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Closing the Italian Alps.

IT is with great regret that we find ourselves compelled to record the existence on the Alpine frontiers of Italy of a system of obstruction to free travel, unprecedented, we believe, in times of peace. Along the whole extent of the chain from the Maritime Alps to Tyrol, the Trentino and Jugoslavia, the mule and glacier passes have been during the past summer more or less closed to travellers desirous of entering or leaving Italy. Members of the Alpine Club have found the Foreign Office passports, which the Italian Government formally declares to be the only documents necessary for visitors to Italy, wholly disregarded by individuals claiming to act under some official authority. British travellers, both men and ladies, mountaineers and local guides, have been not only turned back summarily and without warning, but arrested and detained and even in some cases deliberately aimed and shot at by bands of youths describing themselves as 'Local Guards' or 'Fascist Militia.'

The facts above stated are, unfortunately, not open to question. The Editor of the Alpine Journal has had brought to his notice some thirty instances, authenticated by thoroughly trustworthy evidence, of interference with travellers. He has himself had personal experience of others. Several of the worst, in which firearms have been used, have occurred on the French frontier and in the neighbourhood of the Mont Cenis.

If we may believe a telegram in *The Times* from its Roman correspondent, the Italian Government denies having issued any instructions that could possibly have authorized the forcible closing to travellers of the High Alps. In a later telegram, however, (published on August 29, 1927) from the same corre-

spondent, we read as follows :—' The exercises of the Fascist Militia in Northern Italy have now ended and General Bazan, Chief of Staff of the Fascist Militia, is highly satisfied with their success. In a statement made to a Fascist weekly publication, he points out the efficiency of this voluntary corps, its perfect organization, and the task which is reserved for it in case of war. He says that perfect discipline has reigned among all ranks of the " Black Shirts " throughout the manœuvres and that their enthusiasm and interest in the military exercises were such that their commanding officers were forced to issue orders *to prevent incidents due to their excessive ardour for battle.*'

' For battle ' ! With whom, we ask, did these Italian Don Quixotes desire to do battle ? The native cowherds, or innocent tourists and their guides ?

At first sight there may seem to be a notable discrepancy between the two telegrams cited above, but the phrase we have italicized in General Bazan's report on the proceedings of the irregular force lately under his command may serve to suggest a plausible explanation of what has happened. It would seem that local militia, imperfectly disciplined and acting in small detachments, have, without authority, discharged their martial ' ardour ' by creating the recent ' incidents ' referred to, in which the chief sufferers have been travellers duly provided with the documents required and recognized by the Italian Government. They have, of course, not been the only sufferers. The population on both sides of the frontier have found themselves deprived of the stream of summer visitors to whom they look for an annual harvest.

The Alpine Journal has nothing to do with the matter of our complaint in its political aspect. But in its practical consequences it affects the mountaineers of all nations, and most of all our own Members, who since the time of John Ball and F. F. Tuckett have done much by their example and their writings to further the exploration and the development of the *Italian Alps.* We have felt it therefore impossible to pass over without notice the arbitrary and apparently unauthorized interferences with the movements of travellers to which our attention has been called, both privately and in the Press. Having done so, we are content to leave any further remonstrance in the hands of that very competent body, our ancient ally, the Club Alpino Italiano. We feel confident that it will spare no trouble to prevent the repetition of incidents that have pained all friends of Italy. It may surely be trusted to see to it that the Italian Alps are not permanently excluded from *The Playground of Europe* !