

MOUNTAINEERING IN THE HIMALAYAS

F. BULLOCK WORKMAN

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SINCE my two summers in the Himalayas I have passed one in Switzerland, an experience which has caused me to look back on even my first season in the Indian mountains, although chiefly employed in exploring high valleys and passes, as one of original if not of adventurous interest. A few years ago in the Alps, if the valleys and lower hotels were overfilled, one might expect a certain immunity from crowds in the inns and huts near the snow-line as well as on the snowy slopes themselves.

But things have changed now, and there is small hope of a quiet night's rest at the Betem Hut on Monte Rosa and less still at the Theodule, where I met a young ladies' boarding school last August. And as for the Swiss side of Monte Rosa itself, it is a mere *route de pèlerinage*, trodden by hundreds of tourists, who daily more or less wearily cover its endless snowfields in the season. I heard a Zermatt guide, with evident pride in the fact, assuring his patron that the path could not be better marked or in finer condition.

There are two ways of enjoying a summer in the Himalayas, both of which I have tested and either of which commend themselves more to my taste than spending a season in overfilled Swiss or Tirolean hotels and huts. The first is to make trips with tents and camp kit from a centre such as Simla or Srinagar, studying the people and their customs in the upper valleys, crossing high passes, and now and again scaling a peak of moderate size.

This can be done without over much

trouble even by those who do not care for tramping, as horses and yaks are usually to be had where no real mountaineering is concerned, and servants for ordinary camp life in the hills are nowhere so good as in India.

The other method, and by far the more interesting one, is to steer straight for the great peaks and glaciers, and, leaving men and their humble habitations far below, march and climb for days over such interminable glaciers and moraines, such never-ending slopes topped by airy summits as only the Asiatic mountain world can offer. This sort of outing requires quite a different camp outfit, both as regards provisions and tents, for here tinned meat must take the place of sheep and chickens, and the Mummery or Whympet that of the more luxurious Cabul tent of the lower, less-icy valleys.

A Swiss guide or two are usually considered necessary accessories, but more imperative than tents, guides, or scientific instruments is a vast mental equipment of combined patience and combativeness, which is sure to be brought into requisition in the overcoming of obstacles of a varied and often exacting nature. Thus provided and weather permitting, a most interesting if not altogether luxurious season may be passed in the Asiatic highlands.

An animal that plays an important rôle in Ladakh and Suru for carrying camp kit as well as the traveller over high passes is the yak. The real yak, which resembles a buffalo as much as anything, is a curious looking beast with an ample covering of thick crinkly hair. It is a slow

but very sure-footed animal, and much to be preferred to a pony on a precipitous place. I never saw a yak slip but once, and that was on an occasion when I nearly lost my life on a pass.

I was riding a pony, and my part of the caravan was nearing the top of an abrupt incline. Two Tibetans, driving some rather unruly yaks, approached from above. On the narrow zigzag I could see the driver beating one of the

the mountain flank, loosening rocks and low bushes as they sped onward.

Yes, this time, and it was the first and last occasion I believe, I had reason to be most grateful to a Kashmiri, for my agile bearer, who had been climbing behind, seized me just in time as the pony reared, before he fell, and by doing this saved my life.

Crossing passes and climbing stray peaks a few hundred feet higher than



YAK FROM VARKAND, ON THE KARDONG ROUTE.

beasts, which, of a sudden, evidently catching its great paw in a loose rock, stumbled and came lounging down in a direct line toward my pony. It was the work of a second, all I recall was the animal crashing down toward me, the sudden rearing of my horse on his hind legs, just as I felt myself seized from behind, supported somewhere in mid air and finally landed on a rock near by. From there, before regaining power of speech, I could view the pony and yak as they continued their mad career down

Mt. Blanc is amusing enough, but in a country where Everest, K² and Nanga-Parbat proudly raise their measured crests to 26,000 and 29,000 feet, and benignly look down on thousands of peaks ranging from 18,000 to 24,000, one feels rather bound to turn one's steps to loftier routes. And thus our second summer in Asia saw us started on the ascent of the great Biafo glacier in Braldu, which had not been traversed since Sir Martin Conway descended it from Hunza in 1892.



BIAFO GLACIER, TOWARDS HISPAR PASS FROM OGRE CAMP.

