

silhouette of the Solvay hut, where we obtained a well-deserved rest.

[We are much indebted to Signor Benedetti for his valuable article. The translation we owe to Signor Don R. Cajrati-Crivelli.—*Editor, 'A.J.'*]

IN THE JULIAN ALPS ; FROM THE FORCA DEI DISTÈIS
TO THE CLAPPADORIE.¹

BY MADAME MARKO DEBELAK.

THE Valley of Raccolana lies south of Montasch (*Montasio* in Italian, *Poliški Špik* in Slovene, 2752 m.²), and extends from Chiusaforte to the Passo di Nevéa (1198 m., *I. map*). The natives of Raccolana are miserably poor mountain folk. They speak Furlano. The men go out into the world as masons or coal-miners, because they cannot earn their living at home. The women do all the hard work. You scarcely believe your own eyes when you see those little women cutting grass on the mountain pasture and then carrying enormous loads of it down to the valley. Their faces are haggard and sharp-featured as if carved in wood. If you meet a woman of Raccolana in the daytime, she will return your greeting kindly ; but when the sun has dipped below Jôf di Montasio (*Poliški Špik*, *Mentaž*, *Montasch*), the people shut themselves up timidly in their stone cottages. In vain the weary traveller seeks a night's lodging in those parts. The men of Raccolana are excellent shots and good hunters. One of them was that Osvaldo Pesamosca, grandfather of the well-known guide Pesamosca who died not long ago. Old Osvaldo was a poacher. He knew every crag and gully in the domain of Montasio and Višnja Gera, 2666 m. (*Wischberg*), and for years and years he hid in those fastnesses as a deserter while the gendarmes tried unsuccessfully to catch him. The Pesamosche are the pride of Raccolana.

I have described the Raccolanese lest other mountaineers fare among them as did Edo Deržaj and I !

¹ See, in general, the extremely indifferent 1 : 100,000 Italian map, sheet 'Pontebba,' the only one now available for the public.—*Editor.*

² 2754 m., *I. map*.



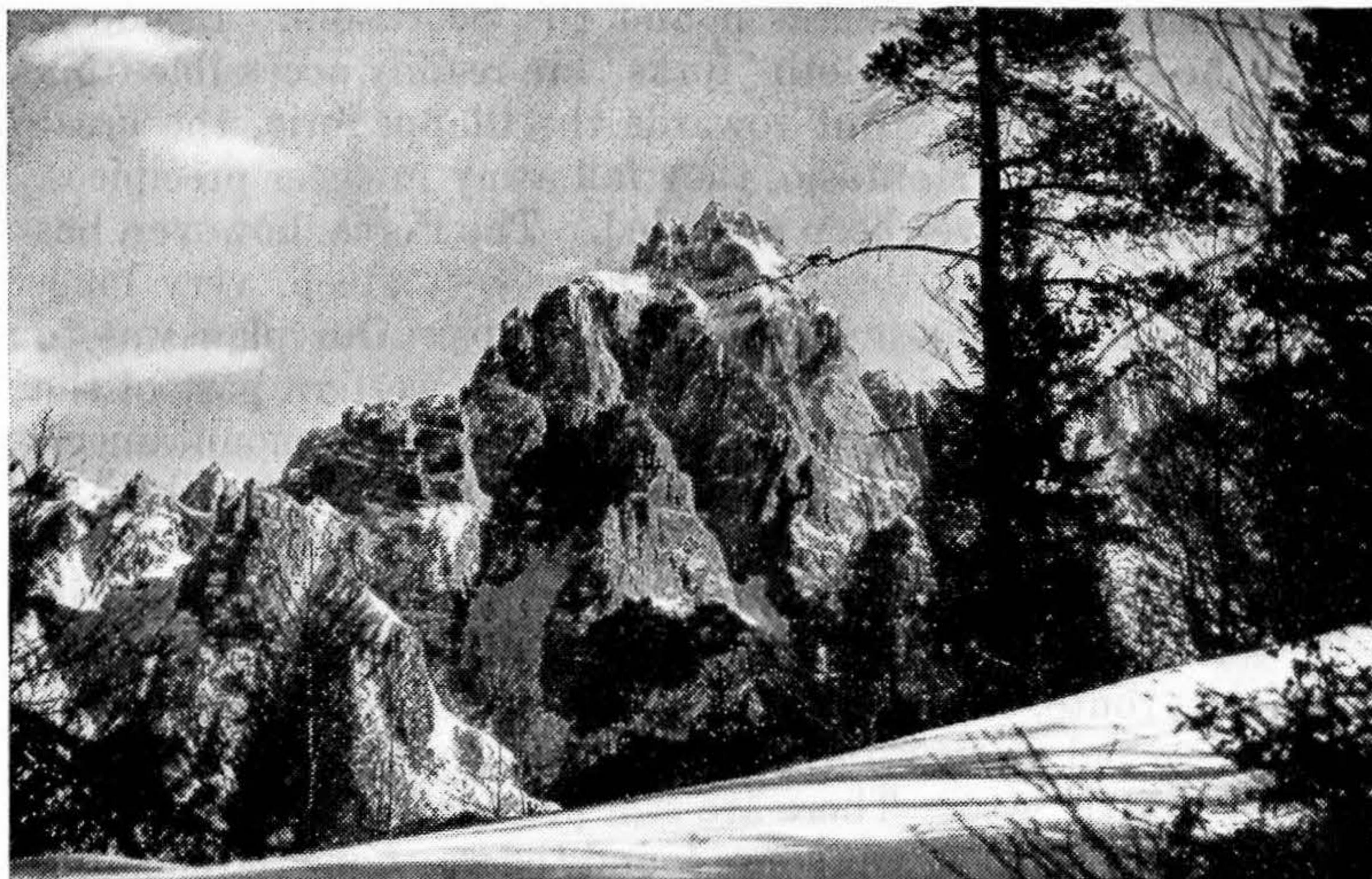
Photo, Britighelli.]

