HIMACHAL

The Story of an Himalayan Adventure

BY

RUSSI D. ANKLESARIA

"Does the road wind uphill all the way ?
Yes to the very end.
Will the day's journey take the whole long day ?
From morn to night, my friend."

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THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY

Dedicated

TO THE MEMORY OF MY BELOVED GRANDFATHER

NOSHIRWAN

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INTRODUCTORY

Kabir saith :

It is the spirit of the quest that helpeth,
I am the slave of the spirit of the quest.

INTRODUCTORY

This small book is a personal account of an attempt made on Kanchenjunga and Pandim, and the successful ascent of the Guicha Peak and other great mountains of the Sikkim Himalayas by a party of seven Parsee mountaineers, under the leadership of Mr. Jal Bapasola. I have endeavoured to record my own personal impressions of what was primarily an adventurous holiday. It is now no longer necessary to disguise adventure under the cloak of anything else. Mountaineering is a sport, a grand sport and must always remain so. How men face and resolutely overcome one obstacle after another, how with indomitable spirit climbers stand up against icy hurricanes and every missile which the mountain would hurl against them, and how in danger and disaster they would stand by one another and at the risk of life itself support each other—these are the great things.

It is difficult to account for our delight in the different sights and sounds of Nature in all her varied pageantry. Probably much of our joy in her arises from the fact that we have arisen from the same original earth and therefore have something in common. It is also worthy of note that our admiration of the wild and the magnificent is largely a result of our advanced civilisation. Before man had subdued Nature, she was only terrible to him. But now we seek Nature in her wildest moods because we do not fear her. The terror and grandeur of the ice peak have become a joy to us, and we may seek our highest ideal of an earthly paradise on the snowy slopes of Himachal. How could it be otherwise? Unimaginative is he who can gaze at these mountains and not sympathise with the simple and child-like adoration of the hill-folk for the eternal homes of the gods. Dull indeed is he who can gaze unmoved upon the snows when the maiden of dawn fires them and the great peaks glow above the slumbering plains.

But though man and mountain may be built up of the same elements, the mountain is lower in the scale of being, however massive and impressive in outward appearance; and man though the punier in appearance is the greater in reality. He has that within him which will not be daunted by bulk. The mountain may be high, but man will show that his spirit is higher. Man the spiritual means to make himself supreme over even the mightiest of what is material. And so the struggle continues. Man knows full well that in order to stand for a bare few minutes on the summit, he will have to suffer terribly—there is the tale of frozen camps, of desperate ventures along smooth vertical ledges where life depends upon the friction of a single bootnail on the rock, of slips corrected only just in time, of upward toil when every nerve in the tired body calls for a halt —and there also perhaps may be the tale of never coming back. Yet nothing daunts him. It would almost seem as though the greater the danger the stronger is the attraction—to his temporary disaster perhaps, but in the end to an intensity of joy, which without risk he could never have experienced. The mountain makes a man of him, and he is grateful.

This is then the true secret of the lure of the mountain. It is a struggle of spirit to establish its supremacy over matter. The mountain stands for an adventure of the spirit. And if faith in the spirit is strong, the heights can always be attained.

There is perhaps no more beautiful sight in the world than the summits of Kanchenjunga, "The Five Treasures of the Snow." The highest, which is lit up with a golden glow by the rising sun, is the treasure of gold ; another, which remains in a silvery shade till the sun is well up, is the treasure of silver ; the other three are the treasures of gems, grain and holy books, a collocation showing the articles to which the Buddhistic Tibetans, living in an inclement climate, attach most value. And these treasures are guarded in a fortress formed by the most terrible and savage mountains in the world, chief among which is Pandim,

meaning "the king's minister", an appropriate name, for it stands on guard beside the monarch of the Sikkim Himalayas...

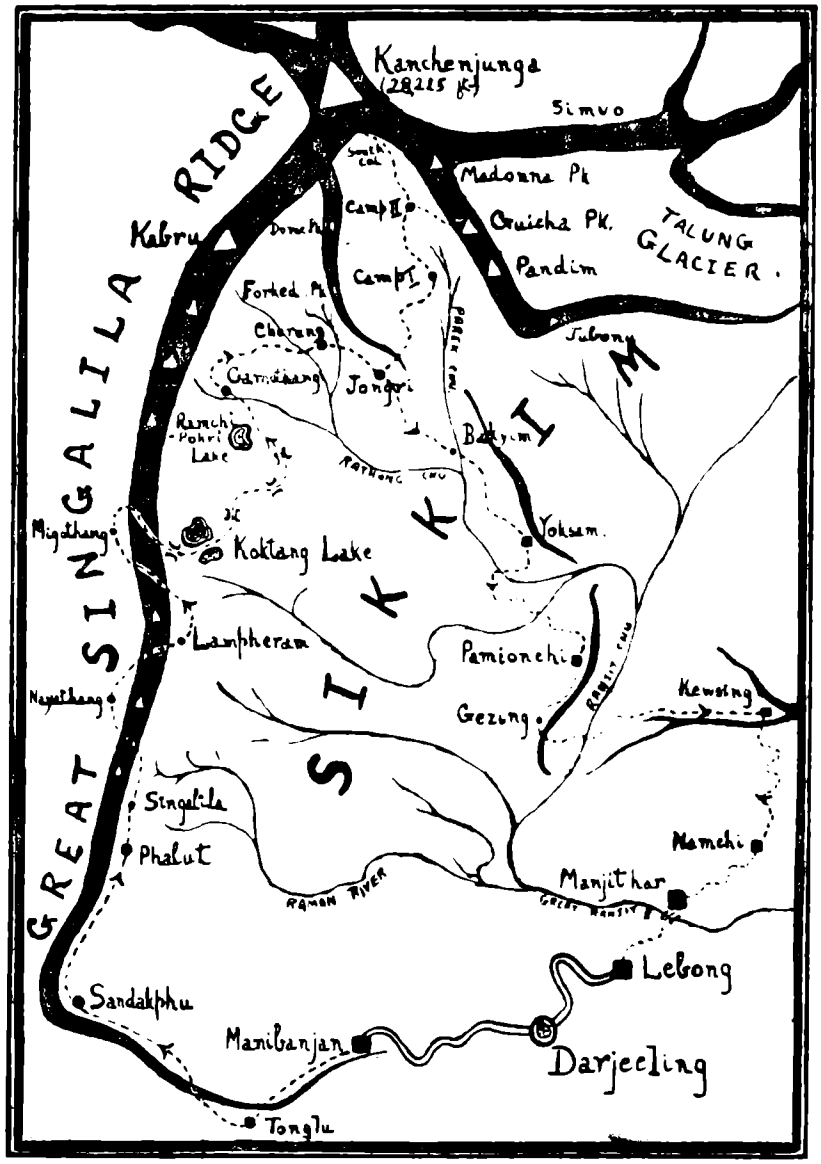
A few months ago Kanchenjunga meant nothing to me... Today, that mountain stands to me for strange and wonderful adventures, dangers sufficient to make the blood run icily cold and thrills such as even Edgar Wallace at his best could never conceive. I have gazed upon her, when she has been cruel and heartless, and to my petition to yield her secret, has howled down derision in gusts of wind and avalanches. And I have seen the mountain in another and fascinating mood, when she has been so alluring and beautiful as to be irresistable. But it was the same mountain and what is the use of words?

There are moments in life, which photograph themselves indelibly on the brain. Such a moment was one lonely sunset eve. A profound silence brooded over the sanctuaries of the snows; the avalanches were hushed; not a pebble fell. Far below me were the peaks of countless smaller summits, their cleanly chiselled walls, minarets and spires suggesting a goblin city, the queer phantoms of a cubist's dream or may be a halted regiment of this Mountain King. Above on my right was an exquisitely carved balcony, from which three fair-haired snow princesses, linked hand in hand, their countenances covered with rouge and lipstick, gazed rapturously at their lord; while beneath this balcony was sculptured the wrinkled face of an old witch, peering sardonically. Twisted masses of cloud slowly sallied into space from the upper reaches of Kanchenjunga and passed like tall ghosts into the night; a bitter wind blew over, jabbing cruelly with its icy stilettos; frost stalked out with shadows; and the summits of the great mountain glowed for a few minutes like red-hot castings from a Titan's forge before being quenched in a cold bath of stars—of stars that pulsated eagerly and fiercely, that flashed and glittered a bright electric blue. And across the stars stretched a

gossamer veil, a tenuous banner spanning the breadth of heaven. Strange whisperings then possessed me. In the quietude I heard the whisper of small voices; the liquid notes of some strange harmony stole across the glacier, seeming to rise from the very snow I was standing on, then—a shattering, bellowing roar from Kanchenjunga; snow whirling upwards and outwards, a grinding thunder of echoes, rolling and crashing from peak to peak, booming, murmuring, dying into an affrighted silence. But the spell was broken—and the voice and the music I heard no more.....And who shall not say that it was worth the trials, the dangers and the difficulties to live those few moments on the snows? To see it all once is to dream of it forever.

One final word. To a lover of Nature, the call of the mountains is the strongest that he can face. It has been said: "When a man has seen the Himalayas once, he longs to go back again"—despite blizzards, zero cold, perils and discomforts. But the important thing is that he should go and see them *that once*. Will this impulse to adventure die with its opportunity? I hope not, I pray not. Let this sport, the most manly of all, be popularly acclaimed and acknowledged by us. And though the day of great geographical discoveries may be over, the dawn of the specialist explorer is just beginning. In this latter category, we have a great field, for the fastnesses of the Himalayas are yet unknown. The object of this narrative will be fully served if, tempted by our achievements and experiences, small as they may be, some more such expeditions are organised by Indians. May that day indeed be not so far distant when we, Sons of India, will be the first to tread the snowy summits of the great mountains that God has so rightly ordained as *our glorious heritage!*

November, 1941. R. D. A.



The Route followed by the Expedition through Sikkim.

THE IDEA

"I'll walk where my own nature would be leading—
It vexes me to choose another guide—
Where the grey flocks in ferny glens are feeding,
Where the wild wind blows on the mountain-side....."

I once gazed enviously and longingly at the great Kanchenjunga Range from Darjeeling, whither I had gone for one of my solitary holidays. I was between fifteen and sixteen at the time, and for years I had gone to the hills, enjoying them to the utmost. It is God's country, and it is best enjoyed alone. Little did I then know that five years later I would be climbing that mighty mountain range myself.

At school, geography, was, indeed, one of the few subjects in which I took an interest whatsoever and I found much satisfaction in drawing out any map, especially colouring its mountain-range portion, sometimes to the exclusion of all else. If I had learnt as much about other branches of geography as I knew about mountains I should, probably, have been a paragon ! As it was the green lowlands had little fascination for me. But there was one part of the Earth's surface at which I would gaze more often than at any other—the masses of reds and browns in the map, which sprawl over Central Asia. There I would stop and dream, picturing the dazzling icy summits, lashed with wind and snow, until the harsh voice of the Geography Teacher broke in with threats of punishment for gross inattention and brought me back to the dull walls of the schoolroom. I remember the mess I got into once, when I dared to argue with him that Kanchenjunga was actually a higher peak than Mount Godwin Austin—an argument which resulted in my being disgraced and sent out of the class for the day! Had he known about my obsession for the mountains, he might perhaps have left me there on my dream-summits, for he was an understanding soul.

Though I had always loved the mountains, the idea of ever climbing them had scarcely entered my mind until almost three years ago when with six other Parsee boys I had spent a holiday in Kashmir; and it was here that my love for mountaineering began. I

found out everything I could on the subject. I read and re-read all the accounts of the parties that had gone out into the mountainous regions of the earth, which by virtue of their height and inaccessibilty were marked on the map as "Barren Regions Incapable of Commercial Development." My gods were Scott, Somerville and Mallory. And then followed mountain expeditions and short treks into Sikkim, to get an experience of the Himalayas. On their peaks I learnt the art and craft of mountaineering and the brotherhood of the hillside. But always there was the idea of making an expedition later to a major peak, and that peak was to be Kanchenjunga.

And first as to the reason we had in making this expedition. When a man stands at the foot of a hill and gazes up at it, he is sooner or later driven to try and get to the top. Partly this is because he would like to see the view from the top, and partly because that hill throws down a challenge to him. Though it may be a tremendous exertion to get to the top, he enjoys making it—for he likes to show himself off and display his prowess. He is doing something that makes him proud of himself and gives him inner satisfaction. Man likes to be his best. But often nothing short of a Himalayan peak can extract it from him—can compel him to be his fittest in body, alertest in mind, and firmest in soul. So he is drawn to the mountain.