Ascending a glacier over thirty miles long is more of an undertaking than climbing up the *argentière* glacier, to see the *séraes*, and in some ways it is somewhat like climbing a new peak every day. First come one or two days of plodding over moraine and then follow the *séraes*, the great ice pinnacles which in an Asiatic glacier often raise their honey-combed heads to 50 and 60 feet above the glacier, quite putting in the shade the show *sérac* of Mt. Blanc which one can buy for a franc, coloured sky blue, in a Chamounix photograph shop.

Journeying through these *séraes* with a Swiss guide and plenty of ice axes would be slow enough, but to our party were added fifty luggage coolies carrying loads of from thirty to fifty pounds each. Besides these, three sheep trotted along laboriously behind the coolies, each awaiting his turn to be slaughtered in order that we might enjoy fresh roast mutton as far up the glacier as possible. We usually made about eight hours'

march, often covering little real distance, and then scrambled off as best we could in the afternoon on to some rock or grass ledge where we encamped.

The difficulty of getting the men through two very tall *séraes* separated by a large crevasse on one particular day was serious, and we not only lost time, but were terribly chilled by a cold wind blowing down the glacier. It took Zurbriggen nearly an hour to cut a gallery along one of the ice walls, and it was bitterly cold sitting about the frozen shelves on macintoshes waiting for him to complete his work. When it was finished and we had passed through, there was another long wait while the coolies were unloaded and their packs passed. For the couloir was too narrow to admit of the men getting through it loaded.

A number had joined us on the further side when the sheep had to try their luck at conquering the gallery. Zurbriggen stood in the middle of the passage, one leg astride the crevasse,

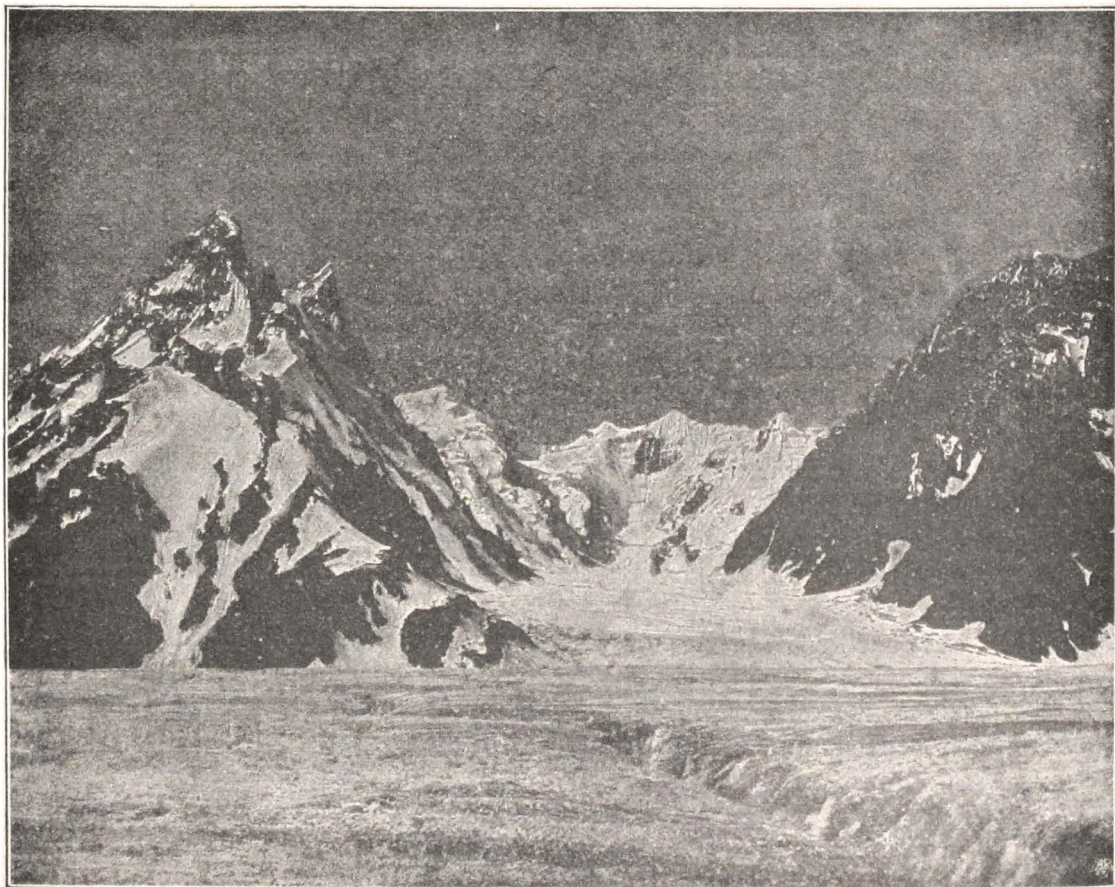
waiting to receive the fluffy burden which he in turn was to throw into the arms of a camp servant waiting at the other end of the chasm. The first sheep, well aimed, reached Zurbriggen's arms in safety and continued its journey on to the servant, but the coolie was less skilful in handling the second, which instead of reaching the guide fell into the crevasse and disappeared from view. Zurbriggen, like many Swiss guides, has a tender heart for animals and proposed that the men should lower him into the ice chasm. He found the lamb shivering and with teeth chattering, but otherwise unhurt in the glacial trough forty feet below.