N. FACE OF JÔF DI MONTASIO.

[*To face p. 78.*

We had a six days' tour behind us when we entered the Valley of Raccolana at dusk on July 15, 1929. We were going up Jôf di Montasio, and intended to spend the night at Pian. About 10 p.m. we stopped, very tired, outside the 'Kanin' Inn. There was a light in the house, but the door was locked. We knocked, we called, we banged. No effect : no one answered : dead silence within.

Nonplussed, we turned uphill to where the two villages, Pian-di-quà and Pian-di-là, lie on the slope of Pecòl. We



JÔF DI MONTASIO SEEN FROM DOGNA (DONJE).

knocked and called, but not a door opened. We had slept in the open for four nights running, but that had been high up in the mountains. We never dreamt of having to bivouac in the valley ! When it was nearly midnight we realized that we had drawn blank at Pian. We turned our backs upon the villages and lay down to rest in a field—a potato field, I think it was.

In the morning we bade farewell to Raccolana and went uphill by the well-made path. We walked slowly, because the sun blazed pitilessly down upon our enormous packs. We reached the top of Pecòl (1516 m.). A kindly shepherd—not from Raccolana, of course, but from Gemona—told us why the good folk of Pian did not care for visitors. When we told him where we meant to climb (Forca dei Distèis and Clappadorie gorge) he implored us not to attempt it : life was too precious.

He told us of horrible accidents in the mountains, and in every sentence assured us that he had been an *Alpino* for seven years and knew the mountains from end to end ; but that he had never seen anything to equal the terrors in store for us. When we nevertheless bade him farewell, he assured us that we were welcome to his cabin at any hour, if so be we should change our minds.

Slowly we crossed the plateau below Montasch. Within an hour and a half we had reached the Forca dei Distèis, known in Slovène as the Škrbina v Strmali (2172 m.).³ The Forca lies south between Montasch and the Scortisoni. Beside it rises the Forca Alta. Both 'forks' are readily accessible from the Pecòl pastures. But towards the Clappadorie, the great ravine of the Rio Montasio, they fall away in sheer precipices. The *ravine* has never been ascended. The Forca, however, has been climbed three times by a gully, very steep, very long, and one of the largest in the Julian Alps. Our plan was to make the first descent. The whole of the western part of the Montasch is mysterious and grand. The Trieste mountaineer, Hesse, had warned us of the great difficulties we were likely to encounter.

