

**ENCHANTED COUNTRY**







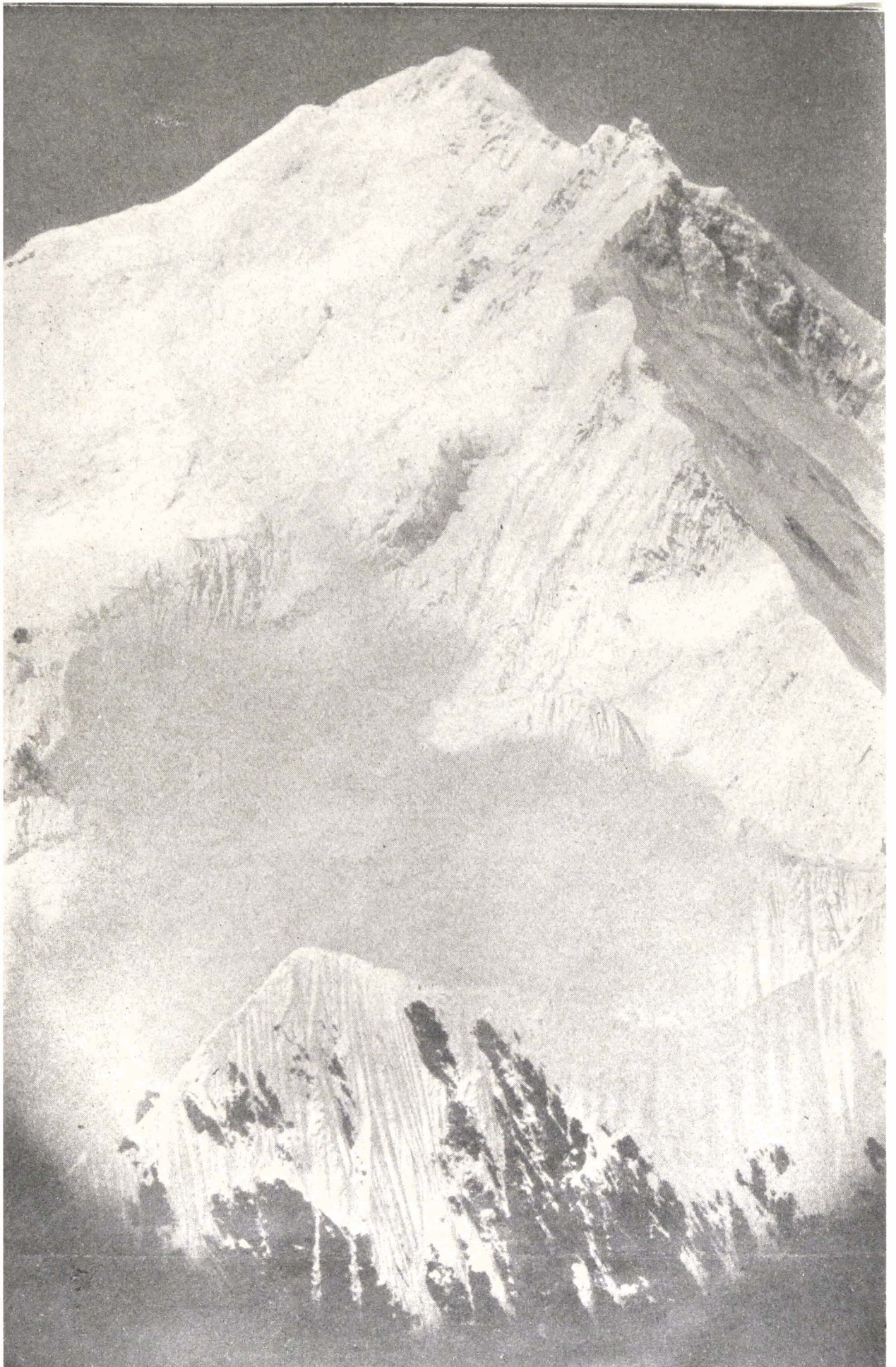
# ENCHANTED COUNTRY

BY

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*To My Mother*





## FOREWORD

THIS is the story of a journey up the Jumna valley and some light-hearted mountaineering. Not one false note was to dim our delight in a month which was as nearly perfect as, I imagine, anything in our world can be. Our Sherpas and coolies seemed to enjoy themselves almost as much as we did. Finally, all the things I dislike doing, such as making preliminary arrangements, giving orders and paying off afterwards was done by Lolly Leyden, my companion. Could generosity go further ?





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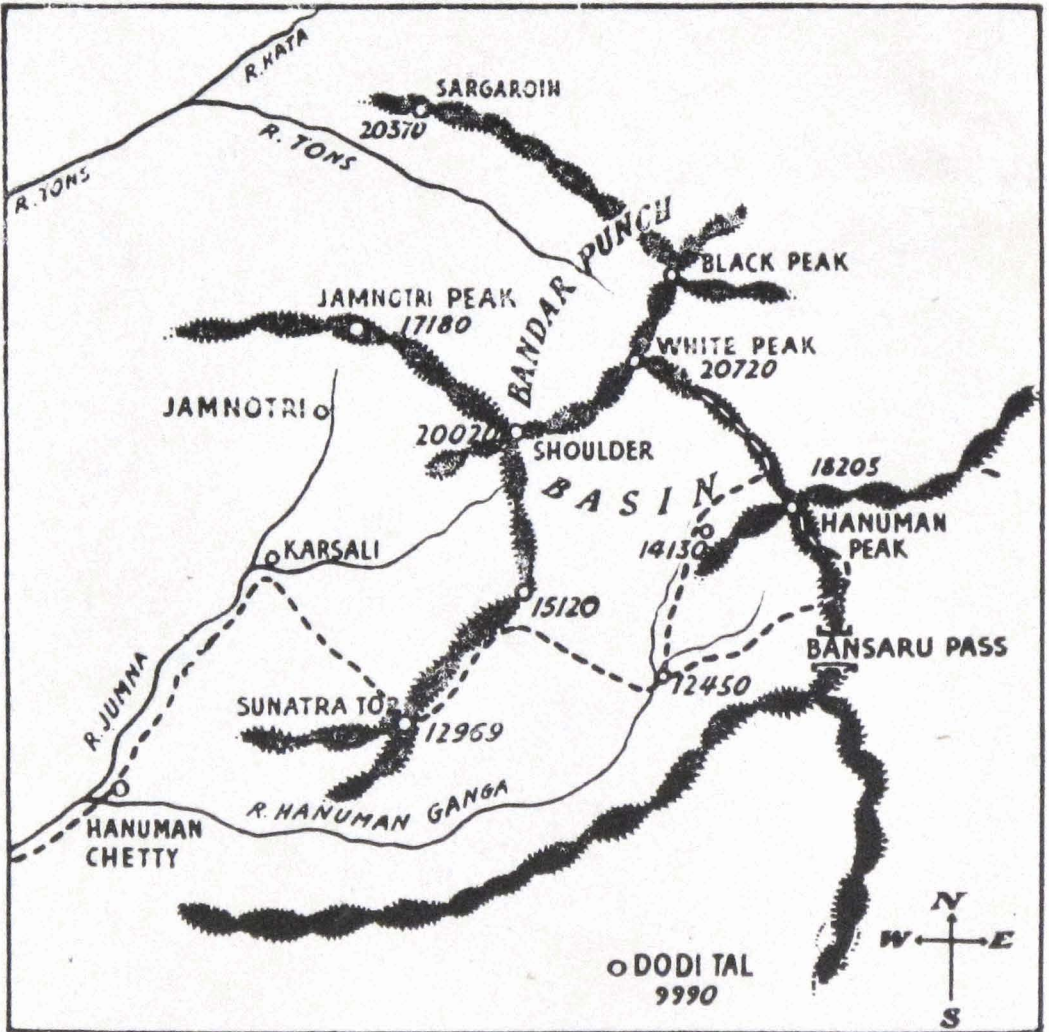
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P. A. H.











*Sketch Map of Bandarpunch Range*

## APPROACH

### I

LOLLY left me in Bombay towards the end of August with instructions to meet him in Chakrata on the twenty-fourth of September and to bring quantities of stores of various kinds. He was unseemly enough to express doubts that I should remember to bring them all or even to arrive on the right day; and I was greatly relieved when, having not only arrived on the right day, we had sorted out all the stores and equipment and he had pronounced that nothing vital was missing.

Most of that afternoon was spent in packing and weighing loads of about fifty pounds apiece for the coolies. Packing is a euphemism. Most of the stores were in tins which were just thrown into baskets to be carried on their backs like rucksacks. Those who had not baskets carried porters' bags supplied by the Himalayan Club and containing such things as bedding. We had one large round tent weighing rather over fifty pounds for the coolies and Sherpas, and two Meade tents, one for each of us. When we bivouacked for a climb, we shared one, the Sherpas the other, and the coolies went down for the night to their own tent at the base camp.

Ten coolies we had and they were all cheerful rogues and good workers. Six of them had been with Lolly the year before. They were collected from among the local men by the tehsildar at Chakrata, who was very helpful to us. One of the best of them had one leg several inches shorter than the other and was dead lame in consequence. He was always rather pale as it was his habit to walk under an umbrella. He also seemed to have influential friends in every village we passed, and was usually entrusted with

the business of obtaining food for all the coolies, who lived off the country.

He would appear in the evenings, whenever we were near a hamlet, laden with a great jug of milk, or some large brass or copper pots and bowls, which he had borrowed for their cooking.

We had two Sherpas. They eat the same food as we do, and it is the custom to provide provisions for them. Off the villages up the Jumna Valley we could buy potatoes, its chief industry, atta and, sometimes, rice.

Dawa Thondrup is a "Tiger." That is to say he is reckoned to be among the best of the Darjeeling mountaineering porters and sports a special medal with a tiger's head on it. He has been on more than one Everest Expedition, and was a member of the disastrous 1934 German Expedition to Nanga Parbat, where he was badly frost-bitten. He is a most modest and unassuming little man, and the better one knows him the more one likes him. He does not laugh much, but has a rather grave and half-whimsical smile; never moody, he is ready to do anything at any time. On a mountain he is safe and steady, and strong. He is not a bad cook. In managing the coolies, he never seems to give an order—things just get done. Sherpas invariably have the most individual headgear, and Dawa is no exception. He wears a Basque beret flat on his head, but its origin we never discovered.

Our other Sherpa was an inexperienced lad named Hukba Tsering. He is supposed to be twenty-one, but looks younger. He is said to be some sort of relation of Dawa's, and is a diffident young man, but cheerful and very willing. The first evening we gave him a pot of marmalade to open. Having tried to unscrew the cap the wrong way, he took it off to the cooking fire and appeared to have every intention of beheading it with his kukri. It was rescued just in time by Dawa. Hukba is the possessor of an incredibly old Homburg hat, now coloured a ripe greenish brown, of which

he is inordinately proud. It always hangs vertically over one ear, apparently defying the law of gravity.

## II

THE night was cold and refreshing, and the next morning gloriously fine. After many months in the plains, the world seemed to us to be reborn. We felt hilarious and rather irresponsible. I said to Lolly, "Once we are clear of Chakrata, we're safe for the month : no one can catch us."

We loaded up the porters and sent them on at eleven, following ourselves an hour later. We posted our last letters. The postmaster looked at us and asked if we were going for a picnic.

Five minutes later we were walking along a narrow path warm and sweet with the smell of pine-needles in the sun. We could see, rising beyond the valley into which we were to drop that afternoon, a narrow saddle, the Ghora Ghat, about 6,000 feet high between wooded hills—our way for the morrow over to the Jumna Valley and into enchantment. The whole Bandarpunch chain shimmered before us in the blue distance, balanced by the more complex group of Gangotri ; further away to the east the tumbled massif of Kedernath and Badrinath ; and beyond, barely visible, the steep cone of Nanda Devi, "the Blessed Goddess," and other distant outlines, fading into imagination and the sunlight . . .

No sooner were we clear of Chakrata than we began to descend, first through a thick wood of holm-oaks, then onto green hillsides, stepped with little narrow terraced corn-fields, soon to be harvested.

Many and varied are the kinds of corn grown up these valleys. The seed of one is like bunched fingers. Another, which is more and more widely grown as one ascends the valley up to a height of 8,000 feet, turns a vivid crimson



colour as it ripens ; and sunlit patches of it high up on a hillside are almost startling in their brightness.

We descended to the valley bottom, a cauldron in the afternoon's heat, and Lolly produced his Hat. It had once been of grey felt and a button was fixed to its ribbon, he seemed to think for the purpose of attaching it to a button-hole to prevent it blowing away. We had already encountered it that morning when he had expended some anxious thought on where best to put it to keep it clean. Since there was little to choose between the hat and the pockets of his rucksack, all of which seemed equally dirty, I was unable to fathom the reason for this final triumphant choice ; but I had to admit that it was in no way diminished by the exotic headgear of the Sherpas.

It was pleasant to walk along the path chewing a piece of grass with a reasonable certainty, for a change, that it was exactly what it appeared to be and no more. The scene was gay with butterflies, many of them resembling, but in some respects differing from marbled whites, blues of various sorts, painted ladies and fritillaries. Others were exquisitely coloured, about the size and shape of swallow-tails, wing-tipped with rich brown outside broad bands of prussian blue of gorgeous depth ; with folded wings, no more than dried leaves.

At length we turned north up a side-valley. Steep wooded bluffs rose on either side, shutting out the view. We camped on a miniature cornfield, recently cut, and so much under the shadow of the hillside that the sun had left it by four o'clock in the afternoon. The stream chuckled in its rock-strewn bed down a steep bank a few yards away. We were to find a bathing place all the way up the Jumna Valley, the water gradually becoming colder and more refreshing.

### III

WE picked our way onto the path, through a heavy dew, at a quarter to eight next morning. Dawa always saw the camp packed up and brought the coolies along with him. Hukba used to come with us if we were painting, otherwise he accompanied Dawa. Sometimes we encountered them on the way, sometimes we did not see them again until we reached our camp-site. Lolly had brought Dawa and several of the coolies this way the year before, and had found the best places to camp, so we had no fear of losing them.

We walked steadily uphill for two and a half hours, mostly in the shade, on the west-facing side of the hill. We passed through attractive little hamlets resting in hollows. On the opposite side of the valley their white walls reflected, shining, the bright sunlight. Moss and bracken and wayside flowers bordered the track. There was a sprinkling of wild apple trees. One, surprisingly, was in blossom. Wild strawberries without taste were slightly compensated by nettles without stings and goats without smell. (The latter two opinions had to be revised later).

Hereabouts, goats and sheep are used as beasts of burden. They carry a little bag, usually containing potatoes, on either flank, knit to each other, and attached with string round their chest and quarters. We saw many convoys of a hundred and more, in charge of villagers and grubby little boys, on their way to Chakrata and Mussouri; and others returning mostly light, for the Jumna Valley is almost self-supporting, even to weaving its own cloth.

A woman passed with a strikingly handsome, finely chiselled face, wearing a stiff black dress bordered with colour at the ankles. She wore some kind of fur on her head, busby-wise, and carried a curved sickle rigidly at

the slope. Her bearing and appearance reminded me strongly of the people in the Loëtschental.

The little pass was thick with ilex, and thickly carpeted with dead leaves. The day was cloudless. A fresh breeze blew from the east. Bandarpunch, blue with distance, rose over a succession of receding ridges. Behind was the last sight of Chakrata, its houses specks on the skyline.

We sat in the sun for an hour. As the porters came past, each one tossed a pebble upon the cairn on the pass, a quaint custom which has some religious significance.

