

THE EASTERN CARPATHIANS. By LESLIE STEPHEN, M.A.,  
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THE audience whom I have the honour to address are of course perfectly familiar with the geography of the Carpathians. I hope, however, that they will pardon me if, for the benefit of the numerous body of intelligent readers who study the interesting journal in which these remarks are destined to be embodied, I venture to recall one or two facts already known to them.

One portion of the Carpathian chain forms a great semicircle sweeping round the north of the Hungarian plain, much as the Alps sweep round the plain of Lombardy. The western horn of this arc rests upon the Danube at Presburg, the eastern upon the north east corner of Transylvania. Transylvania itself is an irregular square. The sides are formed by the continuation of the Carpathian chain, which thus returns upon itself, whilst the interior of the province is chiefly occupied by long spurs descending from the frontier wall of hills. The highest point in the whole Carpathian range is the Lomnitzer Spitz, a little over 8,000 feet in height, nearly at the centre of the great semicircular arc. Mr. Paget, in his work on Hungary, calls this the most beautiful mountain which he had ever seen. He incidentally mentions, a few pages earlier, that he had never seen any mountains before reaching Hungary—a circumstance which somewhat detracts from the value of his testimony. It is, however, inhabited by bears and chamois, and is the only granite peak in the chain, which is something in its favour. On the other hand, we were told that it might be ascended without danger, from which I am I think justified in inferring that it is probably possible to ascend it on a pony, if not with a four-in-hand. I would recommend, however, some zealous member of the club to investigate it for himself. A railway journey from Pesth will take him to within a day's march from a place called Bad Schmöcks. Here he will find civilization, a very interesting population, and a little-known mountain district, to which Schmöcks is the Chamouni. It was always mentioned to us as the 'Sogenannte Csips.' Why the epithet was prefixed I cannot say.

The eastern half of the semicircle, reaching from the Lomnitzer Spitz to Transylvania, gradually sinks into lower hills covered by enormous forests, only traversed, so far as I could hear, by smugglers across the Austrian frontier.

Of these mountains I can only speak from hearsay. The Carpathians, which I am about to describe, are those which form a kind of ring-fence round Transylvania. On the northern and western frontier they never rise above the dignity of hills. The western hill district includes indeed some points of interest. It is the California of Austria, where there are still profitable gold mines and many very curious traces of the old Roman mining works. The show place of the district is a hill called the Detonata—a great mass rising from the summit of a lower down, and formed of basaltic columns like those of Staffa. From their curve they somewhat resemble the ribs of a stranded ship, and I had some thoughts of starting a new theory, in confirmation of the scriptures, reposing upon the probable hypothesis that the Detonata is nothing more than Noah's Ark petrified.

The principal interest, however, for mountaineers will be found on the eastern and southern sides of the quadrilateral. The southern side includes three principal masses, between which the rivers escape from the interior on their way to the Danube. The most easterly of these, known as the Fogarascher range, culminates in the Bucses\* (8178 English feet), of which I shall have more to say presently. The most westerly culminates in the Retyezat (8115 feet) which rises above the Hatseger Thal, famed as the most beautiful valley in Transylvania. We were unluckily prevented from seeing it, but it is said to be well worth visiting—amongst other things with a view to chamois. The central mass culminates in the Negoï (8278 feet). We contemplated this mountain from the little town of Hermannstadt in company with an energetic German bookseller named Krabs, and from his explanations we gained our first notions of the difficulties of Transylvanian mountaineering. The base of the mountain is three hours' drive from Hermannstadt. Krabs assured us that the ascent would take three days. The first would be occupied in reaching the mountain, procuring guides, and ascending to a point where we could sleep out. In the second we should reach the summit, and descend to our sleeping-place, and on the third we might hope to return to Hermannstadt.

The principal danger, as he told us, to be anticipated, was from the attacks of the sheep-dogs. These animals scent the traveller from an incredible distance, and rushing upon him

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\* I have taken the heights mentioned from a map of Transylvania by Franz Fischer, Hermannstadt, 1860, which is clear and convenient for travelling purposes.

with appalling cries, tear him, or at least his clothes, in pieces. My own subsequent experience went to show that Transylvanian sheep-dogs are the veriest curs that ever ran away from a fictitious stone; but as such ferocious beings may possibly exist somewhere, I will communicate to the club the remedy which he described as infallible. No one should venture, he said, upon these mountains without a good supply of fireworks—squibs and crackers, I presume, for the dogs, and rockets for the wolves.