Our idea was to descend from the Forca into the Clappadorie. We left our packs at the Forca and went up Montasch by the ordinary route. The sky had clouded over towards evening, and so we had no view. Only to the west, towards Dogna, could we see a little way. There are still plenty of reminders of the World War on Montasch, so we found the way none too cheerful. As we topped the ridge our shadows acquired haloes such as the saints are shown with in pictures—just round our heads, in beautiful bright rainbow colours. I felt quite proud of mine. What a pity we had to leave our aureoles behind on the Montasch ridge !

To the left of the Forca we bivouacked so comfortably that we slept till daylight and got well rested, although this was our sixth successive night in the open. We had light sleeping-bags, so that we did not feel the cold. At 5 A.M. (July 17, 1929) we shouldered our packs and climbed into the gully. Our luggage was heavier than before, because it now included our hobnailed boots. After the very first few metres we saw that we had to let our unfortunate packs down by the rope. Climbing in the upper part of the gully was easy enough down to the narrow waterworn cleft which is at first perpendicular,

³ 2152 m. ; no name on *I. map*.

then turns into an overhang and finally disappears. To the left of this crack lies exposed rock, unpleasantly brittle, but we preferred it to a descent by the rope across the overhang. Farther down were scaly slabs, pink in colour, with water trickling over them. These proved very tiresome, because they break away at a touch, and yet they are all the support there is. The angle is about 50° . Below the slabs came a sheer drop. We had to be very careful, because one's movements are never so free or springy in a descent as when climbing up. Most tiresome of all we found the transport of our packs, which we could let down only for short steps at a time. We were thankful when we had passed those slabs. Hesse told us afterwards that they were the most difficult part of the ascent.

The gully narrowed greatly towards the lower end. To the right rose the wall constituting the S.W. face of Montasch, towering above us, bulging, black and water-worn. The left-hand wall is the face of Scortisoni, as the gully inclines westward—in descending, of course.

At the bottom of the gully the walls meet, forming an enormous inclined chimney. Through the rift we saw the sunny slopes of Jôf di Miez (1974 m.⁴), and flattered ourselves that we should soon come to the end of the gully—had we not climbed for 6 hrs. now without a rest? The water, a mere trickle higher up, had grown into a respectable torrent by now. We climbed quickly, sure that we were near the base of the gully and therewith of our climb. Before us was a small shelf shutting out the view. We hurried on, anxious to see the end of our troubles.

The shepherd on Pecòl had told us that a glimpse into the Clappadorie from the Forca dei Distèis was enough to make one's hair stand on end. The sight from the edge of our gully did not make our hair stand on end, but it made us feel hot all over. Dumbfounded, we gazed upon the magnificent Alpine scene before us, so wildly romantic that we fairly held our breath. The dark, sheer walls of the gully form a **V**. Down at the base, over a water-worn step, leapt the water, crystal-clear, forming a little pool down below, transparent as glass. From that pool the water rushed on over a clean-cut edge and vanished into an abyss. Neither to the right nor to the left of it was there the slightest possibility of a way down.

⁴ 1975 m., *I. map.*

In despair I looked at my comrade, who was gloomily contemplating the impassable walls of the gully. For a long time we considered the situation and then came to the only possible conclusion : Back ! We could not get past the waterfall, nor out either to the left or right. We had to return to some point higher up, and there find a way across one or other of the walls of the gully.

I suggested to my companion that after 6 hours of arduous climbing we might as well take a short rest and a little food. But Deržaj replied that a mouse in a trap doesn't fancy bacon—in other words, that he would not eat until we had made sure whether we could get out of the gully or would have to climb all the way back to the Forca. In feverish haste we climbed upwards, and after about 250 to 300 ft. noticed a narrow ledge leading across the S.W. face of Montasch (*i.e.* the true right-hand wall of the gully), right up and round the western edge of the face. On that side the wall drops straight into the Clappadorie from the pinnacle known as the *Sphinx*.

The sun stood above the ridge of Jôf di Miez, and shone upon that ledge. To us it seemed a path back into life. Down in the gully, beside that transparent pool below and that lovely waterfall, lurked disaster. Uncertainty would not let us pause. We tackled the traverse, which indeed (as we learned later on) is the only entrance—the exit, for us—of the gully. Traversing with our large packs was most awkward. The ledge was too narrow and too much tilted outwards for us to push them along, while above it the rock bulges. Feeling for good holds in the overhang we picked our way along the outer edge of the shelf, while our packs appeared to yearn for the gully below. After some 70 ft. of this the ledge rose to a small promontory, whence we could overlook the western crags of Montasch.

