; the heart beat with rapid, shattering strokes; the head was seized with dizziness whenever one looked up to search the way. Higher, always higher, the ascent continued by little stages, the breathing becoming more and more difficult, the body more exhausted. At length the rocky ridge was achieved and there succeeded a ridge of detritus composed of sulphurous dust. It looked easy to surmount. And then the top! But painful moments were reserved in the sulphur dust. So inconsistent it was that one could not take three steps without sliding, staggering, falling. It required an hour and a half to cover 500 feet. Strength was giving out; it was already 3 o'clock in the afternoon.

Finally, to make an end of it the Swiss left this difficult ground to take to the ice, and without cutting steps or paying attention to the anxious calls of his companions, rushed sixty feet up the glare surface; the slope ceased; it was the summit! A few seconds flat on the back and fatigue vanished. Remarkable good fortune gave a cloudless and mistless atmosphere on the mountain, but the plain, nearly three miles below, was dimmed by a surface haze. Far, too far off and too insignificant, were the other mountains of Armenia. The wind blew in terrible squalls; it was necessary to shout at the top of one's voice to make a word heard. The cold numbed one's fingers and blanched the lips. Half an hour of this was enough, and there was still the descent to reckon with.

RAPID DESCENT.

But once below the glare ice, what a descent was that!—a glistade of 4,000 feet in height, which accomplished in a few minutes what in ascent had taken five painful hours. The