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CHAPTER III.

WEST OF THE BERNINA.

THE PEAKS AND PASSES OF VAL MASINO.¹

Il montera, descendra, traversera, remontera, redescendra, retransversera, etcetera.—*French Play.*

And when I most go here and there,
I then do most go right. SHAKESPEARE.

THE MOUNTAINS OF VAL MASINO—THE AVERSTHAL—MADRISER PASS—VAL BREGAGLIA—Zocca Pass—PROMONTOGNO—VAL BONDASCA—PASSO DI FERRO—BAGNI DEL MASINO—PASSO DI MONTE SISSONE—THE FORNO GLACIER.

To the crowd, which having sat down in a draught on the roof of Europe spends its time mostly in bemoaning the cold, to the water-drinkers of St. Moritz or the pensioners of Pontresina, the mountains of Val Masino are unknown. Yet had they eyes to see they might often be attracted by the vision of two square towers rising far beyond the blue lakes and the green ridge of the Maloya, and shining like an enchanted keep through the warm haze of Italy.² They are indeed the ramparts of Paradise, for on the further side they look down upon the gardens of Lago di Como.

¹ This and the following chapter were originally written as a paper to be read before the Alpine Club.

² See Vignette.

Even to climbers this western wing of the Bernina has remained little known. So long ago as 1862 Messrs. Kennedy and Stephen carried at the second assault its proudest peak, the Monte della Disgrazia. But I could count on my fingers the names of all the Englishmen who have since penetrated Val Masino. Foreign Alpine Clubs have for the most part held aloof. The Swiss have found enough to do elsewhere, and have not as yet chosen Val Bregaglia—politically a Swiss valley—as the ‘gebiet’ of one of the summer ‘excursions’ in which they contrive to combine so happily the features of a prolonged picnic and a mountain-battue. That practical, and in some respects energetic, body, the Italian Alpine Club, is only beginning to turn its attention to a district containing one of the few wholly Italian peaks of over 12,000 feet.

Those who have been already somewhat disappointed in the Upper Engadine and the heart of the Bernina will perhaps argue that there cannot be much worth seeing in its extremities, where the peaks are lower and the ice-fields as a whole less extensive. Such an assumption, however, would be ill-founded. For scenic effects, every one will allow, the measurement of a mountain must be taken, not from the sea-level, but from its actual base. Moreover the lower the base the richer and more varied will be the contrast in vegetation. On applying this test we find that the Punta Trubinesca¹ towers 8,500 feet above the chestnut trees of Promontogno, while Piz Bernina itself rises 1,000 feet

¹ Herr Theobald states that the villagers of Bondo give the name of Trubinesca to the Cima di Tschingel of the Federal map. Herr Ziegler, the author of a new and very beautifully executed map of this portion of the Alps, confirms this statement, adding that ‘Turbinisca’ is the correct spelling, and he has accordingly changed the names of the two peaks. As

less, and far more gradually, above Pontresina. The icy ridges of the Disgrazia soar 11,000 feet above the vineyards of the Val Tellina, or as much as Mont Blanc above Courmayeur.

The peaks, moreover, are of a durable granite. They have, therefore, that combined boldness of outline and solidity which often belongs to this hardy rock. Other mountains have the air of having been built up; granite peaks seem rather to have been rough-hewn like a sculptor's block out of a larger mass. In glaciers the group possesses almost every known variety. The Bondasca and the eastern glaciers of the Disgrazia worthily represent the frozen cataract type, tumbling in broken billows from cope to base of the mountain; the Albigna is an ice-lake fed by huge snow-basins; the Forno a stately stream surpassing in length the Morteratsch.

Here, however, I gladly break off from the conventional tone of recommendation in which discoverers are apt to assert their own merits.

For the people who either cannot or will not walk, the large class which, taking advantage of the shade of contempt already attached to the epithet by Vatican infallibility, I may venture to call the 'Subalpine Club,' Val Masino has few attractions. Inaccessible on three sides except to pedestrians, this valley will probably remain for long a sure refuge for the misanthropic climber driven away from the peaks of

a rule, local usage should, no doubt, be followed. But in the present instance, the mistake is of such long standing, that an endeavour to correct it would only lead to confusion, and I have adhered to the nomenclature of the Federal map. It is much to be regretted that Herr Ziegler's map is wholly inaccurate with regard to the glaciers of Val Masino, and the position of many of the ridges dividing its lateral glens.

the central Bernina by the demands of the guides or the clatter of his fellow-countrymen.

In the summer of 1864 I set out from Splügen with two companions and François Devouassoud for the Bernina. Our route led us through the Avers Thal, a cross-road of travel still but little frequented, though no better reason than fashion can be assigned for its neglect. For mile after mile the Averser Rhein, a strong blue-grey torrent, leaps and roars between masses of marble crag tinted with lichens, and clasped about by huge pine-roots. Tributary streams rush down from the rugged precipices towering on either side the gorge, and shoot with a creamy rush into the deep cleft which holds the larger flood.