As Zurbriggen was being hauled out by the head man after the rescue we took a snap shot at him and the coolies watching eagerly from above.

The work of passing difficult séracs is usually overcome on the first part of the

ascent of a big glacier. Afterwards one sometimes has a whole day's march on the beautiful ice river, which is framed in at the sides by such precipitous and wild peaks as the Biafo Walhalla.

On a glacier like the Biafo, in some places three miles wide, crevasses more or less formidable may at any time have to be reckoned with. They are not infrequently a mile long and may or may not, as it happens, be spanned, when you most desire, by snow bridges. When they are not thus bridged the caravan has of course to cross and re-cross the glacier, looking for a chance to get over or around the crevasse. One occasion when I found the snow conditions most trying was on a mild morning after a rather heavy snow fall in the night. Zurbriggen had just successfully crossed a somewhat shaky snow-bridge spanning a crevasse which was quite covered with new snow.

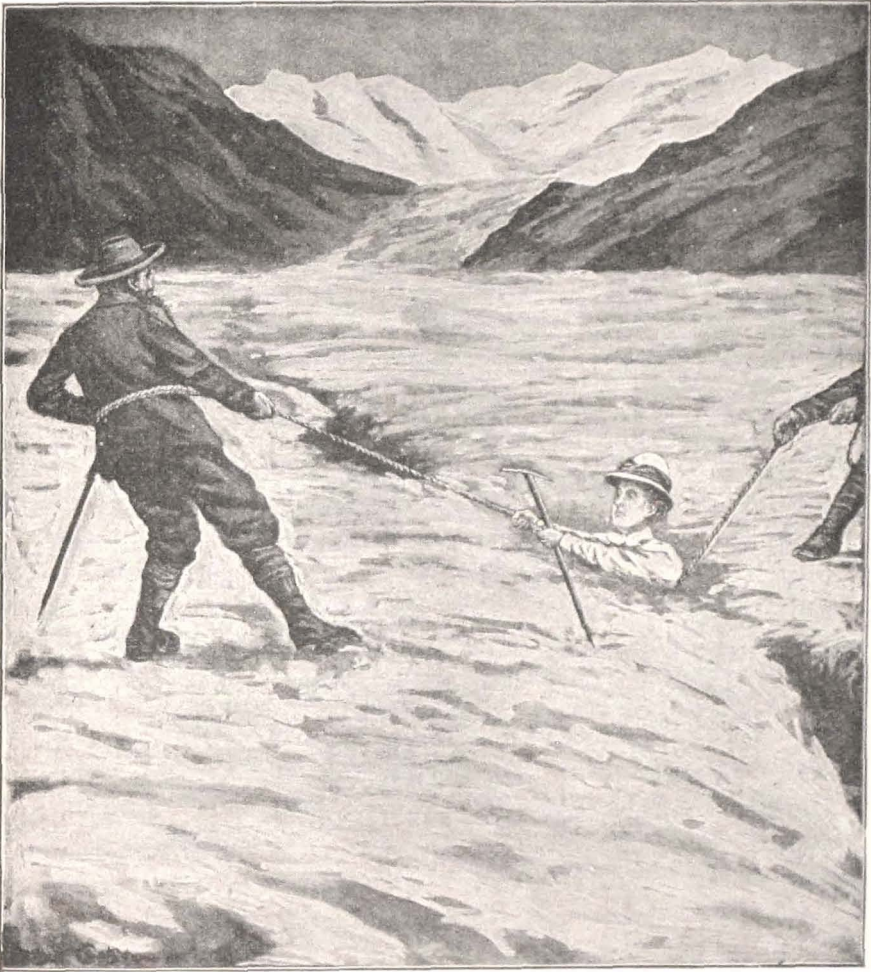


MOUNT MERU, WITH GLACIAL VALLEY, WEST SIDE OF BIAFO GLACIER.