Bad weather, however, prevented us from attacking the highest peaks of the Fogarascher mountains. Our first serious expedition was therefore directed against a mountain on the eastern frontier. A few days after our failure at Hermannstadt Bryce and I were crossing a ridge of hills covered with the dense forest which clothes all the eastern ranges in what is known as the Szeklerland. An open glade on the summit enabled us suddenly to catch a glimpse of a mountain due east, near the Moldavian frontier. The hills amongst which we were wandering had few more distinctive features than the South Downs, although some of them, *e.g.* the great Kelemen, rise to between 6,000 and 7,000 feet. They are covered for miles with monotonous pine forest, above which the loftier ridges swell in long grassy downs. We were therefore delighted to catch sight of a mountain, flanked by real precipices and with something like a genuine rocky peak. We simultaneously exclaimed, 'That's the mountain for us!' As our companions, with one doubtful exception, spoke nothing but Hungarian, we were unable at the time to identify the mountain which had excited our admiration. The same evening, however, we reached a curious little bathing-place called Borszek, celebrated for mineral water resembling that of Selters. It consists of a number of wooden shanties, clustering round an inn (in one of the beds of which I may remark that Bryce slew thirty-five fleas whilst we were getting up next morning), and inhabited by a motley population of Magyars, Germans, Poles, Wallacks, and Moldavians. We immediately became great centres of attraction, and a kind of informal committee, composed of the chief frequenters of the coffee-room, undertook a searching investigation of our plans. From them we learnt that the name of our mountain was Csalho, and that it was beyond the Moldavian frontier. The frontier line, I may remark, crosses the stream which descends from Borszek a few miles down the valley at a place called Tolgyesch. So far as Tolgyesch there was no difficulty, but there was the widest divergence of opinion as to our probable fate after

entering Moldavia. A Hungarian count recommended us to sleep at Tolgyesch. A more sanguine Wallack thought that we might do the whole affair by leaving Borszek after breakfast and returning for supper. A Moldavian, who professed the most intimate knowledge of the district, told us that it was at least a day's drive to the foot of the mountain, and that another would be required for the ascent. We resolved at any rate to make a start, on the afternoon of Sunday, August 26th. A Moldavian boyard gave us a letter of introduction to a friend who lived near the mountain. The bath director gave us letters to the quarantine director at Tolgyesch, and to a Pole who enjoyed the office of forester. We started amidst most affectionate farewell speeches from our new friends, of which the most appropriate was pronounced by a stout hearty little German, who pathetically implored us with many repetitions, to beware of robbers, but especially to beware of '*Illusionen*.' I assured him that we were old enough mountaineers to be pretty well accustomed to illusions; but I confess that I was scarcely prepared for the universal atmosphere of illusion which distorts and perplexes every fact as to time and distance in these beautiful regions. And so we started on our somewhat vague search for a Moldavian mountain, jammed into a bundle of hay which filled the bottom of a springless peasant-cart. It is enough to say of these carts, that they jolt so unmercifully that you may consider yourself to have made a very good shot when on attempting to put your pipe into your mouth you stick it into your eye. I will not go through our troubles at the rambling village of Tolgyesch—a straggling lane of wooden houses in a valley enclosed by forest-clad and bear-haunted hills—further than to say that we were driven an hour out of our way from our total incapacity to speak a word to our driver, and that we were received with the utmost kindness by the two officials to whom our letters were addressed. Next morning we started at eight o'clock, two hours after the time upon which we had agreed,—an approximation to punctuality very unusual so far east. Being still unused to the ways of the country, we were unreasonable enough to be a little put out at the delay. We did not venture to express our feelings to its magnificent cause—the Polish forester—who condescended with great good nature to act as our guide. He was a fine looking man, with a jaunty air, in a smart Hungarian costume, tight pantaloons, and Hessian boots, well adapted to set off a good pair of legs, but not particularly suitable for mountaineering. He was followed by a Wallack peasant with sandalled feet, legs swaddled in ragged bandages, coarse homespun shirt,

secured by a broad leathern belt, a sheepskin cloak, a vast wideawake, and wild black locks floating over his shoulders. This gentleman was supposed to be familiar with all the intricacies of our route. We packed ourselves into the peasant's cart, whose five occupants spoke four different languages entirely unrelated to each other. We were armed with a rifle, a double-barrelled gun, and a pistol, with a view to certain robbers, with whose exploits we had already been frequently entertained.

The Austrian empire may deserve all that is said against it but it also deserves one negative piece of praise, namely that the roads in Moldavia are infinitely worse than those in Austria. As soon as we had crossed the frontier the roads degenerated into mere tracks. Sometimes they crossed the torrent, and sometimes amicably shared its bed. We had to wander vaguely across swampy meadows, or were brought up sharply at the edge of a gaping chasm, where the stream had suddenly cut a deep trench through the former track. I have never seen any more hopelessly poverty-stricken district: the country was naturally beautiful, being a broad rich valley bottom, between picturesque hills, but an infectious melancholy seemed to brood over it; there were a few miserable cottages at intervals, whose inhabitants apparently cultivated some wretched fields of stunted maize, and kept a few curly yellow pigs. It was a feast day—every other day in these parts being apparently a feast of the Greek Church. Such of the inhabitants as we met were consequently lounging about in bright coloured though filthy garments. About one-third of them seemed to be priests, at least equally dirty, though not so brightly dressed as their flock. It made one quite unhappy to think that so fine a country was given up to anarchy, superstition, filth, and cruel poverty. Our horses having a tolerably heavy load behind them could rarely be coaxed into a languid trot along the detestable roads: it was already twelve o'clock when looking up a lateral valley we caught sight once more of the cliffs of Csalho, looking at us (to compare small things with great) much as the Balfrin looks down upon the traveller who has descended the Rhone valley to Visp. We turned up this lateral valley and entered a scene more miserable, if possible, than that which we had left. The road at its best was like the worst of English country lanes, with high round boulders inserted in it like plums in a pudding; at its worst, that is for about three miles in four, it served also as the bed of the stream. Everything else, fields and cottages and natives, fell off in the same proportion as the road. The