Above the long defile lies a broad grassy upland dotted with some of the highest villages in Europe, and encompassed by green slopes which divide the waters of three seas. The landscape is, it is true, tame to the eye; but on a sunny August morning, when the vast hayfield is alive with mowers and the air fragrant with the smell of ripe grasses, it contains much to tickle other senses than sight.

We turned up a side branch of the valley, the Madriser Thal. Near its head a white line seamed the slopes we had yet to surmount. On nearer approach this resolved itself into a laboriously-built stone staircase, showing that we were on what was once a frequented passage for beasts of burden. Judging from the solidity and care with which it had originally been put together the 'pavé' might have been Roman. I do not venture to say it is. More probably in the middle ages this was an alternative route for the Septimer. Perhaps the indefatigable explorer and describer of his

native Alps, Herr Theobald, or some other curious enquirer, has told the date and story. If so I have failed to fall on the passage.

It was from the ridge which divides the Rhine from the Maira that I gained my first general view of the mountains of Val Masino. Opposite, and separated from our stand-point, the Madriser Pass, only by the deep but narrow trench of Val Bregaglia, a great mountain-mass glowed in the afternoon sunshine. Its base was wrapped in chestnut woods, its middle girt with a belt of pines, above spread a mantle of the eternal snow. The sky-line was formed by a coronet of domes and massive pinnacles carved out of grey rocks, whose jagged yet stubborn forms revealed the presence of granite. Full in front the curving glacier of Val Bondasca filled the space beneath the smooth cliff-faces, and at one spot a gap between them irresistibly suggested a new pass for the morrow.

The descent on the southern side of the Madriser Pass, long, rough, and extremely steep, leads to the village of Soglio, which rests on a terrace high above the valley, and commands a noble view of the granite peaks. Here stands a deserted villa belonging to the old Grisons family of De Salis, surrounded by ruinous gardens and tall poplars, an Italian intrusion on a landscape otherwise Alpine. Mossy banks shaded by old Spanish chestnuts slope down to the high-road and the river. On the opposite side, near the tunnel from which it takes its name, we found the 'Albergo della Galleria,' which provides clean rooms and moderate fare for those who are bent on penetrating the Val Bondasca, the most beautiful of the side glens of Val Bregaglia.

It was not my first visit to this valley. Long

before Mr. Ball had written his handbook I had found in Professor Theobald's excellent little volume on Canton Graubünden¹ a most exciting description of the waterfalls and ice-tables of the Albigna Glacier and the rocky splendours of Val Bondasca. At the same time the appearance on maps of the Forno Glacier as a long ice-stream equal to the Morteratsch had excited in me keen curiosity. But my companions in 1862, although induced to halt a day at Vico Soprano, and to venture as far as the level of the Albigna Glacier, could not be persuaded that the Zocca was 'fit for ladies,' and my explorations were reduced to an ineffectual race against time to reach a point overlooking the Forno.

The Upper Bregaglia, seen from a carriage, is a green Alpine valley showing, except in such additions as man has made to the landscape, little trace of the approach to Italy. Pines are still the prevailing trees; near at hand the mountains are green; higher up naked grey pinnacles saw the sky or cut through the vapour-wreaths.

A mile or two above Vico Soprano clouds of sunbeam-painted foam shoot up round the base of a white column, and the tourist, driven by the first cold days of September from the hill-barracks of the Engadine to the lake-palaces, takes out his 'Guide' and his notebook and ticks off as 'visited' another waterfall.

This is the fall of the Albigna, and close at hand the track to the Zocca branches off through the woods. It is a forest-path known only to smugglers and shepherds (and, I may add, chamois, for I once met two here within a mile of the high-road). Every passer-by, who has a real love of nature, and can endure for it a night

¹ *Naturbilder aus den Rhätischen Alpen*: Chur, 1861.

in a clean country inn, is strongly recommended to leave the road and climb at least as far as the foot of the glacier.

The scenery is best seen as a descent. From the wild bare crags of the inmost recesses of Val Masino and from the cold snows and savage ice-peaks of the Albigna, the traveller suddenly plunges over the edge of the uplands into a region of mountain-sides broken up by deep chasms fringed with pines and broad-leaved trees, and resonant with the roar of the great glacier torrent, which, scarcely released from its icy cradle, 'leaps in glory' down a stupendous cliff.

The Zocca Pass itself I have never crossed, but the omission can be supplied by the experience of friends. In ordinary years it is a simple glacier pass. But that it is not to be attempted without a guide or a rope the following history shows.