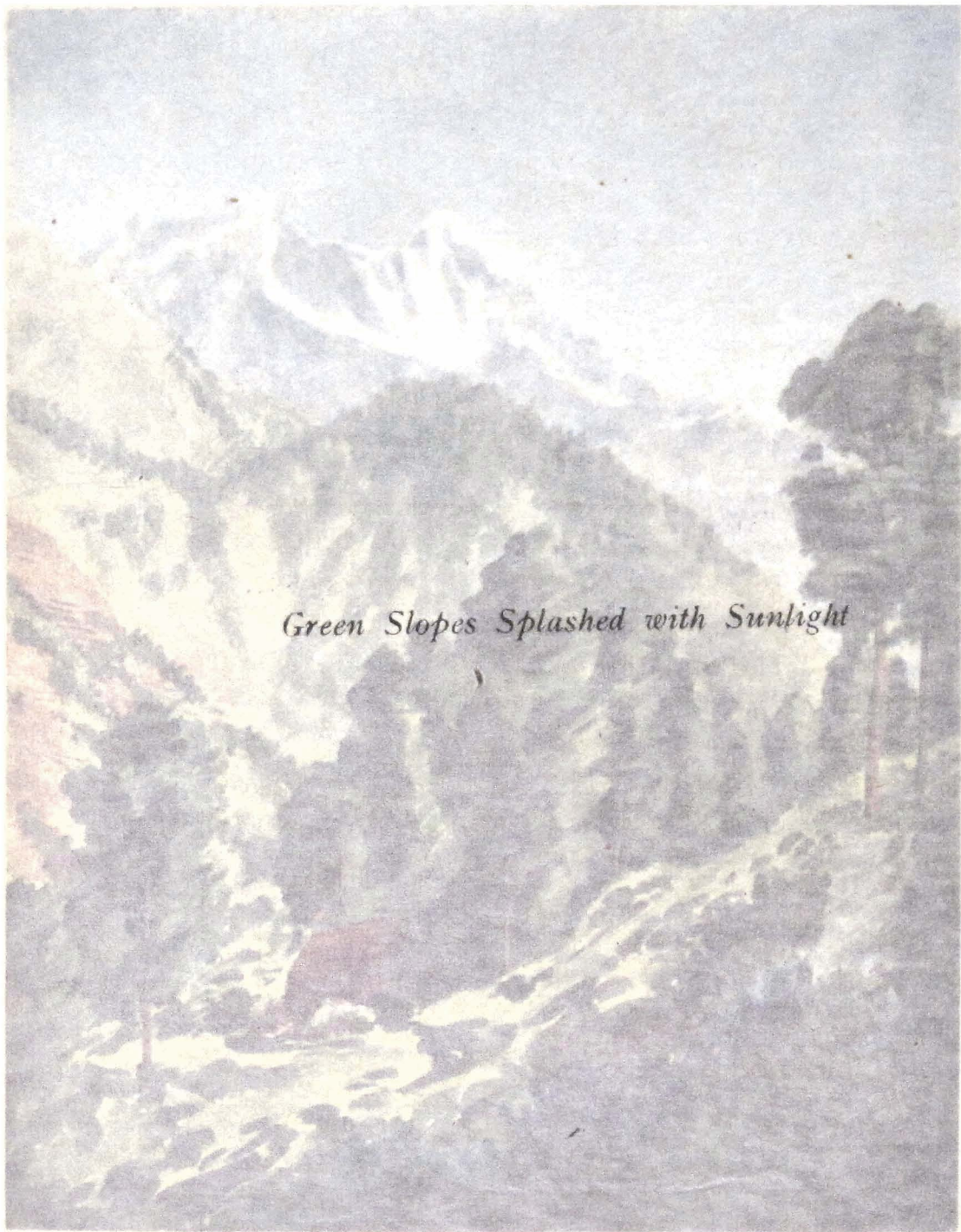
Below the Ghora Ghat were thick woods of ilexes, which gave place after a while to a green side-valley dotted with pines. We made our way along it two hundred feet above the river, through deep waving grass red-tinted. We lost the way and found ourselves slithering waist deep in grass down a steep hillside. On reaching the bottom we were pincushioned with burrs of all varieties, those on our arms and legs only removable by cutting off the hairs with scissors.

The way down to the Jumna Valley was very hot. The path was crazy and much of it was used by the inhabitants as an irrigation channel. The coolies waded knee-deep down it. We balanced along the edge which frequently gave way. The last part seemed to go more uphill than down across a hillside desolate with old landslides, but refreshed by some vivid autumn colours. We could see the Jumna below, shining like a mirage. Half an hour above it we passed through the village of Lakha Mandal, where there is an attractive Hindu temple, said to have cost a lakh of rupees in bygone ages, and some good stone figures.

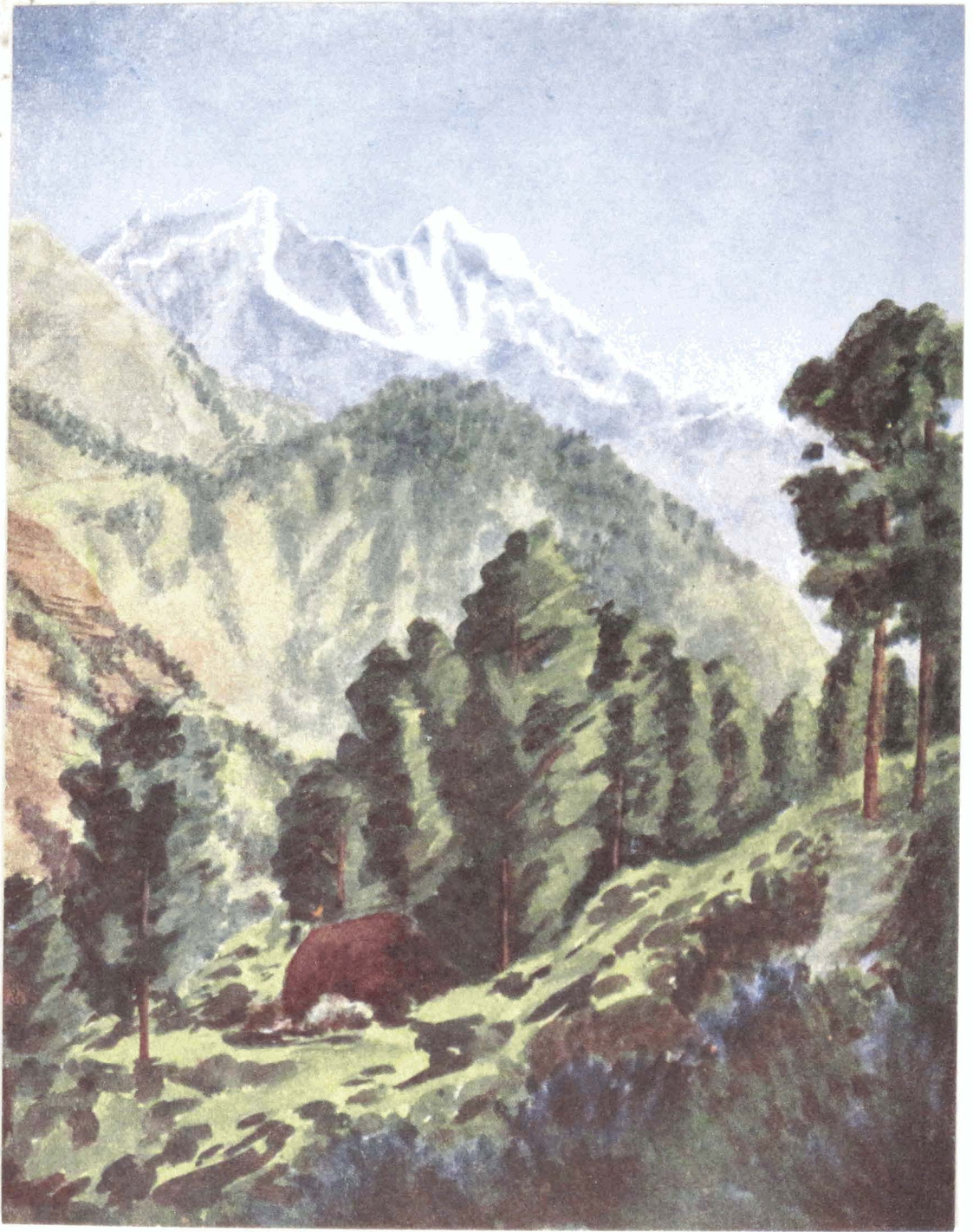
Where we joined it, the Jumna was running, comparatively tranquil, over a green flat plain, two miles long and a quarter in width. At either end the hills close in again steeply. We bathed in a small side stream.

The porters arrived at 6.30, rather travel-worn. Several





*Green Slopes Splashed with Sunlight*







had cut feet, on which I used powdered sulphapyridine and elastoplast. Of all the quantity of drugs and dressings I had brought, these and aspirins and acriflavine ointment were all we needed to use.

Two enormous grasshoppers with scarlet and black bodies and bright yellow spots on their wings inspected the tents. Handsome butterflies like small coppers with tailed hind wings floated over the grass, and as we sat in the dark after dinner, glow-worms and fire-flies lit their pilot lamps for the fairy folk.

#### IV

A SMALL hut lay half a mile on about a hundred feet above the river. This represents the "customs" into Tehri-Garhwal state. Ninety per cent of the traffic goes via the smuggler's track along the shore, but nobody seems to mind. Having a permit to show, we showed it, and were allowed to proceed.

The path runs two to five hundred feet above the river, which is here rather bigger than the Visp at Stalden. Three miles on, it crosses to the other side by a suspension bridge which oscillated like a springboard. After rising another five hundred feet above a gorge, we rounded a bluff and saw before us a broadened valley beyond cool pinewoods and rich green slopes splashed with sunlight, rising to the cooler snows in the distance.

We had purposely made this a short day, for half an hour on, where we intended to camp, lies a perfect natural swimming pool. So we sat and painted for three hours and then hurried down to it.

At a point where the river bends, the main current eddies into a rocky side-pool. At one end is a miniature white sandy beach, almost as dazzling to the eyes as snow. We dived off the rocky wall into deep green water, only a little less cold than its parent glaciers. Pine clad moun-

tains encircled us. The only other occupant was a kingfisher and our presence did not seem to trouble him.

After lunch Lolly sat on his camp chair shaving, his picture propped on the ground in front of him. It was very popular with the flies many of whom came and sat on Bandarpunch. I suggested that they liked the taste of the paint. Lolly disagreed. He considered their interest was due to aesthetic appreciation.

Clouds came up over the high mountains in the afternoon. As the sun went down they were banked to northwards in solid ramparts. There was a brown-red glow on the further hills, and the clouds caught a succession of fantastic colours, changing from yellow to orange, transformed by the afterglow to rose-pink and, quickly, an almost solid grey-white. The sky above them went through an exquisite shade of mauve to turquoise blue. At this point, they dissolved as if by magic, and were gone in a few minutes. The moon rose, three quarters full and waxing. One of the coolies was playing a pipe, a thin flute-like trill full of dimly understood yearnings.

## V

THE next day has left me with an impression of foot-paths strewn with pine-needles and fircones; sunshine; bracken and ferns; glimpses of the river away below, winding between steep mountain sides; little Valaisian-like hamlets; and Bandarpunch, like a silver shield, now dominating the valley. Harvesting was in progress.

At Barkot, an "important" village on a sheer bluff three hundred feet high, we were amused by a battle between two kids on a grassy knoll. The one higher up the slope would leap into the air and come down head to head with his antagonist, with an impact which was almost painful to the onlooker. The grace of any hill-animal moving always

delights me, but the photograph I took of them did not do the scene justice. We encountered also two beautiful children who passed us carrying brass urns on their heads.

As a quick way down to the camp-site by the river, Lolly produced a "short cut" which took us across a slope where we had to hold on by the trunks of the pine trees, and finally back on to the main path. At the bottom of a slope like it there is a tiny meadow next to a stretch of boulder-strewn sand, carrying on its edge a belt of alders. The sun shining through their tracery of leaves overhead made delicate patterns like it does in beechwoods, of an emerald green purer and more transparent than any gems. We bathed in the rock-pools in the shallows at the side of the river.

The day's walk had not been long, and at 3.30 Lolly became restive and went off to look for the porters. They arrived at four, having attained an average speed of less than one mile per hour. Lolly spoke to them like a father—a Victorian father—and for once they had no answer ready. Next day we set them a time limit.

## VI

THE morning began with another of Lolly's short cuts, which landed us in a wringing wet paddy field. Lolly was getting sensitive about his short cuts and this time he offered an apology for losing it before we tried it, hoping to silence the critics in advance. (There was only one audible critic; Hukba used to content himself with looking reproachful).

Soon we crossed one of the high-level routes from Simla to Mussouri, which itself crossed the Jumna by a bridge below us, trailing over the range to Uttarkashi in the Bhagirathi Valley.

The valley became steeper and wilder, and the way rose through forests of pine, past shattered clefts and buttresses and over slopes strewn with rock. At one place we were

obstructed where thirty buffaloes going one way were passing a herd of more than a hundred goats going the other, on a path four feet wide and a sheer four hundred feet above the river. We picked our way through delicately, for a buffalo does not bother to remember that the sides of his belly stick out a long way beyond his horns.

A little further on we watched a Himalayan tree-pie. He is a dark-coloured bird about the size of a cuckoo, with a forked tail at least three times as long as himself, which he uses for somersaulting and swooping as if on a switch-back.

After a few miles, the path again crossed the river and wound upwards to 6,000 feet, where we camped. All along the path large deep blue lizards were sunning themselves. Here, too, little villages have been built where the slopes ease off, and red cornfields lie, like splashes of blood. But here they are on sufferance and not by right, and the forests appear to be waiting only to pounce back and reclaim the land for their own.

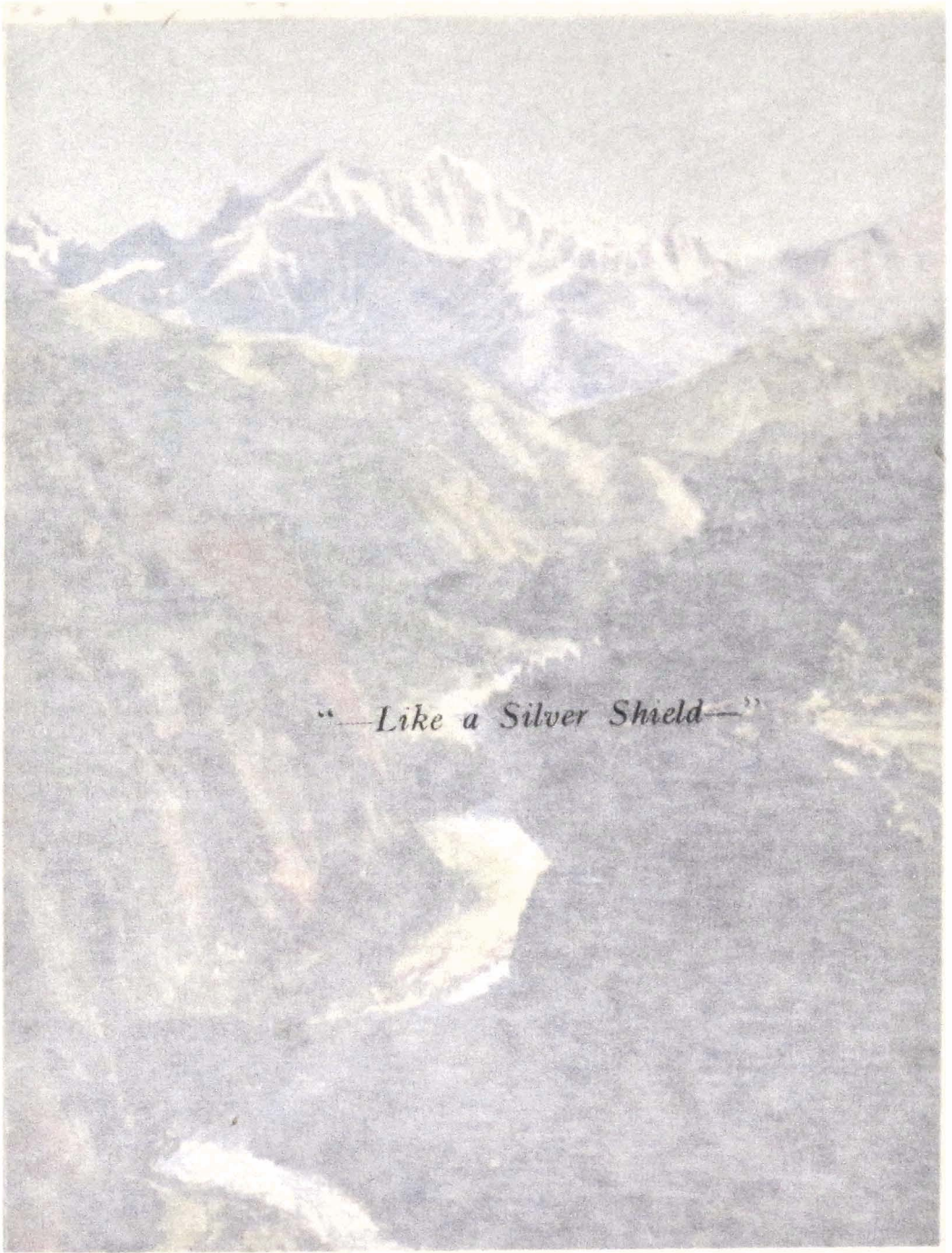
At our camp the river ran in a series of falls and torrents, roaring aloud. There were great boulders and steep cliffs. In the forests above stood the true mountain pines, a dark heavy blue-purple in the distance, solid and majestic as the mountains themselves, but graceful, too, with their tapering spires.

It was cooler here, and after sunset we sat by a fire for the first time.