But to look at Kanchenjunga is a very different proposition. To get to the very top, of *that* we never even dream. Yet expedition after expedition has come from Europe to wrestle with the giant and has retired beaten after an epic struggle. But never has there been an Indian expedition to this mountain or any other. Why and how is this? Millions of us Indians have through the ages looked up at the great Himalayan peaks and never dared to think of climbing even the minor ones, much less the giants of them all. There are many Hindoos who will patiently suffer the most terrible hardships in travelling thinly clad to some

lonely place of pilgrimage by a glacier in the Himalayas. Of sheer suffering we can endure as much or perhaps more than any Everest or polar climber. But the idea to conquer the great peaks never enters our minds at all. Nor even to those sturdy hill-men who spend their whole lives in the mountains has it come. That they have the physical capacity to do so is proved by the fact that on Everest expeditions they have carried heavy loads to 27,000 ft. And if a man can carry a load to such a height, it can be presumed that he could easily go unloaded to 29,000 feet. Still the idea of climbing the great Himalayan peaks has never been entertained by our Indian minds!

But this is all by the way. My friends and I make no pretence of being Indian pioneers in mountaineering or anything of that nature—far from it. Nor did we go, as some might suggest, to Kanchenjunga under the dictates of Science—we never had any such idea. We went in obedience to that indefinable urge men call adventure, an urge which in spite of our modern easy living and "Safety First", still has its roots deep in the human race. Adventure tugs at the heart-strings of youth, and the short holiday that we had at our disposal, we decided to spend "out of bounds". Adventure does not necessarily mean the taking of risks. But the perfect adventure is that in which there is blending of our mental and physical powers and in which the measure of achievement is so great that life itself must be risked. And no sport better conforms to this rule than the sport of mountaineering.

Man's mental alertness is dependent on his physical virility, and a mysterious Nature has decreed that man shall ever war against the elemental powers of her Universe. And man can never acknowledge defeat or he would descend in the scale of life. But there has been given to him that "something" which is called the "Spirit of Adventure". It was this spirit that sustained Captain Scott and his companions in their tragic race to the Frozen South; it was this spirit that led Mallory and Irvine to their doom on Everest;

and it is also this same spirit which is responsible for the daily struggle for existence.

This is the simple secret in the heart of the idea to go to Kanchenjunga. And the story now to be told must be ascribed to a love for adventure and nothing else.

KANCHENJUNGA: ITS NATURE & HISTORY

Mountains are of various forms, but there are two types which deserve special mention. There is the mountain which projects as a point from a range, ridge or glacier system—a good example of this is the great Himalayan peak, Mount Godwin Austin, better known as K2, a solitary spire of rock and ice rising above the glaciers and snowfields of the Karakoram Range. And there is also the mountain, which stands apart from other ridges or ranges and possesses its own glacier system—of such an independent mountain, there is no finer example than Kanchenjunga. It is a mountain great enough to possess its own glaciers radiating from its several summits, and though it is surrounded by many smaller peaks, which add their share to the ice rivers radiating from the main massif, the glaciers which flow far down to the fringe of the tropical forests cloaking the lower valleys are the undisputed possession of the Monarch.

It is not yet quite certain whether Kanchenjunga is the second or the third highest peak in the world, for its height is approximately equal to that of K2. As determined previously K2 was given as 28,250 feet high, 194 feet higher than Kanchenjunga. Later, however, on another measurement, the Survey of India arrived at the following: Kanchenjunga 28,225 feet; K2, 28,191 feet. Thus it may be taken that there is a dead heat for second place.

Generally speaking there are four main lines of approach to this great mountain—up the valley of the Tamar River in Nepal, up the Yalung Valley also in Nepal, up the valley of the Teesta River, and up the Talung Valley, the last two routes being both in

Sikkim. Of these the first and third have been the ones usually followed by the expeditions. The second path has been twice attempted and has now come to be regarded as desperately dangerous. The last has never been followed by any expedition as it is said to have several disadvantages, but as it happened, it was the one that we selected.

For sheer beauty of scenery there is hardly any other mountain that can rival Kanchenjunga in all the world. As it is an isolated mountain and only low foot-hills separate it from the plain of Bengal and these not high enough to protect it from the blast of the south-west monsoon, there is an annual precipitation of snow that is probably greater than that of any other peak in the Himalayas. From the mountaineer's point of view it is a disadvantage, for it plasters itself on the mountain, and fills every hollow with clinging masses of ice. These icy masses move downwards to join the main glaciers which they feed. But frequently, they are perched high up on the mountainside and are unable to flow down the steep rock precipices so they break off in masses as big as large buildings, which fall thousands of feet to the glaciers beneath in terrible ice avalanches. These ice avalanches are Kanchenjunga's deadliest weapon. With such a wonderful mountain before their eyes, it can hardly be wondered if the hill-folk have become impregnated with the grandeur and mystery of the great giant. To its five wonderful summits they have given the name Kanchenjunga, which means the "Five Treasurers of the Snow" and on them rests the throne of an all powerful god. There are even dark tales of human sacrifices to this mighty deity handed down from the remote past.

In 1848 Sir Joseph Hooker first explored the Tamar, Yalung and Teesta Valleys around Kanchenjunga and made several unsuccessful attempts to climb peaks varying between 19,000 and 23,000 feet. Thirty years later Captain H. J. Harman of the Survey of India, made an effort to reach the foot of Kanchenjunga, but failed to do so. A year later Babu Sarat

Chandra Das, an Indian Surveyor, crossed the Kang La, from Sikkim into Nepal, passed up the valley of Kangbachen and traversed the Jonsong La (20,200 feet) into Tibet. This was certainly a very bold journey and a great feat. I mention these preliminary explorations in the neighbourhood of Kanchenjunga just to show how little was known but a short time ago of the approaches to the mountain.

In 1889 Mr. Douglas Freshfield carried out his valuable mountain explorations round Kanchenjunga and was the first to examine its great western face, which has been in favour with recent expeditions. But of all mountaineering pioneers in the Kanchenjunga district or for that matter in the Himalayas, Dr. A. M. Kellas' name will stand pre-eminent. His remarkable climbs are too many to mention, but his mountaineering has had far-reaching effects, for he was the first systematically to employ and train Sherpa and Bhutia porters. At the same time he has contributed valuable information on the physiological and physical aspects of high mountaineering. Dr. Kellas was the first who regarded the Himalayas in the same way as Europeans regard the Alps—as a playground. If the Alps are called "the playground of Europe", the Himalayas must surely be the "playground of the gods", for no other mountain range in all the world can compare with the Himalayas. We have more than fifty mighty peaks over 25,000 feet high all of them unconquered except Kamet—an aristocracy of summits, where peaks of 15,000 to 20,000 feet are only middle-class. May we indeed live to see the time when Sikkim will be opened up, as it is bound to be one day, as the "playground of India"!

In August, 1905 the first determined attempt was made by a party of three Swiss and an Englishman to climb Kanchenjunga via the Yalung Glacier. The party reached 20,000 feet but were unable to go higher and the return was marred by a tragic accident which killed one of the party and three porters. The mountain then remained untouched until eleven years after

the last war, when a lone attempt was made by Mr. E. F. Farmer of New York in the early part of May 1929. He first made an attempt via the Guicha La but failing, he entered Nepal and attacked the mountain like the first expedition via the Yalung Glacier; and like the first it also ended in tragedy, for he left his porters at about 18,000 ft. and started to climb alone and was never seen again.

Kanchenjunga had scored heavily. Two attempts had been repulsed with merciless severity. It had not even allowed its attackers to come more than 20,000 feet. But its complacency was to be rudely shaken in the autumn of the same year, 1929, in which Farmer met his death. This was the German Expedition from Munich under the leadership of Dr. Paul Bauer and theirs was one of the most brilliantly resourceful and courageous attempts in mountaineering history, an attempt which has been described as "a feat without parallel, perhaps, in all the annals of mountaineering." They attacked Kanchenjunga from the north-east side via the terrible East ridge. This route is one of immense difficulty and how they worked their way up reads like an unbelievable romance. On October 3, two members of the party reached 24,300 ft. and hopes were running high when the next day, a snowstorm of very great severity burst on them and continued for days. The order was at last given to retreat and thus ended one of the most gallant mountaineering enterprises ever carried out.

In April 1930, Prof. G. Dyhrenfurth led an international expedition via the north-west. The party reached about 21,000 ft. when a mighty avalanche, which killed a porter, put an end to their hopes. A year later Dr. Bauer made another attempt but failed at a higher altitude. Since then no further assault has been made on the mountain and the giant has enjoyed ten years of reposeful slumber. But when attacked she is sure to fight tooth and nail with all her deadliest weapons, for Kanchenjunga is and will always remain something much more than a formidable antagonist.

PREPARATION

Before any big idea can be put into execution, there are usually a number of preliminary barriers which have to be removed. The entire success of any Himalayan expedition depends upon the amount of thought and thorough planning spent on the preparation. Rations that are required must be taken in sufficient quantities, stoves, tents—everything has to be thought of and tested again and again. Absolute necessities only can be taken. Articles of the greatest utility have to be very carefully selected. It is difficult to believe that things can somehow go wrong. Usually they don't; for before a man goes far north into this little known part of the world, he is, or at least should be as fit as a fiddle, for the mountains are cruel and merciless and very rough work. But if something does go wrong—if some sudden peril threatens the little band—then death, grim and relentless, dogs their every step and is ever near.

Many who are reading this book must have visited Darjeeling sometime or another: and if they have climbed to the top of Observatory Hill, they must have seen Kanchenjunga sixty miles away, over range upon range of lower ridges split with deep gorge—like valleys, icily aloof and incredibly remote, lifting its glaciers like silver shields to the sky. There is no scale by which the observer can appreciate the size of what he sees. The eye passes over these leagues of ridges and valleys at a glance, but the foot of man cannot take them at a stride. Those apparently insignificant lower ridges are themselves much higher than the Alps. The problems of reaching the bases of the greater peaks and of carrying sufficient food and equipment are equal to the problems of scaling the peaks themselves.

Climbing is mental as well as physical labour and success depends entirely upon unselfish team-work. Like a team of Test Cricketers, the party must pull together; and if it is to be a good team, it should also be a happy family. In no other pursuit is the best or the

worst in a man brought out as it is in mountaineering. An old friend of civilization may be a useless companion on a mountain. His very snore assumes a new and repellent note; the sound of his mastication, the absurd manner in which he walks, the scarcely concealed triumph with which he appropriates the choicest tit-bits, even the cut of his clothes and his hoarse singing may suddenly induce an irritation and loathing almost beyond endurance. None of these things may matter at sea level and why they should matter on a mountain is a problem I cannot answer—but they may. Mr. Peter Fleming, the well—known traveller—author writes that the ideal companion is rare, and in default of him, it is better to make a long journey alone—one's company in a strange world. But on a mountain, one needs a companion—and self-sacrifice and readiness to help is the first of all laws. Unfortunately, some members of our expedition did not have the opportunity of knowing each other very well before we started; but we soon proved to be a good team and a very happy team at that. I think this was so because our party was one which included different interests, paradoxical though this may sound. It is a profound truth that men sharing identical interests seldom get on well together in the wilds. Wide divergencies of opinions do not usually matter. It is the small divergencies of opinions that count for so much. I cannot conceive a team of mountaineers composed exclusively of doctors, lawyers or politicians.

The primary task was to select the route. Our greatest disadvantage was the short time at our disposal. The first tentative plan was to follow the route of the 1929 German expedition to the Green Lake district, approach Kanchenjunga from the north—east and then failing an attempt on the mountain make an effort for the Jonsong Peak and then return. But at least 5 to 6 weeks were required if it was to work out successfully. This was impossible as three of us—Mr. Antia, Saklat and myself—could only get about three weeks' leave. To approach Kan-

chenjunga from the Tamar or Yalung Valleys requires permission to enter Nepal and this could not be obtained. The only alternative was to try the Guicha La path—and one interesting point of this route is that the mountain has never been assaulted from this side.

The route having been fixed, the next problem was to get to the mountain in the shortest possible time so that at least one attempt could be made, to go even a little way up it. Distances out and back were worked out carefully, then checked and rechecked, to make sure there could be no great error. We then fixed up the number of halts, each day's march being on an average about 12 miles. With this arrangement, we gave ourselves four clear days on the mountain itself. Our main idea at the same time was to make attempts on several other peaks not very high, chief of which was the Guicha Peak, for however much we may wish for it, Kanchenjunga was but a vague hope. But though we proposed all this, the porters finally disposed; for as the road was very difficult, they refused to carry loads over the alloted distances, with the result that we had hardly two days on the actual mountain. I give these preliminary details for the benefit of any future expedition like ours. It is over the graves of former mistakes, and not on wings of new ideas that the climber will at length tread the highest summits in the world.