hospitable boyard was supposed to live in this neighbourhood, but we saw nothing of him or his house. To lighten the cart, and to get on a little faster, I descended and walked on ahead, Bryce and the Pole rattling, bumping and jolting slowly along in my rear. A party of peasants whom I met regarded me with a vacant stare of indifference, as if it had been an everyday matter for them to meet in the wilds of Moldavia a gentleman dressed in the first style of London fashion. The whole thing seemed uncanny and dreamlike, as if I had been suddenly dropped back into the middle ages. The impression was increased by a curious sight. The road led through a narrow gorge between two forests; suddenly I came upon a little glade of open park-like ground sprinkled with graceful birch trees; behind it rose the great mass of Csalho, his lower slopes covered with pines, whilst above the cliffs rose in picturesque pinnacles of bright white rocks. On the edge of the forest at the foot of the mountain was a little Greek convent, in a position which came up to the highest ideal of monastic seclusion from the world. The buildings consisted of perhaps twenty log huts placed so as to form a little quadrangle. In the centre of this was the chapel, whose three quaint cupolas appeared above the outer buildings. The chapel itself was adorned with paintings, in the traditional Greek style, principally elaborate representations of the tortures of the damned, and was exhibited to us with great pride by the monks. If any one is smitten with a desire for union with the Greek Church, or is anxious to restore the devout mediæval life, he cannot do better than retire to this remote and most picturesque spot. There he may be provided with all the dramatic accessories to a life of religious solitude, which he can possibly require. It is fair to add that he must be indifferent to bugs, and unless our informants were unprincipled slanderers, to the company of as ignorant and filthy a set of old thieves and impostors as ever practised upon the credulity of ignorant neighbours. Of this I cannot speak from my own experience. The chief monk I saw was a tall old man with a white beard, whose sole garment appeared to be a long brown sackcloth article resembling a night-shirt made of an old coal sack, and never washed; I daresay that he would have looked well in the foreground of a landscape, especially as his odour could not be represented. He chuckled over the pictures of the damned, about which he had some unintelligible Wallachian joke, and then begged unblushingly for something to drink.

For the present, however, we saw nothing of these gentry. We picnicked on the grass outside the monastery. The Pole

had shown symptoms of a desire to assume that our object would be accomplished by reaching not the summit but the foot of the mountain. Bryce had rejected this notion with proper scorn. During luncheon, however, there appeared from the monastery an unkempt one-garmented lad, who poured forth a stream of Wallachian; we could only guess its general bearing from its lachrymose tone, and from the gradually lengthening countenance of the Pole. The Pole, however, translated some fragments at intervals, from which we discovered that the dirty boy said that we should take four hours to reach a certain hut which itself was about half-way to the top. This I knew to be a lie, but it was hard to convince the Pole that I knew more about a mountain in Moldavia than those who dwelt at its foot. When Bryce asserted roundly that we could reach the top of the mountain in an hour he smiled at us with an expression of melancholy contempt. The main staple however of the lying boy's observations concerned certain robbers. The Pole treasured up his remarks and favoured us with them at intervals in the gloomier parts of the wood. From what he told us, it seemed that the robbers consisted of twelve soldiers who had deserted with their rifles, and who were supposed to be wandering in the woods. The lying boy asserted that they had been seen that very day, and further informed us that if we were caught we should be stripped naked and thrashed. I knew from long experience that one or more liars of this kind lives at the foot of every mountain, as in moral stories we are told that flatterers are to be found at the court of every human monarch. Still the story was so circumstantial that it made me rather uncomfortable, especially as Bryce and I had all our money about us. It was therefore in a rather gloomy frame of mind that our little procession left the monastery at 2.47 P.M., and entered the depths of the forest. The Pole solemnly loaded, capped and distributed the weapons, and warned us to keep close together, an injunction which was rather vexatious, because it involved our keeping to the rate of progression which the Pole himself affected. He informed us that he was suffering from a heart disease, that he could only walk very slowly, and that he wouldn't quicken his pace if the Archduke Albert himself gave him orders. Accordingly we marched at a funereal pace through the forest, pursued for some distance by the lying boy, and after he had left us, depressed by the gloomy discourses of the Pole upon robbers and upon the extreme folly of what he called the English passion of mountain climbing. It was very sultry, and the poor Pole groaned, and sweated, shouted, and apparently cursed us by all his gods. Singularly enough, however,