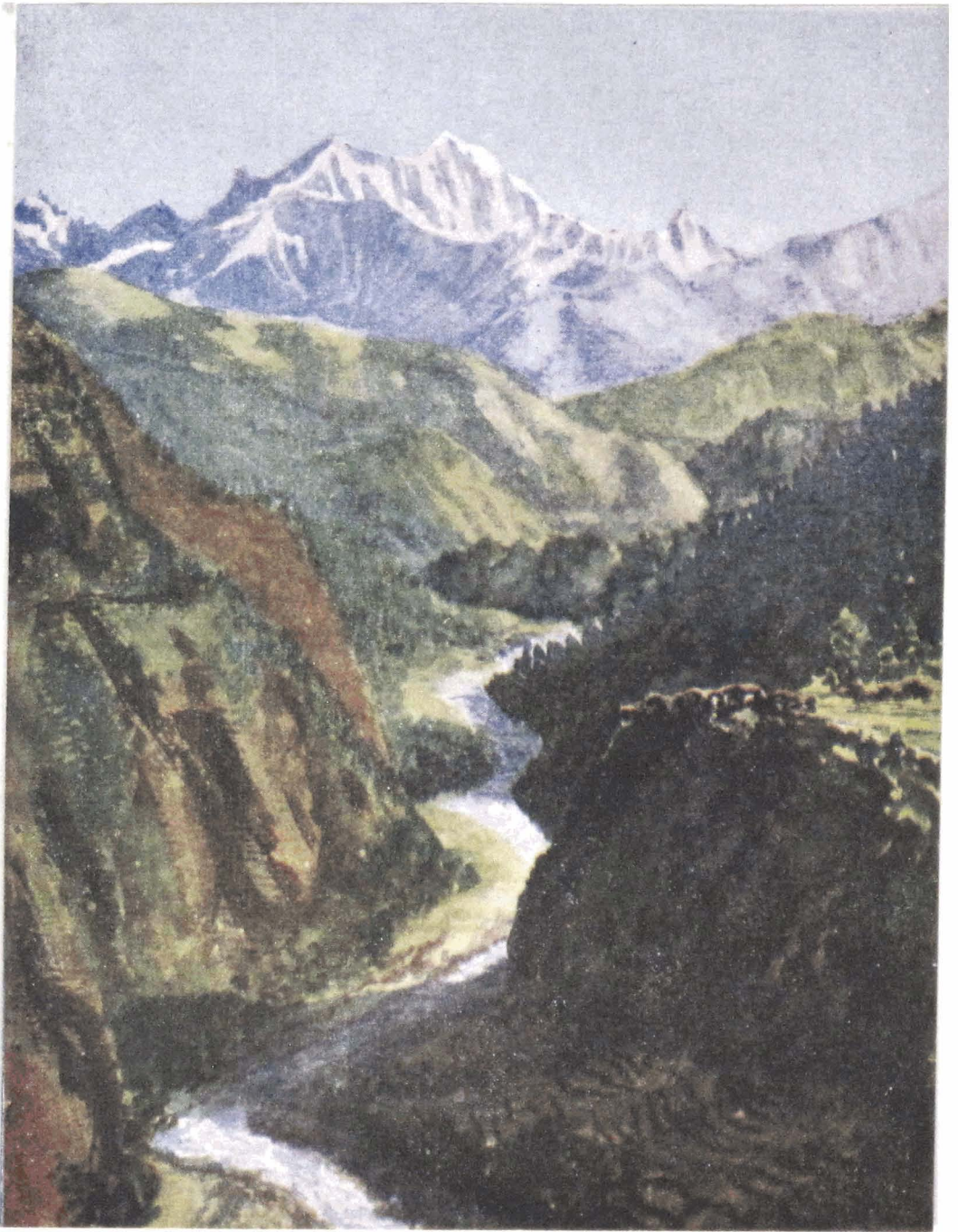
## VII

WE soon crossed the river again, and after about three hours walking reached the entrance to the Hanuman valley, which comes in from the East. This valley leads straight up to Bandarpunch, but there is no track up it and the vegetation is densely thick for miles. It is much quicker to continue on up the Jumna Valley to Karsali,





*“—Like a Silver Shield—”*





the village at its head at about 8,000 feet, and then take the pilgrim's track which winds over the hill-tops and descends into the Hanuman Valley above the tree line, on its way over to Gangotri, the source of the Ganges.

Just now they were logging. The Hanuman river is rather bigger than the Jumna, which rises at Jumnotri, six miles beyond Karsali. A series of rough shoots had been built, but the river is a bad one for logging because it is too small and there are too many rocks and waterfalls. As far as we could see up its course, men were working to free blocks. One hand had certainly found his true vocation. A beam had been thrown across the entrance to a chute, and on this he lay sideways in the sun, head propped on one elbow, while his other hand hung down towards the water, languidly "guiding" the logs into the chute as they descended with the torrent.

We crossed the Hanuman river by a wooden bridge and walked up a cool path in the shade of a cliff above the Jumna, by now quite a small stream. Maidenhair, harts-tongues, bracken, spiraea and pale mauve daisies like Michaelmas daisies grew from ledges and crevices. Yew, chestnut and walnut were mixed with the pines. A colony of large rather handsome blue-grey monkeys with black faces sat perched on rocks or jumped from branch to branch in a sun-sprayed dell. It was all cool and peaceful and several times I nearly walked off the path, day-dreaming.

Soon we were climbing steeply up a hillside, looking down on a cluster of dark roofs that were Karsali. There were banners and flags round its two temples, and cheerful noises : the villagers were making high festival.

A thousand feet up was a small level meadow, covered with daisies. Dark ilexes and rhododendrons surrounded it, and briar and other deciduous trees and bushes whose leaves were turning. Ferns grew up the trunks of the oaks. The bracken was a rich red-brown. Opposite us, as it were from the dress circle, an immense amphitheatre of moun-



tains stood above the trees, brown yellow with autumn grass, their tops cut by afternoon cloud. Jumnotri lay six miles up the valley we had left, where the Jumna is but a splash of ice-cold water. We saw, for an instant, two large mountain cats. A pair of hawks came down the hillside like plummetts just over our heads, with whistling shrill pinions, and were gone, only to reappear a moment later circling upwards on a rising current of warm air.

Rhododendron bushes and maidenhair hid a minute trickle of water in a shady gully. Hukba did some gardening to clear it and finished his handiwork with a curved rhododendron leaf over a rock, as a water-conduit. I sat and sketched. By and by a large flock of sheep came down on their way from the high pastures. They surged round the tents and started to eat anything not actually of metal. Lolly stood by the track leading out of the meadow and told them to go away, but they did not seem to understand him. The sherpas were imitating the uncouth and rather vulgar noises made by the herdsmen, and were applauding each other with peals of laughter. Finally the flock disappeared down the hill, and all was peace again.

## VIII

WE rose steeply through thickets of briar and then woods of magnificent oaks, where we put up two large Himalayan pheasants which whirred indignantly through the trees. The ground was covered with ferns, and ferns grew up the great trunks wherever they slanted. Soon we emerged onto a little alp where white frost jewelled the grass and a few mauve asters remained of the summer. Above it we were among pine and birch and rhododendron; bracken and ferns in a dying glory of flame; briar with large scarlet hips; bushes growing in graceful sprays—whole spinneys of them—by their leaves and berries, evidently a kind of

rowan, the colour of burnished copper. Glimpses of great mountains appeared through the trees. The early sunshine reflected a living tapestry of yellows and browns and flame-coloured reds against the darker green of the pines and rhododendrons.

Above the tree line, at about 12,000 feet, the open hillside bore thick patches of alpine rose and juniper, and the last of the birches, twisted and weather-dwarfed. The hills were deep yellow-brown in the distance ; red-brown nearby with tinted grasses and autumn leaves. They resembled the high tops in Scotland, only not so purple, and their scale was much vaster.

The pilgrim's track winds along the south side of a ridge, just below the tops, directly above the Hanuman Valley. Much of the surface of this hillside is of limestone. Many varieties of gentians were still flowering in the sheltered south-facing gullies, and sheets of edelweiss, as thick as buttercups in an English meadow. Though most of the flowers were over, there were a few purple buttercups, a variety of monkshood, one of several which we found, and more little mauve asters. Rocks and boulders were covered with a climbing plant, like ivy on old walls ; but this had leaves of a vivid red-green, and lavender-shaped clusters of tiny flowers of a soft pink. Flowers and leaves did not die, but dried off into a bright rust red. Range upon range of diminishing foothills stretched away to the south.

We encountered a sheep, evidently left behind by the flocks descending for the winter. The porters, after their practice the day before in sheep-calling, brought it along with them ; but after an hour or two of their company, it wandered off in some pasturage, wiser than it knew.

Later in the afternoon we met a villager from Karsali, an old friend of Lolly's from the year before, who was out shooting (probably without a licence) with an extremely ancient hammer and flint twelve bore shot-gun. He told us, proudly, that he had two others at home. He had got

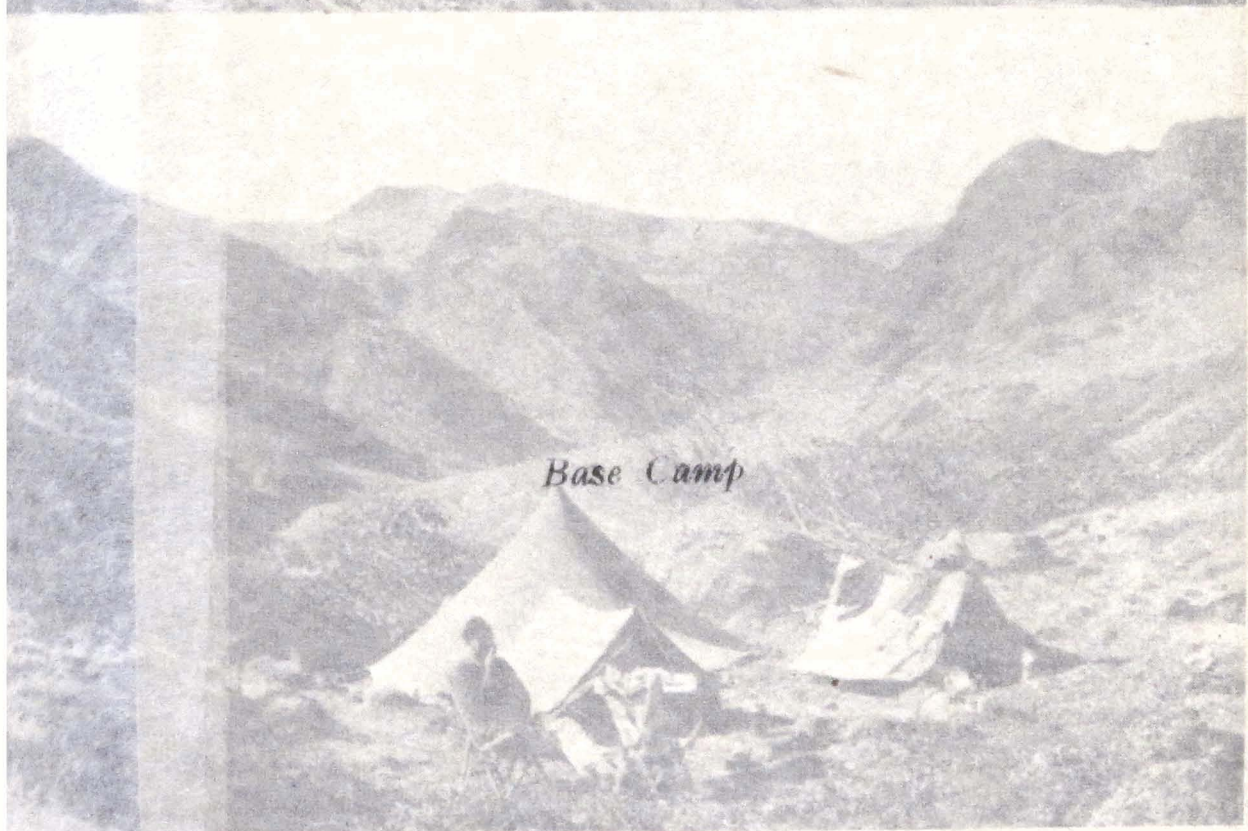
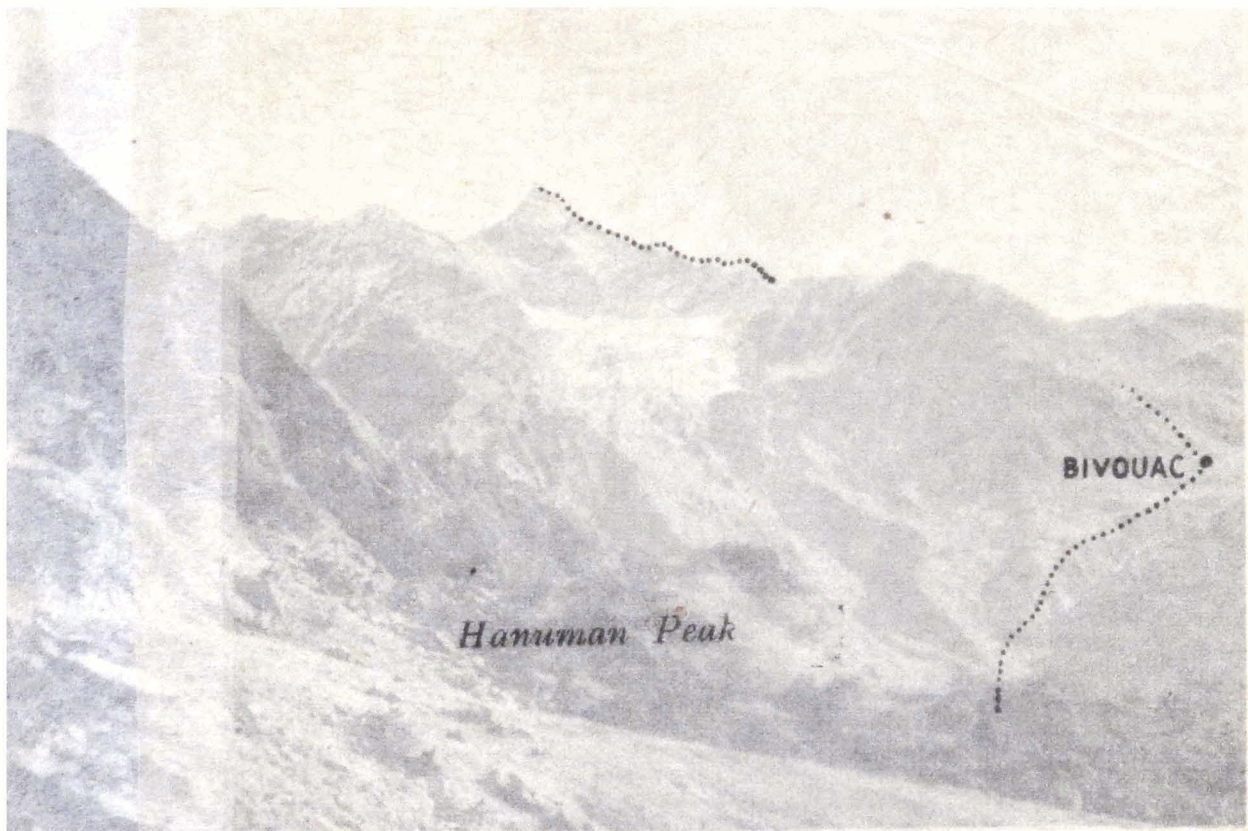
a Bharal, a small antelope rather like a chamois. I say "got" and not "shot," because it is easier to imagine him creeping up behind and hitting it on the head with this venerable weapon rather than shooting out of it. As we were talking, he and his shikar suddenly made off after something moving near some rhododendrons some way down the hillside. I caught one glimpse of blackness, which he reported on his return as four bears, when he reappeared at our camp later. He gave us a haunch of his Bharal, which was excellent, and spent the night with the porters in their tent.

Our camp-site was at about 12,500 feet, below a high waterfall issuing from a cleft in the cliffs. There was a very cold wind but, curiously, for a short distance along the banks of the stream, where it was sheltered, we found a flower garden. There were thick clusters of a different form of monkshood of sky-blue, about eighteen inches high with leaves like delphiniums ; little white saxifrages ; purple gentians resembling periwinkles ; a yellow primula with an exquisite scent like a cowslip ; a variety of wild strawberry with flowers of deep mahogany-red and, queen of them all, a few Himalayan poppies, of a blue of unimaginable delicacy and grace.

## IX

It was an exceedingly cold night. Very little washing was done and no one showed his face before eight. We sent two coolies back to Karsali to bring enough food for themselves and the others to last twelve days. Their loads were divided amongst their friends.

We wound along the mountainside and rose to a ridge at about 14,000 feet overlying the Hanuman Valley again, but this time quite near our base camp. The day was overcast and stormy. The view over the Gangotri peaks, topped by driving storm-clouds and peppered with new









snow, was impressive. The Gangotri massif is steep and complex. As the peaks are only about 21,000 feet high, nobody has bothered to climb them and they are untouched. They would provide a lifetime of glorious rock and snow and ice, quickly accessible from civilization, and we vowed to pay them a visit some day.

We sat on the ridge while an inquisitive lammergeier circled quite close round us. We could see his individual flight-feathers as he swooped, and hear them drone. The lammergeier is the biggest of the Himalayan vultures. In flight he is a sight for admiration and envy: he is hardly ever seen to flap his wings but soars and circles in rising currents of air, a master in the art of flying.

Just below the ridge we had a good view of the Hanuman peak, which we later climbed, before the clouds covered it; and we examined it for a while in the glass.