Someone was needed in Darjeeling who would select a good number of reliable porters, arrange for conveyances for a short part of the journey, make ready a part of the stores, select tents and sundry other preparations. The importance of having an expert person with Himalayan experience at this job can hardly be over-estimated. And in this as well as many other things, the expedition was fortunate in having the assistance as well as the advice of Mr. Nanabhai S. Davar. He is himself an ardent lover of the Himalayas and its mountain-folk and has made

many a trek with his wife into Sikkim, Tibet, Kashmir and Ladak. His expert knowledge of all these districts as well as of local Darjeeling conditions made his work invaluable for the expedition. To him as well as to his wife, we are all deeply grateful.

With all these preparations well under way, it now remained to fix up the personnel of the expedition. There are two types of Himalayan expeditions, the large one with its correspondingly elaborate "band-obast" and the small one burdened only with a light transport. The large expedition has, of course, several advantages over the small one. In case of illness there is a reserve of climbers to carry on the work and the party can be split up into two or more groups and thus the work can be divided. But provided its members keep fit the small expedition has many other advantages. It can live on the country where possible; it is mobile and it needs comparatively few porters. Hence we decided on a small expedition, of about 6 to 8 persons. And the only requisites were personal fitness, a love of mountaineering and above all, if possible, some experience in mountain climbing.

The first thing to do was to select those who would be in charge of the party. The obvious man for the post of leader was Mr. Ardeshir Batliwala, who had led us so well in a Sikkim trek the previous year. Unfortunately he could not get the necessary leave to accompany us. Eventually the lot fell upon Mr. Jal Bapasola. Alhough he possessed no past Himalayan experience, he was the first of the number of Parsee cyclists who have gone round the world. Of magnificent physique (incidentally he and Saklat were the tallest members of the group), he is the kind of man, one would not usually associate as a mountaineer; for experience has shown that it is medium sized men of slimmer and lighter build, with less weight to carry, who go highest. But no better 'boss' for the whole expedition could be found. For he is an extraordinary mixture of boy and man. You never

know what he will be up to next; or whether it is a boy or a man whom you are talking to. If he lives to be a hundred he will always be a boy; and as a boy he must always have been a man. He is a boisterous boy, perpetually effervescing with boyish fun. And he is a shrewd, competent man who will not stand any nonsense. A really remarkable and effective combination. He has pluck too which will never allow his spirits to be depressed. And these spirits are infectious—the whole party catches them. That is why he will always be so acceptable as a leader.

As second in command, we were able to have the services of Mr. Jehangir Antia. He too possessed no past Himalayan experience, but formerly he had made many hikes rather than climbs in the Western Ghats. Of his keenness, however, there could be no doubt. In his younger days he had been a brilliant all round sportsman—he had been one of Calcutta's best cricketers; for years he was a well—known tennis star. And in everything he is methodical and in hand. With him there can be no flurry; forethought will have provided for every contingency. He is a man of great resolution and great stamina; kind and affable, he is of the kind that every other person feels at once at home with. He was in charge of our "treasury", and the wonderful way in which it balanced out made his services invaluable to the expedition.

Pesi Avari was another newcomer with no previous mountaineering experience. But he had done well in all forms of local sport. Compact and collected, tall and erect of good athletic build, he seemed one of those who could reasonably be expected to do well. He had an immense capacity to do hard work —real hard work—and contributed a great deal to the success of the expedition. Why and how he came to be nick—named 'Bibi' which later became Bibs and in the last few days of the trek was changed to Pips is a matter of speculation!

Sammy Palamkote had been with me in the Sikkim trek the previous year, and so had made an acquaintance with Himalayan conditions. He certainly had not the huge strength of Bapasola; but he was slim and wiry and well proportioned. Two weeks before the expedition left, he had been to Darjeeling and discussed all the transport difficulties with Mr. Davar—and this was to prove very valuable to us later. He had great pertinacity and was a devoted lover of mountain beauty. His genial enthusiastic nature was an additional contribution of value. He was confidently expected to go high.

The remaining three members—Saklat, Mehta and myself—were those who had done some mountaineering in Kashmir and had joined the Sikkim trek of the previous year. The lessons learnt and the experience gained in ice and snow work in Kashmir was to stand us in good stead. Parviz Mehta was a younger cousin of Mr. Bapasola. Of average height but well built, he was constantly bursting with enthusiasm, and was a great admirer of hills and forests. For such a man, Sikkim was a land after his own heart. Perhaps, it might be said that suppleness was his chief characteristic—as it was a characteristic of his mind—the suppleness of a spring, with readiness to yield but tenacity to return. A man like him would be a big asset to an expedition like ours.

Lastly, but by no means the least, was Behram Saklat. I am describing him last for he is in a class all by himself. Tall but very slim, with long legs whose stride on flat country is twice that of any average person, he has remarkable powers of endurance and stamina. Though he spent all his youth in Kashmir, he did not go in for any serious mountaineering, excepting for a few hikes. Extraordinarily witty and clever, he is what the Americans would call a "wit—cracker". To him all life is joke. But he can also be serious at times. The serious part of his nature is lodged within a psychological wall; occasionally he

bursts out with a "By Gad, this is....." when giving his opinion; then the shell closes to let nothing out. He is really a clinker and he'd never let you down. He enjoys travelling and also every bit of hardship. As a climber, though somewhat slow, he is still very good and he accompanied me on the final assault on Amarnath in the Kashmir expedition, where we both failed owing to very bad weather. But he is always an ideal companion and any party with Saklat in it would be a cheery party.

These six and myself made up the personnel, and under the circumstances it was the strongest party that could be selected. Mr. Fali Talati was included as a member of the expedition, but at the last moment he was called up on Military Service and to his great disappointment could not come with us. We had no qualified doctor, but as a medical student, I was also able to serve the party in that respect, as far as that went, which was not very far after all!

These details having been fixed, it was essential for each person to equip hinself. I took two pairs of strong boots but as it will be seen later they proved quite inadequate. It has long been known that two layers of thin material are warmer than one layer of thick—and accordingly a few cotton shirts, a pull—over, a thick warm coat and 3 pairs of warm trousers proved quite enough. Thick woolen gloves and several pairs of warm woolen hose are needed for higher altitude. Puttees are also very good to keep one warm. A mountain pike is a great asset in climbing while for higher work on the ice an axe and a pair of snow—goggles are essentials that cannot be dispensed with. A friend had lent me a pair of dark —tinted flying goggles, with a lighter shade in the lower part of the glasses and they proved to be very comfortable. The greatest problem was that of our beddings and though I had 2 blankets to cover me, I spent many a sleepless night. I have discussed this elsewhere in this account.

The last point to settle was that of the stores. Later in the appendix is given the amount and the kind of food taken. Suffice it to say here that after careful consideration we had the whole thing packed in 5 boxes in an assorted manner so that we did not have to open more than one box at a time. We also had a big primus stove and bundles of rope. A kind gentleman offered us a battery—radio set but we had to refuse as its transport would be a difficult problem. Most of us had cameras and binoculars and we were also lent a big telescope which proved very handy.

A day or two before we left, Palamkote and I called upon Dr. Sur, the Meteorologist at the Alipore Observatory. He very kindly explained to us what we were likely to expect. He said that we would probably get very unsettled weather with western disturbances, and warned us that the snow and ice at this time would be rather treacherous. With great diffidence, he volunteered the prophecy that owing to the late monsoon, we might encounter a severe snow-storm and blizzard in the early days of October. His forecast proved to be only too accurate.

One final word about a mistake that we made. We had applied for permits to enter Sikkim as we were told that owing to the War permits were essential. On the night previous to our departure we received a telegram informing us that no word had as yet been received from Gantok and that the passes may not be available. Immediate telephone communication was opened with Darjeeling and through the good offices of Khan Bahadur Avari, the Deputy Commissioner of Darjeeling and Mr. Davar, it was arranged that we could enter Sikkim without permits. (Later we came to know that Parsees come under the rules as foreigners; and only Indians can enter without passes).

From this account the reader will be able to gain some idea of the preparations and forethought involved

in planning a Himalayan expedition. Such planning is almost as interesting as the journey itself. Yet however well planned an expedition may be and however well the plans are executed, there is always one link of strength unknown in the chain of circumstances, and that is—luck. This solitary link depends largely on the weather and what the weather has done, or may do, to the mountain. Luck is blessed and cursed, but without it mountaineering would be a dull, mechanical pastime. Bow therefore to luck, accept it and forget it, making sure at the same time that all other links in the chain are as strong as human ingenuity and forethought can devise. We left our homes strong in the knowledge that we had concentrated our whole attention on the problem before us. We knew well that we had this one link of unknown strength to fear, but should that snap, we were confident that we would have done our best.

So on the night of September 26th we left Calcutta by the North Bengal Express for Darjeeling. A small crowd had come to see us off at the station; and most of those, even our near and dear ones, did not know exactly where we were going. "Somewhere near Kanchenjunga, pretty far north"—that was all that they knew. Only in our hearts *we knew* that if it was found feasible, we would make an actual attempt to go some good distance up the mountain. This was one of those vague hopes with which members, leaders and organisers of expeditions buoy themselves up when they have made every preparation and discounted every danger, hardship and physical obstacle. Men are ever hopeful and their hopes ever do stretch beyond the actual limits of their task, while they like also that their performance should outstrip their promise. Therefore they do not publish their hopes for the multitude to scoff at. Their secret hopes they keep to themselves.

Members of the Expedition.
Sitting from L. to R :- Russi Anklesaria, Jal Bapasola, Jehangir Antia.
Standing from L. to R :- Pervez Mehta, Behram Saklat,
Pesi Avari, Sammy Palamkote.

ASSEMBLY & OFF AT LAST

The journey to Darjeeling is too well known for any description. It was a dull misty evening when we steamed into the station. Besides a few friends, who knew of our coming, there was Mr. Davar to greet us on our arrival. He had brought with him his trusted porter, Kirken, who was to serve as our Sardar. A room was kindly lent to us by the railway authorities, where we were able to dump all our stores. And immediately final discussions began, for an early start was to be made the following morning.

After everything was arranged, Mehta, Saklat and I went and visited the "Victory Carnival", which was being held that night in the market-square; and we were able to win a prize at a stall where a few pot-shots had to be taken at Herr Hitler, and Saklat soon winged the Dictator's right eye! Kirken had been told to keep a good watch on our porters and to see that in all this festivity they did not booze themselves very much, for we wanted them to be in fine trim the following morning.

Late that night when I went to bed and crawled beneath my blankets, I felt that same queer thrill, the adventurers of old must have had, when they slipped their cables to venture into the unknown. The plans, the theories and the preparations of weeks were to be put at last into practice and tested. How foolish and futile they all seemed that night. Outside, the world stretched limitless into the darkness.

We were awakened next morning by a terrific hullabaloo. It seemed like a riot, but it was only our porter corps assembling outside. The most vital condition of success in Himalayan exploration or mountaineering is successful porterage. As had been proved previously on Everest and Kanchenjunga, the best types of Himalayan porters are Sherpas, Bhutias & Tibetans. There is little to choose between these hardy races for carrying power and endurance, but

the Sherpa is the best mountaineer. They come from the remote valleys of northern Nepal and have both Nepalese and Tibetan blood in them. They are used to withstanding cold and hardships on some of the most inhospitable portions of the world's surface and are natural mountaineers.

It appears extraordinary to us that these men, who are mostly "rickshawwallas" and make a comfortable living during the tourist season should so readily leave their homes and work in Darjeeling. Is it because of a born instinct for adventure, or because of the prestige to be gained by being chosen to accompany an expedition to the greatest peaks of the world or is it because of their love for the mountains with a primitive unreasoning devotion? Whatever it is—and it would be interesting to know it—it is not entirely the prospect of pecuniary gain (for they could earn much more if they stayed on in Darjeeling) that impels these men to risk life and limb.

There had been many applicants, but Mr. Davar had chosen the best and the fittest lot. Fifteen porters were believed to be required and as our sardar we had engaged Kirken. He had carried for me in 1940 and though he was getting on in years, his spirit was as high as ever. A better Himalayan guide than him would be difficult to find, for he knows the mountains as he knows the palm of his hand. He had been on every major expedition in the Himalayas since 1921 and was an old Everest and Kanchenjunga "tiger". His pock-marked, rugged countenance was one of the hardest I have ever seen in a native, and indicated a masterful personality. A Sherpa by birth, he was of that rare type, which prefers being left to himself, to act largely on its own initiative. He was a genuine "tough" in the best sense of the word and a "hard case" if ever there was one, but a tremendous worker and a real mountaineer. Though he had just recovered from a serious illness, he intended to climb as high

as possible and we realised what an immense asset his prestige and influence would be in regard to the new young entry.

As his second-in-command was another Sherpa porter, Sing-ting-rue. He was an excellent fellow, especially in the management of the stores, pitching the tents and doing other odd jobs—a fine, honest, extraordinarily strong and handsome man. He appeared to find life one perpetual joke and to extract huge amusement from everything he saw or did. He was full of fun and mischief and kept the whole porter battalion in good humour. Nothing ever seemed to ruffle his cool and calm temper. But for sheer drive and personality he could not be compared to his leader, Kirken.