there must be even in this benighted country some being with a heart accessible to the charms of mountains. An indefinite boyard had actually made a neat path which wound up through the forests for a great distance, and but for which the Pole would, I am certain, not have persevered. The boyard, moreover, had built a little hut (that to which the lying boy had referred as four hours distant, which we reached in an hour's easy stroll) to cover a clear spring of exquisitely cool and refreshing water. A draught of this improved the Pole's spirits. The path led through an open glade where the air was less oppressive, and afterwards became less steep. Encouraged by this, the Pole now asserted that as it was a Saint's day the brigands would probably be drinking in the village, instead of roaming the mountains, which, as the nearest village must have been several miles off, was certainly encouraging. I had, however, become convinced that these brigands must be more or less mythical. Bryce and I had been so far influenced by the lying boy as to think that we might possibly be doing a very foolish action. However the absurdity of meeting robbers in a mountain where travellers of any kind are about as rare as bishops on Mont Blanc, gradually became so obvious that we resolved to disregard their possible existence. Accordingly on reaching a point where a great shoulder of the mountain first lifts itself above the forest, Bryce and I pushed on, leaving the Pole and the Wallack to follow as fast as a heart disease and a pair of Hungarian tights would permit. Just as we topped the ridge, our eyes were delighted by the sight of a bunch of edelweiss, which I stuck in my hat by the side of some gathered on the Riffel. Directly afterwards, on our turning a corner a magnificent bird soared slowly in a huge circle just above our heads. I unhesitatingly asserted that he was a *lämmergeier*, and although my assertion was inaccurate, it gave me and Bryce a great deal of pleasure at the time; he was in fact one of the large vultures which are very common in the Carpathians. We were thus in a truly Alpine region, though the form of the great grassy ridge where sheep were pastured earlier in the year was rather disappointing. The rocks which had struck us from below turned out to be masses of white crumbling conglomerate, which formed singular obelisks and walls, but nothing really grand in the way of cliffs. We pushed rapidly onwards and reached the summit with no more difficulty than we should have found in climbing Helvellyn, at 5.7 o'clock. A curious wooden erection on the summit showed that some human being had been there before us, and that he had probably even a scientific turn of mind.

I have been frequently and as I think most unjustly criticized for not inserting poetical passages into my descriptions of mountain scenery. I fear that the club would hardly find such poetry as mine much to their taste; but as the reproach has been made by those for whose opinion I have a high respect, I will attempt on the present occasion to give a specimen of my powers in the department of flowery prose.

The Carpathians closed our view to the west, running north and south in a mighty purple wall. Far above its parapet huge masses of vapour were floating towards us and over us on the wings of a steady-blowing east wind. Where Kelemen lifted his ponderous bulk above his neighbours, they gathered in gloomy wreaths about his brow; elsewhere they formed a wide-spread canopy over a thousand leagues of forest, down, and champaign, pierced through innumerable rents by sickly gleams of sunshine.

No view is more cheerful than that of a wide country chequered by sunshine and flying shadows of cloud. But here the demon of desolation had taken up his abode. Profound melancholy seemed to haunt the hollows of the mountain ridges. Deep pine forests, desolate clearings, spotted with dead trunks of pines that must have committed suicide, long undulating ridges of deserted pasturage, all breathed the very spirit of sadness, from where the forces of the earth had heaved the Carpathian wall highest into mid-air to where the last faint undulations died away in the shadowy plain. A solitary cottage or two, a few wretched fields, and the little convent at our feet, spoke of human life struggling feebly against the gigantic oppressions of nature, and all but stamped out in the struggle. The wolf whose tracks we had marked, the vulture soaring overhead, and the bears whom we knew to be prowling in the secret recesses of the forest, were more in harmony with the country, and their presence was less depressing to the imagination than the miserable human beings, whose labours and even whose own persons seemed to be marked with a curse. The 'still sad music' of the scenery varied only so far as it struck the melancholy notes of utter wildness, or awoke the more depressing melancholy of human degradation. Far away, beyond the utmost gorges of the hills, the broad Moldavian plains stood half revealed through the haze; to us they were but a faint blue mist, with delicate changes in hue where a forest darkened them or a river gleamed feebly across them, fading gradually from the edge of the dreary highlands till they mingled imperceptibly with the shadowy cloudbanks of the horizon. Pine forest and clearing, hill and valley, plain

and cloud, melted strangely into each other, under the sober light of the clouded heavens, as though the sun was gradually growing sick and the universe being veiled in the unutterable sadness of an eternal twilight. The huge circle of country swept by our vision, unrelieved by one bright colour, and all toned down to the faint aerial tint which characterizes vast mountain panoramas, produced an effect more impressive, though unpleasantly impressive, than I have often felt in the sublimest Alps. Something of the same might be imagined in Monte Rosa, if the contrast between rich Italy and the barren snowfields were lowered in its force by laying waste the plains of Lombardy, and spreading pine forest and pasture over the Alpine snowfields. The intensity of the impression was increased by the monotony, though the dramatic effect was lost.

‘What is that stream of water, far across the plain?’ asked Bryce.

‘That,’ I said, ‘is the Black Sea.’

‘Of course it is; I was about to say so,’ was the reply; and as Bryce and I regarded each other steadily, a barely perceptible closing of our left eyelids might be observed. I therefore may inform the Alpine Club that from the heights of Csalho I have seen the Black Sea and possibly the Crimea. I leave it to the envious to suggest that the water may have been the river Pruth.

After a stay of a quarter of an hour, we descended the mountain, and before long met the Pole and the Wallack, who were calmly strolling after us. We assumed without difficulty that they did not wish to complete the ascent, and before reaching the bottom they had, according to the usual custom, become fully convinced that they had really been to the top; the Pole was already in the state of high spirits appropriate to a successful ascent. He now became really anxious to meet the robbers, and declared that three brave men need not be afraid of any number of rogues. The Wallack, he said, would in case of danger throw away his arms and take to his heels, but that we three should disperse the miscreants by our simple appearance. I was not yet quite at ease as to the mythical character of the robbers, and felt, I must confess, a slight uneasiness when I found that all the arms had, during our descent, been entrusted to the Wallack whose courage was thus disparaged, and that he had lagged behind to drink at the fountain. The forest was incredibly thick and dark, and there was so little sign of any clearing that it might have been and perhaps was primæval. But for the path which the

mysterious boyard had caused to be cut through it, we should have found it almost impossible to penetrate the forest at all; if any robbers had heard of our ascent, they might have laid a convenient ambush near our path, have easily dispersed the Wallack and bagged the Pole and Bryce and me with the utmost facility. I was glad when the trees began to open out and we came upon the little park-like meadow in which the convent is placed. Whether there are or are not any robbers except in the imagination of the lying boy, who by the way turned out to be a kind of chorister, acolyte or other ecclesiastical hanger-on of the convent, I shall never know. If there are, I should say that it would be better, so far as pecuniary prospects are concerned, to adopt even the profession of a curate in the Church of England.