Before we started down, Lolly apologised in advance again for losing the way, and before long we were immersed in boulders and dying vegetation thigh-deep. This time he stifled comments by saying, "I told you so." On regaining the path we soon dropped to rhododendrons and birches and copper coloured rowans, where we put up three more pheasants. They are handsome birds of blue-black with rich brown tails. They were very noisy and clattered away registering disapproval with as much indignation as those we had seen the day before.

The whole valley was strewn thick with dead flowers: it must be a very lovely place when they are all in bloom, for it was a lovely place now. It is very secluded, and we saw no soul save our own porters while we were there. Our base camp lay about a mile up the valley beyond the point where we reached it. It was sheltered by a spinney of rhododendron bushes, out of the middle of which grew a flame-coloured rowan which was to delight our eyes when it took life in the westering sun. It was raining when we

arrived, but it soon stopped though the sky remained overcast.

The valley here is surrounded by steep containing walls rising to rocky peaks. About half a mile further on it forks. The right hand leads up a side valley by which the pilgrim's route continues its wanderings on its way to Harsil, and it frames the Hanuman peak; the left makes of itself a narrow valley which comes to a sudden termination under the great mountain wall of Bandarpunch. It was an impressive spot, and at the same time a very homely one.

I had brought up some blue poppies from the last camp and spent the afternoon trying to paint them, very conscious of my shortcomings compared to what Audrey would have made of them. Quite vividly I could hear her saying, "You can't *start* to call it a flower till you can pick it off the paper."

A large tear had appeared in one of the Meade tents, which had been in use ever since it started life with the Kamet Expedition twelve years before, and whose fabric had become not much stronger than damp blotting paper. We removed the window flap and made, from it, a serviceable, but inelegant patch. Lolly sat inside and I sat outside the tent, and we passed the needle rapidly to and fro through the tent wall—and sometimes through one another's fingers—using a rock as a thimble and trying not to break the only needle.

The evening provided some entertainment trying out the second primus stove. Lolly and Dawa as the only available experts, self-styled, fiddled with it and produced some fine explosions and jets of hot paraffin, but they had to abandon the struggle before they had wasted all the fuel.

We had arrived two days earlier than we had expected and had a clear twelve days before we needed to start down. Bad days, at this time of year, are usually followed by a week of fine weather; and our plan was, next day, to camp



at 14,500 feet, a couple of hours up the valley. From this camp there was to be a steep climb up the south face of the mountain to the main ridge at just under 18,000 feet, where we hoped to bivouac for the final climb.

## BANDARPUNCH

### I

YESTERDAY had not been fine, and today, if I had not been assured several times by Lolly that nothing ever falls in these mountains at this time of year except an occasional thunder-storm and five hail-stones, I should have said that the monsoon had returned. It was far too hot and woolly clouds were blowing up from the south. In the morning we sorted out stores and clothing and watched five Gharal through the glasses, browsing on a green gulley across the valley. They resemble chamois in head and size and the beauty of their movement on steep ground. Their colour is a handsome grey, there is a little white on their throats and quarters and their legs are decorated with a thin black band. Fashion models could learn a lot from them both for smartness and grace of movement! Four of them kept staring suspiciously at us: the fifth was not yet of an age to find anything suspicious.

At one we started up the valley, taking the left branch and accompanied by some of the coolies carrying the two Meade tents, wood and provisions. At this time of year the torrent is easy to ford as it is only knee deep in selected places, though swift-running. A chalk gulley the other side was still gay with flowers, a welcome contrast to the sullen sky and the biting wind. A few poppies of the

most exquisite transparent mauve swayed above clusters of gentians.

At half past two we came upon a perfect camp-site on a small piece of level ground protected from wind. We were rather above fourteen thousand feet and a little above the limit of the juniper and alpine rose. Clouds were thick about us.

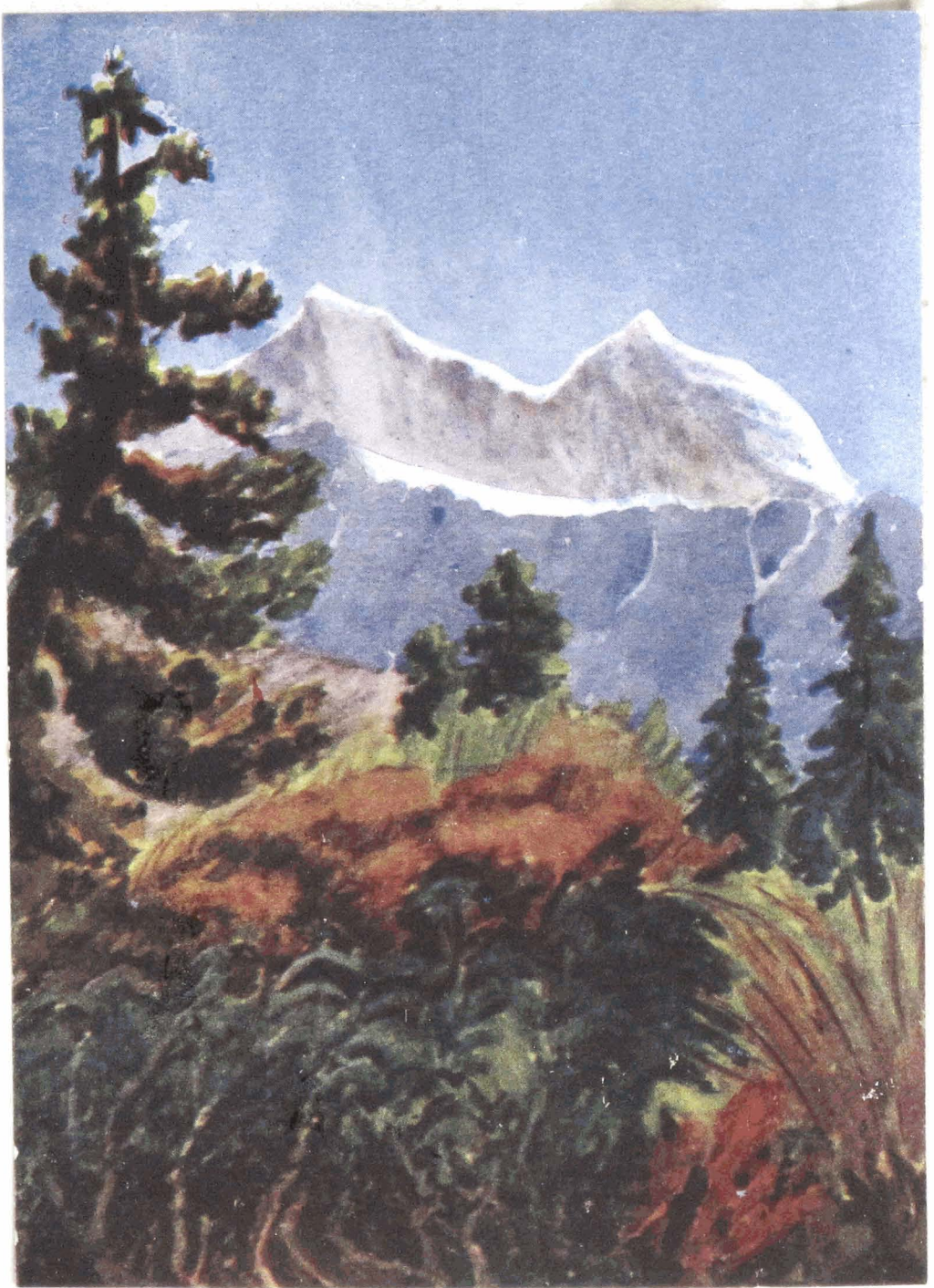
No sooner were the tents pitched and the coolies dispatched down than it began to hail, turning soon to rain. Lolly was deeply offended. He sat in our tent and grumbled to himself. I could catch phrases like, "No business at all to do it at this time of year—can't understand it—deeply hurt—if your barometer doesn't go up in the night I shall throw it down the hill."

This was the beginning of the Barometer Jest. My barometer comes from the old English firm of Nigretti and Zambra, a present from Bumps just before I left England. It is also calibrated as an altimetre to read up to twenty thousand feet. On arrival at this camp we found it had jumped to fifteen thousand five hundred, twelve hundred feet too high. Without thinking very hard we said jubilantly, "the glass has gone up and it's going to be fine." After we had got tired of tapping it next morning, and Lolly had Expressed an Opinion about Nigretti and Zambra, it occurred to me that it had gone down and not up; and it was, indeed, faithfully recording the weather. After this our confidence in Nigretti and Zambra returned.

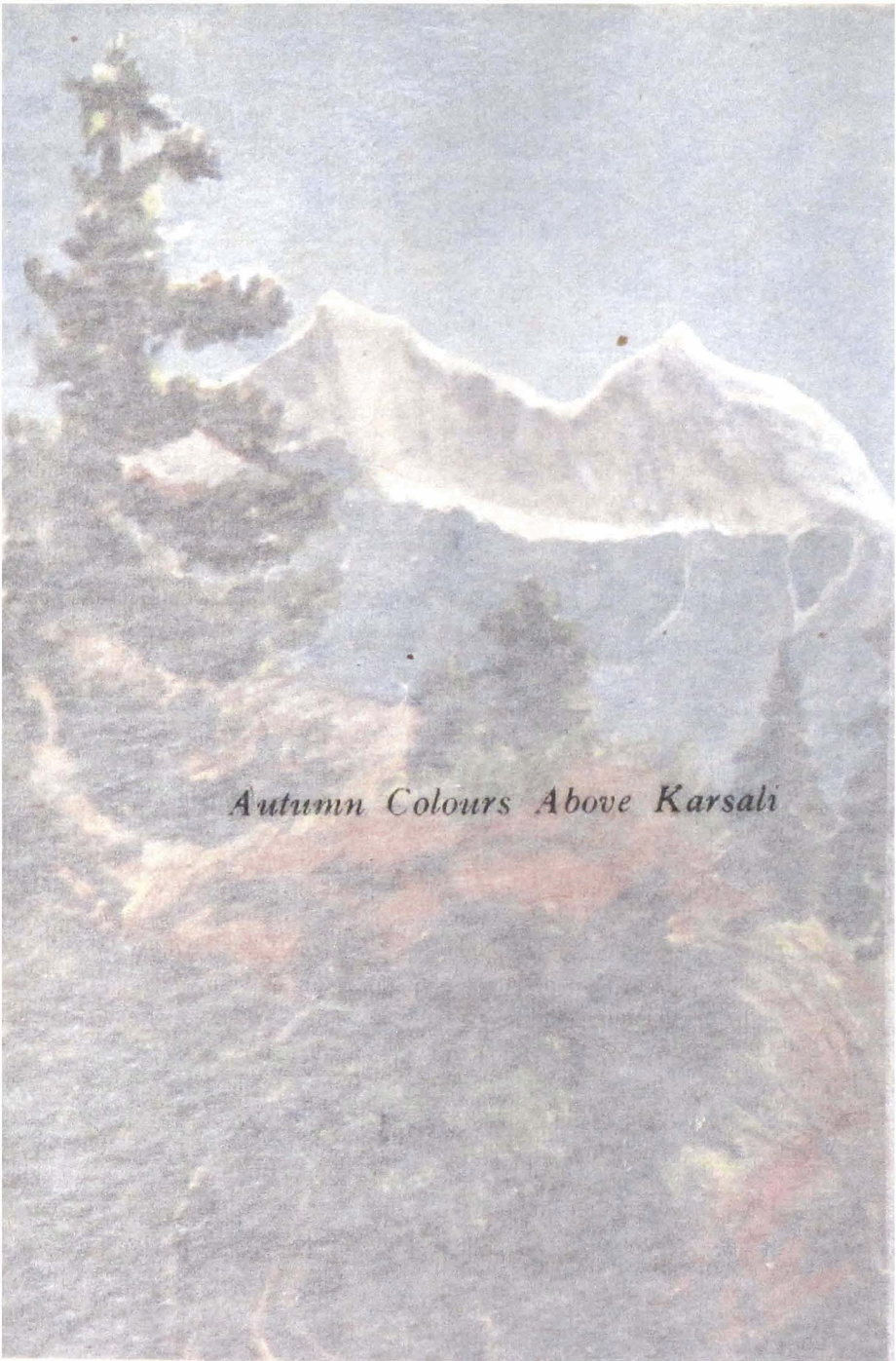
Meade tents are said to be waterproof when new. Ours were neither new nor waterproof. The water came in all over the roof, and we sat for an hour sponging the waterfalls with towels and then wringing out the towels, while Lolly still muttered about fair play and unnecessary monsoons.

Towards evening it cleared a bit and we could see a little of the magnificent mountains encircling us. There are no less than four glaciers on this face of Bandarpunch and the









*Autumn Colours Above Karsali*

mountain was softened and etherealized by new snow and the mists which drifted across it in the gentler evening light.

Nightfall brought a fine thunder-storm which Lolly said would clear the air. But the next morning was no more promising. Snow was down to our camp. The mountains were invisible.

After breakfast we set off to climb along a rock ridge separating us from the right hand branch of the Hanuman valley, and about fifteen hundred feet above. We ascended over scree and loose rock covered with six inches of new snow, until we gained the ridge, where we sat on a flat rock and the day obliged by clearing temporarily. We took some photographs and then the curtain descended once more. Along the ridge we roped up and as it started to snow, descended down a convenient gulley to lunch.

According to the weather prophet, the first fine day means a week of fine weather in this locality during October. With due faith in the forecast I agreed that all we had to do was to wait for the first fine day.

A great ridge connects Bandarpunch with the Hanuman peak, about 17,500 feet at the lowest point of its curve. The year before, Lolly had discovered a way onto the ridge some three hundred feet above its lowest point, on the Bandarpunch side; and he had also found a good sheltered spot rather below 18,000 feet, where there was a level place large enough to pitch a tent. If the conditions for climbing were good, and especially if no time needed to be spent on step-cutting, we thought it would be possible to get to the top and back, even to the camp we were in now, by nightfall.

## II

WHEN we turned in it was snowing, and the long-suffering barometer was as low as ever.

At six we awoke to a scene of almost fairylike beauty. Not a cloud was in the sky and there were four inches of snow on the ground, which a three-quarter waning moon was flooding in silver. The mountains shivered ghostlike and utterly unreal in the moonlight.

The darkness slowly grew pale in the tent. As the first shaft of sunlight caught the summit of Bandarpunch, we left the tent and emerged into crisp hard snow. I walked up the slope behind in order to see what the weather to southward promised.

The steep-sided hills enclosing the Hanuman valley were all snow-capped against the valley's dark brown. Beyond, tier upon tier of deep blue foothills stood sharply against a sky of lemon yellow fading upwards into turquoise blue. A few dark streaks, low down, were all that were left of yesterday's clouds. Westward my gaze was drawn by the dazzling sunlight on the freshly white peaks framing a large glacier field south of Bandarpunch. Though only 17,000 feet in height they had borrowed a most noble majesty from their white raiment.

I descended to camp where the Sherpas had hot coffee waiting.

Points of light started catching the edges of the battlements which rose from either side to the curving white summit. No words of mine can describe the heavenly radiance of that morning's mountain. We sat watching the whole edge catch fire from a dozen kindling points; seeing tongues and arrows of brilliant light mould the glacier surfaces and supporting ridges over the blue depths; our eyes drawn back, and again back, to the white plume of powder snow streaming off the summit ridge, unimaginably beautiful.

If reflection can but dimly rekindle a vision in the smoky mirror of memory, how little such an attempt can do towards bringing the picture into the imagination of a mind which has not experienced the scene. But the deeper feelings, mystical or religious, which accompany the ex-

perience of all scenes of surpassing beauty and lend them added colour, must be the touchstone of understanding. The transport of wondering joy, poignant, yearning, unutterably sweet, gone—alas—almost before its bouquet has been so much as savoured, is not found only in the mountains, though to some, the mountains open the readiest gateway.

Clouds came up at midday, but not sufficiently thick to make the day cold. We painted, talked, shaved (an absurd conceit resulting in considerable loss of blood), and sorted things out for next day. The sun had already stripped most of the snow off the lower slopes ; and around the camp its last remains were speckled over the ground, resembling in imagination through half-closed eyes a field of Alpine crocuses. Of all Alpine flowers perhaps the most lovable, of them I once wrote, to escape in spirit the exhausting heat of mid-summer Bombay :

*How came you to this place so quickly,  
Small heralds of spring, and so thickly  
Besprinkled, on slopes that were lately  
All snow-bound with winter ? And only  
The pine-trees in parties so stately,  
Were living, and they seemed all sombre and lonely.*

*Who scattered your hundreds of flowerlets, so lightly  
Awaking their opening petals, so brightly,  
In white and in purple, but silently, shyly  
Reflecting the sunshine ? You stand bravely smiling  
At shadow or tempest ; the fairies must slyly  
Have brought you, for never was sight more beguiling.*

Hereabouts the only really green things remaining were plants on sturdy single stems about eighteen inches high. Their flower resembled a bunch of small thistles, completely enclosed by cupped, rounded leaves of light green. I had



thought their presence incongruous but oddly attractive. That morning each one had worn a snow-cap and their lower leaves were drooping and frozen, bearing also a burden of snow. Crestfallen they had appeared, and somehow defiantly and comically pathetic. By the evening they had thawed out, though a little the worse for wear.