The guide called to me to step lightly, but too late, alas, for the bridge collapsed taking me along with it. We were roped and the guide on one side and those on the other withstood firmly the pull on the rope, but it was not pleasant all the same to find the main part of my body swinging in space and my arms

guides' part, I at last made a successful if not triumphant exit.

Most persons dread some particular thing in mountain travel. With Zurbriggen, as he has often remarked, it is crossing mountain streams, with others it is an avalanche, but with me it is the unsuspected crevasse, and the sudden



IN A CREVASSE AT SNOW LAKE.

and neck embedded in soft clinging snow.

"Push out with your feet and pull yourself up on the rope," called Zurbriggen, in his most cheery German. "Very good;" I replied; "but I must have something to push against and in this vacuity there is nothing." By turning my full attention to the rope and baring my hands both of gloves and skin and with strenuous hauling on the

ignominious feeling of helplessly disappearing into a bottomless abyss.

Another pleasure awaiting those who explore Asia's ice fields, which is not granted to visitors of the Aletch and Rhone glaciers, is the chance to take a first photograph of such a symmetrically combined massif of towers and spires as is seen in the mountain we christened Meru, or Mountain of the Sun, so called after a mythical peak in the Ramayana.

We saw it on clear days when its soaring turrets cut the blue background of an Eastern sky with sharpest accuracy, making every detail of rock and schrund visible thousands of feet below, and we saw it when feathery midsummer clouds floated on its ramparts veiling its wild chimneys in partial gloom and massing in fluffy mystery behind its ærial summits. But whether it stood in cloud or sunshine, I recall it as the noblest rock massif I have seen in any mountain country.

After ascending the glacier for several days we came to a huge snowy basin called Snow Lake, surrounded by a line of splendid snow and rock peaks. Between some of these on the left side we wished to climb to the icy Hispar Pass, which we intended visiting for the purpose of photographing. The only one of the party who had ever been there before was Zurbriggen, who had descended the pass seven years before in a storm, and consequently had seen nothing of Snow Lake except the part he crossed in a blinding snow squall.

It was a question up which snowy col we should make our way, for there were several bearing north-west between the peaks. Overhanging the lake on this side and about five hundred feet above it was a narrow, rocky ledge overtopped by massive cliffs, and beyond stretched a snow reach which might be the beginning of a pass. Zurbriggen said the rocks looked familiar, and as afternoon was upon us we turned the caravan toward them. The icy slopes leading up were very sharp and approachable only by step cutting. I recall feeling giddy and ill on these cold slants; in fact, had the first attack of mountain sickness I had experienced on the glacier.

When we reached the ledge under the cliffs we were at 16,450 feet, 650 feet higher than Mt. Blanc. It was a most glorious point of view, and while we waited for the tents to be spread on the icy surface of the terrace, although shivering and longing for hot tea, we

rejoiced in our lonely but grand bivouac which for no price would we have exchanged for the warmer, more noisy Swiss hut. And welcome was the new brought by one of the men who had discovered a bundle of faggots stowed away in a cleft of the rocks, left doubtless by the last visitors seven years before. Sun now that we were on the track of the pass we turned into our tents, after most perfect sunset "on the stainer ramps of huge Himálas wall."