There were five women included in our porter list. This should not be surprising. In weight-carrying powers, they were the equal of the men and their powers of endurance were prodigious. They were also a great asset as far as our cooking was concerned. These women did much to keep up the spirits of the porters and relieved their tedium of the march with many verbal leg pulls and jokes, which unfortunately we did not understand. The oldest and best of the lot was Peloo, Kirken's wife. She was a really wonderful woman and she came to be known by us as the "Memsahib".

September 28 dawned mistily, but as the sun got up, the dense blanket of white, wet fog enwrapping Darjeeling quickly dissolved. Rifts were torn in the curtain disclosing Kanchenjunga, silvered, blue-shadowed and remote. It was a morning full of calm promise. There were a few friends and strangers to see us off, including a Bengalee gentleman, who asked me whether I did not expect to find it "bitter cold and terribly slippery" on Kanchenjunga.

Two small lorries had been engaged for the first stage of our journey to Manibanjan. From there, onward, we were to continue on foot. It is fifteen miles from Darjeeling to Manibanjan —an hour's run. But we experienced a qualm of apprehension when confronted by our vehicles. They were very old and decrepit. Their bodies were warped and cracked, but it was the tyres that caused us most anxiety! Nevertheless Mr. Davar, seven other Parsees, fifteen Darjeeling porters and a tremendous amount of luggage were somehow stowed away. Before leaving, it was deemed necessary to obtain a pass. Apparently our load was many times the maximum allowed, but the police seemed to be solicitous neither for our safety nor for regulations. After all, we were already looked upon as madmen and if we did go down the hillside.... why worry? It would be God's will and we would have deserved it!

As all difficulties were thus removed, the clutches were engaged with fearsome wrenches, the gears jerked home with nerve-shattering crashes and we went rattling, bumping, and banging over the road, the cynosure of all eyes. The first stage of our journey had thus commenced. We could only hope that it would not prove the last! A fine road leads one as far as Sukiapokri. From there suddenly a rough track descends tortuously nearly 4000 feet, in a distance as the crow flies of about three miles. Frequently, the gradient is as much as 1:3 or 1:4 and there are hairpin bends, such that the wheels are but a few inches from the unprotected edge of precipitous drops. Both our drivers looked soured and disappointed men, who seemed fed up with this world. We smiled at each other—at times a trifle wanly—and strove to make light and airy conversation.

At first we passed through woods and glades of oaks, firs and beeches, reminiscent of the hillsides on the railroad to Darjeeling. Then came more open

slopes covered in dark green terraces of tea and clumps of tall bamboos. After Sukiapokri the road leads down close to the Nepal frontier and then follows on along the border. It was with profound sighs of relief that we stepped at last from our chariots at our destination.

At Manibanjan there was feverish activity as soon as we arrived. Kirken was assigning to each porter his particular load and packing him off. The biggest problem was a huge Bell-tent that we had. Sing-ting-rue came to Kirken's rescue and shouldered this heavy load himself. Mr. Davar, who had kindly accompanied us up to here, supervised all these affairs and so everything was disposed of quickly.

Manibanjan is a picturesque little place. It is the last big village met with. Its few primitive thatched houses and shops rest in the shadow of spreading trees, but like most native villages, the spaces between the houses were plentifully bestrewn with garbage. Therefore, there were smells and there were flies. And when after a final good-bye to Mr. Davar we jogged leisurely on, we were glad to leave it.

Almost immediately we encountered a very steep path. There is a continuous ascent to Tonglu for almost seven miles and I have always found this little journey very tiring. Walking was no doubt good for us, but in the enervating heat, such mortification of the flesh seemed both unpleasant and unnecessary. The sun was decidedly surprisingly hot and Mr. Bapasola threw off his hat and replaced it with a wet towel and I left him vowing that he would soon take off his shirt too—a thing which he fortunately did not do or he would soon have lost most of the skin of his back.

Very soon it became evident that all of us could not keep together. In such hikes or treks each regulates himself by the pace that is most comfortable for

him. A likes walking slowly, B very fast. A is indefatigable, B tires easily and needs rest. A is very good at ascents and manages them quickly, B cannot do so but on a straight road is very fast and leaves A far behind. Thus each member of the band has to adopt himself to these strange and constantly changing conditions, and the party is soon broken up into twos and threes. It was for this reason that everyone carried a little food, so that in case we got too far separated, a thing which we always tried to avoid, no one could starve—for villages are few and far between and in case someone gets separated or lost, he is faced with a very disagreeable and nasty situation. Besides this, each member carried in his rucksack his personal necessities and some first aid.

On the way we made a halt for about an hour or so at a small village called Chitre for lunch. As we lay back at last with appeased appetites, we heard a few faint sounds coming from a hut. Some Lamas were offering prayers. The approach to the hut was lined with high poles decorated with prayer-flags, consisting of long multi-coloured strips, inscribed with prayers, nailed longitudinally to the poles. These prayer-flags are common all over Sikkim and Tibet and as they flutter in the wind, the prayers are supposed to fly to heaven.

There are several such innovations. Telling beads is one convenient method of praying for us, but perhaps the best of all methods, as it gets through the greatest number of prayers in the shortest possible time, is the prayer-wheel! This is made of a copper or brass cylinder, which revolves on a wooden handle. Inside the cylinder is a roll of paper or parchment on which are written as many prayers as can be squeezed in. As every revolution is equivalent to reciting all the prayers inside, it is possible, by assiduously revolving this apparatus, to get through some millions of prayers a day.

As the Lamas prayed on, the low mutter broke into a wail of religious fervour, accompanied by the monotonous ringing of a hand-bell and I felt an indefinable sensation—that time and space were boundless, that man was but a puppet of fate, a mere plaything of elemental forces beyond his comprehension or control. The music of these people is also the epitome of this strange mountain-land. Its weird dirge-like monotime, its occasional passionate crescendo, suggests infinity, the presence of great mountains and limitless spaces, the fears and hardships of those foredoomed to dwell here and gaze for ever on the mighty mountains and their inhospitable solitudes.

The praying ceased as suddenly as it had begun, and no sound disturbed the hill-top save the "chuck-chucks" of a few chickens. We rose to go and continued in silence. A couple of hours later we reached the 18 mile post (these mileages are all reckoned from Ghum) and almost immediately after, Tonglu. Alongside the Dak-Bungalow is a police station, the only one we ever came across on our way up. Soon all the porters and every member of the party had arrived and we stretched ourselves on the big veranda of the Dak Bungalow. We had reached a height of over 10,000 feet. As we wished to get accustomed to sleep out in the open, we pitched our tents. Late that evening, a policeman came and asked us for our passes. At first he positively refused to believe we were Indians. And it was only when Mr. Antia pulled out his "custi" (sacred thread) and pushed it under his nose that he seemed at last somewhat convinced that we were some kind of Hindoos after all and not foreigners!

Tonglu is on the top of a hill and is a very exposed place. Consequently it was bitter cold that night. Towards the east, Darjeeling is beautifully seen with night's dark cloak thrown over the hills, and as the mist parted for a time like a curtain, and the cluster of electric lights shone in the distance

above the low-lying clouds, she seemed like a fairy city set amidst the heavens. It was a clear night as we went to sleep, but the rapid rise to over 10,000 feet was now beginning to tell and some of the party were troubled with insomnia, which is a very common complaint on high altitudes.

Many discomforts face those who go to the mountains, but they are worth every difficulty and danger. Great is the voice of the mountains, suggesting to the mind the changeless and the eternal. The first vision of the sea is always marvellous; but who can describe the effect on the mind of the first glimpse of the snow-crowned Himalayas? It is without question that these glorious forms set amidst the clouds, or shouldering as they sometimes seem to do, the blue of heaven, exercise a peculiar and fascinating power over the imagination. They transport us out of the fictitious atmosphere of civilization into a region of freedom and purity. Among their serene and quiet retreats, the fevered conventional life brought face to face with the purity and calm of Nature, reverts to its primitive simplicity. We look upon these bastions of the sky—guardians of liberty—sentinels of God—we look upon them and they make us also great.

Early next morning, with the promise of a brilliant day, we started on the road to Sandakphu. A big descent through a dense tropical forest, brought us down to a small village called Jongmai. From here onwards there were steep ascents and sharp descents crossing range after range, whose monotony was rarely relieved now and then by a straight path.

One great disadvantage that we had, and future expeditions who use this road should remember it, was that water is not available over great distances. To guard against this, a number of water-bottles should be taken. We had only three between us, which proved absolutely inadequate. And in the one which

belonged to him, Palamkote had put some sulphur bitters. No doubt he was actuated by hygeinic principles and wanted to make quite sure of the purity of the water, but he also made quite sure of himself. I only tasted it once during the whole trip and hardly had a few drops gone into my mouth, when I spat it out swearing that he could keep his d—d—! The, result was that as everyone else held it in disgust, Palamkote usually had a whole bottle to himself and he really seemed to enjoy it! I suggest it as a good plan for all those who in future wish to conserve their personal supplies.

Since Jongmai we had definitely changed our direction. We were no longer proceeding due west, but were heading north. Noon saw us reach Kala-pokhri, a picturesque little village. There is a very pretty little lake over here, glassing in its bosom earth and sky. Tall trees rise on either side and framed within them in the distance is a snowy peak. It made a lovely peaceful picture. The Sardar of the village was a puffed-up gentleman, who wanted to show his importance. One of the heels of my shoes had become loose and I asked him whether he or anyone else could repair it. "I am not a 'mochi', I don't know". "Have you got any milk to sell us"? "I don't know". "Can we buy any potatoes"? "I don't know". Well, we got rather fed up with the fellow, so we ate what we had and were about to go, when he asked to see through my binoculars. Thinking that this would perhaps make him friendly towards us, I gave him the pair. He seemed very pleased and when he had returned them, I asked him if he had found them good. Back came the reply "I don't know". There may be a great philosophy in this 'I don't know", but it is pretty maddening to the man opposite.

Some three miles from Kala-pokhri is the base of Sandakphu. Then came the steepest climb of the

day and a bad stony path leads to the dak-bungalow. But the scenery is magnificient. As we came higher and higher, we were presented on one side with a view of the weird and desolate sublimity of the gigantic conifers scorched with the intense cold frost till only their solitary trunks remained, while the other side offered one of the finest panoramas of wild beauty that could be seen. There are two grand dak-bungalows at this place and as we were far in advance of the porters, we occupied one of them and stretched ourselves before the hearth.

It became very misty and stormy soon after we arrived. Woolly clouds were rising from the valleys and draping themselves about the shoulders of the peaks. Once, while we gazed towards the west, the cloudy waves rolled back; in a distant trough a great peak rose in noble solitude above the world. Someone said, "Everest"! As I gazed at that final summit, beneath which so many high hopes have been shattered, I thought of Mallory and Irvine. Their last resting place is surely one to be envied. Though all other neighbouring peaks were cold and grey, one steadfast cloud banner streamed from its summit, whilst below, the great mountain drew to itself night's purple folds like the toga of some imperial Ceasar. Then the mist closed in and we saw it no more. There was a beautiful sunset that evening and it flooded the heavens with glory.

For dinner that day Kirken had cooked for us some dal and potatoes. Earlier at Kalapokhri, he had bought some flour and so both dishes were accompanied by "kulchas" (Nepali Chappattees), into which he had managed to impart a consistency and texture resembling well-seasoned boot-leather. In appearance and taste, "kulchas" resemble dried burnt wood. This comparison is not based on imagination. Avari, who, up-to-date, had been foremost to insist that living on the country was essential, was enthusiastic

as to the excellence of these "kulchas". This enthusiasm was maintained, *verbally*, up to the last morsel. It is really remarkable, therefore, that on no future occasion was he observed to eat this excellent and nutritive food, nor did that pearl of Himalayan philosophy "living on the country", ever again fall from his lips!

As night came on, the weather became worse and worse and we were decidedly feeling uncomfortable at the thought of sleeping in the tents. Before turning in, Saklat and I took a stroll out in the open. In the direction of Everest sudden floods of white light darted like serpents from one cloudy abyss to another or burst upwards in fountains of fire, soundlessly illuminating the towers, minarets and cupolas of a cathedral of mist towering above the world. As though jealous of his supreme neighbour, the God of Kanchenjunga struck out with fierce blue swords and vicious darts of forked lightning from the clouds. From the depths of the valleys beneath ghostlike swathes of mist wraiths swayed evilly upwards like Jinns from the confines of a monstrous bottle. Somewhere over the distant Bhutan and Tibet another cloud winked with bibulous persistence like some lesser mountain God delighting in this fiery combat of Himalayan giants. The weather boded ill. From the direction of the greater Himalayas came long low growls of thunder.