### III

WE left camp next morning at seven-thirty, the Sherpas carrying about forty pounds each. The world was frozen hard and the first sunbeam had not yet appeared. For an hour and a half we plodded steadily up the moraine which was covered in hard crisp snow, then we ascended a couloir and got onto a rock buttress. Here Lolly put Hukba on a rope, since he had no experience of climbing, and though there were no difficulties a slip would have seen him a long way.

After an hour of this we were in brilliant sunlight which was already ruining the snow-surface.

We were mounting steadily towards a rock rib on the right, flanking a steep gulley and ending in a delicately curved snow ridge which thrust its way steeply upwards for three hundred feet to the true ridge, whereon we intended to bivouac. To reach the rock rib it was necessary to traverse upwards and across a steepening snow slope above some cliffs. From here onwards the snow was uniformly bad. It failed to support a foothold for more than two and slid away bodily from its underlying bed of old hard snow or ice. Dawa and I, in the tail, often found it necessary to cut ourselves steps through this mush into the underlying surface, and, in addition, I had to assist young Hukba by prodding his generous posterior with my axe while Lolly hauled him up from above as lustily as his own treacherous footholds would allow. Soon we were forced to descend



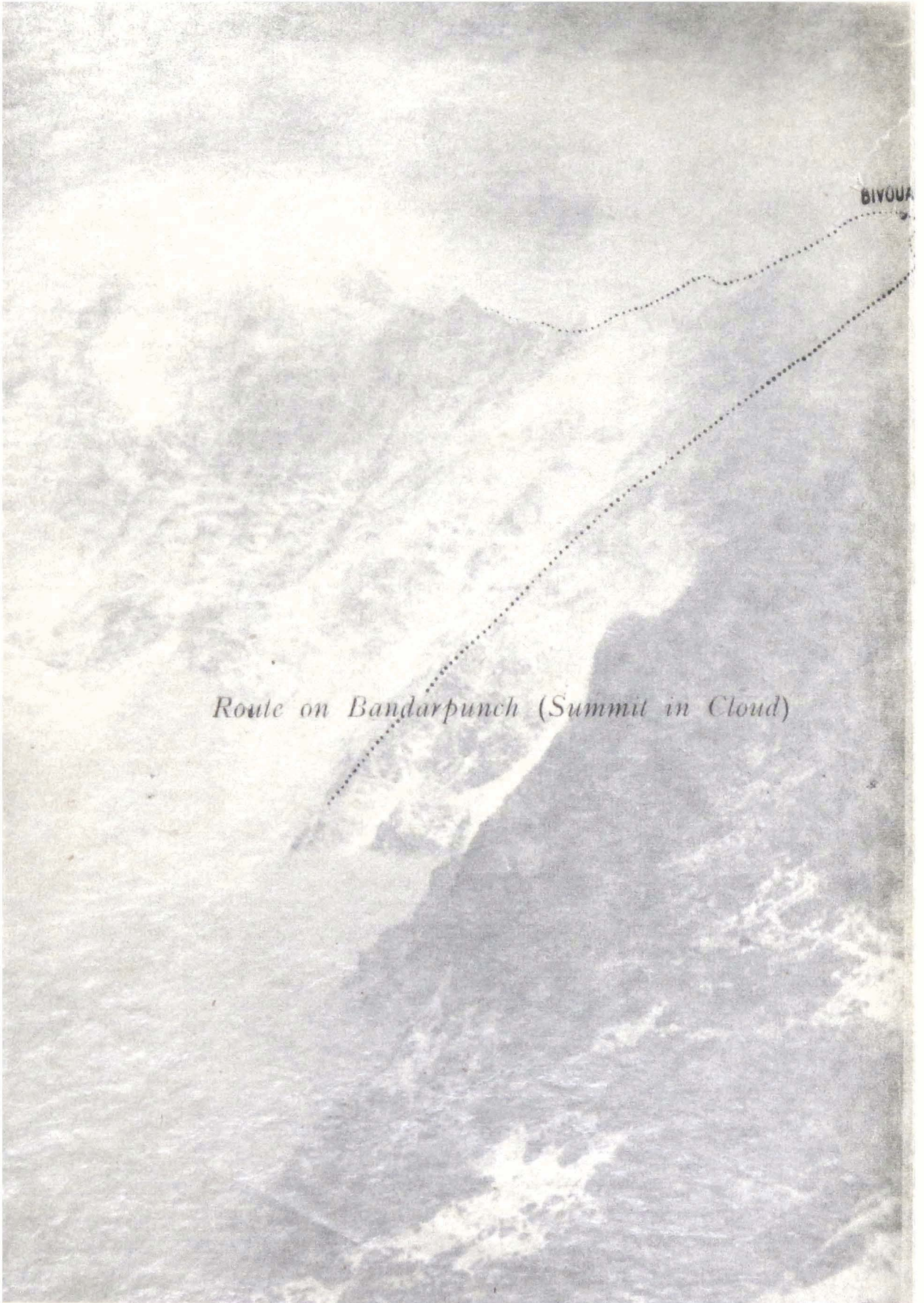






BIVOUAC

*Route on Bandarpunch (Summit in Cloud)*





diagonally across an ice couloir, and to steady Hukba from above I tied on behind him. We remained in this order for the rest of the afternoon.

The time went slowly. We put on crampons which were, on the whole, an improvement so long as one remembered to kick away the snow which balled up under them every few steps. Sun-softened snow of this nature is a well known crampon trap.

About half past one clouds started to come up, and little gusts of wind. It was no longer hot but cold. Not until three did we reach the rib but up this the going was sounder. At the bottom of the snow ridge we traversed across a gully, up some rocks which were less exposed than the ridge, and so to a little snow hollow on the true ridge, completely sheltered from the wind. Indulging his perverted sense of humour, Lolly said "Well, only another hour now," to which I answered "It's been 'only another hour' since two o'clock this afternoon," before I interpreted his grin of triumph. It was 5.30, and instead of the expected five hours we had taken ten. It was also too late for the Sherpas to go down that night, so we told them they would have to stay with us which they considered a great joke.

Dawa, who is an expert at putting up bivouacs quickly, stamped a square in the snow and the tent was up in a few moments. We all got in, the two Sherpas squatting on either side of the primus stove. I had been feeling the altitude for the past hour and curled up in a corner. Lolly told me I was a delicate blue-green colour and enquired solicitously after my health. I replied it would be excellent by next morning. In the meantime Dawa had lit the stove and was melting snow. A mug of tea and brandy all round, followed by bovril and biscuits and cheese made us feel much more comfortable.

About sundown the mists cleared and we were able to see the beauty of our position. We were high up on a great ridge which curved down towards the east in a series

of fantastic spires and pinnacles and snow edges, rising again to form a buttressing arête of the Hanuman Peak, not to be climbed from this side, we judged, and in this aspect blue-white with glacier in the evening light and cut with the deeper shadows of bergschrund and ice-fall. The side we had ascended was barred to us by the sheltering snow-crest a hundred feet above our heads. Along this crest lay our way to Bandarpunch, and its continuation upwards masked all but the summit slopes which seemed to lean over almost near enough to touch in the clear still air. Just north of it towered the rock peak of Bandarpunch, said to be higher than the snow summit; and though quite near, it had no connection with it. I could see nothing of beauty about this mountain, except the ruthless beauty conveyed in some aspects of power. Limned of black rock, it rises above the glacier, unclimbable I think and menacing, like a gigantic fang. Below our feet, some steep rocks fell to a great white glacier, heavily crevassed and curving downwards away into the violet depths of the Bhagirathi valley. Srikanta and the Gangotri group, razor-edged, were reflecting in rose-coloured glory the last rays of the setting sun; and beyond, to the east, we saw the outlines of a wilderness of great peaks. Away in the distance we could distinguish the dark hump, like an ogre, which must be Kamet.

We gave the Sherpas blankets and dry socks, and since Lolly and I, only, had sleeping-bags with us, we put them in the middle, side by side, while we lay on the outsides at opposite ends to them.

The primus stove and four bodies in a minute tent did quite a lot towards warming the atmosphere, but the moisture which condensed on the under surface of the tent roof soon started to fall on our heads as snow, until the cold became too intense for it to fall any longer.

## IV

I HAVE not often spent a more uncomfortable night. Although neither we nor the Sherpas were particularly cold, there was no room to change our position. I was heartily glad when it was time for Dawa to start the cooker and make porridge, and glad too to find that, except for a slight headache, I was feeling fairly well. But Lolly had a severe headache and neither of us was in a mood to go climbing that day.

Hukba had apparently disappeared. Not until breakfast was ready did he emerge from beneath a pile of blankets, looking very owl-eyed. Boots were frozen solid and needed half an hour's kneading over the stove before they could be put on.

At 8.30 we sent the Sherpas down with instructions to come up next day with some more provisions and their sleeping bags. We watched them across the couloir at the bottom of the snow ridge and then returned towards the tent. As we reached it a flight of snow pigeons came swooping along the ridge above our heads, and the delicious ease and carefree grace of their swift rush through the air made one feel more like a snail than ever.

A little veganin and four hours sleep worked wonders. We woke at 1.30 feeling fit for anything. The rest of the day was spent cooking, eating and preparing next morning's breakfast, which we put in thermos flasks. This saves a great deal of time and energy in the early mornings. To avoid any inconveniences like frozen boots, Lolly wrapped his tenderly in a blanket and I took mine to bed in my sleeping-bag.

I woke in a sheet of blue flame. Lolly had upset the spirit. Feeling as if I was still dreaming, I helped him beat it out. To our dismay we found that the jet of the cooker was blocked and both prickers were broken. The thermoses,

true to form if not to reputation, contained stone cold porridge (which was full of tea-leaves) and almost stone cold tea. With a considerable effort of will power we consumed their contents, put on boots and crampons, emerged from the tent into an arctic chill, replaced the ice-axes supporting the guy ropes with rocks, roped up and set off like sleep-walkers into the moonlight.

Lolly, who was leading, flogged his way through deep powder snow up the steep slope above the bivouac onto the ridge where the wind met us and made a mock of our layers of clothing. We advanced slowly. Before long Lolly went too near the edge of the cornice and broke through.

He disappeared, accompanied by several feet of cornice.

I jumped down the slope, drew in the rope, and waited for the jerk of its tightening. It never came. I had time to think "What a lot of weight Lolly must have lost," when his head appeared over the ridge, like a jack-in-the-box, and his voice requested me to stop pulling him in half. He had alighted neatly on a little snow ledge and climbed back quickly onto the ridge.

This incident woke us up, and besides, the darkness was thinning. Soon I took over the lead.

The way led more or less level, only rising or dipping a hundred feet or so, along an easy ridge which broadened into a narrow glacier field thrown, as it were, like a towel over the ridge. There were a few crevasse systems, but they were simple to pass. The depth of powder snow made progress slow and laborious and what in better conditions, we should have romped over in half an hour, cost us an hour and a half. Probing for hidden crevasses was also unprofitable, for an ice-axe could be pushed in almost anywhere up to its head.

This comparatively level stretch led to the foot of a rock ridge which rose steeply for about a thousand feet before giving place in its turn to what appeared from below to be an



easy, nearly level, snow arête, steeping finally into the long curving summit ridge. Lolly had not seen the further snow ridge, since he had been compelled to turn back the previous year just before surmounting the rocks; and how deceptive can be the effect of foreshortening from below, we were soon once again to find out.

We reached the foot of the rocks as the sun appeared over the rim of the Gangotri peaks, and sat sheltered from the wind for a few minutes of what is commonly called "glorious reincarnation." The first five of them I spent removing my crampons, of which the leather straps had frozen hard in their buckles, and the second five minutes in banging my left foot back to life.

The ridge was of fine sound granite and a delight to handle, for its rough rock was now sun-bright and friendly. There was not often any need for a check other than the feeling of weakness imposed on us by altitude. We were soon overtopping the Hanuman Peak. An enchanting bird's-eye view of the ridge connecting us to it gradually unfolded...tower, and crest, and snow-wave, a sea of dazzling light and grades of blue shadow, frozen in the act of breaking.

The way steepened further. We were forced into a right-handed traverse on slabs in order to outflank an intrusive gendarme. We edged back on to the ridge again. One last pitch, almost sheer, for which Lolly removed his sack, and we were up.

## V

WE sat in the sunlight munching chocolate before putting on crampons again. Above us a sharp-crested edge rose, curving, to disappear three hundred feet above our heads where its incline must slacken off again. It was corniced on the north side, and its southerly slope, which we must tread a few feet down, had just come into full sunlight. It

was not all quite white. Indeed one look at it was enough to show us that its surface was of ice covered in patches with a few inches of snow. Whatever this snow was like to tread now, in an hour it would be ready to slide off in sheets into the unspeakable depths to which the curving slope pointed in lines of austere beauty; and because of this, steps would have to be cut through it into the hard ice beneath in order to safeguard the return.

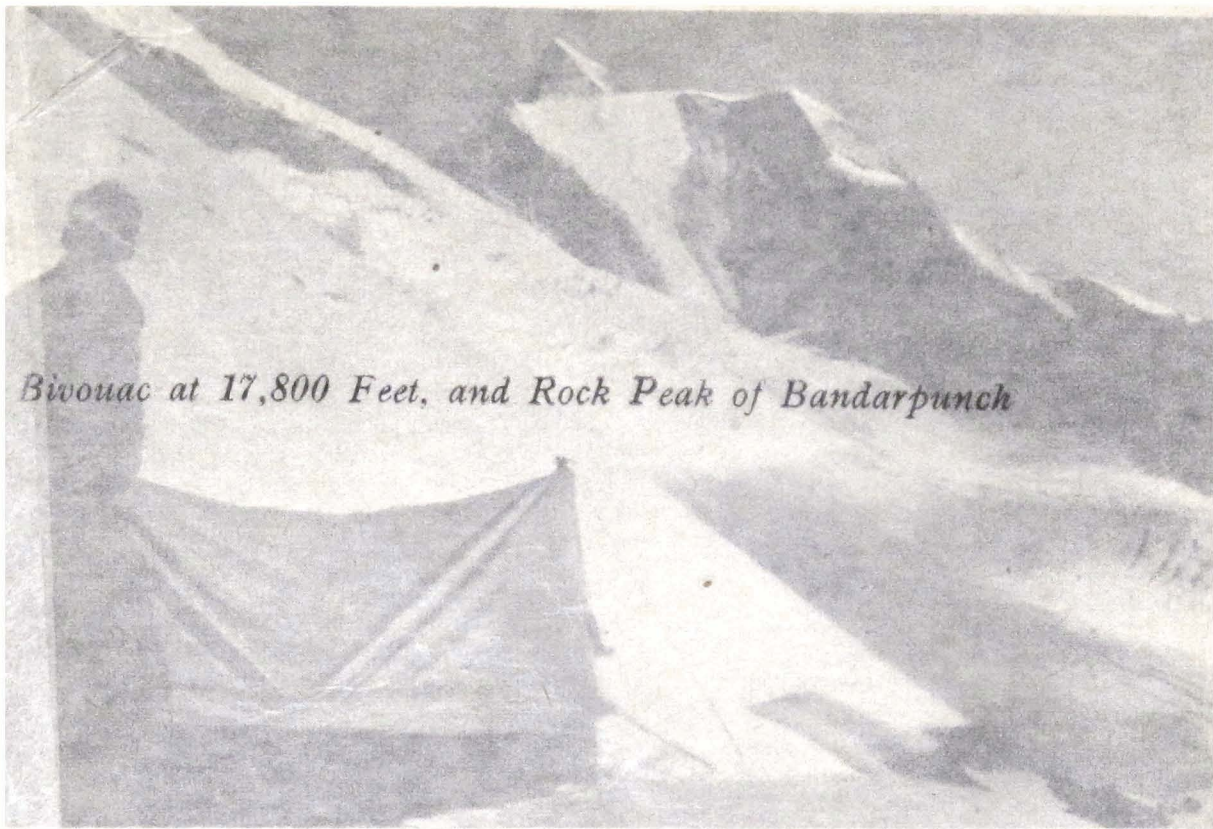
I went in front. Soon I had to start cutting steps. After twenty minutes of this we had covered about a third of the distance to the top of the crest and much less than a third of the height. I was neither surprised nor sorry to hear a counsel of retreat from behind.

As we turned to go down I recall Lolly remarking "If I slip you must throw yourself over the other side," in the tone of voice of one saying "Have another cup of tea"...