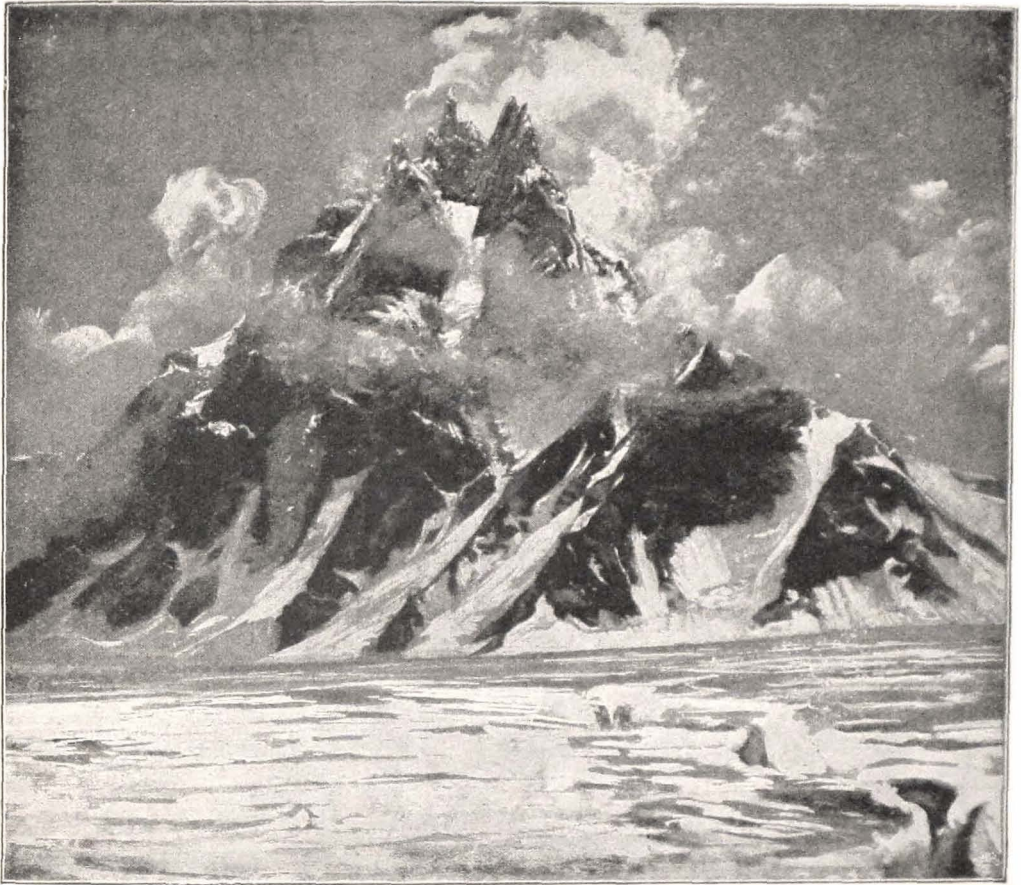
We climbed the Hispar Pass the following day and secured excellent views of the magnificent peaks bordering it. It was one of those cloudless windless days met with by mountaineers in every climate. Travellers speak of the heat experienced at great altitudes in Tibet, and I can only say that I felt as limp at noon at 17,500 feet as I have felt on the streets of New York in summer. Of course the clothing which one must needs wear on leaving camp at five a.m. is out of all keeping with the heat met with after the sun is high, still I am quite sure that thinnest cotton garments and ice cream soda, were they available, would be much appreciated in the middle of the day on certain occasions at 18,000 feet in the Asiatic mountains.

When we had seen all that we cared to of the great glacier we secured a new set of men from the chiefs of Askole, a village in the valley of that name, and started for some climbing in a mountain chain between the Askole and Shiga valleys. Having chosen one's mountain the next proceeding is to bring the coolies and camp successfully through the ascending valleys, across the unbridged, often-tumultuous mountain torrents and over the tiresome slipper moraines to a place for the highest possible camp. The tent at Avalanche Camp was in such a spot, and there we passed the greater part of a week while making two first ascents, the Siegfried horn and Mt. Bullock Workman, 18,600 and 19,450 feet high.

One difficulty is to get the men beyond

the last inhabited huts where they always stop to eat, drink, and waste time, and another is to make them carry

I called the interpreter and told him to tell the men that if they would not go on we should stay there until we had



MOUNT MERU, "MOUNTAIN OF THE SUN," ABOVE OGRE CAMP, BIAFO GLACIER.

up wood and encamp on or near a glacier. They are always disinclined to stay overnight above wood and grass, and when one considers the light food they eat and their insufficient clothing one cannot wonder at it. When planning the ascent of the Siegfried Horn we wished to take them across the glacier seen in the illustration to a place on the main peak, but they refused to go. They threw down their loads and put up their hands in an attitude of prayer which with these natives means, "Please go back to the warm valleys."

It was not a comfortable spot where they did this on the moraine-covered edge of the glacier, just safe from the base of some rock peaks that kept up a continued fire of stone avalanches, but