Two young converts to mountaineering set out from Val Masino for the pass, guideless, ropeless, axeless. The top was easily reached, but only a few yards below, on the northern side, a huge ice-moat, or 'bergschrund,' as a German guide would have called it, yawned suddenly at their feet. My friends hesitated, but clouds were rapidly gathering round the peaks, and a snowstorm impended. There was no time to be lost. The upper lip of the chasm was too steep to stand on until, by dabbling with the points of their alpenstocks, they had succeeded in making some sort of a staircase down to the brink at the point where it seemed best to take off for the jump. How they jumped or tumbled over they have never been able clearly to explain, but each maintains he did it in the best possible way, and both agree it was very uncomfortable. In many seasons this moat is entirely closed,

but it is evidently an obstacle not to be altogether disregarded, and unseen might be more dangerous than when gaping for its prey.

To return to Promontogno and 1864. Although the political frontier lies beyond Castasegna, several miles further down, the rocky spur which here closes the valley is the natural gate of Italy, the barrier between the pines and the chestnuts. The afternoon hours lingered pleasantly away as, stretched on the knoll behind the inn, we gazed up at the impending cliffs of the granitic range or fed our eyes with the rich woods of the lower valley and the purple hills beyond Chiavenna.

François meantime had gone off to the neighbouring village of Bondo to look for a porter who would consent to accompany us over a pass utterly unknown to the people of the country. For the 'Passo di Bondo' of the map became more mythical at every step. To cross the Bondasca Glacier to Val Masino was at least in the estimation of all Bregaglians to make a new pass; and this was to us Alpine novices a matter of no small contentment; for beginners ten years ago were not so audacious as those of the present day, who are satisfied with nothing short of the Weisshorn and Schreckhorn. Yet I cannot help thinking that by venturing only into moderate difficulties, where one guide among three could help us through, we learnt as much as by tying ourselves to two or three first-rate men and daring everything through the strength of our guides.

We knew pretty well what was before us, for from the Madriser Pass the whole route had been displayed. François, remembering that an unknown icefall had to be dealt with, was anxious to be off early, and our own enthusiasm was sufficient to carry us through the ordeal of a night breakfast with less than the usual morose-

ness. By two A.M. the provisions were packed and we were on the march.

There was no moon, but the heaven was throbbing with large white stars, and coronets sparkled on the heads of the dim giants of the southern range. Leaving behind us the sleeping hamlet of Bondo, the path climbed steeply through a fir-wood until it reached the short stretch of level ground, which is called Val Bondasca. An expanse of grass and wood is here spread out as a carpet at the very base of the granite cliffs. Scarcely in the Alps are there finer precipices than those that lead up the eye to the far-off brows of the Cima di Tschingel and Trubinesca. In front the glen is closed by steep rocks, over which the glacier pours in a long cascade.

As we strolled over the dewy lawns we had full leisure to watch the first signs of the coming day. A faint gleam spread over the eastern sky, and was reflected on the pinnacles above us, gradually drawing forth their forms out of the shadow, until at last a rosy blush played for a few moments on their crags; then the clear light of daybreak was shed upon peak and valley, and ice and rock alike were bathed in the universal sunshine.

Near another group of chalets we crossed the stream a second time. A well-contrived path, winding up by steep zigzags amidst underwood and creeping pines, lifted us from the glen to the upper alp, a sloping shelf of pasturage on the east of the glacier. Bearing to the right we made for the edge of a level portion of the ice, where it rests for a space between the upper and lower falls. Our porter had halted at the highest hut to get some milk from the solitary man who tended the goats

and pigs. The herdsman, who now saw us turn our backs upon the only pass he knew, the gap leading over to the Albigna Glacier, hurried after us, *jödelling* at the top of his voice, and pointing violently in the direction opposite to that we were taking.

He was too far below for words, and signs he would not comprehend, so, after some fruitless endeavours to quiet his mind, we went on our way, causing 'le bon garçon' (as François called him) to give vent to a last expostulatory chaunt before he returned to his goats to meditate upon our probable fate.

The usual rough borderland between earth and ice scrambled over, we halted for breakfast on a smooth piece of ice conveniently furnished with stone stools and tables. Over our heads towered a range of pinnacles, one of which is known as Piz Cacciabella. In form and grouping they closely resemble, on a smaller scale, the Chamonix Aiguilles, as seen from the 'Plan.' Divided from them by a snowy bay, the source of the glacier, rose the splendid peak of the Punta Trubinesca. Only granite could show such a tremendous block, free from flaw or joint, and hopeless to the most fly-like climber. Its broad grey precipices looked as smooth as if they had been planed; and, Mr. Ball having pronounced the summit inaccessible on the other side, it seemed to us at the time a pretty problem for rising Alpine Clubmen.