We reached the monastery at 6.40 o'clock, and started soon afterwards at an even more funereal pace than before. The ponies in spite of their rest were thoroughly jaded with the morning's exertion, and crept painfully along the apology for a road. It was soon a dark night, which made progress still slower. Bryce and I strolled on in front till the point where we reached the main valley. The cart came up to us about 9 o'clock, and after consuming the remains of our victuals we started for our weary drive up to Tolgyesch. The moon soon rose in unusual splendour. I tried to persuade myself that I was admiring the tender light upon the great bank of forest opposite; I thought of the last moon which I had seen shining on Monte Rosa; I endeavoured to work myself up into some kind of poetical excitement; I smoked innumerable pipes; I tried at intervals to get sleep by all the most approved expedients; and at last I resigned myself to the enjoyment of such pleasure as can be derived from dogged ill-humour. The poor little ponies dragged us over the detestable roads at about two miles an hour. Every three or four yards a large boulder or a deep rut sent a jolt through the cart which threatened to dislocate every vertebra in my backbone; I felt like that unfortunate prince in the Arabian Nights who was turned into marble below the waist; for half of my body was jammed into the hay and wellnigh frozen, whilst above I swayed violently to and fro in obedience to every impulse which shook and rattled the ribs of our rickety old machine. I was too chilled and miserable to summon up the energy requisite for walking, and my only real pleasure was when we once or twice lost our way in crossing the fields, or bumped through the deeply cut channel of the brook, or came to some other difficulty which had the effect of rousing Bryce and the Pole.

How they managed to sleep I cannot conceive, but they certainly seemed to snatch a few intervals of repose. I could only hope that their dreams were troubled. It gave me a transient gratification also to reflect that the Wallack was all this time sitting bolt upright on the sharp edged back bar of the cart, a position I imagine of intolerable discomfort.

The only interruptions to our weary drive were once, about 1 A.M., when we knocked up a Tyrolese who had set up a saw-mill in these remote parts, and upon whom, though in a semi-torpid condition, the Pole insisted upon discharging an eloquent narrative of our adventures; and once when we had to corrupt the Wallachian officer at the frontier. We persuaded him to let us pass at 2 A.M. contrary to the regulations, in obedience to which the gates are closed till 6; and at 3 A.M. reached Tolgyesch, where we were not sorry to turn the landlord out of our room, and get to decent beds. The next day we took an affectionate farewell of the Pole and of our landlord, who by the way was an Armenian, and after buying sundry bear-skins started in a cart across the hills. The last warning we received was to avoid a particular piece of road, because robbers had been just seen there.

We passed a few days inspecting the curiosities of the Szeklerland, which is a land flowing with carbonic acid gas and sulphuretted hydrogen. A deep crater, surrounded by woods, and called the St. Anna Lake, is the most picturesque object; the most curious, perhaps, is the Büdös, where there is a repetition of the Grotto del Cane; *i.e.* there is a hole in the ground which emits a horrid stench, and where you may get suffocated if you hold your head low enough—which is an interesting spectacle. To omit, however, such non-mountain-eering sights, we found ourselves at the very picturesque old town of Kronstadt, which lies nestled amongst the lower spurs which extend from Bucses. On Sunday morning, September 2nd, we drove over with a large party of hospitable Transylvanians to the old frontier castle of Törzburg. The castle is said to have been built by the Teutonic knights, but is still in perfect order, and presided over by some kind of official who was known to our friends. We joined a pic-nic on Sunday to visit that most detestable of all natural wonders—a cave; and at night the gentlemen had a shakedown in one of the castle garrets, whilst the ladies, children, and babies were entertained below.

Now, on Sunday there arose a difficulty, instructive to the philosophic mind, and which I must therefore explain. Herr von T., the chief of our party, had promised to take

us up the Bucses. But it has been frequently observed that when two races in different stages of civilization are brought into contact, great difficulties are apt to ensue. So, for example, the conflict between the English and Hindoo ideas of landed tenures has produced incessant misunderstandings. In the same way, as I gradually discovered, the English and Hungarian theories as to mountain climbing are radically divergent. To obviate, as far as possible, future misconceptions, I will endeavour to explain their characteristic differences. The English mountaineer holds that the problem before him is not fully solved until he has discovered the shortest practicable route to the summit, and though he does not, as certain maligners have said, think it right to climb against time, he yet takes a pardonable pleasure in a rapid ascent. The Hungarian, on the other hand, has a glorious indifference to all considerations of time. He has no objection to go a mile round to avoid such a slope as that of Holborn Hill. He cares very little about the precise summit, and looks upon the whole performance much as a Roman Catholic looks upon a pilgrimage. There are a certain number of stations to be visited, of which the top may or may not be one. Any amount of time may be spent on the excursion, and if possible, it must be done on horseback.