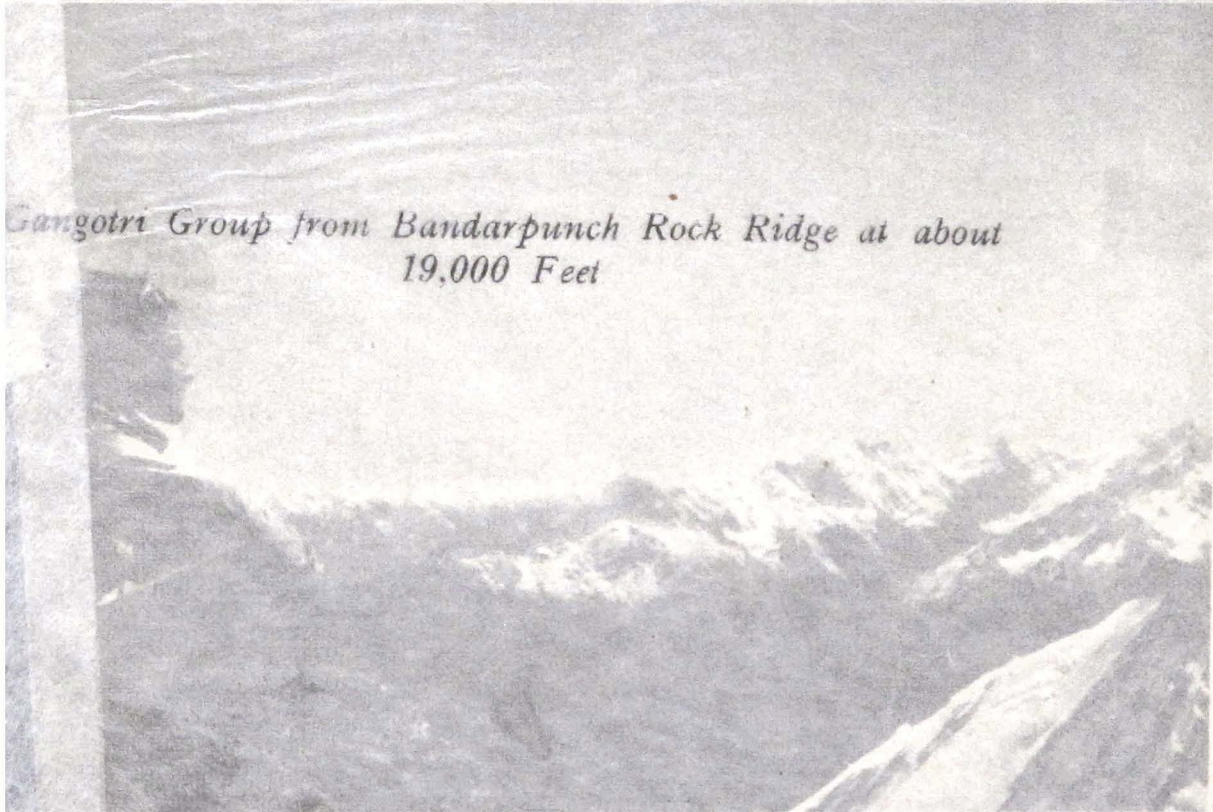
We sat at the top of the rock ridge again, in lazy enjoyment of a world of sunshine and snow. As we had turned back before overstepping the edge of our reasonable margin of safety, in face of snow conditions which we had known would beat us if we were confronted here with them, we had no regrets. To climb the peak in these conditions would be impossible without at least another bivouac where we were sitting now; and this in its turn would mean more equipment, more Sherpas, and more climbers to assist the Sherpas up and down the ridge.

We drifted companionably down the ridge, pausing to take photographs. Even at this height one or two blue flowers, some form of monkshood, were growing in crevices in the rock, but sadly withered by the cold.

The sun had softened the snow, and snow-bridges over crevasses were disintegrating. In the dazzling, enervating whiteness I felt the altitude again and presently sank down in the snow, all my energy drained away for the moment. Lolly said, "Don't drink too much brandy at this height or

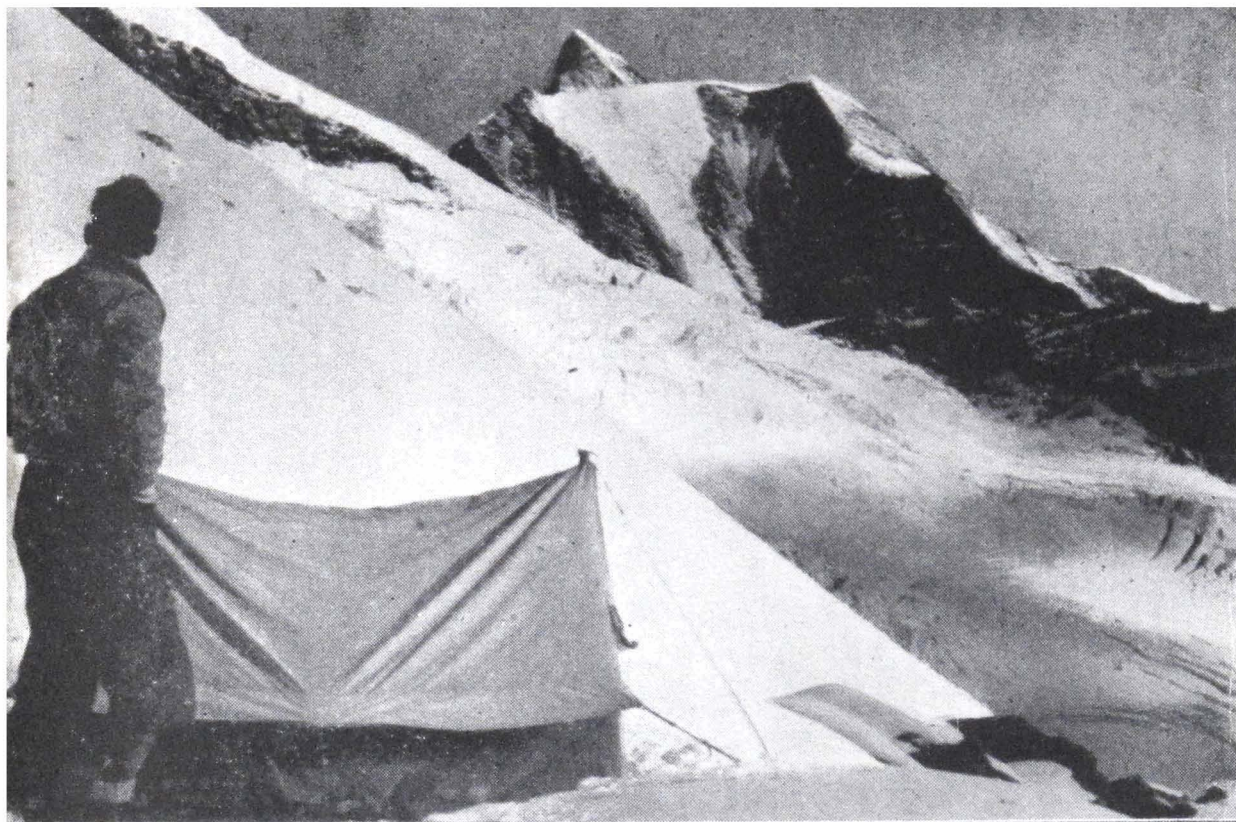


*Bivouac at 17,800 Feet, and Rock Peak of Bandarpunch*



*Gangotri Group from Bandarpunch Rock Ridge at about  
19,000 Feet*









you'll get tight." This was libel for only the smell was left in my flask. He sat in the snow collecting little flies (which, curiously, were scattered over it), in spirit phials for his friend Colonel Glennie who is interested in them.

And so, by slow stages, we came to the bivouac where the Sherpas had arrived and were waiting. That they had brought up their bedding and a lot of provisions and now had to take them down again, they considered object for mirth. The coolies, we were given to understand, had been in a great state of alarm the night before when nobody had turned up at the camp below, and had stayed chattering till midnight.

After half an hour's rest we started down. Lolly took Hukba on a short rope and I took Dawa on another. The snow was in much better condition, but we had to keep close together because of loose stones. In fact, the year before, a falling stone struck one of the Sherpas on the leg and put him out of action for several days. Hukba was splendid. He descended very steadily and surprisingly fast. He will make a good porter.

We avoided all the lower rocks by taking a long snow slope on their right hand side. This would have made a glorious glissade, but since the Sherpas were both loaded up and neither of them much enjoy glissading we kept on our crampons as a brake. By 5.30 we were coiling up the ropes on the moraine, and waving the Sherpas on ahead we strolled down.

About twenty minutes from camp it was Lolly's turn to feel done, and he sat on a rock unable to walk a step further. I hastened into camp and sent a coolie back to carry his sack down and another with a thermos of tea.

In a long day one sometimes reaches a point where one is mentally and physically incapable of going any further, a kind of temporary feeling of complete exhaustion. But it is curious to find after a short rest, and a biscuit or a few mouthfuls of tea, a resurgence of energy out of all pro-

portion to the rest or the food. After a short time one is capable of going on for hours with very little effort of will, and no more than a feeling of normal healthy tiredness.

Like a fool I put my boots too near the fire to dry them out, and when I came to remove them, some of the nails were red hot. The full result was manifested next day, when more than two inches of the front end of the soles came off in charred ruins. This was a source of great delight to a gang of Sergeant's children in Chakrata when we arrived there. They were thrilled with my boots and asked if we had been hiking. I told them I was in the habit of walking so fast that my boots got red hot and bits fell off them.

We had dinner in front of the blaze, and tumbled into our sleeping bags, well content.

## HANUMAN PEAK

### I

HANUMAN, the Hindu monkey god, is supposed to live on the top of Bandarpunch. The mythological story goes that at the request of Rama, whose wife Sita had been stolen away by the evil king of Lanka, Hanuman descended from his lofty seat of meditation, summoned all his monkey people and set off to help recover her. After her rescue, Hanuman returned to Bandarpunch where he dwells to this day. According to a local story from Karsali, a Very Holy man lives also on the top of Bandarpunch and it was a pity we could never verify this tale !

A fine rock peak stands wedge-shaped above its glacier at the head of the Hanuman valley, of height 18,200 feet, and christened by Lolly the Hanuman peak. It is the last mountain at the eastern end of the Bandarpunch chain

before it falls away into the Bhagirathi valley. We had studied it through the glass from the ridge on the pilgrims route the day we reached our base camp ; and had thought then that the only reasonably accessible ridge, that partly on the right skyline, dwindled into a steep face several hundred feet below the summit. But since we were looking at its upper part direct and not in profile, we decided it was well worth a visit.

The pilgrims route to Harsil and Gangotri leads up the right branch of the Hanuman valley beyond the continuation of our proposed ridge into that valley, before it crosses the Banzaru Pass at 15,200 feet. We intended to camp with the Sherpas up this valley at a point as near to the peak as possible, and to this end we set out about nine in the morning.

The coolies were in a holiday mood. Their way of crossing the Hanuman Ganga was to run down the side of a sheer rock, jump some eight feet onto another rock in midstream and make a final leap over to the other side. It is easy to visualise their ancestry at such moments.

Two and a half hours of usually steep and often imaginary track brought us to a great amphitheatre circled by mountains partially snow-covered. Not counting the valley by which we had entered, four passes, all over fifteen thousand feet, lead out of it. There is a small frozen lake, but it will surprise nobody to learn that we did not, like the old gentlemen of the Serpentine, break the ice and go for a swim.

Our camp site was windy. Its advantage was that it was near running water (melted snow tastes beastly) and the setting sun left it late. At least the setting sun would have left it late but for the clouds which obscured it from three o'clock onwards. The ground was sloped and rocky but those parts which were earth-covered were thick with gentians, a few only left and those withered. The year's last edelweiss were in flower among the rocks, stunted and stalkless and rather pathetic ; like pins stuck in pineushions.

Some really were meant to be like pins stuck in pincushions for, said Lolly, they were not the year's last edelweiss at all, but a rare dwarf variety. In which case pathos was not the word to apply to them—one was to imagine that they liked being stunted !

In no time the coolies, who appear really to enjoy camp gardening, had levelled platforms with ice-axes and built a fine terrace for us to sit on, complete with a fireplace. Wood we had brought with us and the rockery was already there. When they were satisfied with their handiwork, we told them to come up next day and sent them down.

As we sat down to lunch, four whitish birds like ptarmigan came off a cliff above our heads at an incredible speed, making a high droning sound. They were out of sight far down the Hanuman valley almost before we realised what they were.

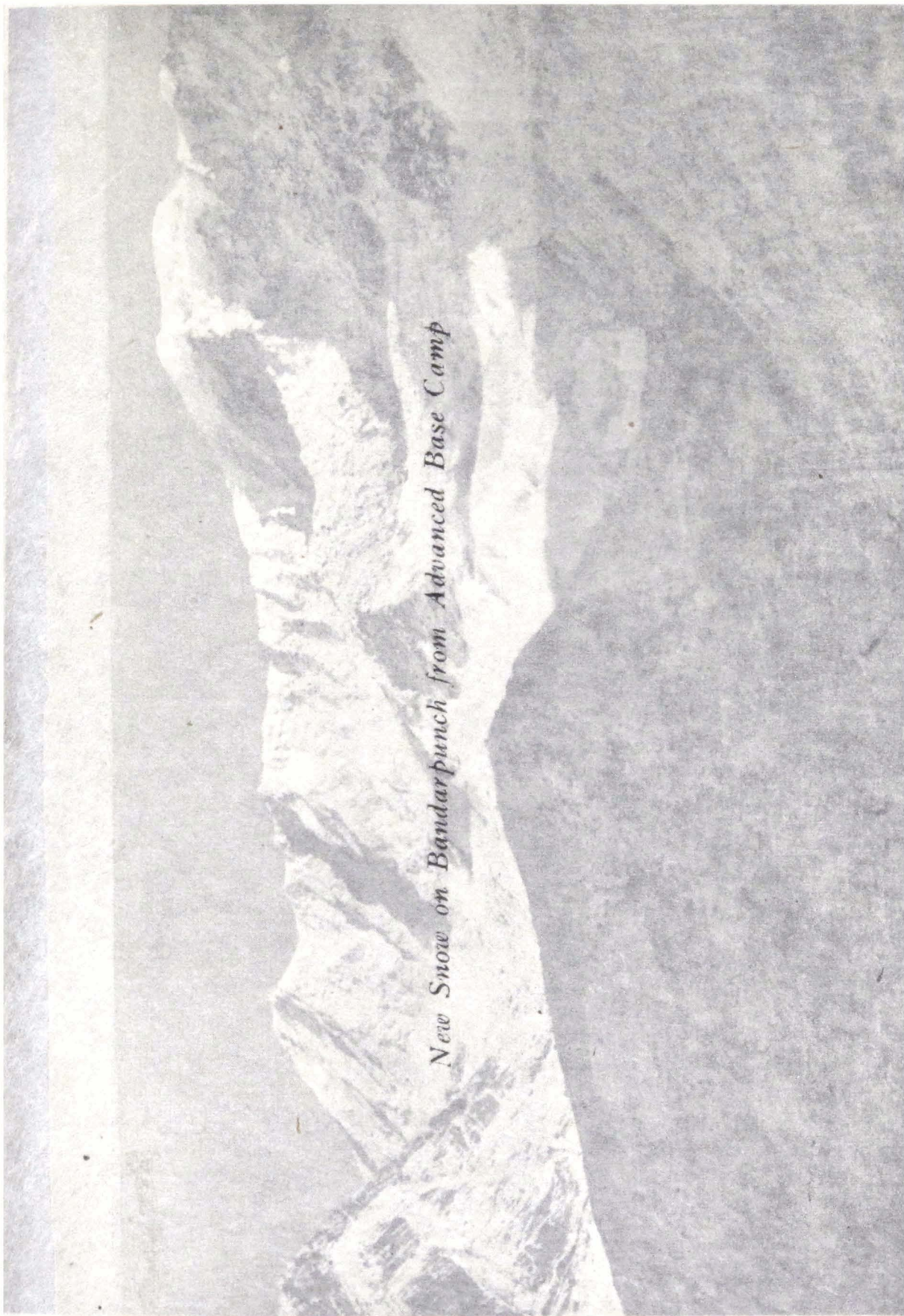
One of the four passes out of the basin lay north up a steep side-valley beyond some cliffs. This valley was a desolation of loose rock and stone and snow-drift, not in the least attractive ; but it was contained on the left hand by the downward continuation of the ridge onto which we were hoping to find a way. From the pass, if anywhere, we should not only be able to obtain a nearer view from a new aspect of the ridge, but would also have our best chance of getting on to it and finding a way up. So after lunch we wandered up towards it.

The hour we had estimated extended into an hour and a half, for lunch was heavy and the going was heavy, and clouds had appeared which made it improbable that we should see much of what we were seeking. Nor did we. When we reached the col, clouds were masking almost the whole of the Hanuman peak and all we got was a glimpse of a monstrous step, low down on the ridge and full of mystery in the drifting wraiths. The pass wind was cold and penetrating.

We christened the pass the Illusive Col, but it seemed to



*New Snow on Bandarpunch from Advanced Base Camp*











offer a better way down to the Bhagirathi valley than the pilgrims route. And then we thought that perhaps it didn't; for the slope up is steep and thick with loose rocks which are a curse to bare feet, or boots either, and steep are the scree and snow slopes by which it curves right-handed into the depths leading down to the Bhagirathi valley.