Our ambition, however, had never soared to such a conquest, and we were content to discuss a matter nearer at hand, the upper ice-fall which separated us from the supposed pass. Opinions differed; François prophesied difficulties and five hours' work to the top; a sanguine spirit set it down as half an hour's walk.

The rope was soon put on, and we prepared to face the unknown.

I presume everyone who cares to take up these sketches has already felt sufficient interest in the Alps to endeavour to realise, even if he has not seen, the nature of an ice-fall. If he has not, he had better go and look at Mons. Loppé's pictures. No word-painting can give an idea of anything so unlike the usual phenomena of our temperate zone. A cream-cheese at once squeezed and drawn out, so that the surface split and isolated blocks stood up, might, if viewed through a magnifying glass, slightly resemble in form, though not in colour, the contorted ice. But the imagination would have to look on from the point of view of the smallest mite.

The lower ice-falls differ considerably from the highest. In one case the material is hard ice; in the other, closely compacted snow. In the ice the rifts are longer, narrower and more frequent, and fewer towers rise above the general level; the snow or *névé* opens in wider but less continuous chasms, sinks in great holes like disused chalk-pits, and throws up huge blocks and towers, which the sun slowly melts into the most fantastic shapes. The higher fall is generally both the most imposing and formidable to look at, and the easiest to get through. The maze here is less intricate, and the very size of its features makes it easier to choose a path. But it is unsafe to shout before you are well out of the wood. At the very top, where the strain caused by the steepening slope first cracks the glacier, one huge rent often stretches across from edge to edge, and unless Providence throws a light causeway or a slender arch across the gulf, there will be work for the ice-axe before you stand on the upper edge. Some crack in the

pit's wall must be dug into steps, the huge disorderly blocks which make a floor must be got through, and then escape must be found in the same way that entrance was made, by a ladder of your own contriving. Such a passage may often cost an hour's hard work.

The Bondasca Glacier above where we struck it was riven by a network of small crevasses. Some could be jumped, and the larger clefts were generally bridged, and thanks to a sharp night's frost the arches were in good bearing order. With occasional step-cutting and frequent zigzags we got clear of the thickest labyrinth and stood victorious on the upper snow-fields. They rose before us in a succession of frozen banks to a well-defined gap flanked by two snow hummocks. The western was connected by a long curtain of rock with the Punta Trubinesca. After skirting the highest snow-bowl, we crossed the deep moat which marks the point where the true mountain-form rises out of the folds of its snowy vestment, and in a moment more stood on the crest of a curling wave, fringed with icicles for spray.

Where we had expected to see only the rock-surrounded basin of the Val dei Bagni, we looked down on a deep, long valley, running southwards towards the Val Tellina.

At the second glance our eyes were caught by an enormous object lying in the centre of a grassy meadow. We were at once assured as to the identity of the valley. The block could be nothing else than the 'natural curiosity' of Val Masino, the biggest boulder in the Alps. Its dimensions are given by Mr. Ball as—'Length, 250 feet; breadth, 120 feet; height, 140 feet;' or as tall as an average church tower, and large enough to fill up many a London square. Legend has

nothing to tell about this monstrous block, and we are left to determine as we like, whether it fell from some neighbouring mountain going to ruin in the course of nature, or was dropped by the devil, on one of those errands of mischief which are always so fortunately interrupted by the opportune appearance of the pious peasant.

We had only been two hours from our last resting-place, and the day was still young, so that we could well afford a halt. As there are some tourists whose chief object is to get to the end of their tours, so there are climbers who throughout the day seem to long only to arrive in as few hours as possible at the end of it. But peaks and passes and not inns were our goal, and we had no desire to hurry on. We chose a warm corner in the sun-facing rocks, whence by lifting our heads we looked over intervening ridges to the Alps of Glarus, and raked the Punta Trubinesca and its neighbours, now viewed end on, as weird a pile of granite as I have seen in many a long day's wanderings.

From the snow-dome on our right a lofty and extraordinarily jagged ridge stretched out at right angles to the main chain, the barrier, probably, between the two branches of Val Masino.¹ I wanted to climb the dome and reconnoitre, but clouds had partially covered the blue sky, and were whisking, now one way now the other, as the gust took them, as if playing a wild game of hide-and-seek amongst the granite towers. A storm seemed probable, and François thought it foolish to waste time.

¹ The junction of this spur, the Cima Sciascia, with the principal ridge, has been placed too far east in all maps previous to the Alpine Club Map of Switzerland.

We were clearly not on the legendary *Passo di Bondo*,¹ but on another 'Col' of our own contriving, leading somewhere into the *Val di Mello*, the eastern branch of *Val Masino*. The descent looked practicable. Why not attempt it and complete the pass? The distance to be retraced along the valley to our sleeping quarters, the 'Bagni,' could scarcely be worth considering. So after erecting a solid stoneman, and trusting him with the usual card-filled bottle, we set out.