We knew that the Trieste mountaineers had ascended the W. face of Montasch, in the direction of the second 'Y,' a bare fortnight ago. Only we had no idea of how they had got on to the wall. We were equally ignorant regarding the 'Dogna' route up Montasch, and the result was a first ascent—or descent—which was not in our programme.

From the promontory we followed an easy chimney and some good rocks ; below that, we came to the wide terrace of shale extending right along the foot of the Montasch face above the Clappadorie and giving access to the wall. But, of course, we did not know that. On that terrace we found the spot where the Triestines had bivouacked. We found water nearby, and

had a rest beside it. Convinced that we should reach the valley—and in it some human habitation—before nightfall, we shared the last of our provisions. After half an hour's rest, at about 2 P.M. we turned to the right along the terrace and presently got among dwarf pine. After that our terrace turned sharply upwards. We stopped and considered. We consulted our map (1 : 50,000), and saw a foot-track indicated as leading down the Clappadorie.⁵ This convinced us that the Triestines had come up through the Clappadorie, scaled the face below the shale bank, and then bivouacked. The crags below the bank fall sheer into the Clappadorie, some 1000 to 1200 ft. farther down.

We returned to the site of the bivouac and there found a very doubtful way of descent into the ravine. For the first half of the way we could see a passable route, the second we could not overlook. From the formation of the strata we concluded that there must be abrupt and lofty steps below. We resumed our climbing-shoes. From the bivouac we climbed to the left along a steeply-inclined chimney on open rock, with pines growing from the cracks, and so reached a promontory. Deržaj went to the very edge and reported that below us was a chimney, very rotten rock, but still—a chimney. Well, that was the chief thing in our present position. Heaven alone knows how many stones hurtled down from that chimney into the abyss ! We climbed both at a time, stemming down only a few feet apart. The actual climbing was not too hard, but all the greater was the peril from falling stones. Accordingly, we did not rope. Our packs we let down ahead of us. That chimney is about 130 ft. in length ; it grows wider at the bottom and then ends in a bulging step. There we found a convenient ledge to the left, and by that we descended easily to the head of the Clappadorie Valley. It is a stony hollow, enclosed by the crags of Forca dei Distèis, Scortisoni,⁶ and Montasch. Probably no human eye had so far beheld it otherwise than from above. They call it *L'Inferno*.

As we stepped upon the stone floor of the Inferno we shouted for joy. Surely this was the end of our climb. But this was the second time we were so convinced, and things often go by threes ! The booming of the waterfall in the hollow we greeted with feelings differing widely from those with which we had beheld its source, beside which we had stood some hours ago

⁵ The 1 : 100,000 map marks no track.

⁶ ? Curtissón, 2240 m., *I. map*.

with gloomy faces. We had circumvented it, after all, in the face of all probability. We no longer felt hunger nor weariness. Down the scree we ran alongside of the young Rio Montasio, so as to get down into the valley as soon as possible. But that was not such a simple matter. We scrambled over wet rocks, picking our way between scattered boulders. From the centre of that forbidding hollow rises a small green hillock, covered with wild rhododendron and gentian, so that it resembles a gay carpet spread out upon the white barrenness of the hollow. The carpet was soft and our weary feet felt refreshed as they stepped upon it. But this respite lasted barely for 100 yards. Again we wormed our way between boulders till we came to the first snowfield. Although it was July, the ravine was still full of snow. The old snow was everywhere undermined, while the great rifts, gaping between it and the rocks on either side, we had to cross and recross as best we could. The first snowfield was divided down the middle by a stony ridge, so crumbly that we had to work our way down very cautiously on our stomachs, relying on the friction of our clothes for hold. At last the snow closed over the ridge and we could take to it again.

The ravine, shut in between dark, sheer walls, became narrower and more gloomy. We marvelled that nowhere could we find traces of that foot-track so clearly marked on the map. The horrible truth had not yet dawned on us. So we scrambled down for 2 hours and then came to the edge of a waterfall that dropped about 30 ft. sheer into a jolly little green pool with an islet below.