By the ascent of Bucses, Bryce and I understood going to the top and back by the shortest route, which we calculated, and rightly, would take nine or ten hours. Herr von T. by what he called the '*Bucses partie*,' understood a ramble of three days over the mountain, including a visit to another Greek convent, said to be frowzier, if possible, than that of Csalho. When I pointed to the top, and said that I could get there in five hours, he laughed and said that I didn't know the way. When I asserted that it looked perfectly easy, he said that it was so difficult as to be impracticable without horses. Bewildered by this assertion, I gave up argument, but I was utterly horrified when he pointed out to me the way he meant us to go, and which I can only compare to a proposal to ascend Helvellyn from Patterdale by way of Ambleside. All argument, and we had a good deal, and rather acrimonious argument, was thrown away, except so far as it convinced him that Bryce and I were either idiots or maniacs. Under these circumstances, an idea occurred to me; it is possible sometimes to lose one's party on a mountain. I suggested this fact for Bryce's consideration, and remained, I must confess, in a state of perfectly furious but suppressed ill-temper all Sunday. I ought to explain that in spite of the horrors of a Greek

convent in a cave 6,000 feet above the sea, I would have given in willingly to T.'s plan, but that we had not a day to spare, and that he would not hear of our going alone. At 7.50 on Monday morning our party started, within three hours of the time appointed, in a long procession mounted on scraggy ponies about three feet high, said to be wonderfully sagacious and sure-footed, which reputation I think they deserved about as well as Alpine mules, that is, I had much rather trust my own legs and brains than theirs. Having given a lively representation of Don Quixote to my friends on Sunday during our picnic party, I absolutely refused to submit to such torture to-day, and had little trouble in keeping up with the diminutive beasts of burden. At about 10.30 A.M., we reached a little Austrian custom-house station, a dreary hut, high on the mountain side. Our route, which had been the cause of endless discussion, was still undecided. In Magyar, German, and Wallachian, various plans were laid down and again abandoned, every member of a party including, besides ourselves, four gentlemen and six guides, giving his opinion. The main point to be decided was this: a long range of limestone cliffs rose above us, through which a broad gap in our immediate neighbourhood presented an obvious and straight route to the summit. Another gap some miles off was, however, somewhat easier for ponies. The ordinary plan was, therefore, to make what I may describe as an exaggerated zigzag—each arm of which was some miles long, whilst the height surmounted was a few hundred feet. The cliff range separated the two arms, running up into the angle between them.

After lunching at the custom-house, and dismissing the ladies, we started at 11.10 in some uncertainty. The badness of the weather had suggested the propriety of omitting this monstrous circuit, and for once making a straight course to the top—even at the price of omitting the Greek convent, which was near the angle of the zigzag. T., as I understood him, told us that we should probably make an effort at all events to reach the summit that day, and instead of passing the night in the filth of the convent we might at worst return to sleep at the custom-house. He implored us, however, to put faith in a certain ancient and, to us, inarticulate Wallack. This venerable humbug had, I think, an undue influence over him. Let the Alpine traveller who does not implicitly obey his guides cast the first stone! Guided by this hoary impostor we started, and to my disgust I found that we were taking the zigzag. Bryce and I discussed the matter seriously. Of the many contradictory assertions as to the

plans of the party, we thought it safe to select that which suited us best. We assumed then that they would come to the top that night in accordance with T.'s last suggestion. It would evidently do no harm if, without an actual desertion, Bryce and I could reach the top a little before them. No credible accident indeed could lead us into the straight path, which was at right angles to that which T. was entering. But suppose we climbed close to the foot of the long range of cliff? Geologically I pronounced it to be interesting. Bryce thought it might have some botanical claims. It was curiously rent by certain chimneys (ghylls as they would be called in the lakes), through which a direct ascent to the plateau above the cliffs would be possible. If we accidentally ascended one of these we should avoid the terribly long circuit by which the riding party were turning the range; we should thus cut off, as it were, the end of the zigzag, and might, if we chose, wait for them on the top. Bryce and I edged off in an abstracted frame of mind towards the cliffs. Our friends below noticed it, and shouted to us to rejoin them. We explained at the tops of our voices in a high wind that we were only going up to look at the cliffs, but should move parallel to the party. Possibly they heard some of the syllables. After a short climb, part of it through a curiously impenetrable thicket of the dwarf creeping fir, we reached the base of the cliffs, just at the foot of the most accessible-looking chimney. Turning a rock we suddenly discovered that the said chimney was a delusion. The cliffs were perfectly smooth and overhanging, but in front of them there rose a curtain of easily accessible rocks, which from below entirely concealed the true cliff and had produced our delusion. Unless we discovered another chimney we should be forced to keep along the foot of the cliffs, from which a talus of *débris* sloped some hundred yards down to the pony track, and should ultimately rejoin the party at the gap in the cliffs forming the apex of the zigzag. We should thus have ourselves made a long circuit, but should not really have deserted T. We hurried along beneath the cliff, presently catching sight of the others, and communicating with them by shrieks, of which the meaning was, 'We have not deserted you.' We passed chimney after chimney, each more precipitous than its predecessor. At last the cliffs began to sink. We could make out the ponies standing in the gap or angle of the zigzag in front of us, having already got some distance ahead. Suddenly Bryce said, 'Here's a chimney that looks better.' We resolved to risk a trial, and five minutes' scramble placed us on the top of the cliffs, at 12.30,