The last man had not set foot on the ice when François disappeared to his shoulders beneath the surface. Looking through the hole he had made we could appreciate the use of the rope. A dark green chasm, some thirty feet wide, yawned beneath us, its depths scarcely visible in the light thus suddenly let in upon them. The glacier we were descending fell away steeply, and became so broken and troublesome that we tried the rocks on the left. The change was for the worse, and we soon came back and cut our way through the difficulties.

As soon as the rocks ceased to be precipitous we took to them again. But they were not pleasant footing. We found ourselves committed to a slope of boulders so shockingly loose that the slightest provocation sent half-a-dozen rolling from under our feet, and piled at so high an angle that when once started they bounded away at a pace which promised to take them straight to the valley. In such places an impe-

¹ I am disposed to doubt whether a direct pass from the *Bondasca Glacier* to the western branch of *Val Masino* was ever effected before 1865. It is true there is a tradition embodied in the Swiss Federal map of such a pass. It is possible, however, that smugglers may have gone up to the *Passo di Ferro*, and then scrambled westward over the rocks into the basin of the *Porcellizza Alp*.

tuous companion always insists on stopping to take off his gaiters and then following at a run. You have scarcely missed him before his return is announced by a whole volley of grape rattling about your ears, while a playful shout warns you to make way for a 100-pounder boulder which is ricocheting down on your heels with the force of a cannon-ball. Then your friend comes up with a pleased air, as much as to say, 'Didn't I come down that well?' and it is hard not to remonstrate with him in language the use of which should be restricted to divines.

Halting beside some water which filtered out at the foot of the boulders, we enjoyed a beautiful view of the Disgrazia and the wild range behind us. On our right was a long comb, whose teeth had been tortured by time and weather into all sorts of quaint shapes; one rock bent over like a crooked finger, in another place a window was pierced through the crest. At a hasty glance one might have compared the fantastic shapes to those assumed so frequently by dolomitic limestone, but closer observation showed the tendency to curving outlines and to sharpness of edge peculiar to crystalline rock. In the dolomite districts the separate crags, cut up as they may be by flaws at right angles to the lie of the strata, have not, except from considerable distances, the same flamelike outlines. In any near view the layers of which they are built up become conspicuous, and often, as in the Brenta chain, have all the appearance of courses of masonry.

Bearing to the left from the first huts on the Alpe di Ferro, we crossed a stream just below a tempting pool, in which five minutes later we were all plunging. At the next step in the descent our path re-crossed the

water, and zigzagged steeply down the hillside, which was covered with broom and Scotch heather. Passing a succession of pretty cascades, we entered the Val di Mello, near a group of châteaux, whence a stony mule-road led us in half an hour to San Martino, the village situated at the fork of the valley. It is a cluster of untidy stone houses, with nothing to delay the passer-by except a douanier's bureau and a tobacco store.

We now met a car-road running up the Val dei Bagni—the western fork of the valley. The floor of the glen soon rises suddenly—a granite valley, like the national prosperity, always advances by leaps and starts—and the road indulges in a couple of short zig-zags. We are again in the heart of the mountains, hemmed in by pine-clad slopes and cliffs too steep to allow any view even of the summits behind them. In this *cul-de-sac* there are no signs of a village. It is a spot where one would expect to find no one but a Bergamasque shepherd with his longtailed sheep. But shepherds do not make roads, nor do they often receive visitors such as the portly dame who advances towards us, supported by a scarcely perceptible donkey, and herself overshadowed by a vast crimson umbrella resembling the mushroom of a pantomime. Shepherds, moreover, are not in the habit of constructing little paths like those, too faltering and purposeless for any practical use, which wander off here and there into the woods; nor do they employ their leisure hours in planting stems of fir-trees in a futile manner along the sides of the road, and covering their branches, as the foliage withers away, with tricolour flags.

The meaning of these attempts to fasten a little paltry embroidery on nature's robes is explained when

as we turn a corner and enter the bowl-shaped hollow which forms the head of the glen we discover under the hillside a long, low building—the Bagni del Masino. The presence of a sulphur spring has caused this remote spot to be chosen as one of the summer retreats of Northern Italian society.

The bath-houses in the Lombard Alps do not in any way add to the beauty of the landscape. The consistent regard for economy shown in the simplicity of their architecture and the roughness of their construction may possibly delight the heart of some shareholder, and would perhaps have commended them to the favourable notice of a late First Commissioner of Works. But to the common eye the result is not attractive. Outside we see a long two-storied barrack built with unshaped stones and abundance of mortar, the surface of which, never having been finished in any way, has a dusky-brown hue and ruinous aspect; unpainted woodwork; balconies unbalustraded, and to the last degree perilous. Internally and on the ground floor a long range of dingy fly-spotted rooms, devoted respectively to smoke, billiards, literature, and eating, and decorated with portraits of the reigning family of Italy and full-blown lithographic beauties. Above, equally long passages, and nests of scantily furnished, but tolerable and, so far as beds are concerned, clean cabins.