The storm that had been threatening all night burst upon us in the early hours of the morning. It lashed out furiously but fortunately lasted only a short time. We had been frightened about the tent, but it stood the test bravely and well and gave us high hopes for the future. The morning, however, was not very clear and we only caught occasional glimpses of Kanchenjunga and Everest.

We started before the porters, leaving Kirken to settle everything. And settle he did, but at great trouble. For some of the porters had lost heart owing to the night's stormy weather and did not like to move on. In fact, matters came to such a pass that Kirken had to deliver a smart blow here and a cuff there to get them all going. It is really surprising how soon bad weather seems to knock all the stuffing out of these otherwise admirable men. Such worries and problems are to be avoided at all costs and it was only the "toughness" of Kirken that prevented a porterage break-down then and there.

The early part of the jounney from Sandakphu to Phalut is surprisingly wonderful. As we came down, we suddenly burst upon a scene with gentle undulating hills and stark leaffess trees, some still standing and some in decay—remniscent of the pictures that we had seen of Canadian lumber-lands. The road goes up and down winding round the mountains.

Six miles before Phalut is Sabargam, a very small village. As I arrived there, Mr. Bapasola greeted me gloomily. He was always anxious to get as much fresh food as possible. His most roseate dream was of the eggs and chickens awaiting us at the next village—dozens of chickens and hundreds and hundreds of eggs. He would talk to us of chicken "dhansak" and chickens, roasted and succulent, and of eggs—poached eggs, scrambled eggs, and huge omelettes, steaming and savoury. Alas! these dreams had not materialised. Yet, despite continued dis-

appointments, Mr. Bapasola always remained undaunted. I had seen him leave Sandakphu that morning with the stern light of a fixed resolve in his eyes. Sabargam was, he told us, a very big village. There *must* be such things there. Now he was seated on a big boulder. The light of stern resolve had died from his eyes and had been replaced by a look of settled gloom. There were no chickens, nothing in this God-forsaken world! And Sabargam the 'last village!' But to mitigate his disappointment, however, some curd and milk were obtainable and that with the little we had made a pleasant lunch.

All throughout the trip, the difference of climate experienced during the day was striking. Sunburn was a universal complaint. The glare in these regions is so strong that it does its work only too efficiently. During the very first few days of our trip from Darjeeling, we had become so tanned that Mr. Antia remarked very truly that any famous beautiful screen star would become green with envy and pay large sums for just such a tan. But as days advanced our countenances were reduced to a truly dreadful state. The non-mountaineering reader may think that I am making a lot of this affliction: but those who gently brown, either artificially in the beauty saloon, or naturally on the sands of the beach have little conception of what a Himalayan sun can do. Anyone who has ever experienced the agony of eating and smiling or the sleepless nights it may cause will have good reason to remember it. Although the direct heat of the sun at mid-day used to be great, at night the temperature usually dropped to several degrees below zero. Thus our experience was that in this part of the world there is an emormous range of temperature during the day, probably over 125 degrees.

Compared to the previous days' hike, it was not very difficult going until the last lap was reached, when the scene as well as the road suddenly changed. The ascent to the top is a very rugged one. Broken crags

and huge boulders scar the surface of the mountain. But the rudest forms in Nature have something of beauty; the most rugged strength possesses some power to charm.

Mr. Bapasola, Palamkote and Saklat, however, were yet missing long after we had come up. We were beginning to get anxious ard were about to send a search party out, when they arrived. At one spot, they had taken the wrong turning and had gone down in the direction of Raman. Seeing nobody coming behind them, they returned to the cross-roads and tossed for it; and it was good for all that Palamkote's call happened to be correct.

As this was to be the last habited place we would come across for days, we decided to celebrate by having a bumper dinner and accepting the good chowkidar's proposal to spend the night on the veranda of the dak-bungalow. Accordingly, Kirken announced to our leader's great joy that he would make some chicken "dhansak". And so one of Phalut's poor inhabitants was sacrificed in our honour.

That evening before dinner, we had some spirited discussions on a subject that had long been on our minds—of starting a Parsee Mountaineering and Rambler's Club. The idea in itself is good, but there is a doubt if it will meet with any public support. And unless there is some such institution, the idea of further major Himalayan expeditions should be discounted. Excepting for Mr. Bapasola and Mr. Antia, we all belonged to the recently formed Calcutta Parsee Rovers and so we had received some help from our troop in the form of railway concessions. But nevertheless, ours was entirely a private enterprise; we were given no financial or other help; and it must be remembered that Himalayan treks are expensive affairs. Roughly our expenses for the actual trip came to about Rs. 100/- per head. This was the very minimum that could have been spent. We were not like the

European expeditions, who calculate their calories of food and their anti-scorbutic vitamins, who carry elaborate wireless sets and cylinders of oxygen and whose porter contingents number in hundreds. But though we "roughed it" out a lot, we still found it rather heavy on our purses, for personal equipment for the mountains also cost a lot of money; and besides there is the question of films for cameras and as in our case, for movies. On an average, then, we might say that each of us spent anything from Rs. 175/- to Rs. 250/-. This is far too costly and cannot be undertaken again in future. In the case of a recognised club, the members can easily be equipped, stores can be obtained at a discount, travelling would be at concession rates, various other official bodies and firms would be willing to help and part of the expenses would naturally be borne by the club. There is every advantage to be gained by having such an institution, but the difficulties in starting one of its kind in a small community like ours are immense, for there are yet very few who are really interested in mountaineering. There is perhaps more chance of a better co-operation coming forth if it be an All-India Club instead of keeping it to only one community, but in that case there are some obvious disadvantages.

Arguments were at last brought to a halt by Sing-ting-rue's announcement that the great dinner was ready. Two porters led by Kriken came along bearing large dishes which brought a gleam of fire into Mr. Bapasola's eyes. Eager faces were already devouring in anticipation that sublime fowl and the splendid machinations of our cooks. But alas! The poor fowl was so thin and covered with one of those thick bristly skins, through which the bones could not make their way out in spite of all their efforts. Kirken must indeed have sought for the fowl a long time before he could have found it in the corner to which it must have retired to die of old age! Besides

we never quite made out what it really was—whether it was "dhansak" or some kind of chicken and rice or what! I have always had the greatest respect for old age, but I don't think much of it boiled or roasted.

Phalut is a very bleak and exposed place and consequently very windy. It was lucky for us that the veranda was protected on all sides with glass panes. It had been very misty when we arrived, with occasional lightning. But now as I turned to go in for the night, there was a wonderful change. The moon had risen and her calm radiance seemed to quell the stormy disputes between earth and sky. Beneath her contemptous gaze, the distant lightning became desultory and wan. The clouds were withdrawn from Kanchenjunga. Far up in the awakened stars something white gleamed steadfastly—the summit.

Long after I had lain down to sleep, my brain was still busy with thoughts of the past and the future. The past already seemed so remote. I could review its events almost with the detachment of a god. The remembrances of civilisation passed before me, a procession of phantasms. Of the future, I could but speculate in vain. And, so at last, the peace of the mountains laid gentle hands upon me and I fell into the deep, dreamless slumber that is the daily reward of those who live and travel in the open.

Early next morning, Saklat and I climbed upon an eminence waiting for the sunrise. We were alone with Nature and with God and we waited eagerly, for there was a promise in the skies of a glory never to be forgotten. Before us, in the north, was Kanchenjunga, a form seemingly born of the sky rather than springing from the low earth and for a time we were dumb in the presence of its virgin purity. So near did this dazzling mass appear that it seemed as if a strong arm could cast a stone to it yet it is really forty miles away. More towards the west was Everest, rising in its abrupt and rugged grandeur. Looking through

a pair of powerful glasses, the eastern slopes of the mountain are seen shaped just like a throne. It seemed to us that we had seen this snowy white seat let down from heaven for the Great Spirit Himself. Is it small wonder then that the natives regard Kanchenjunga and Everest as the home of the gods? Below us were some of our porters, also gazing towards the snows. Like ourselves, these men from Darjeeling see more in a mountain than inanimate ice, snow and rock. Love and veneration for Nature is part of their Buddhist religion. Their fears and fancies are merely an outward expression of a primitive instinct that recognises in these mountains something beyond human understanding; a world apart, akin both to Heaven and to Hell; something to be revered, feared and worshipped.

At first the silvery splendour in the east seemed only that of clouds such as may be seen floating at early morn in our skies. But ere long as the dawn came to us gloriously with trembling pulses of tender light, it became apparent that those glorious masses piled on the horizon were no shifting or transient splendour, which the winds may change or bear away upon their wings. No, they were solid masses against which the tempests of untold ages had burst in vain—masses, indeed, which were as real and enduring as the stars, which rode above their crests or the sun whose slanting rays were flung from their giant shoulders.

Slowly and almost imperceptibly the sobre grey put on a lighter shade. Slowly the stars died out and the pale shield of the moon was broken by the arrows of day. The fleecy clouds in the east carved in lines of exquisite beauty by the subtle chisel of the wind lit up with a rosy hue. The grey brightened into white, the white into primrose, and soon far up the first golden beams smote the pale brow of Kanchenjunga and flushed it with a delicate pink flame. Then the sudden glory sprang from peak to peak, as though they were

cressets lighted up with the richest hues of heaven by the torch of an Angel on the wing. Now the beams of coming day touched Everest and its summit was one mass of crumbling gold, which crept gradually downward, until its thousands of feet of precipices stood out in burning splendour against the rich blue heaven of Tibet. As the light travelled westward, the colour deepened. The jagged peaks of Jannu were flecked with scarlet, while beautiful Kabru and its peerless neighbour, Pandim, were robed in crimson. Far down in the east, the valley, over which the clouds had spread themselves like a floor of many-coloured marble, was lit up in glorious sunshine. O vision of glory! to be remembered for ever. We could have knelt down upon the bare rock in tears—it was as though we had looked upon the beauty of God.

The sun was up. There still stood Kanchenjunga, its dazzling whiteness now relieved by the black of its lower foothills, which fell from it like dark robes from the snowy shoulders of a queen. And there still stood Everest, as the finger of God, upraised from eternity amid this land of wonders, ever admonishing the thoughtless ages of mankind that are only as the shadows which flit past it and are seen no more.

It was some time before we could sufficiently recover to do what we had actually come up for. We fixed up the telescope we had brought and viewed the mountain which we intended to assault. To appreciate the beauty and dignity of Kanchenjunga, the apparently smooth sickle-like sweep of its ridges, the pale red of its granite precipices, gleaming through a blue haze, should be viewed with the naked eye. Seeing it thus, it is impossible to grasp the scale of the mountain and the mountaineer's analytical mind is peacefully submerged in a quiet ocean of meditation.

But seen through a telescope, Kanchenjunga ceases to be an object of restful meditation. It is

suddenly revealed in all its cruelty. The pale red precipices are resolved into fearful slices of unrelenting granite; the apparently smooth ridges resemble the blade of a knife seen through a microscope; broken and jagged, torn and hewn by wind and weather into edges, gaps and towers of fantastic and terrible beauty; what appear to the naked eye as straggling thin white threads are terrific ice armoured couloirs, down which crash stones and ice avalanches from disintegrating cliffs of rock and ice. Even looking through a telescope, it was impossible not to gain some idea of Nature's forces that are ever at war slowly destroying the greatest peaks of the world.

Only a minute's examination was needed to assure us that it was going to be difficult at that, to seek any way from the Talung glacier. The way up to where the mountain's ridge curved behind Pandim seemed more or less clear enough but what lay beyond we could not tell. The eastern ridge was the only one that seemed to offer any feasible route and that also at only one spot. We were yet too far away to decide anything definitely yet it seemed that a big couloir which led to the main ridge on the extreme right would be the least difficult way up. If only this couloir maintained its promise in its lower part too, then it would prove to be the one little chink in the armour of the gaint. But it was all a question of—"if". Anyway it was worth trying. The telescope, however, effectively dispelled any nebulous schemes we may have cherished of finding the whole affair easy.

Continuing our journey still further north we passed a cairn about a mile from Phalut, marking the border between three countries—Nepal on the west, Sikkim in the north-east and British India on the south and east. The wonderful thing about this border—and it is an example of what perfect international relationships should be—is that there is no sentry. Not one solitary person guards the entrances. Now we were on Sikkim soil and soon the ascent to Sing-

alila was begun. This apparently insignificant mountain—it is only 12,200 feet high—gives its name to the mighty range over which we had already traversed and over which our future path also lay. The Great Singalila Ridge runs in a curved manner from Darjeeling to Kanchenjunga and extends even beyond that mountain.