on the upper limb of the zigzag, and therefore once more ahead of our friends. Their path to the summit, after crossing the gap, would of course lead up to our present position. A question now arose, would T. and Co. really come to the top as they had said, or would they go to pass the night amongst the bugs, fleas, monks, and other vermin. As we were within shout, I thought it would be civil to go back and take counsel with them, or at least to wait. Bryce, with a presence of mind for which I shall eternally honour him, replied to the question with simple scorn, proposing to go on immediately, and to assume that they would of course follow us. Accordingly communicating this resolution to our friends by a few frantic shrieks, we started, and from that day to this I have seen and heard nothing of Herr von T. Our path lay over a monstrous down, heaving its enormous ridges to a height of over 8,000 feet. The view, as limited by huge cloud banks which hung heavily about us, suggested a vast rolling prairie half-way to heaven. It might have served for the happy hunting grounds of Choctaws or other noble savages, but to us was not a little dreary. Some huge flocks of sheep were pasturing upon it, and we held a consultation with one of the shepherds. Bryce, I believe, knows one more word of the Wallachian language than I do, my own knowledge being absolute blank, which enabled him to maintain a lively conversation. A kind of bad Wallachian, I may explain, may be manufactured by spoiling Italian, and chiefly by the conversion of all the vowel sounds into u. Leaving the shepherd, we crossed the grassy slopes of Bucses, rising very gradually towards the summit. The grass, as rich as that of a Swiss alp, continued to the foot of the very last peak. A certain wildness, however, was added to the scenery by sundry vultures, which sailed out from the mountain coves in twos and threes, passing close over our heads, doubtless on the look-out for dead lambs or Englishmen. Their chance of this last delicacy was indeed rather small. The two valleys which radiate from the summit towards the south-east and south-west present in places precipitous walls of limestone rocks; that which sinks in a south-westerly direction is enclosed by a semicircle of precipice forming a fine cirque. The top, which we had not previously seen, was suddenly revealed to us through a gap in the mists on the further side of this cirque. The summit resembles that of Snowdon, or one of the Welsh hills, and the very last slope consists of bare disintegrated rock. The actual top, which we reached at 2.50, is marked by three huge lumps of stone, the highest rising about twenty feet.

We ought, I suppose, to have climbed it, but were content to get under its lee, eat some dry lumps of bread which we had judiciously pocketed at the custom-house, drink some drops from a precious flask carried by Bryce, and then to light our pipes and wait punctiliously till 3.40 for the arrival of our friends. A cold wind was whistling over us and blowing huge masses of cloud from the north. Through the driving mists the neighbouring summits loomed vast and mysterious in our immediate neighbourhood. Looking southwardly along the valleys we could dimly see faint gleams of purple between the iron-grey cloud which represented the distant plains of Wallachia; to the north a long line of cliff running east and west sank precipitously to the pine forests; beyond them was a fine but inferior mass called the Sonnenstein, and further we ought to have seen the lowland country of Transylvania. We could only distinguish occasional glimpses of the plain and of the still more distant forest-covered ridges of the Szeklerland. In fine weather this must be a singularly fine point of view. It commands nearly the whole of Transylvania, a large part of the wild labyrinth of the Carpathians, and the Wallachian plain almost if not quite to the Danube. As it was, there was a not unpleasing feeling of mysterious wildness which the flocks of sheep pastured upon these lofty downs failed to dispel.

Bryce and I held a long discussion as to our plans: to return to the filth of a Greek convent was not to be thought of; on the other hand, a descent straight to Törtzburg would leave T. in complete uncertainty as to our fate, which he would probably suppose to be the slow death which often overtakes bewildered and benighted travellers in bad weather on wild mountains. A middle course was therefore suggested; we might descend to the custom-house at which he might possibly return to sleep, and in the event of missing him there, send him up a message to the convent. The way back over the long grass slopes was indeed long and tiresome, but by descending the valley from the cirque I have mentioned it looked possible to find a more interesting route. After waiting therefore as long as possible and seeing and hearing nothing of our friends, we started and descended into the cirque, pushed rapidly down the valley and entered a gorge which was incomparably the finest piece of scenery which I have seen in the Carpathians. The cliffs which formed its northern bank reminded me strongly of the mighty precipices of the Gasterenthal. They must have descended sheer for two or three thousand feet. They were marked by the courses of some