Below our feet the scene was as desolate as that of our route up. The valley was narrow and was scattered with large flat-topped rocks, looking like dwellings. There was a great hole in the snow-bed apparently leading into the bowels of the earth and, nearer, a bizarre formation of rock like the remains of an enormous brick incinerator.

We looked at one another and said, in a breath, "Hanuman has been here."

"He doesn't keep his house in a very good state of repair," Lolly added irreverently.

But we called the place Snowman's valley as Hanuman already has one, and in view of what we found next day perhaps we were right.

## II

LOLLY shouted for Dawa at six next morning. Tea and porridge appeared in an astoundingly short time and by seven we were under weigh, accompanied by Hukba carrying crampons, pitons and a spare rope. We still hoped to see from the Illusive Col whether we were likely to need any of them, and if not, we intended to send them down again with him.

The Illusive Col seemed even further than it had the day before. Hukba decided that we were going too slowly and disappeared ahead. I like to start the day like a snail and gradually attain a comfortable rhythm which can be maintained indefinitely. Lolly, who if left to himself, usually walks too fast uphill to be able to maintain his

pace in comfort, likes to make his mind a blank and walk behind me.

We reached the col at half past eight. The morning was crystal clear and the new risen sun was bathing the mountains in splendour. The Hanuman peak rose majestically skywards across Snowman's valley, a glorious artistry of warm red rock and bands of darker granite, of ice crests and snow-lined couloirs. The south-east ridge, now on the left skyline, rose in gigantic steps now of granite, now of the more friable red rock, until it thrust aloft in an ever steepening arc its final five hundred feet of dark granite, culminating in a sharp rock summit. This, of course, corresponds to the right hand end of the summit crest as seen from our Bandarpunch bivouac, and conversely, on this the southern flank, the surface is mostly of rock. The summit crest continues at much the same level in a series of graceful rock and snow curves, and finally descends in steep rock planes flanking Snowman's valley. The Gangotri peaks beyond were a shining splendour of silver and soft blue shadow.

The south-east ridge, at about the level we were standing, curved in a semicircle of quite easy rock and snow edge, rising and falling until it became continuous almost with the col itself. We could, if we wished, clearly follow it in order to get onto the mountain, but it would have been a lengthy process and a tiring one. The semicircle enclosed a small glacier and some slopes of snow and scree. Without losing more than three hundred feet of height, we could strike across this and gain the ridge where it began to rise steeply, by a convenient couloir. The ridge itself looked long but nowhere impossible. As there appeared to be no serious ice-work, Hukba took the extra equipment down again.

While crossing a snow slope towards the glacier, we were amazed to see a single line of tracks, apparently belonging to some large biped, leading a not very direct course from



down in the valley up into the rocks above our heads. Unfortunately their details were unrecognisable because they had been melted in the sun and refrozen, and it was a pity we had no time to follow them up or down. After a short debate Hanuman had it in favour of the Abominable Snowman or the Very Holy man who lives on Bandarpunch.

“Obviously,” I said, “We should find that the tracks come out of that hole in the snow we saw yesterday, but where are the marks made by his tail?”

“Oh he carries that over his arm,” was Lolly’s contribution.

But the tracks raised a problem as intriguing as it was mysterious. Their direction and locality could serve no useful purpose that I could see. Who made them and why? We wondered about this for days.\*

Finding some hidden crevasses on the glacier, we put on the rope and were soon across it, up the couloir and on the ridge. From here we could look down on the glacier which is such a feature of the view of Hanumán peak from the base camp; and beyond the ridge connecting Hanuman peak with Bandarpunch, away to Bandarpunch itself, laughing down at our insignificance across the still clear space.

I have never enjoyed rock climbing more. The granite steps were a sheer delight of edge and crack and chimney, and we climbed them direct. Each step was two or three hundred feet high, joined one to another by a curving snow or rock arête. Two of the red towers we turned by a right handed traverse; one because of a great slab which we could not see our way over; the other, higher up, because it looked like the prow of a battleship and a traverse the less objectionable alternative. The second traverse led us onto a series of vile loose crumbling ledges covered with a few inches of wet snow. As we had just, without very great

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\* No doubt the real Author was a red Bear, a creature known to haunt these solitudes.

difficulty, surmounted a great bastion of red rock, which from afar, had appeared the most probable place where we might be turned back, the battleship was probably less severe than it looked, and would certainly have been sounder and more entertaining.

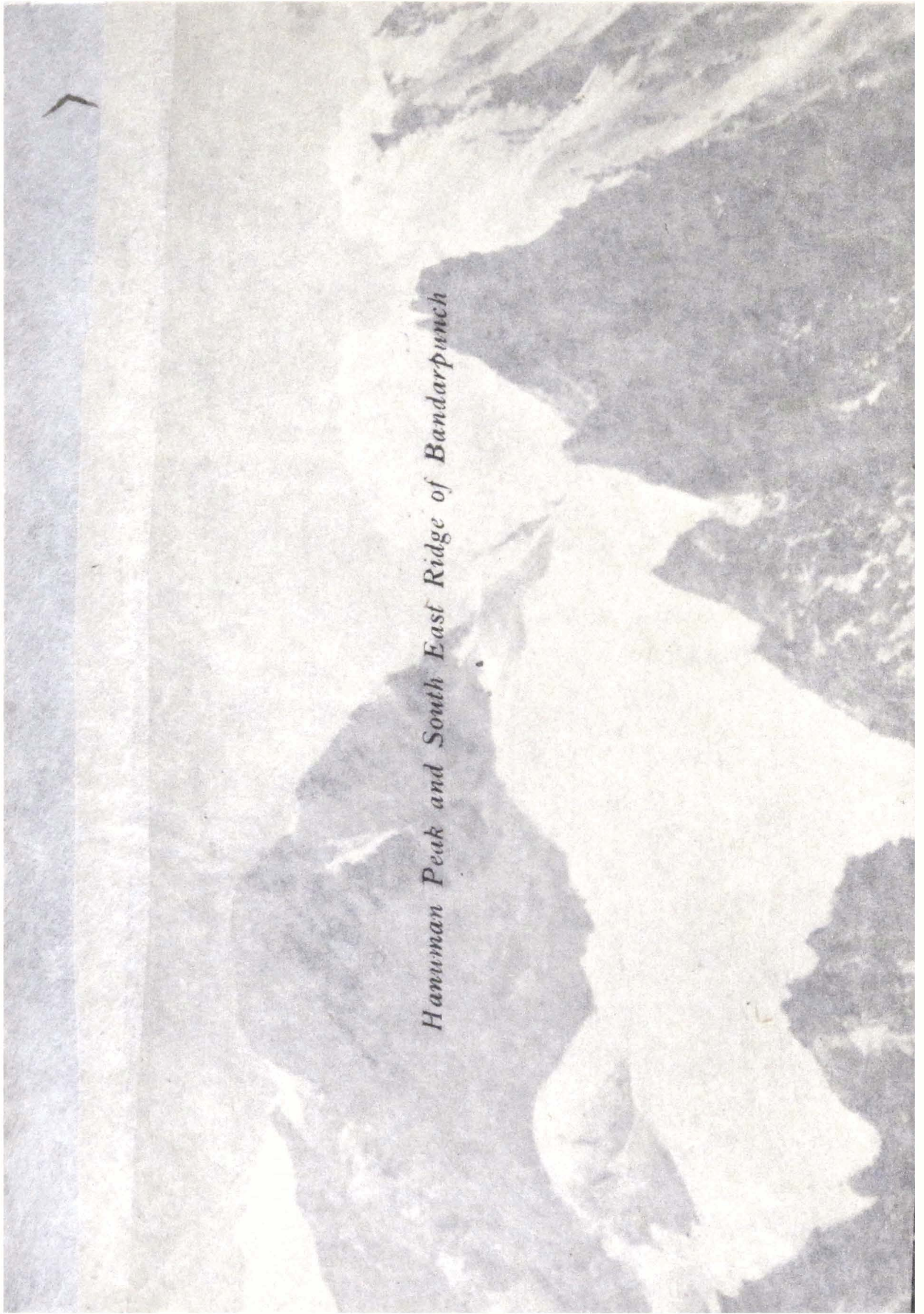
We regained the ridge above the battleship's prow just below the final few hundred feet of steep granite. By now clouds were about us and about the other peaks in view; and the drifting mists teased our vision and our patience with a never ending succession of towers above our heads. Each time we thought this must be the last and each time, as we approached it, another loomed above. Nowhere are distances more deceptive than in mists, but quite suddenly we found ourselves on the summit. It was ten past two; we had been on the ridge five hours with one rest of about ten minutes. In two places the leader had been compelled to remove his sack and haul it up after him.

Bandarpunch was in cloud, and so were all the high mountains except for the odious black tooth which had leered upon us in the Bandarpunch bivouac and which now showed for a few moments through the cloud; and it appeared no less uninviting.

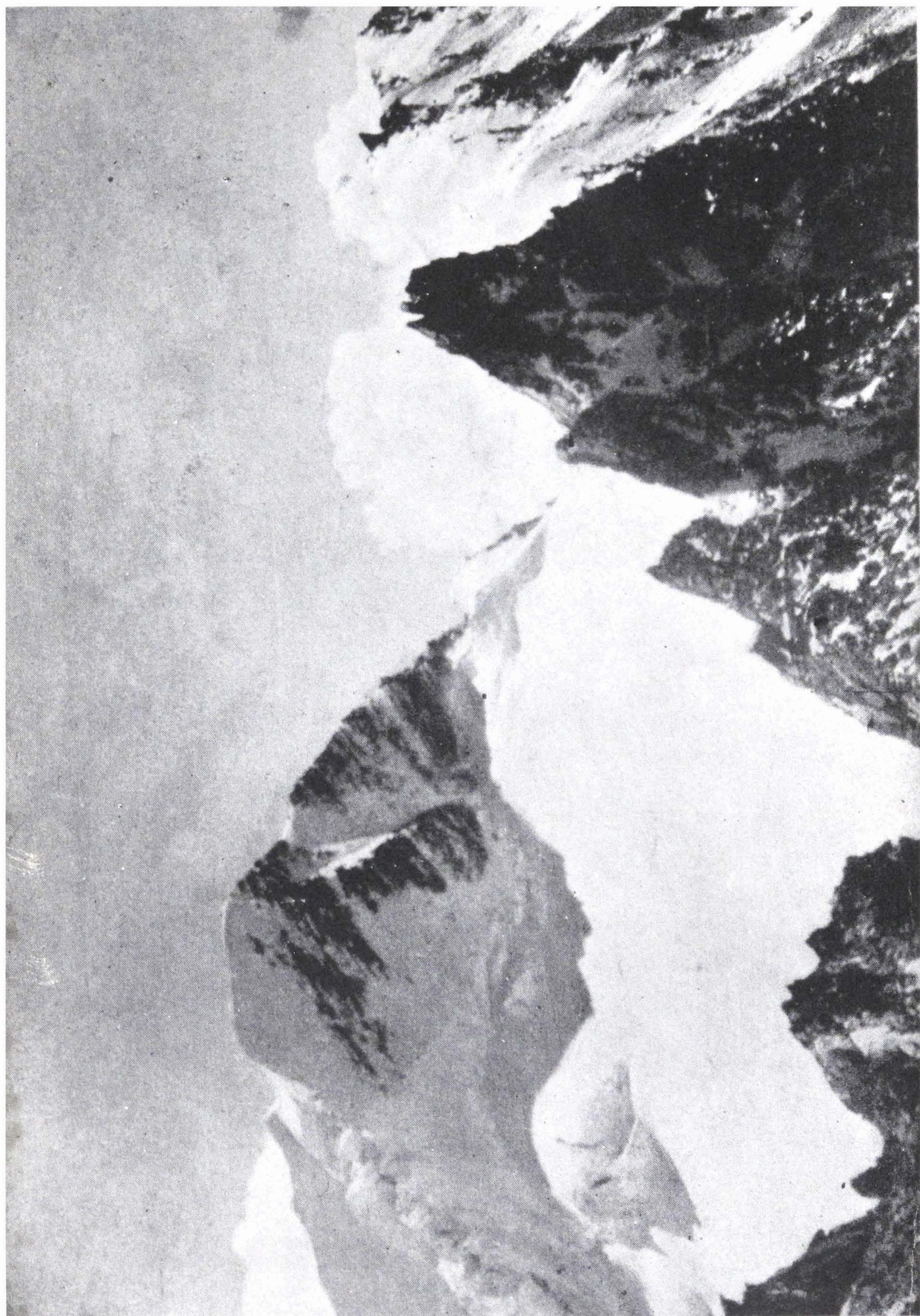
After fifteen minutes, having finished the tea in the thermos and eaten some biscuits and chocolate, we started down. As all well regulated climbs should be, both ascent and descent were completely devoid of unexpected excitements or hairbreadth escapes; and that is always the goal to be aimed at even if an account of it makes colourless reading!

Hanuman's tracks were as we had left them—I had half expected to find them gone. We reached the Illusive Col soon after six, drank a mouthful of brandy, a fine energy restorer, and were down in camp in twenty minutes.

*Hanuman Peak and South East Ridge of Bandarpunch*











### III

EVERYTHING was packed up and waiting, the last of the wood burning and the kettle on. We sent the Sherpas and coolies on, intending to catch them up, and sat drinking tea. At seven we started down.

The mist was thick which made the fading light unusually and unnecessarily dark. A pilgrim's track is easy enough to miss even in broad daylight, and of course we missed it. The second time we failed to find it again. All we could see by now were some nearer grassy slopes, fading into the mist in the half-light. They showed dimly through the layers of silence and I thought of the Highlands at the close of a late summer day.

We struck down what we took to be the direction of the valley. We knew we had to cross two torrents, and in the deepening shades of night we had to be careful not to reach them a great deal quicker than we intended. One we crossed ; and we were making our way right-handed along a steep grassy slope, thinking with our unerring sense of locality that we had strayed too far to the left, when we heard some Anxious Cries dimly filtering through the mist. A few moments later we could make out some Anxious Shapes across a deep chasm containing the second torrent a hundred feet below. We felt our way down one side and across the torrent. A coolie waiting by the torrent ran up, in the dark, a very steep grass slope in front of us to join the others, who were excited and all talking at once. I felt more certain of his ancestry than ever !

It was now pitch dark. How the leading coolie kept the track, as he did, at a smart pace with never a check I cannot imagine, but he did it apparently without effort.

Eventually we lit a hurricane lantern and by its aid and that of Lolly's electric torch we forded the Hanuman Ganga or jumped across on rocks. From here our camp fire glimmered at us out of the night. We reached it at quarter

past nine with a feeling partly of regret that a perfect day should have ended, partly of thankfulness for the prospect of a long night's sleep and for another sheaf of golden memories.

## RETURN

### I

THE day following our climb on the Hanuman Peak we should have started back, but a day of idleness in this perfect place was so tempting that we succumbed and spent it, leaving five and a half days to return instead of six and a half.

I set off early across the west side of the valley, intending to take some photographs of Bandarpunch from a point of vantage two thousand feet higher, whence the effect of foreshortening would be less. The sun was just over the eastern skyline. Streamlets were half frozen and grass-stems and rocks, where the tiny waterfalls splashed them, were flashing with diamonds soon, alas, to be dissolved in the sunlight. Myriads of little star-shaped gentians were peeping from among the grasses underfoot, each one, it seemed, having captured a pin-point of sky to contrast with the colour of the turning leaves.

Scrambling up a steep gulley thick with juniper and alpine rose, I reached a rib which I followed over rocks covered with the same pink-flowered plant which we had found above Karsali. The mountains floated in a sea of clear light, and I took a whole panorama of photographs; then, lying on a ledge, dreamed in the sun. . .

No sound disturbed the silence save the murmur of hill-torrents far below and the soft whisper of the wind in the

grasses. An occasional drone of some ambitious insect passed overhead. The air was heavy with aromatic scents. Images of past beauty and laughter drifted over my consciousness: anemones on the hillside at Betaram; the sighing waves along the shore between Mudeford and Highcliffe; japonicas in flower by the boulevard at Pau; the crocuses at Hyde Park and primroses in the railway cuttings; blackberrying with Bumps in the days when we were allowed to eat one in every score and, owing to his method of counting, he would wonder why his pail took so much longer to fill than mine; and later, with Bumps again, the 10.20 from the Gare de Lyons and the magic sound of ski in powder snow...

Three crows flew in circles, cawing, round my head, and the spell was broken. I found my eyes were full of tears. I got up and slithered down several hundred feet of juniper bushes. On the lower slopes a freak edelweiss greeted me, fully a foot high and with a flower three times life size.

Lolly had been washing clothes. I painted flowers all afternoon instead of washing mine, and left the sun to do the work I should have done myself. In this case virtue was its own reward and nothing more, for Lolly had shrunk most of his socks to half their size.