When we had reached the top, a lovely view could still be obtained. Considering that one of the most beautiful sights in all the world is presented before the adventurous traveller, it is really deplorable that so few persons visit these districts. Anyone wishing to see the glorious mountains should spend a holiday going to Sandakphu and Phalut. This round journey does not take more than a week and there is no need to go beyond Phalut. If the time of the year is carefully chosen, the trouble will be well rewarded in the form of the most glorious sunrises and sunsets on top of the world.

As we lingered awhile on the summit, clouds were born in the valleys and floated slowly upwards, caressing the hillsides. I wish we could have camped there for a night and watched the passage of eve and dawn along the ranges. Aurora must sometimes stand on Singalila to witness her handiwork. Was it from here that the Hindu sage of old gazed upon the Himalayas and penned those inspired lines :—

> "He who thinks of Himachal (the Himalayan snows) though he should not behold him, is greater than he who performs all worship in Kashi. And he who thinks on Himachal shall have pardon for all sins, and all things that die on Himachal, and all things that in dying think of his snows, are freed from sin. In a thousand ages of the gods I could not tell thee of the glories of Himachal where Siva lived and where the Ganges falls from the foot of Vishnu like the slender thread of a lotus flower."

The road from here took us down a steep descent to Chiabanjan La where we halted for lunch. Nearby was a small waterfall. Little did we then know that it would be a long time before we would get water again. At this place there was a stone structure in a dilapidated condition and no clue exists as to what it could have been. Perhaps it was a Lepcha fort in the days when Sikkim was its own master and had its wars with Nepal and Tibet!

On our map this was marked as the point where the mule track ended. Thenceforward our way must lie through wilder country and along rougher tracks towards Jongri and the Chemathang glacier. Soon we would be at grips with things. As I reclined on the close-cropped turf, I could not help comparing my companions to the immaculate young men they had once been. The young ladies who had given them dances at Calcutta would have looked askance could they have seen them now with their sun-tanned faces. Already the veneer of civilisation had lost all its polish, despite the restraining and elevating influence of our two "bosses". Table manners had long since been at a discount. Beards were growing steadily, and it was a matter of speculation as to who would win the race for length and bushiness. At present the honours were fairly evenly distributed between Mr. Antia and myself. (I had stolen a march over the others by stopping to save a day before I left Calcutta!)

It must not be thought that we grew beards out of sheer laziness. We did so because they afford protection from the ravages of the sun at high altitudes. But at this early stage in their development, they presented an unpleasant spectacle. Mr. Bapasola, Avari and Mehta had so far developed little more than straggly fluff. Palamkote's and Saklat's growths were just beginning to inspire respect, while the appearances of Mr. Antia and myself can only be

described as blackguardly. My own particular effort promised to develop into what I believe is technically known as a "French Beard" or a dark beard which ends in a point. For this I was promptly dubbed by Saklat, with whom nicknames are a speciality, as "Count Rollo Ruskie"!

We climbed higher and higher through thick forest land. At about three o'clock, we reached a small saddle between two mountains and Kirken advised us to camp here for the night. There was a big scooped out hollow measuring about 80 feet across and in the centre was a small pond of dirty water. His idea in advising us so was that we would probably get no other water for the night. I looked with disgust at the pond. All my instincts rose against it. The water was of a rusty brown colour like tea, stagnant and with a covering of innumerable dead flies on its surface. It was one thing to see it, but quite another to drink the nasty thing. Anyway we took Kirken's word for it and camped there. And it was lucky that we did so for we had hardly gone in before a sudden storm broke over us and the rain came pelting down.

Agrument seems to be the chief by-product of sojourn in high camps. It raged from a misty afternoon to a shining moon-lit night. Mehta is an out-and-out Indian Nationalist, Palamakote a conservative. What more could you want? Dinner early over—Kirken had boiled the water, rinsed it through muslin and had thrown a pinch of alum also in it, but the concoction had tasted awful—these two gentlemen settled down happily to mutual vituperation. A general analysis of lack of sympathy, indifference to native interests, breaking of promises and callous exploitation of Indians was met by a formidable catalogue of communalism, crime, internal strife and general incompetance for leadership. The hours merely added fuel to the flame. Lofty invective gave way to the grossest personalities. On the

slightest sign of flagging, Mr. Antia, Saklat or Avari would contribute some provocative and unfounded assertion which provided a fresh stimulus, what time a distracted leader was vainly endeavouring to attempt to sleep and I to write my diary, which was many days overdue. Needless to say, neither side was ever convinced, or ever will be. But the spell-bound audience could not complain of lack of entertainment.

That night—some little devil, who wanted a laugh, whispered in our ears—and Saklat, Palamkote and I decided to use only two beddings between ourselves and we tossed up to see whose should be opened; the lot fell upon me and Saklat. We arranged ourselves as well as we could in a corner. The sharpest stones in all India had inserted themselves cunningly beneath the tent! The threat of bad weather had prevented the porters from constructing a proper platform. The ground directly below was undulating and Palamkote occupied the side that faced upwards and we, that which sloped awkwardly downwards, Saklat taking the lower berth and I the upper one. Consequently, I spent the night rolling on top of Saklat and Saklat spent the night in being rolled on by me. And as we rolled, we were continuously dragging off the blankets from Palamkote, leaving him to shiver. Decidedly the idea was a foolish one and we all passed a restless and uncomfortable night.

Fortunately sleepless nights at high altitudes seem less interminable than they do at low levels. The mountaineer lies half comatose, only dimly aware of the slow march of the hours, caring little for the angular elbow of a companion or the inevitable stone exploring his hip or the small of his back.

We woke up very tired and depressed and angry with the world. Even the cheery "Good morning. everybody" of the leader only brought out a vehement reply from Saklat, which I dare not give over here.

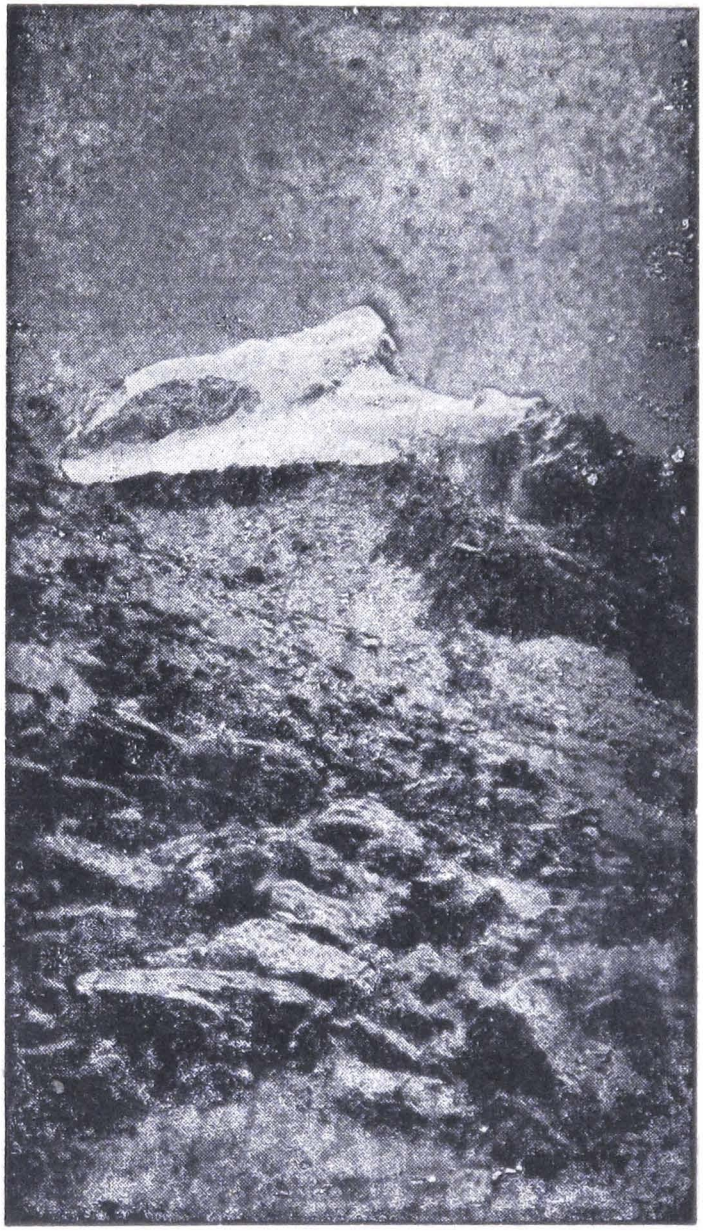
A mug—full of chocolate and we started on the road to Migothang. Will we get water on the road? We asked Kirken; he shook his head—he was not decided. Time alone would tell.

THE ROCKS.

The morning was one of sparkle and freshness as we set out for Migothang. Improving weather raised the spirits of the porters and for once everyone was all smiles, cheerful and willing. And just as well, for as it proved later, it was going to be a terrible day.

I left well in advance of the party to try and take some photographs before the usual morning clouds concealed the peaks. For a little distance the path ascended through woods, but soon it suddenly rose steeply. As the snows were all but beginning to vanish behind growing masses of cumuli, I scrambled up as fast as I could and not as careful as I should have been. The path here is very narrow traversing the mountain with a vertical fall of over a thousand feet on one side. In my haste, I stepped on a large block of loose rock without first testing it. No sooner had my sole touched it, when it went away rolling down the precipice and I almost with it. Luckily I was able to get a handhold and pull myself up again—but I lost some of my zest for photography after that! Perhaps some evil spirit lurked at that place for a little later Saklat had an almost similar adventure near about the same spot. If it was a coincidence, it was certainly a curious one!

Nevertheless we did not go unrewarded. From the top of the mountain, I was able to get a superb picture of Kanchenjunga and Kabru framed within the trees and not twentyfive miles away. Everest too could be clearly seen in all its greatness. It was a view so overwhelming in its magnificence as would cause the most ardent photographer to despair of



"Jubonu, serene and stately mountain, with icy ridges converging to a summit of purest snow."

C

reproducing one tithe of its grandeur. So gigantic is the sight that all the greatest works of man, his towns, his factories, his skyscrapers, would all be lost in such a landscape. Only physically can one learn to appreciate the scale of Himalayan foot-hills and that by toiling over them.

From the top we plunged down in a zig-zag manner till we arrived at a larger saddle between two ranges. Here we came across a little pool of water, exactly similar to the odious thing of the night before. The road was getting worse than anything we had yet encountered—in fact at most times, there was no road. The scenery was dreary. The snows were shut off and we were hemmed in by towering rocks. On the way we passed some bushes bearing small fruits which the porters called "lalchus." They were some form of wild berries and though in appearance they seemed like cherries, were really very bitter to taste. But our men evidently enjoyed eating them. Of a far different nature, however, were the wild figs that we were fortunate to obtain later. They were truly delicious. As time passed, the clamour for water became louder and louder. Noon saw us reach Lampheram and we searched for some fall or other—but they had all dried up. Even Palamkote's sulphur bitters seemed acceptable but his bottle too was finished. There was no help for it but to go on and on.

On the first day's hike to Tonglu, we had occasionally come across a few birds. Since then we had seen none. Now at Lampheram, we met our first crow. As it was to prove later, he was also the last. It is curious indeed how rarely we saw any animals or winged creatures, even though our way occasionally took us through thick forests. Once Mr. Antia came across a great big lizard and at another time Avari and Saklat saw a large snake. But though we were fortunate to miss them, bears are very frequent visitors of these parts. Only the

previous year, I had run up against two big ones near Sandakphu.

It was on this march that I learnt an amusing thing. I was climbing just behind Mr. Bapasola, when I saw my leader, pretty tired, sit down to rest as I thought, on a projecting ledge. But I saw something that was truly surprising. He opened his rucksack, took out a bottle of "Scott's Emulsion", had a teaspoonful of it; then emerged a jar of "Glucose Honicose", had one of those and he was immediately transformed into all fire and energy, and attacked the road again. I was so taken aback that I asked him about it. He replied shyly that it was a thing he had learnt on his world tour and that it gave one immediate energy. And I suppose for him at least this must be true—for like the immortal Pop-eye, the Sailor-man, and his spinach—he actually seemed to swell visibly before my eyes. He offered to let me try it also, but although I accepted a honicose, I hastily refused the emulsion, saying that my internal anatomy did not probably require it and that I did not think I was very tired after all!

Not so very far from Lampheram begins the climb over the rocks. They are so loose that each has to be tested, and so steep that each deserves a swear-word. It is curious how on any climb the mental equilibrium of the mountaineer is liable to be upset by bad rock. Difficulty is one thing, danger another—and these rocks though difficult are positively dangerous. The nerve-stressed mountaineer needing a safety valve for his feelings frequently finds an outlet for them in forceful language. I make no excuses, therefore, for certain most improper remarks, when clambering up these rocks. I cannot remember what the others said but once Mehta turned and remarked to me "These rocks are———!" sentiments which, happily, I was able to return with interest.