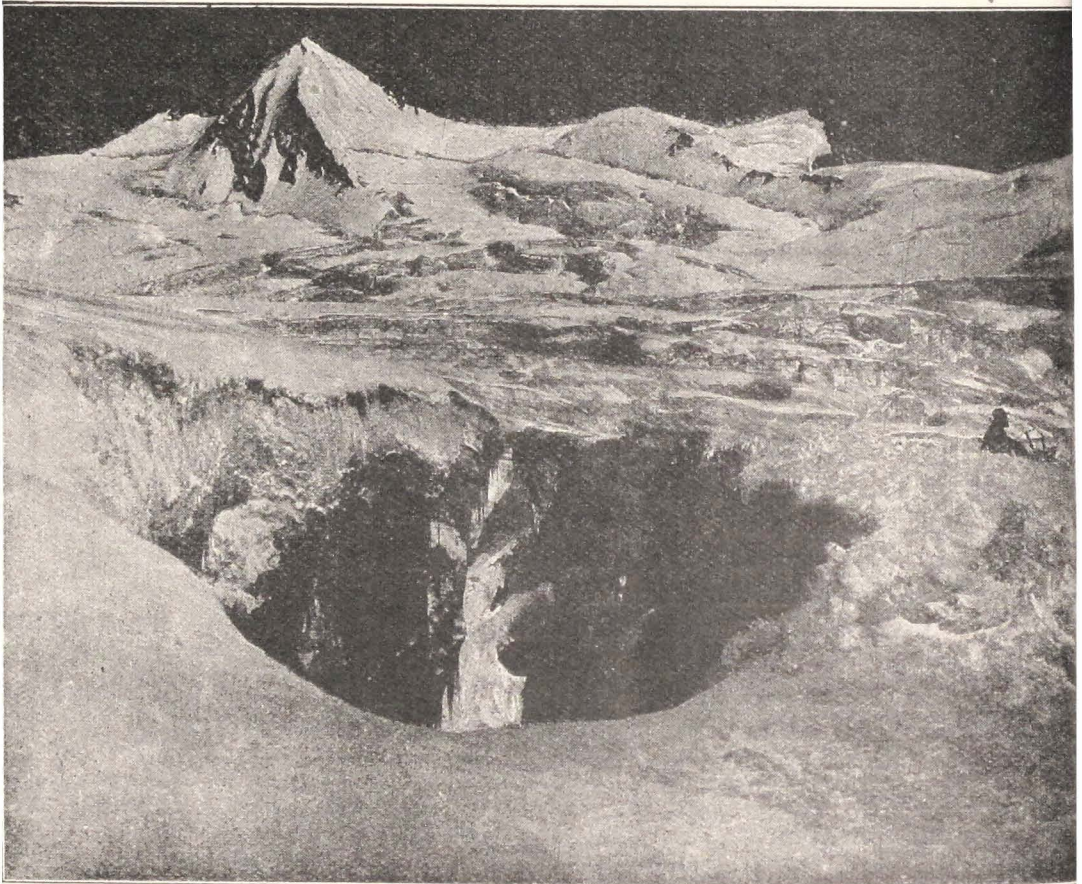
finished what we wished to do, if it took a week.

How much he told them I do not know, but they grasped the idea and after smoothing up the moraine with their hands for our tents, crawled under big boulders themselves and built a fire for their evening meal. The next day when we returned from our first ascent we noticed that several small houses built out of loose stones were perched up wherever a hold could be found on ice hummocks or a bit of moraine, and into these four or five men would crawl at night through a central opening. Thus they were protected from the frequent snowstorms which visited us, and, although they often complained, they were in the main contented. After

the first mountain was conquered we were storm-bound for several days at Avalanche Camp. When the weather cleared twelve of the men were induced to carry a small kit up still higher on to the glacier of another mountain we decided to attempt. From this high bivouac, 17,400 feet, favoured by good weather, we successfully climbed a fine snow peak which we called Mt. Bullock Workman.

Well satisfied with securing two interesting high peaks within eight days we returned to the Shigor valley and marched to a village at the base of a beautiful mountain called Koser Gunge on the Indian Survey map. On several days' march in this valley in the early summer we had watched the mountain

Our impression was that this was only a lower summit and that the real peak lay further behind. As soon as it was possible to get coolies together, abandoning our larger tents and luggage below, we went up the lower spur and made a camp at 14,400 feet. Although at about the height of the Matterhorn, this was on a convenient grassy ledge with water running at ten minutes' walk from the tents, and had we were to have so good a place, thunder, hail, and snowstorms kept us stationed there for three days. When it cleared and we wished to take the men up a thousand or two more feet on rocky walls and jagged arêtes to find a higher camp they refused to go. After much parleying this obstacle was over-