We were extremely hungry and tired, and in such conditions a bath in water with a temperature but little above freezing-point was anything but inviting. But there was no help for it. Once more we got out the spare-rope tackle, drove in a piton, made a noose, and heroically plunged down the fall. I went first. The water roared in my ears, blinding and deafening me. I tried to steady myself against the rock, but it was slippery and moss-grown, so I gave it up and simply went down the waterfall by the rope till I felt solid ground beneath my feet; unfortunately this was not before I was ankle-deep in the pool. With a jump I gained the shore. Our packs followed me dry along the taut rope. Deržaj came last. Being taller than I, he reached the pool a little sooner, but quite as wet. As we stood there below the waterfall, wet to the skin, we realized at last that no human being before ourselves had ever stood in this enchanted vale of Clappadorie. Those other parties who had climbed the Forca dei Distèis must have made

their way to the wall by the shale bank after all. That this was so, we learned afterwards from Dr. Kugy.

Were we trapped again? We could not afford to neglect even the least likely of exits from the ravine, and this would have to be to right or left over one or other of the walls. Up till now we had met with no insuperable obstacles on our way down; yet nobody had ever ascended so far. Logical conclusion: the real difficulties which had hitherto protected the ravine against all intrusion must be farther down. We should not reach the Dogna Valley by way of the Clappadorie.

The bounding walls were about 1000 ft. high, black and water-worn as those of a Colorado cañon. Unscalable—we had to try farther down.

The water tumbled down the narrow gorge, forming little pools and cataracts. After that first fall we always contrived to find dry footing on one or other of the banks, but really we were so wet that we could get no wetter, and scrambling along, half in and half out of the water, had ceased to worry us.

The Jôf di Miez sends down a steep gully (marked on the 1 : 50,000 map) into the Clappadorie. The Miez measures 1974 m.,⁷ and the altitude of the ravine at that point might be about 1200 m., or only 700 m. difference. It is a stiff, though surely possible climb, but almost a day's programme in itself. In our condition at the time a terrible task, to be faced only as a very last resort.

For some little way the snow facilitated our progress. After that the Rio Montasio and its water-worn banks had it all their own way again. A little 20-ft. waterfall drenched us once more to the skin. We could not avoid it. Directly below, framed in the walls of the ravine which had rounded its last bend, we caught sight of the friendly houses of the little village of Implanz,⁸ scarcely 2 kilometres away as the crow flies, yet could only guess what difficulties lay between us and it.

At last the left bank of the Montasio—in other words, the eastern face of Jôf di Miez—became less sheer. Broken ledges and shelves appeared, tending towards the N. ridge of the mountain. Just beyond the last bend of the Clappadorie this ridge sends down a steep scree right into the ravine; scarcely 500 ft. to climb—here lay safety! On the ridge we saw dwarf pine and larch, whereas down in the ravine there were doubtless more and larger waterfalls and impassable banks. That is why the ravine has never been climbed from below and the

⁷ 1975 m., *I. map.*

⁸ ? Splans, *I. map.*

Clappadorie has become the mystery valley of the Julian Alps.

We felt so happy and relieved that in our joy we forgot to fill our water-flasks. All day long we had kept our hunger at bay with water, and now it had become a vital necessity. Our throats were parched, but even that we forgot in the prospect of reaching the valley within a very few hours. We climbed as fast as we could, so as to reach easy ground before dark. Soon we were on the ridge and immediately swallowed up in thickets of dwarf pine. We worried our way downhill, fell and picked ourselves up again. Suddenly the ground fell away beneath our feet. We had reached a drop, scarcely 200 ft. above the hay barns of Montasch. Under ordinary circumstances one could easily have negotiated that with the rope, but in our condition at the time we could not think of attempting it. We could scarcely stand. Greatly depressed, we turned uphill again and traversed towards Clapblanc (1662 m.).⁹ According to the map, there ought to be a gully between it and Miez. Surely we might get down by that. But night overtook us before we reached the gully. We were in awkward scrub-covered ground. A ledge, one metre wide, invited us to our seventh bivouac. We felt it beforehand in every bone !