As the evening fell, we watched a herd of thirty bharal which drifted, browsing, to within two furlongs of us.

## II

At nine next morning we were under way. It was cold and fine. At a point where the track leads right-handed up over the crest 2,000 feet higher, there is a sheltered ravine thick with rhododendrons; and in precisely the same place as they had appeared on our way up, the three pheasants informed us once again how distasteful our presence was to them. It was to impress me all the way back how the wild



creatures, having apparently absorbed some of the changelessness of their own mountains, would appear exactly where they had been before : pheasants, blue lizards, eagles, butterflies, glow-worms and fire-flies, the kingfisher and even the two yellow and scarlet grasshoppers.

A couple of hundred feet up—wonder of wonders—graceful bushes were covered with blossom, some pink and some white. I rubbed my eyes and thought of Bernadette's rose bush ; then discovered how I had been fooled. The rowan trees had shed all their glory of copper leaves, which had been concealing clusters of pink and white berries, and their effect in the sunlight was very charming.

We were covering two marches today, and we sat for lunch at the site of our former camp. The three days' bad weather had played havoc with the gentler flowers : blue poppies had gone for the year, the yellow primulas too, and the others had lost vitality. We had found a fifth gentian—a large bell-shaped trumpet of blue-white with purple flecks and yellow stamens. This I tried to paint—but under difficulties, for clouds were drifting across and every time the sun went in it shut with a snap.

It was apparent that winter was approaching. The waterfall above us was half frozen, even the edelweiss below Sunatra Top had a bleak look in the mist and, approaching the woods above Karsali, the birches were quite bare, the bracken a yet deeper brown.

We caught up the porters, and in order to let them prepare the camp before we arrived, sat for a while near the edge of the tree-line. As the clouds were down, our attention was not distracted from the beauty of the nearer woods by mountain visions showing between the trees : there was only the grey unicoloured mist. The track down which we had come was almost like a ride. It ran up a gentle slope in a shallow gully, about the width of a lane. A dying richness of bracken covered it ; a spinney of rowans drooped their bunches of pink berries on its right flank ; and between









*Near Barbot*



them rose graceful birches, bare, hung with long strips of light green lichen like elfen Christmas decorations, swaying as the air stirred. Dense clumps of rhododendron bushes were on the left of the track. Dark red briars dangled their large scarlet hips. Scattered pines extended to the nearer skyline two hundred yards away, where the mist shut out further sight. The wind rustled in the tree-tops. I love nothing more than English woods in a late autumn afternoon; and in addition to its own appeal, the scene was familiar enough to arouse some rather poignant, bitter-sweet feelings where memory and longing are interwoven with the perception of beauty and you pretend that some cigarette ash has got into your eye. I could have stayed till nightfall, with the pines for company.

In the denseness of the forests, at lower altitudes, pines are like town-dwellers—intent each on making his living, among a horde of others doing the same thing, and growing all alike in the process. Near the edge of the tree-line, each has a character of his own; shattered, distorted, rugged, fashioned by wind and weather into individual personalities, they seem to embody, as nothing else, the wild, breath-taking, mountain-spirit.

*Their slender spires high up upon the hill-side's crest,  
Where distance lends them  
The deepest blue; and in the crags where eagles nest,  
And lightning rends them;  
They stand like battered warriors,  
And nature tends them.*

*As though to watch the splendour of the mountain scene,  
They stand a-tiptoe,  
As reaching for the moon; and clad in rich dark green,  
They catch the wind-flow,  
And sway in mock solemnity  
As taller still they grow.*

*Where maidenhair and rhododendrons line the turf ;  
Hill-torrents ring there,  
A never-ending murmur like the tireless surf ;  
Faint whispers bring there  
The sorcery of moonlit nights,  
When fairies sing there.*

*The leaves are glistening emerald green from passing hill-  
showers,  
And larkspurs grow there ;  
And columbines and primulas and shy wind-flowers  
The moist winds sow there,  
And toadstools round the knotted roots  
Which twist below there.*

*Their gracious canopy of sober green bestows  
A sense of rest there,  
Enhanced by sunlight splashing through their sturdy  
boughs,  
As if in quest there  
Of surity and soft repose  
On nature's breast there.*

The descending track passed between two steep moss and fern-covered banks where the rhododendrons met overhead. Only twenty minutes from home the coolies had sat and made a fire. We shooed them on down and ourselves sat by their fire until we judged that tea would be ready for us.

One last surprise before reaching camp—a rhododendron that had mistaken the season and was in flower—a delicate creamy mauve and faint scent, alluring as ever.

### III

IN the morning a white frost was sprinkled, like salt, on the leaves. We dropped quickly down to Karsali, dis-

turbing several pheasants in the woods. As we meant to pay a visit to Lolly's friend, the bharal-stalker, there was a torrent to cross between the track and Karsali; and the bridge over it, thirty feet above the water, had rotted and was nothing more than two parallel pine trunks of questionable security. We saw an ancient inhabitant cross by shuffling over with one foot on each. We decided that what was good enough for him was not good enough for us, and descended to the torrent, which we crossed on rocks a little higher up.

Karsali is a huddle of little wooden houses built chiefly to withstand the cold. There are no fireplaces, no windows, and the doors are so small that they almost have to be entered on hands and knees. In the centre of the village are two temples. One is of stone, a rather ugly square building a good fifteen degrees out of the true. The other is a little wooden pavilion like a Swiss chalet. The front of it is covered with wood-carvings, attractively quaint and of surprisingly good design and workmanship. There are gargoyles and fircones and odd little scrolls. All over it are nailed coins, of all types and all stages of antiquity, placed by pilgrims and notable visitors. Among them was an old East India Company coin.

We were examining the second temple when Lolly's friend appeared, greeted us with enthusiasm, and escorted us to his home. It was a building in keeping with the rest of Karsali, but rather better constructed. Unlike the other dwellings it had carvings on the outside, of a similar nature to those on the temple, and a little courtyard, bounded by a shed, a wall and the back of another house. Hanging over the wall was an apple tree—the only apple tree we saw in the Jumna Valley.

The house was in two stories—the bottom for animals, the top for the family, which owned several cows, sturdy but small. There were three small children. The two we saw were healthy and well nourished; the third was down

the valley. The firstborn, a strapping lad just growing up, proudly had three puffs of his father's cigarette, supplied by Lolly. The goodman's wife who, needless to say, was about to propagate, had her ears so festooned with silver ornaments (the usual method of hoarding wealth in these parts) that they were pulled quite out of shape. Wives of prosperous husbands must find life most uncomfortable.

Two very heavy iron chairs were produced and we sat in the sun, surrounded by the admiring family, including the grandparents, and we talked about crops and animals and snow and shikar. Before we left I took a photograph of the family group. They were thrilled. Just as we had them arranged, they decided that they wanted their fowling pieces (no other term will do for these weapons) in the picture. So they were brought out and distributed among the menfolk. We left with gifts of sugar, apples, and extravagant expressions of goodwill.

The chestnuts over the path leading to the confluence of the Hanuman and Jumna Valleys had strewn the ground with conkers, so hard and so tough that they would have filled the heart of any child in England with delight. Several villagers and one or two goat-herds, returning light to Karsali, passed us. I had been trying to think for days what it was the villagers of Karsali resembled, and when a little old woman came padding up the path, beady-eyed, almost completely submerged by an enormous load of red corn, I had the answer. She, if anybody, must have been a marmot in a previous existence; and so must the old man who had asked us a fortnight before to cure his rupture, and then sat on his haunches smoking the cigarette Lolly gave him through his two trumpeted hands, like a squirrel eating nuts. Even his clothes added to the illusion—a hat like a fez and trousers of a rough home-spun cloth with tapering legs. Bumps's pencil would have had them to the life.

At the Hanuman Chetty all the logs and wooden chutes

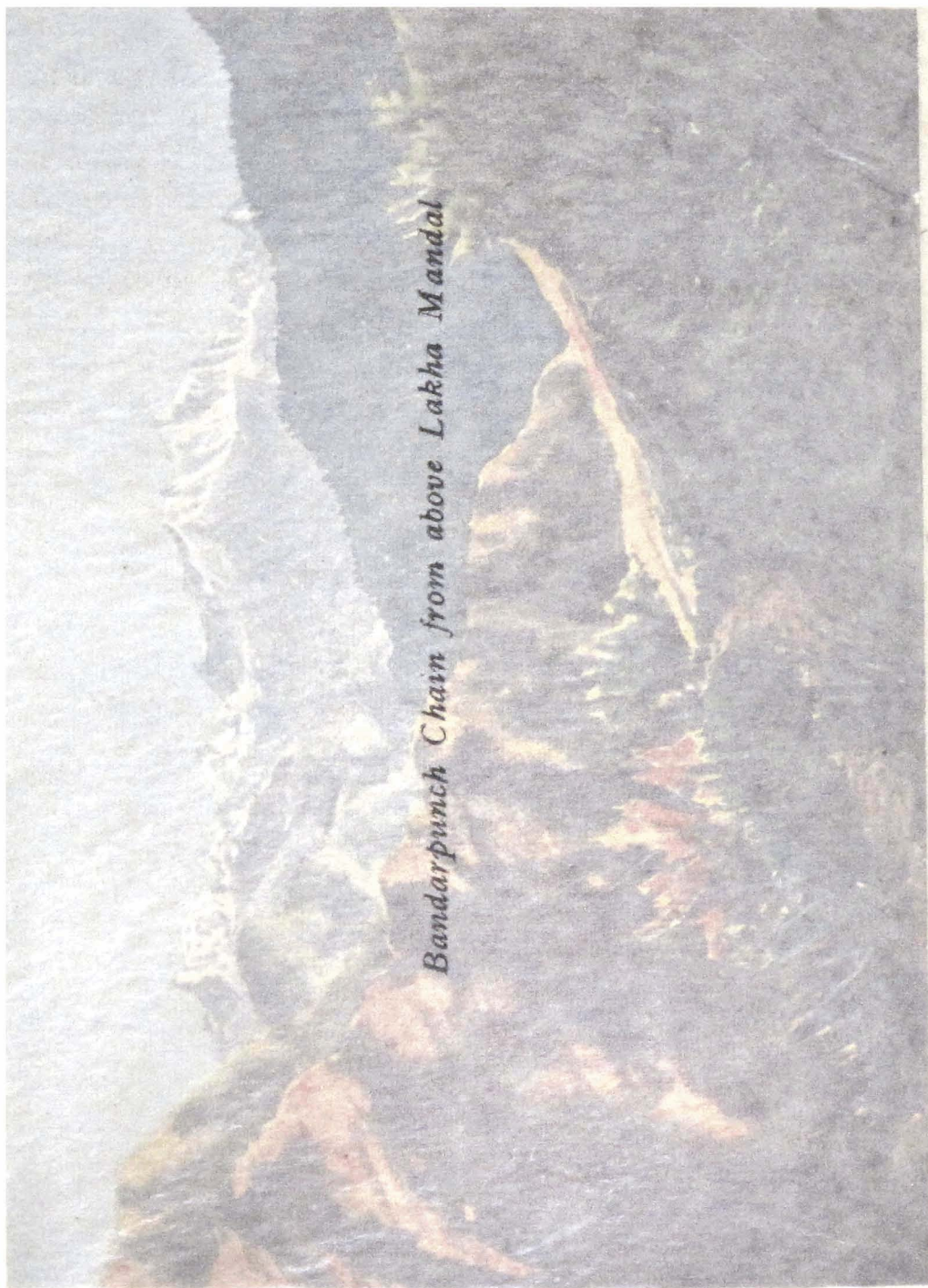








*Bandarpunch Chain from above Lakha Mandal*



had disappeared. Quick work, we said, until we saw them all jammed again half a mile down the river. At this rate they will reach the plains by about 1950.

We sat for lunch in a minute field, ten yards by five, and watched the wind rippling the grass on the other side of the valley, and the white billowing clouds. Five lammergeiers rose rapidly on a current of warm air to the tops, planed across the valley and disappeared behind a ridge of pines. One, probably young and less practised in flight, had to flap his wings now and again to keep up. In a few minutes they all reappeared some thousands of feet lower, crossed the valley and so completed their circuit. They were still doing it when we rounded a bend in the valley and they were lost to sight, and I never once saw the four elders move their wings.

At 1.15 we started to feel hungry again, so we moved on as we had already eaten everything with us. At our former camp-site we had a dip in the ice-cold water, and the hot afternoon sloth fell from us as the covering of a chrysalis; but we undoubtedly looked less like butterflies than the English Gentleman, immaculate in bush-hat, corduroy trousers and clean blue shirt, who passed us on a pony half an hour later, on his way up the valley. We exchanged compliments. Lolly looked at his retreating back, and those of his retinue, and thought he had seen his picture in Punch.

The sun had left the east-facing hillside, on which we were now walking. There were thickets of spindly bushes with little blue flowers, a kind of burrage I think, which had sprayed the air with a sweet smell like a mixture of honey and syringa.

Tea was waiting for us in camp on a green, rock-strewn meadow by the restless torrent. On either side rose great cliffs with horizontal grass-covered terraces carrying Scots pines.



## IV

THE next day's walk was uneventful and has left no particular impressions beyond three hours painting in the morning, lunch at our former camp beneath the alders, a hot walk up to Barkot in the afternoon and the lovely position of the rest house there surrounded by deodars, criss-cross patterns of sunlight and tree-trunk shadows over the pine needles on the path, and camp—when we eventually found it—on a windy grass plain by the river.

Having over-eaten as usual, we sat by a fire of pine branches and fircones, very fragrant. From here we could see, by the lightning flashes, the great bank of thunderclouds which was once more ensheathing Bandarpunch, for the valley was nearly straight for quite a long way. As an undertone to the crackling of our fire came the sound of the river, the song of crickets and the sighing of the wind in the trees. An occasional meteorite crossed the sky in dying brilliance. Along the track, two hundred feet up in the pines, came some villagers with blazing naked torches, on their way home towards Barkot. They were quite silent and the scene bore the flavour of romantic border tales of long ago.

In the morning we hurried on for half an hour in order to catch the early sunlight for sketching. Lolly painted Hukba. They were both bitten by hundreds of little flies and Hukba fidgetted so much that the likeness Lolly achieved was really remarkable, particularly his half worried frown. He came in for a good deal of leg-pulling by the others that evening.

On our way down the valley, we stopped for a bathe in the rock-pool. By the time we had regained the path, we were ready for another, and for the last two hours we walked into the western sun while a hot wind blew into our faces.

We camped below Lakha Mandal again, and again the scarlet, yellow and black grasshoppers were there—they were so handsome that I would have liked to paint them. But they wouldn't wait.

## V

ABOVE Lakha Mandal the whole range from Sargaroin to the Hanuman Peak hung before us. Lolly painted Dawa's portrait, very successfully, and a much more difficult likeness to capture than Hukba's.

We were returning by a different and far better route to the Ghora Ghat, a path which rises steeply to 6,000 feet and then contours round the hillside, almost level, to the pass. The porters, for some obscure reason of their own, prefer the other way. We expected them to be late, and had told them not to be.

We lunched in a bay in the hills carrying a grove of deodars and a quaint little wooden temple. We were three and a half hours from camp: Nearly half of this was spent in contouring, to the Ghora Ghat, some very deep bays. We were on a south slope, which was bare of trees, but held terraces of crops and little villages perched on saddles. The north sides of the gullies were lined with trees—one a wood of graceful blue pines, the next of ilex in which the path suddenly entered deep shade where they met overhead and the banks were of cool damp mossy earth.

The way down from the Ghora Ghat was hot and dusty. Several convoys of sheep and goats were going our way, all objecting to being passed. Tea was our only thought.

We were surprised to find the porters waiting for us at the bottom of the hill, but we had to find a new place to pitch the tents because the little cornfield had just been sown again.

We made an early start in the morning, hoping to reach Chakrata after three hours of very rapid walking. We passed an inhabitant who asked for a "smoking box" (box of matches) but we had none left. After we started to ascend, two or three fleshy scarlet plants—some form of fungus—with startling black and white seeds like eyes, peered out of the bank at us.

We ascended the path with quiet breath and slow pulse, at a rate which, three weeks before, would quickly have reduced us to a condition of panting exhaustion. I was feeling that faint sense of regret which always treads on the heels of completed delight; the old wish of childhood which says "if only today was yesterday—or three weeks before"; the old possessive instinct which desires to hold more than just the remembered experience—as if it could!

We rose through the cool ilex woods, past a colony of grey black-faced monkeys. As we emerged from the trees, we looked back. Not a cloud was in the sky. The whole Bandarpunch chain shimmered before us in the blue distance, balanced by the more complex group of Gangotri; further away to the east the tumbled massif of Kedernath and Badrinath; and beyond, barely visible, the steep cone of Nanda Devi, "the Blessed Goddess," and other distant outlines, fading into imagination and the sunlight...

There they were, just as they had been three weeks before, just as they will be a thousand years hence, when we have passed to a different scale of values; still reflecting in Time a little of the eternal glory and changelessness of their Architect.