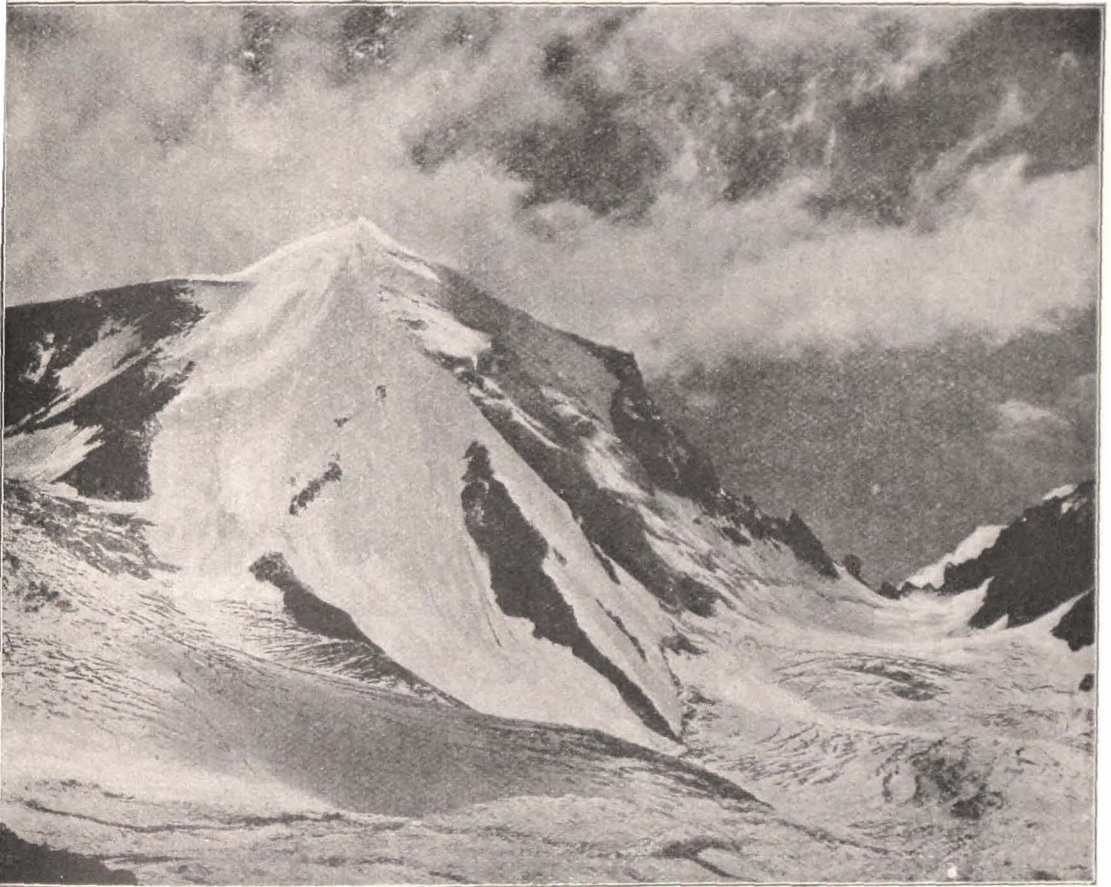
ICE CHASM AND PEAK OPPOSITE HISPAR PASS, ON EAST.

rising like a great glistening dome from the valley, and even then our thoughts turned to climbing it.

come by reducing our camp kit to the lowest limit and by offering a few of the better coolies substantial bakshish.

The next halt, at 18,000 feet, was among the rocks where no one would care to pass many nights. I, for one, slept very little and I could hear the coolies talking or groaning nearly the whole night. Leaving the camp, we started off at 5.30 a.m. to see if we could find and conquer the peak. After a thousand feet of rock gymnastics the snowfields were reached. There, after

increasing, lifted my helmet and sent it bounding down the great snowy slants where it was soon lost to view. I wore a cap under it and was consequently not without some protection. While looking out for the summit, of which nothing was then to be seen, we realised three things, namely, that it had become very cloudy, was beginning to snow, and was bitterly cold. But we were at a great



SIEGFRIEDHORN (18,600 FEET) AND SKOR LA (17,000 FEET), FROM AVALANCHE CAMP.

a short halt for breakfast, we put on more clothing the better to withstand the wind which had become very keen. The weather was also slightly overcast, but there was no real sign of storm so we continued. We now had our hands full with long snow-slopes, which after 19,000 feet are turned off rather slowly, particularly when the deep fresh snow of recent storms adds to the difficulty of breathing due to altitude.

Suddenly the wind, which had been

altitude, 20,000 feet, and none of us cared to turn back unless absolutely driven, so we trudged onward, but with ever-increasing weariness and slowness.