Thirst tormented us, burning and unquenchable, since our flasks were empty. Dog-weary we lay down, some moderately dry things from our packs next to our skins, the wet ones outside, and fell asleep at once from sheer exhaustion. Deržaj drove in a piton, which saved me from falling off the ledge during the night. I tried to stretch my legs in my sleep, with the result that the upper half of my body hung over the precipice, with the rest prepared to follow. Fortunately, my movements had waked up Deržaj, who dragged me back to safety with a strong hand and none too gently. Only then did I wake up ! It was 3 A.M. : we massaged our aching muscles. We felt as if made of wood. At 4 A.M. on July 18 we left our bivouac.

Wearily we made our way to the gully, only to find it wet and very steep, so we went on to the slope of Clapblanc. There we got into a real proper wood, where we found strawberries, red strawberries ! I think we should have eaten them if every berry had been guarded by a *carabiniere* ! We ate and ate, and forgot our troubles in the bit of strength we obtained from that

⁹ Clapblanchs, *I. map.*

meal. Soon afterwards we found a hunter's trail and by that we got down at last to the Stavoli del Montasio (Montasch hayfields). Our climb down the largest and grandest of the ravines of the Julian Alps was over.

In the hayfields we were told that we should have to go on for another half-hour before we could get anything to eat. Suddenly our patience was exhausted. Indignant obstinacy proved stronger than hunger. We crossed the hayfields of Rive de Clade (902 m.), walked up the endless zigzags of the Somdogna Saddle (1405 m.),¹⁰ and finally strode along the



SEISERA VALLEY, WISCHBERG AND MONTASIO.

high-road right down to Wolfsbach in Carniola,¹¹ where we were warmly welcomed by Dr. Kugy. It was he who told us that the Clappadorie had never been traversed before.

Clappadorie, the glen of mystery and legend, has been penetrated. Perhaps these lines will prompt some reader to make the ascent of that gloomy ravine from the very foot up to the valley-head of the *Inferno*. It is shut in by the gigantic walls of Miez, Scortisoni, Forca Alta, Forca dei Distèis, and Montasch. It has no equal in the Julian Alps. The little flower-decked

¹⁰ 1398 m., *I. map.*

¹¹ i.e. down the Seisera glen; Wolfsbach lies about 3 miles S.W. of Saifnitz, which is situated on the watershed between the Adriatic and the Black Sea, and on the Pontebba-Villach Railway.—*Editor.*

mound in the centre softens its splendid desolation. The hunters, looking down from the heights into this chasm, call it *L'Inferno*—dark and mysterious in its apparent inaccessibility.

【A description of the various routes up Jôf di Montasio will be found in 'R.M.' L. pp. 723–35. We must express our warm thanks to Madame Debelak for her interesting narrative, as well as to Mrs. Copeland for translating the same. 'The Alps are not nearly exhausted'!—*Editor, 'A.J.'*】

MOUNTAINS OF THE MOON.

BY E. E. SHIPTON.

WHETHER Ruwenzori, Kenya, Kilimanjaro or the group of volcanoes of Kivu are Ptolemy's 'Mountains of the Moon,' still appear to be matters of doubt. Nor is it of great importance, as the ancient tradition of the Nile rising in a system of lakes fed by snow mountains, though true, seems to have been more in the nature of a lucky guess than a result of actual geographical observation. However, as Ruwenzori alone fulfils the ancient tradition, it has come to be labelled with that romantic title. Its mystery, invisibility and remoteness, surrounded as it is by thousands of miles of tropical swamp and vegetation, and the fact that, unlike its rivals, it is a *range* of non-volcanic mountains, perhaps make it the more worthy of the distinction. The origin of the appellation Ruwenzori is very doubtful, and it is not used by any local natives as a name for the mountain range.

Nevertheless, it is remarkable that the ancients should have believed in the existence of these snow mountains, as it was not until 1888, some thirty years after the discovery of the Victoria Nile by Speke, that Stanley discovered the existence of snow mountains in Central Africa; this despite the fact that a great many explorers had been travelling for a number of years in the neighbourhood of the range, and Stanley had himself camped for many months at its foot without so much as suspecting the existence of vast glacier-covered mountains. To those who have experienced Ruwenzori weather, this is not very surprising!

During the next eighteen years various attempts were made to penetrate to the glaciers, but it was not until 1906 that a