The mist was now coming in and visibility became narrowed to barely a few yards. We were climbing in two parties, Mr. Bapasola, Avari and Saklat in the first and Mr. Antia, Mehta, Palamkote and myself in the second. Saddle after saddle and range after range were traversed but the rocks seemed never-ending, Thirst was now becoming intense and parched throats did not help us at all! Mentally, a man is lost in this country of God. Like an astronomer he can estimate distance only in figures. His brain is too small, too tied to the little houses, towns and villages among which he is accustomed to live, to grasp the real magnitude of these immense ranges.

It was really a heavy day. The marches on this route over the Singalila Ridge are not only long ones, but they involve tedious and steep ascents. We had taken their lengths into consideration but not their difficulties. For once we could appreciate the lot of our porters. Theirs is a heritage of service and hard work. Load yourself with about 80 lbs. and trudge twelve to fifteen miles a day, included in which is an ascent of over 4000 feet under a hot sun, and you will be glad that you were not born a Sherpa porter. And, if you believe in reincarnation, you will pray fervently that you are not born a Sherpa porter in the next life. It may be argued that load-carrying over such long distances is, of course, a matter of knack and experience, but this cannot alter the fact that it requires a tremendous amount of energy to do it. I really cannot believe that it is entirely for monetary reward or for self-glorification that these men are prepared to undergo toils, hardships and dangers that are inseparable from mountaineering on the greatest peaks in the world. I believe that, like their sahibs, they are born with that strange instinct men call "Adventure."

Our speed gradually became slower and slower due to exhaustion. The shades of evening had already

descended and cloaked the mountains. All around us in the valleys was an ocean of clouds, lit up with a delicate pink in the dying rays of the setting sun. Soon the moon rose with her court of stars, and seemed to be laughing at our discomfiture. Suddenly new scenery and new conditions were observed. Hitherto the rocks had masked all, but now we found ourselves descending through thick thorny bushes. Perhaps the transition was more abrupt than could be expected, probably because we had come up those last slopes with heads down and senses dulled by altitude.

But hark! what was that sound? What else could it be but that of a waterfall. And so close too! As we hurried towards it, we say a light flickering in the distance. Evidently some of our porters who had gone ahead of us had reached and pitched tents. We rushed on and felt our feet sinking into mud. We were very near the water now and soon we were drinking the icy cold refreshing thing. Oh blessed, blessed hour! What sound more musical than that of a fall, what beverage more wonderful than its cold pure waters chilled in Nature's own refrigerator, the icy mountains. With a prayer of thanks to God, we entered our tents and lay down to rest.

Tropical night fell like the lowering of a curtain on the important act of a drama and soon the mists had completely enclosed us and all was silence save the wind that whistled a curious lullaby. The evil day was over.

We rose early next morning and passed on. We found that our porters had not pitched their own tents for the night; but they appeared to have had a comfortable time despite the lack of shelter. Evidently Sherpas think nothing of spending a night out in bad weather at 15,000 feet or more under conditions which would perhaps make men like us quail. It had really been bitter cold and the early morning had coated the small trees and bushes in a filmy garment of white,

while a thin coating of ice lay in patches on the ground.

Soon the path rose sharply up and we arrived at a point where it needed some exploring to find a track. We broke off in several directions and cutting directly up a steep hill, I came upon one which seemed to be full of promise. After I had made somewhat sure, I hailed the others up and sat down to see them climb. Looking the way I had come, I could see my friends and the porters strung out in a long line of slowly moving dots. It was difficult to realise that these dots on the vast counterpane of rock slabs were indeed men and each man, in addition to the load he was carrying, carried another load of care and trouble, joy and sorrow.

Did I really soliloquise thus? I doubt it. It is only now seated in my comfortable armchair and breathing the air of Calcutta approximately eight feet above sea level that I can think of what I ought to have thought of then and forgetting for a moment the grumble of traffic and the inferno of tram-cars conjure up in my mind's eye that string of little men toiling up that weary road.

It was almost noon when we reach Koktang Lake and found beauty everywhere—beauty, fresh and unstained, as if just fallen from the hand of God; beauty, meekly hiding in the depths and proudly seated on the heights; beauty, clothing the hills and mirrored in the waters; beauty, scarfing the rocks with the red of the granite and staining the hills with the green of the bushes; beauty, veiling the shattered arches of crumbling mountains and dreaming amid the soft witchery of the clear waters. And above this beauty stands grandeur—grandeur, looking sunwards towards the Kabur peak, while in the west, one gazes in awe at Kang and Koktang raising their summits to the sky.

Sitting on the shore we enjoyed a beautiful lunch. Later Mr. Bapasola wished to jump in but the

curious belief held by the porters that this is a sacred lake and if anything is thrown in, all the neighbouring mountains will topple over, prevented him from doing so. Probably it was just a hoax for hardly had any of them ever come this way before. Their idea must have been to prevent our wasting any time and to have the day's work done with as quickly as possible. However, we could not afford tampering with their feelings.

Compared with the previous one, this was a day of wonders. From Migothang to Gamothang, the traveller has to cross no less than four mountain passes —the Ghara La, the Tag La, the Dui La and the Oma La. Barely two hours after we had left our luncheon spot, we burst upon another broad expanse of water, the Ramchi Pokhri Lake. In its beautiful setting it compares very favourably with the other one and it is a matter of personal opinion as to which is the prettier. Water adds to all scenery a delicacy, a grace, a peculiar charm, without which it is more or less hard and wanting in true loveliness. Without water we instinctively feel that no landscape is complete. "Water among scenery" says one "is like a woman among men".

A little further from this lake we came to the crest of the mountain and caught a grand view of the snows. We had not seen them since we left Nayathang and it served as a reminder how close we were to the ensuing struggle. Then came a miserable descent of hundreds of feet over huge rock slabs to the lovely valley of the Gonpatang Chu—"Chu" is the native word for river. And there at last we pitched camp by its side.

This was the first river that we had come across. A fast, flowing, eddying torrent, roaring down over rocks and mountains, it is but typical of the rivers of Sikkim. Most of us had a wash after the many days of abstention, and although the climate of the valley was not so cold, I must exclude the temperature of the

water. There was some discussion whether we should use it as a swimming bath or not; and at last only Mehta and I plunged in like the enthusiasts of College Square—but only one plunge was sufficient and even we came out of it as corks out of a bottle. It seemed, however, that the porters were greatly impressed by our performance and there was no doubt that our stocks rose several points in their estimation.

That night during dinner Mr. Antia remarked how funny it would be if on our return we found that peace had been declared or that some earthquake had destroyed some distant island, or that——! We really wondered that must be going on in that world outside. Enclosed by high and terrible mountains, we had almost come to feel that nothing else but ourselves existed. I must confess that throughout our trip, we rarely thought of the world's news. Being completely cut off, we knew nothing of the latest sports reports, or of divorce scandals or of High Court trials or of any political crisis—or even of the War. These things that ought to have mattered had ceased to matter at all. The things that seemed really important to us were whether our men would ever cook us better meals, the length and difficulties of a day's march and our own internal economy. The mountaineer if not a throw-back to the ape, is certainly at least a throw-back to some sort of primitivism!

The next day, October 4th, will be one that I should long remember. We crossed the river and immediately continued on a steep ascent. Occasional waterfalls broke the monotony of the towering mountains. Already I was beginning to learn something of the secret that makes for good up-hill walking at high altitudes; it is rhythm. The heart and lungs must keep in time with the movements of the legs and each upward step must synchronise with the breathing. It does not matter how many breaths are taken to each step so long as it is always the same number. If this synchronisation is allowed to fail, it is found neces-

sary to stop and puff. The secret of maintaining it is a pace not varying by a fraction of a second in the interval of time elapsing between each step. Although at the beginning it is necessary to concentrate on the maintaining of this rhythm, it soon becomes automatic. This is one reason why ground, calling for a variety of pace, is more tiring to negotiate at a high altitude than ground on which the same pace can be kept up continuously.

It was on this march that we came across one of the steepest climbs of our whole journey to the mountain. We had seen this ascent from afar and had pulled each other's leg by saying that we would probably have to climb it. But the joke was really on us when we found that we did have to "go over". And "going over" was no laughing matter at all. Just as we had come up sharply, so the last part of the day's march was a steep descent to the Churung Chu. This river has its origin in the snowy glaciers round the Koktang & Kang peaks and just before it reaches the valley to join its eastern neighbour, the Rathong Chu, it tumbles over the mountain-side. It is really a fearful sight to see the torrent tear downwards a sheer 2,000 feet into the gorge, where strangled by the rocks, it roars and rages like a mad beast.

It was the most magnificent and fiercest waterfall I had ever seen. As we came down I was on the look-out for a chance to take a photograph and especially did I fancy at one point where it broke into a huge expanse as it scurried down the rocks. I was accompanied at that time by Kirken and I told him to go on while I took a snap and followed. To get a superb picture, however, I saw that it would mean crossing the fall itself and getting on to a rock that projected boldly from its centre.

Some very gingery bit of acrobatics were required, especially as the rock was very slipperly, but at last I was able to get on to it. At the same time, I did

not notice that one of the soles of my boots had separated completely and was projecting out awkwardly. And this was the cause of my disaster. As I fell my camera was wrenched out of my hand and I was carried down a few feet before I was able to cling to a small ledge. The suddenness of the movement, however, dislocated my left arm and I felt an excruciating pain in my shoulder. It is curious how at such moments the mind acts quickly and the body derives that extra energy so badly needed. If the ledge gave away nothing but the rocks hundreds of feet down where the river eddied evilly would break my fall. From above, the waters thundered over in full force. And to crown it all one of my arms was useless. To this day, I do not know exactly what manoeuvre it was that brought me out from there. My mind was somewhat dazed as I sat down at last in some safety.

As I turned to go, my eye fell on my poor old camera jammed between two rocks, I just could not leave it there, so I went again to save it. This time I took the precaution of taking off my boots. There must have been a diabolical devil encased within that camera. As I grasped it one of the rocks came down and to avoid being hit, I awkwardly jerked my arm back with the result that it was knocked out a second time. Luckily I was able to get out without any further mishap and set my shoulder properly, but my retrieved camera seemed ruined, the shutter refusing to work. The diabolical devil could seldom have laughed so heartily as he did that day. True the whole affair had been rather amusing and I could have laughed with him, had it not been that it had also given me a good fright! I took my revenge, however, by taking a cine picture of the falls, after all! It was late in the evening, when I joined my companions and told them about my adventure.

I will take this occasion here to speak about our shoes and boots. This may seem very trivial, but to the mountaineer, it is one of the most important points

—perhaps the most important. The value of good shoes or boots can hardly be overestimated. Each of us had taken at least two pairs. I had kept a pair for the journey to the mountain and the other which were lightly nailed I intended to us on the ice. But things did not turn out as expected. I lost the heels of the first pair on the road to Sandakphu and so from that point I wore the others; but these I found to be absolutely unwearable after the waterfall incident. My only recourse was to fall back on the old heelless pair. I was the worst off but the others too were complaining of torn soles. All, except Saklat, who had a peculiar pair. His footgear was of the Kashmiri type and was in two parts. It consisted of a soft close-fitting leather sock, over which was worn a thick, well-nailed "Kabuli champal". Not only are they very comfortable and lasting, but give also firm support to the ankles. I subsequently wore them for the higher work on the mountain and can vouch for their extraordinary good behaviour on the ice as well. They were also very warm. When my friends were wearing several pairs of socks, I never found it necessary to wear more than one or at most two. Besides it does not constrict the leg and this is important for constriction of any part of the body tends to interfere with circulation and to promote frost-bite. I unhesitatingly recommend this pair as the best for all rock and ice work.

So it happened that I was in none too good a spirit as we left Churung early next morning. Excepting for my accident, I shall always remember Churung as a lovely and delightful spot. The reader may well enquire what had brought me into the dumps when this was going to be our last march to the base camp—but vivid recollections of the previous evening, an arm in a sling, a ruined camera just when I needed it most, a torn pair of shoes that would become absolutely useless, God only knew when and they the last pair—all these were not conducive to overflowing and cheerful spirits. Not so the others; and to see them

also happy added to my discomfiture. I know it is a mean thing to say it, but so it was!

We had made an unusually late start—Mr. Antia said that it was due to its being a Sunday and that Kirken was rather particular in observing the sabbath—but the journey was very short. We first climbed up, then climbed down, and then climbed up again. A path like this that goes up and down is very irritating, but it is common in these parts and cannot be helped. The crossing of the swift-flowing Rathong Chu was a minor thrill. We held on to each other's hands and made a sort of human chain for our men to get across, and then they helped us out.