Our first enquiry, whether the house contained baths—at many so-called bath-houses the waters are only taken internally—called up a triumphant smile on the countenance of the waiter who had welcomed us. As he ushered us along the passages a strong smell of sulphur raised a suspicion that we might find ourselves in hot water. In another moment this fear was converted

into a certainty. The beaming waiter ushered us into a little room, or rather large stove-heated oven, surrounded by four wells, each some five feet deep, and full to the brim of sulphureous waters. On the one hand we had gone too far to retreat with credit, on the other we were incapable of any prolonged endurance of the purgatorial temperature. So having made but a hasty plunge we dashed on our clothes and fled back to our rooms, ignoring the stove on which we ought to have sat and submitted to a process of slow baking. This ordeal and a good dinner completed, we had leisure to study the patients, for the most part Milanese, with a sprinkling of local Val Tellina priests and farmers. The mineral waters of the place are, no need to say, like all mineral waters, invincible enemies to every disease to which humanity, male or female, is exposed. Such being the case, it was a subject for reasonable regret that with few exceptions the visitors appeared to suffer from no more serious complaint than a difficulty in composing their minds to any mental exertion beyond a game at bowls or a shot at a popinjay.

Let us sit down for a few moments on the bench before the door and observe the pastimes going on around. Three leading spirits, the doctor, a curé with his skirts tucked up to his knees, and a Milanese visitor clad in a suit of the large yellow check so often affected by Italians, are in the middle of a contest with bowls, the progress of which is watched by a deeply interested circle of cigarette-smokers. The Milanese is nowhere, but the struggle between the priest and doctor becomes terribly exciting, and the 'bravas' attract even a group of Bergamasque shepherds, honest fellows despite their bandit style of dress, who have been lounging in

the background. The rest of the patients are burning powder at a mark set up in the wood a few paces off, or hanging over a game of billiards, which seems to us a good deal more like a sort of Lilliputian ninepins.

We have scarcely withdrawn to our rooms satiated with the sight of so much innocent happiness when a loud ringing of the bell which welcomes new arrivals assures us that Victor Emmanuel must be appearing in person to pursue the chamois of the neighbourhood. Hurrying to the window we see an excited crowd gazing and gesticulating at the sky in a manner which suggests that they have been visited either by a heavenly vision or temporary insanity. In fact a small fire-balloon has been sent up. After a time another peal of the bell announces its descent, the Bergamasque shepherd boys set off up the hillside to secure the fragments, and night closes upon the scene.

To most of us there comes a time when the pleasures of infancy pall. But these water-drinkers seem to have found the true fountain of youth and oblivion, where

—— they lie reclined
On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind,
For they lie beside their nectar ——

and, far removed from the politics and stock-exchanges of a lower world, can treat even the leading articles which occasionally creep up to them at the bottom of a fruit cart

Like a tale of little meaning tho' the words are strong.

Happy Milanese! for is not Val Masino better than Margate?

It is difficult, perhaps, to recommend the Baths as a stopping-place for any length of time to the ordinary traveller. Though so high (3,750 feet) they are too

much in a hole for beauty. But the situation, if it would not satisfy an artist, is not in the least commonplace, and has even a curious fascination of its own. On every side the eyes are met at once by almost perpendicular rocks capped here and there by sharp spires of granite. These cliffs are not bare and harsh like those of Val di Mello, but green with forest and bright with falling waters. They seem friendly protectors to the smooth oasis of grass and pines. The suggestion of savage wildness close at hand added by the few glimpses of the upper peaks heightens the sense of peace and seclusion in which the charm of the spot is to be found.

The little plain is quite large enough to suffice for the very moderate demands of the Italian visitors, but it will hardly satisfy the average British craving for exercise. You must, however, either stop where you are or climb a staircase; these upright hills will not easily lend themselves, like the slopes of the Upper Engadine, to short breaths and untrained limbs. To enjoy Val Masino you must be either sick or sound; it is not a place for invalids or idlers.

To the mountaineer the bathing establishment is invaluable. It is true that as a passing guest he pays a bill large when compared to the charges made to the 'pensionnaires,' and that his guide will probably have still greater reason to complain. But he obtains in exchange the boon of a good bed and an excellent dinner in a situation admirably chosen for glacier expeditions. Moreover, owing to the general custom of the patients of keeping up impromptu dances till midnight, a waiter can generally be persuaded to provide breakfast before he goes to bed; and not only is the

customary difficulty in an early start entirely absent, but it is sometimes hard to avoid being sped too soon by a host whose night begins only when yours ends.

