

MOUNTAIN CLUBS FOR THE HIMALAYA

FROM time to time during the past forty years travellers and explorers have suggested that the foundation in India of a Society with objects akin to those of the Alpine Club would be likely to prove of invaluable aid to geographical and scientific exploration of the great ranges of Central Asia. But to those on the spot, to Anglo-Indians, there seemed many obvious and practical difficulties in the way of carrying out any such suggestions. Himalayan exploration, it was alleged, demands both more time and expense than the average Englishman in India can afford ; distances are great and transport is onerous ; guides and porters, in the Alpine sense of those terms, have to be created. And after these difficulties had been faced and overcome there remained always frontier barriers and official restrictions, liable to be strictly enforced by an unsympathetic Secretary of State.

Yet before the end of the War there had come a perceptible change in the atmosphere. The lapse of years had brought with it not only a series of important scientific expeditions by travellers or Survey Officers into the previously unexplored wastes of the Karakoram beyond Kashmir, but incursions by wandering sportsmen or Members of the Alpine Club into different regions of the Himalaya, in Kumaon, or Sikkim, or Gharwal. General Bruce had spent the best part of a lifetime in training his Gurkha soldiers and making them expert snow- and ice-men. Mountaineering was in the air, not only in official circles but in the highest quarter. Already, in 1905, Lord Curzon, during his Viceroyalty, had written to Mr. Freshfield asking for his services at home in securing the joint support of the Royal Geographical Society and the Alpine Club for an attack to be made on Mount Everest under official auspices. Thwarted at the time by the objections of the Nepalese Durbar and the strained condition of our relations with Tibet, it was not till 1921 that Lord Curzon was able to see his project put into execution. It was inevitable that the three years of dramatic conflict between Man and Mountain which ensued should be watched with the keenest interest by our countrymen in India, and that as a consequence its tragic end should have stirred their minds in the direction of some action commemorative of so heroic an adventure.

No form of memorial, we believe, could have been adopted more appropriate or more welcome—not only to the friends of all who took part in the late assaults on Mount Everest, but to all travellers and mountaineers—than that which has been chosen simultaneously at Delhi and Calcutta. It has taken the shape of the formation of Societies whose primary object is to be that defined in the Rules of the present Alpine Club—the promotion of mountain climbing and mountain exploration, and of a better knowledge of mountains through literature, science and art.

For the following particulars as to the two Indian bodies in question we are indebted to their respective Honorary Secretaries—Mr. Allsup and Major Kenneth Mason.

In order of date the first Club to be founded was that started at Calcutta, with the title of "The Mountain Club of India," under the Presidency of General Bruce. It already numbers some seventy members, mostly residents in Calcutta. General Bruce informs us that it owes its inception mainly to the energy of Mr. Allsup, who has taken infinite pains in its organization. In the Sikkim Himalaya it should find a readily accessible field for exploration. There its members may see to the opening and improvement of paths to the glaciers, fill in the gaps in Prof. Garwood's map, and emulate the feats accomplished by the late Dr. Kellas with no aid but that of native guides and porters.

If it can succeed in establishing a substantial refuge near the head of the Zemu glacier, the long eastern spur of Kangchenjunga and the base of Siniolchum might be fully investigated.

Unconscious of the movement at Calcutta, steps were being taken about the same time in influential quarters at the seat of the Government at New Delhi to start a Himalayan Club which should have all the advantages of official and departmental support and sympathy, and might through its branches and its relations to the Survey hope in time to cover the whole of Northern India. The Commander-in-Chief, the Governor of the Punjab, and the Surveyor-General were amongst those who supported the project and agreed to become Founder Members. In this state of affairs the active promoters of the Delhi Himalayan Club, Sir Geoffrey Corbett and Major Kenneth Mason, met and engaged in friendly conversation with the Secretary of the Calcutta Club. They agreed that there was plenty of room for both bodies, and that while the Calcutta Club was not in a position to deal adequately with the Himalaya as a whole its independent existence would, at any rate for the present, be an advantage to the common end in view.

The next formal step to be taken was the issue at Delhi on December 20 last of a circular letter signed by Sir G. Corbett and Major Kenneth Mason proposing that a Himalayan Club should be formed "with the object of assisting Himalayan travel and increasing our knowledge of the Himalaya in all its aspects, and with a scope not less wide than that of the Alpine Club." The promoters pointed out that, "apart from the assistance that such a Club would give to its own members, it might be of great value to the Survey of India, to the Geological Survey and other scientific departments, and also from the point of view of military intelligence and training in mountain warfare," adding that they had been informally assured of the interest of the Departments of Government principally concerned. The headquarters of the Club it was proposed should be at Simla. In conclusion they referred to the formation of the Mountain Club of Calcutta and expressed a cordial

hope that the two kindred bodies might cooperate, if not coalesce, in the future.

The circular above quoted was followed on February 17 last by an Inaugural Meeting of the Himalayan Club held at Delhi, at which the Chairman, Field-Marshal Sir William Birdwood, was nominated the first President of the Club. The following officers were elected: Vice-Presidents, Major-General K. Wigram and Colonel Commandant E. A. Tandy. Sir G. Corbett was appointed Honorary Secretary, and Major K. Mason Honorary Editor. Local secretaries were appointed for Kashmir and Kumaon, and correspondents for Lahore, Razmak and Peshawar.

Sir F. Younghusband and Mr. D. Freshfield were invited to become Founder Members. Mr. Freshfield has also accepted the Honorary Membership of the Calcutta Club.

The Club was assured of the sympathy of the Viceroy and the support of the Heads of the various Departments. Starting under such favourable auspices we may feel confident that the newly formed Clubs will prove equal to their task and do much to add to our knowledge of the greatest mountains in the world.

D. W. F.