waterfalls which when there is any water in them must be very beautiful. At present everything was as parched and dry as a limestone district alone knows how to be. The stream in the gorge we were threading, showed nothing but a bare rocky bed; our mouths were themselves as parched as the rocks, and as we descended the heat increased. After a time the gorge opened, and by keeping sharp round to the left we should have reached the custom-house. Tired and dry-mouthed as we were, the way thither seemed most uninviting; it evidently led along the face of steep slopes covered with the dense Transylvanian forest. Scrambling transversely across the face of a slope is proverbially fatiguing; and when the slope is covered with unthinned forest, when there is a chance that miscellaneous crags will require much up and down work to turn them, when the day is late, the legs tired, the tongue like a piece of leather, and nothing to be gained by the operation but the satisfaction of relieving the alarm of your friends, the mere thought of the effort is oppressive. The valley, on the other hand, led straight towards Törtzburg. If we reached that place before sunset, we should certainly get supper, and possibly a carriage to Kronstadt. With a mental struggle which I will not seek to describe, we resolved to abandon T. to his anxieties and make straight running for Törtzburg. We descended the valley rapidly, soon enjoying a delicious drink and wash in the refreshing stream which made its appearance in due time, and found a path leading homewards through the forest. A few perils from sheep dogs were easily surmounted without fireworks, the alacrity of the brutes in running away evading all attempts at vengeance. After a time we reached the mule track, and a steady trudge along it led us back to Törtzburg a few minutes after seven, just before dark. It was impossible to get a carriage, but the ladies entertained us hospitably, gave us supper and beds, and started us next morning to Kronstadt. We explained to them elaborately the story of our mishap, which we had carefully rehearsed during our return. We bewailed our misfortune in missing T., explained that we had waited for him an hour on the top, that we could not understand his failure to follow us, and showed how our ignorance of the country had caused us to miss the custom-house. By our advice, they sent off a messenger with a note stating our safe arrival, which I hope quieted the minds of T. and his party. However that may be we reached Kronstadt early next morning, left it the same afternoon on our return home, and have heard nothing more of our most hospitable

entertainers. I have one regret to express. Herr von T. had not only been put to inconvenience, but probably to some expense in providing ponies, guides, &c. for our expedition. We wrote to him, giving a most lucid explanation of conduct which had a certain superficial resemblance to a base desertion, and asked what was our share of the expenses. To this we have received no answer. I hope that he was not offended. I am certain that we are most grateful to him for the great civility and real kindness with which he treated us.

I have now only a few words to add by way of advice to any one who may think it worth while to follow me. The Carpathians, where I have seen them, form in many ways a very interesting district; there are no real hardships to be encountered; food is good; the fleas, dirt, and such minor grievances are not intolerably great; the higher classes of natives are most hospitable, a stranger is really welcome, and especially an English stranger. German will carry a man anywhere. I do not, however, suppose that anyone will find it worth while to go merely for mountaineering purposes, the mountains being after all, even to the Pyrenees, no more than a hobbledehoy to a full-grown man, if so much. Nor would even the sporting be probably sufficient in itself, although there are occasional chances of bears and chamois. But if anyone travelling for other purposes should like a few mountain excursions, I would venture a suggestion or two. If he has plenty of time he will find it pleasant to join the natives and do as the Transylvanians do; in that case he must be prepared for an utter disregard of punctuality, for provoking waste of time, for consequently spending three days on a hill 8,000 feet high, and to being restricted to going only where a dilapidated pony can conveniently carry him — a restriction, however, which will not cut him off from the highest mountain tops. If he merely wishes to climb Bucses, he might take a carriage from Kronstadt early in the morning to Rosenau or Törtzburg, ascend the hill on his own legs without guides in perfect safety and with no hurry, and return the same evening to Kronstadt; and the other summits might in all probability be reached with equal facility. In short, to a mountaineer accustomed to any really difficult district, they are mere child's play in point of climbing. Their chief interest is derived from their extreme wildness; the huge forests of the Szeklerland, and the long rolling pasturages of the southern mountains, were equally suggestive of remoteness from all civilized life. The stories about robbers were universal and, so far as we could hear, utterly without foundation. Of course, the existence

of professional robbers is out of the question; they would long ago have been reduced to skeletons; but we were frequently told, with great circumstantiality, that there were 'schlechte leute' wandering on the hills, who were hiding from the conscription, and would be glad of a little diversion in the way of robbing travellers. Certainly, the 'schlechte leute' must have been glad of any little excitement; and we were always told that they had robbed somebody the day before yesterday. But as we met none, I cannot speak with authority. In conclusion, I will mention that the fullest information is to be found in Mr. Boner's work on Transylvania, and Mr. Paget's earlier work on Hungary. Mr. Paget is still a resident in the country. The best mode of reaching Transylvania is by railway from Pesth to Arad or Grosswardein, whence diligences go daily to Hermannstadt and Klausenburg respectively. The latter is by far the shortest journey; but it is to be hoped that both will before long be supplanted by the railways, which are the great need of the country and which appear to be promised by the new Hungarian Ministry.

THE LAQUIN JOCH. By C. G. HEATHCOTE, M.A.

WHEN I was at the Hotel Monte Moro at Saas, not long ago, I turned to the visitor's book for amusement and instruction. In its polyglot pages I found an entry which I plead as my excuse for inflicting this narrative on the readers of the *Alpine Journal*. I read there, in the handwriting of one who is eminently qualified to judge of the relative merits of mountain districts, an expression of surprise that the many beautiful scenes in the neighbourhood should be still so imperfectly known and so rarely visited. It certainly seems strange that, while the western side of the valley and the passes leading from Saas to Zermatt are so well known and so often traversed, so few have thought it worth their while to supplement their familiarity with the Mischabel with some slight acquaintance with the hardly less beautiful range which extends from the Monte Moro to the foot of the Simplon, and forms so conspicuous an object from any of the passes from Zermatt to Saas.

It is with the desire of calling the attention of mountaineers to one at least of the passes across this range that I have endeavoured to write a short account of the Laquin Joch. It is true that it lies somewhat out of the track of travellers, but it is a pass which is well worth a slight détour, if indeed