At half-past twelve the voice of the inexorable François was heard at the doors: 'Bonjour, messieurs, il fait encore beau temps.' One of us who had gone to sleep in the middle of a thunderstorm gave a deep groan of disappointment at the auspicious news. But in half-an-hour we were all gathered round the table at a meal which we had ordered, and now affected to treat in the light of a late supper. I need scarcely say the pretence was a miserable failure. Though the stars shone brightly in the narrow strip of sky visible between the steep mountain-crests, the night was so black that some precaution was considered necessary to prevent our falling off the edge of the road, and prematurely ending our Alpine investigations. The obliging waiter dexterously screwed up in paper a tallow candle after the model of a safety bedroom candlestick. But soon, as was to be expected, the shield caught fire, and our impromptu lantern disappeared in a blaze.

François then beguiled the dark hours by an account of the cross-examination he had undergone the evening before. 'What was our illness? Should we take the waters? Where had we come from? How long should we stay? Where were we going?' Such were the enquiries of the guests; and when they heard that we had come over one glacier and were departing next day by another with the intention of sleeping at a place two days' drive off by the only road they knew, they were fairly at their wits' end.

The road which had seemed so long the day before was soon traversed, and leaving our old track to scale

the hillside, we continued in the trough of Val di Mello, until just as dawn was breaking behind the Disgrazia we reached the châteaux of La Rasica. The incident which now followed, interesting to me as the origin of a valued friendship, must find a place here on account of the influence it had on all my further wanderings.

People were heard stirring inside one of the barns, and lights seen moving—a very unusual phenomenon at such an hour. For a moment we imagined we had caught a party of smugglers starting for the Zocca. But, conspicuous even in the darkness, a pair of white flannel trousers, such as no smuggler ever wore, issued from the door. Before we had time to speak they were followed by another and still more startling apparition. All we could at first make out was a large lantern, surrounded on all sides by long yellow spikes like conventional sunbeams or the edges of a saint's glory. A moment later the human being who carried the light became distinguishable, the rays resolved themselves into the bright leather cases of scientific instruments, and a voice announced that we were in the presence of Mr. Tuckett and his guides.

Still young and inexperienced as a mountain-climber, and knowing only by hearsay of the Alpine Club, I was at this time penetrated by a profound respect for that body. Its rank and file I believed to be as little hampered by the laws of gravity as the angels of the Talmud, of whom three could balance themselves upon a single pinnacle of the Temple. To its greater heroes I looked up as to the equals of those spirits whom their leader reminded—

That in our proper motion we ascend
Up towards our native seat; descent and fall
To us are adverse.

For me, therefore, it was an awful moment when I found myself thus unexpectedly in the presence of the leader himself—the being whose activity, ubiquity, and persistence in assault have made, at least in the lips of wearied guides, ‘*der Tuckett*’ almost equivalent to ‘*der Teufel*.’ Conscious, moreover, of intentions on the new pass of the country—the one possible link by which Val Masino could be brought within a day’s walk of the Upper Engadine—I felt an inward presentiment that this great mountain-slayer must be there on a similar errand, and a fear that he might punish our poaching in some very serious manner.

Perhaps it was partly the guilty expression of our countenances which caused our suspicions to be returned and our party also to be taken for a band of smugglers whose acquaintance Mr. Tuckett had made on the Albigna Glacier the previous day. The mutual misapprehension having been speedily removed, our further fears were set at rest. The *Disgrazia* was the immediate object of Mr. Tuckett’s ambition; and though he did intend to cross next day to the Engadine, his quiver was already so full of new peaks and passes that he could well afford to leave some small game for others.

It would have been pleasant to have united our parties, but we had an appointment to keep at St. Moritz, and could not venture to risk a detention by bad weather on the wrong side of the chain.

A steep ascent led to a miserable shelter where Mr. Tuckett and his friend left us, and to which they subsequently returned to spend an uncomfortable night. We were now on the upper pasturages, a wide desolate tract merging into the rocky heaps which fringe

several small glaciers descending from the highest summits.

Three ice-streams flowed towards us—one from immediately under the Pico della Speranza; the second from the angle in the chain under Monte Sissone; the third lay far more to the left, and was barred at its head by steep cliffs extending to the Monte Sissone, and broken only near that peak by a narrow snow-trough. The head of the central ice-stream was a broad saddle, and for this we determined to steer. I had a presentiment that it would overlook Val Malenco. But that point gained, it would be easy to reach the ridge of Monte Sissone, and probably without losing much time by the circuit.