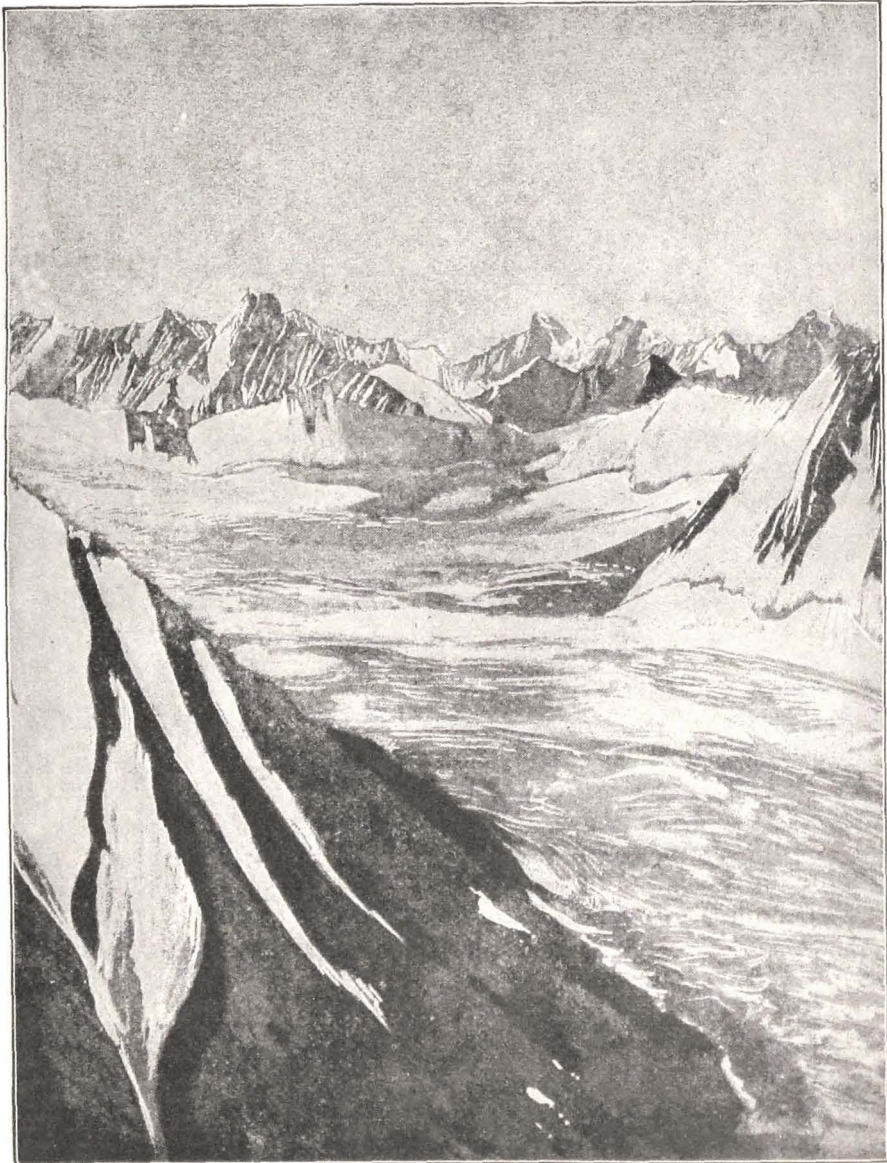
At last, rounding a shoulder of the mountain in a whirl of snow dust, we saw through the parted clouds above us the beautiful curled final peak, rising about 500 feet above.

We raised a faint cry of greeting and put on what spurt we were capable of,

for at that height and in the wind and storm we were nearing the end of our strength. I don't know how my face looked under its woollen mask, but I recall that Zurbriggen's face had a rich purple hue and his beard was massive with icicles, although he said afterwards he did not suffer from cold. We did, however, and when we reached the windy, icy goal could hardly endure the cold in hands and feet long enough to take the necessary observations.

Always on reaching an Alpine summit

the view has been my first consideration, but here it was not, for the fact that it was obscured. On a clear day from Koser Gunge the prospect would be regal, including, besides many others, ten of the world's highest peaks. But to our sorrow we saw about 500 feet below only the lower summit, which had so attracted us from the valley. However, all things are seldom as they should be, and, glad to have climbed a peak of 21,000 feet, we hurried downward as fast as weather, snow, and rock permitted.



PART OF CRESCENT GLACIER FROM MOUNT BULLOCK WORKMAN (19,450 FEET).