We ascended for a long way over the boulders on the south of the central glacier. They offered villainous foothold, but the ice was so slippery that we gave them the preference, and were rewarded for our pains by finding some remarkably fine crystals. Leaving solid ground only a few hundred yards below the crest, we soon found ourselves on its summit. Beneath us, only at a much lower level, and cut off by an apparently impracticable cliff, was the glacier-field which encircles the head of Val Malenco. Beyond it rose the massive forms of the Bernina group. We lost no time here in looking at the view, but turned again upwards, following the ridge for some distance; then, at François' instance, we crossed a treacherous snow-slope to the left, and, after losing some of the height we had gained, reached the rocks. We and the porter took a pretty straight course up the peak of the Sissone, leaving François to make more to the left for the head of the snow-trough. Towards the summit the rocks became

steep, and afforded an exciting scramble. As we worked up a gully the first man put his arm round a large and apparently firmly-wedged stone, which tottered with his weight. Had it fallen, we should have had a sensation something like that of jumping out of the way of a cannon-ball. When our heads rose above the level of the ridge, we were glad to see snow-slopes on the other side, falling away steeply to a great glacier basin. Now we felt our pass was secured. A pile of broken crags still rose above us; a short race, and we were seated on the highest boulder, one of the corner-stones of the Bernina chain.

The Monte Sissone, although insignificant in height compared with the giants which encircle the Morteratsch, claims an important place in the orography of the group. It stands at the angle of the range, where the main ridge is met by the spur which connects the Disgrazia with the rest of the chain. This mighty outlier was the one object which riveted our eyes, quite eclipsing the more distant glories of the Bernina. The noble mass (scarcely three miles from us as the crow flies) rose tier above tier out of the great glacier which extended to our feet; its rocky ribs protruded sternly out of their shimmering ice-mail, and the cloud-banner which was now flung out from the crowning ridge augured no good to its assailants. Deep below lay Chiareggio and the Muretto path, so that the mountain was visible from top to bottom. For massive grandeur united with grace of form, the Disgrazia has few rivals in the Alps. Between us and the Muretto stood the fine snow-peak of the Cima di Rosso, and then the eye swept along the red cliffs which lie at the back of Piz Guz and the Fedoz Glacier to the giants of the Bernina, crowded too closely round their queen for indi-

vidual effect. In the west were the Cima del Largo, and the more distant peaks surrounding the Bondasca Glacier.

Immediately from our feet on the north broken snow-slopes fall steeply on to a wide level basin, the head of the Forno Glacier. Yawning chasms forbad a direct descent, and when we left the peak, the higher by several feet for our visit, we followed for a little distance its eastern ridge. There were a legion of enormous pitfalls, but no continuous moat, so that after some circle-sailing we were able to slide swiftly down to the snow-plain. A circular hollow formed the reservoir into which cascades of névé tumbled from the enclosing ridges. These, like the walls of an amphitheatre, stretched round from the Cima di Rosso to the Cima del Largo; to the west of Monte Sissone they became almost perpendicular, and it seems doubtful whether a more direct pass can profitably be forced in this direction. A large block of ice had detached itself from the upper séracs and now lay at their base—a bright mass of cobalt amidst the pervading greys and whites.

I have nowhere seen a more perfect 'cirque,' and we could fancy that our feet were the first which had ever penetrated it, for the Forno, though the second glacier of the Bernina group, and within an easy walk of the Maloya Inn, has never been the fashion with tourists, and no record of its earlier exploration exists.

Looking downwards a green mound close to Maloya was visible. It can scarcely be half-an-hour from the road, and must command the whole length of the glacier. Our course lay straight before us; we had nothing to do but to follow the great valley of ice. Two fine masses of secondary glacier poured in from

the eastern range, over which the Cima di Rosso rose pre-eminent, a noble peak sheeted in snow and ice. Since leaving the Pennines we had seen no such glacier scenery.

The crevasses were frequent, but generally small, —the right size for jumping over. At one place, however, it was easier to leave the ice and to pick our way through the hollow between the moraine and the mountain-side. A few sheep, which must have been driven at least a mile over the ice, were cropping the scanty herbage. The herdboy seemed simply stupefied at seeing five people drop suddenly on him from heaven knows where, and could scarcely answer our questions except with a prolonged stare.

Clouds had now risen over the sky, and a fine sleet began to fall. The mists, however, did not descend on the mountains, and looking back we enjoyed the peculiar effect of the upper peaks seen through a watery veil and lit by fitful gleams of sunshine. Having returned to the ice we followed it to the end,—a fine ice-cave, whence the Ordlegna, the stream of Val Bregaglia, rushes out in an impetuous torrent. In a few minutes we passed the Piancaning châteaux and made our junction with the dull but well-established path of the Muretto Pass. An hour more brought us to the Maloya Inn and the high road; and after a pleasant stroll along the Silser-See our walk came to an end at the one picturesque village in the Upper Engadine, Sils Maria.