As we breasted the mountain-top, we suddenly burst upon a grand view of Kanchenjunga and Pandim. It was days since we had seen them. The porters, who were coming here for the first time, threw down their loads and gazed in awe-struck wonder. Did they perhaps reproach themselves for having spent their lives so close to the mountains and never coming before? I cannot tell. Even Kirken's face assumed an unwonted solemnity. Of what were they all thinking? Doubtless of the gods, who they believe dwell on the heights. These gods were not kind. Chomolungma, Goddess Mother of the World had swept six of them to destruction; Kang-mi, the terrible dweller on Kanchenjunga, had already claimed the lives of "Satan" Chettan and Passang, bravest and best of Himalayan porters. Pleadings & exhortations to these deities had been of little avail, but it might be that they would be kinder this time. And so perhaps they prayed.

The binoculars rapidly changed hands and many were the ejaculations of wonder and even fear. It was a long time before our men could be got to move on. To them, Kanchenjunga is the home of a great god. Their prosperity and even their lives depend on the good humour of this god, for he is able to blast

their crops with his storms or destroy their villages with his floods and avalanches.

Less than two hours after we had left Churung, we arrived at Jongri. The long march of so many days was over! The Base Camp at last! How wonderful that sounded! True we had arrived two days later than our original programme. But so far everything had gone well without a hitch. Difficulties of the route and lack of time had meant working the porters very hard indeed. They had been marched for eight days without a rest—a thing which must have stressed the physique of the fittest. The march from Gamothang had been a very tiring one, whilst the march from Nayathang to Migothang is better forgotten. Would even our best man stand up to the strains and hardships of Kanchenjunga?

And if they played their part nobly what about us then? That was a question yet to be answered. So far we were all fit and at the top of our forms. The next few days would show all. The best was yet to be!

AT GRIPS WITH THE MOUNTAIN

What strikes the eye as soon as one arrives on top at Jongri are the two primitive stone-huts, which afford shelter to the yak-herds earlier in the summer, when they rarely wander out so far. These stand on a rolling upland, the crest of which separates the Praig Chu and Rathong Valleys. Although it would appear to be a prey to every wind that blows, Jongri is the obvious climbing centre for this part of the Kanchenjunga Range. Its height is 13,200 feet and immediately to the north of it is 15,480 feet Kabur, the culminating point of the Jongri Ridge. The great gneissic boulders that are found strewn about the slopes hereabouts form an interesting geological problem. How could they have come there? It is really curious to find these grassy rolling downs littered with boulders lying in the midst of savage snow and rock peaks. Between the boulders are litttle Alps set green and level, like elfin bowling-grounds. Here perhaps the snow-maidens join hands with the "Lordly ones" of the pastures. The shush of the wind in the grasses might almost have been their impish whisperings.

There are a number of fine mountains besides Kanchenjunga, for the ascent of which Jongri would make an excellent base: Kabru 24,002 feet, Little Kabru 22,000 feet, Simvu 22,360 feet, Pandim 22,010 feet, Jubonu 19,530 feet and the rugged range to the south of it. All these peaks would appear to be possible to a strong mountaineering party.

It seemed as though the air of Jongri was working a wonderful change. Smiles and laughs had replaced the previous depressed and tired faces of the porters. Some manipulation with wire and screws and my camera also started to click again. My arm felt so much better, I even (unwisely) threw the sling off. Kirken was laying aside and dumping all unnecessary stores into the hut, to lighten the

loads, until our return. The women were busy cooking food and singing the while, and some of the men were chopping wood, which would not be found further up.

It was interesting to watch how quickly and neatly the "kukris" were wielded by expert hands. Many, who read this, must have seen the batting of Major Nayudu, the Indian cricketer. Seemingly little force is put into the stroke, yet the ball is over the boundary before the spectators have realised what has happened. The secret is hitting the ball exactly in the driving centre of the bat, combined with perfect timing of the stroke. The same methods apply to cutting with a kukri and it was amazing to witness with what dexterity, branches from short bushes were lopped off. It is said that this heavy sickle-shaped knife can, in the hands of a skilful Gurkha, sever a bullock's head from its body at one stroke. I can well believe this. Seeing our men we were reminded of the stories of Gurkha soldiers in the last war, who used to lie dago and in the dark go over and bring back the heads of a couple of the enemy as valuable trophies.

It is said that "a base camp must be something more than a starting point; it must be the G. H. Q., the hospital and provision dump of an expedition, and not least the peaceful haven at which tired and worn-out climbers can recuperate their strength. In fact the psychological importance of a good base camp to a Himalayan party is great both to mountaineers and porters." All this is quite true and the same may be said in a lesser degree for the higher camps. But it would involve a great amount of time, a tremendous load of equipment and great expense. None of these things could we afford. Nevertheless, we utilised those stone-huts as our store-houses, taking just enough food for four days. There was no other alternative. As we would be now going higher and higher, we would have to lighten our men. Hence

anything that was considered unnecessary, was left behind at Jogri. It was a risk we were taking and we knew it.

We now studied Kanchenjunga seriously for the first time. The base camp was separated some twelve miles from the foot of the southern face. At this distance, it is still difficult to form a just estimate of mountain difficulties and dangers. First impressions are not always accurate and it is never easy to assess the difficulties of a mountain or ridge at their true worth. As a great mountaineer once remarked. "You can never tell what rocks are like until you have rubbed your nose against them."

Towards the west was Kabru, lying in a deep blue shadow, the morning light reflected from the snow-fields revealing the clean-cut edges of its hanging glaciers and its icy steeps and snowy mouldings—it was a cruel and savage face. Eastwards, as though ashamed at the meaningless ferocity of its neighbour rose Pandim, more staid and comfortable, nor merely elemental and savage, but displaying that dignity and grandeur of the nobly proportioned and very adequately buttressed.

Framed in this magnificent gateway is Kanchengunga. It is farther away, but distance enhances rather than detracts from its intrinsic grandeur, so great is its scale It is built up of icy terraces one above the other. Rock cliffs separate each terrace. Great blocks of ice hang perilously, waiting for the unwary intruder, to hurl down destruction. Glaciers rest on the terraces, their lower edges forming formidable ice walls anything up to and over 1000 feet in height—tiers of fortifications guarding the precipices from assault.

It was a fascinating yet depressing view. Fascinating to let eye and mind wander over the great mountain walls, to pass up the granite precipices and over the defending bastions of gleaming ice to

the great summit, untrodden, unassailed as yet; but it was depressing to think that where the eye might wander so easily, the body could not follow. The impression that Saklat and I had gained at Phalut was further strengthened. There seemed no way directly up the mountain face and we should have to seek the gully that runs to the right. But this was still at present obscured in its lower parts. The fate of the expedition would be decided by what lay just round that corner.

Our plan then boiled down to this. If the Chemathang glacier led easily as it promised to do to the great ridge, then the tremendous difficulties of the lower parts would be solved. From there we could proceed on to the main Talung Glacier and ascend the East Ridge by way of the great couloir that runs down it; or we could explore for a suitable and most likely line of attack from the great southern face. But already we could realise that a vast amount of time would be required to cut a way up—days, perhaps weeks. Besides it was by no means certain, however, what sort of climbing would be found on the rocks and ice. Also, in the event of a heavy snowfall, retreat would be impossible owing to the danger of avalanches, for the obvious route forms a natural funnel down which they might be expected to sweep; We almost even then knew that because of the short time at our disposal, we were beaten at the very outset. Whoever may some day climb it, the peak is hardly likely to be gained with less than twelve days of continuous good weather spent on its actual face. And twelve days and nights of continuous good weather in the Himalayas, though the dream of every mountaineer will always remain a dream. If any party gets as many as four successive clear days, it should consider itself as favoured by the gods !

Then after lunch and a long rest, when the base camp had been well established, when every little detail had been fixed up, Kirken spoke to the porters

on our behalf, just before we left: "You have had a hard and difficult time, but you have done well. You are now probably going to face worse yet, and there will be great dangers, difficulties and privations. The sahibs say that those who want to remain here may do so." None did. They all cheered, took up their loads and went down the mountain. We followed behind.

Mehta and I were the last to leave. As we were turning down the corner, I looked back and saw those two solitary stone-huts—our base camp—disappear from view. It signified a lot. The greater adventure had begun. There was going to be action at last !

What a grand day it was. A blue sky above—not a speck of cloud in the heavens. How could any mountaineer claim for better weather than this ? For some distance the path contoured along the south-east slopes of Kabur. Somehow the scenery reminded me of the upper reaches of Pisughati in Kashmir. There was the same sky line of crags, stern rock walls on either hand and clear torrents hanging in thin, gauzelike water veils from beetling cliffs. The great foot-hills that had enclosed us for so many day during our march over the Singalila Ridge to the snows seemed now mere rucks and folds in the earth's surface; while the deep valleys along which we intended to return had sunk out of sight.

As we marched on, we heard a faint shout. Doubtless the porters were happy and some of them were shouting. As we moved again, we heard another shout and then another. This was strange. Men going uphill at nearly 14,000 feet do not waste hard-won breath in shouting. Then suddenly came a whole series of cries. And what was surprising, they seemed to come from the rocks above. Palamkote and Saklat joined us and we all listened. "Perhaps

it is a Migo, one of those abominable snowmen' someone said, half jokingly and then asked if Mr. Bapasola, Mr. Antia and Avari had passed on. They had not. At that the truth began to dawn upon us and straining our eyes we were able to distinguish three figures laboriously descending. When they reached us we asked them how they had found their way up. Poor Avari came in for a good deal of hard words. He had gone ahead on what he had considered would be the easiest route and hailing the others up rather prematurely had unwittingly landed the party in difficulties.

Henceforward our waybecame stonier and stonier and walking correspondingly slow and laborious. Mr. Bapasola seemed to bear a special grudge against the stones and his epithets relating to them were almost as numerous as the stones themselves. He said they reminded him of parts of southern China. I could only sympathise with him and registerd a mental vow to avoid southern China altogether. The stones gave place to large slabs of red granite which made matters worse still. How many decades had passed since these rocks formed a part of the great mountain we were assailing ? Time and weather are forever pulling the greatest and noblest mountains to destruction; but this destruction is so gradual that centuries hence, when civilisation as we know it now has crumbled to dust, the great peaks of the Himalayas will still challenge the hardihood of man.

A mile or so ahead, the path dropped in a series of steep zig-zags on to the old morains of the Chemethang Glacier. As we came down we saw the Praig Chu for the first time. Here a sheet of snowy water tumbled on rocks and boulders and disappeared in some cave and then emerged on the other side gliding like a serpent and leaping forward, shaking its silver tresses in the sun. The mountain walls began gradually to shut us in on either hand as we descended lower and lower. We were now passing through the

portals of an immense gateway into another world—a world unknown, pure and unpolluted by man. Kanchenjunga gained in magnificence as we approached the foot of its southern face.

As I looked at the great giant, I thought of the young American, Farmer, who had passed probably just this way with his porters eleven years ago *en route* to the Talung Glacier. Defeated he had turned back and made another attempt via the Nepal side, which had ended so tragically. What had fate in store for us ? Would we be treated more kindly ? And what had made Farmer turn back we wondered. The association of mountaineering in the past with mountaineering in the present is a very real one. Those who climb the smaller Himalayan peaks today without remembering the pioneers who toiled and struggled against their one time impregnable defences and those who can gaze at Everest or Kanchenjunga without a thought for the hopes and fears and tragedies of the past, are blind to that very essence of the mystical and romantic in which mountaineering has its roots. In the shadow of this great mountain that had already claimed so many brave lives, we felt that the pioneers who had completed "their last journey" were watching our progress and perhaps instilling into us their own determination. If any success, however small, was to be ours, we should only be carrying on work well begun and in realising our own ambitions realise theirs.

We passed over huge rock boulders, waded through several little streams and trudged through thick rhododendron bushes. The mist was slowly coming in now and the sun fought a losing battle against the usual afternoon clouds. It was really irritating travelling. We were either climbing up the side of a morain mound, or descending into the hollow between two of them. The Praig which rolled on dreamily on our right is not more than a few feet broad anywhere but it is the beginning of the Great Ranjit River which

flows into the sacred Teesta. It must have taken us well over an hour to march little more than a mile. Here and there, the way along the sharp crest of the moraine was barred by great boulders many of which were so ill-balanced and unstable that circumspection was needed when traversing beneath them.

We had left Jongri about five miles behind when we came to a hollow in the mountain-side and there decided to establish our Camp 1. It must also be kept in mind that once the mountain is reached, the higher camps must not be at too far a distance from the base, nor even for that matter from each other. Especially did we have in mind the big descent we had made close to Jongri. This would mean a very steep climb for anyone returning to the base camp, and if there is anything upsetting to a tired or sick mountaineer, it is to be faced with *a big ascent at the end.*

It was not an ideal spot on which to camp and the ground had to be carefully levelled and platforms engineered between slabs of granite. There was not as yet much wind and all nature seemed to be hushed as though expectant of some calamity. But the place welcomed the party with a cheery greeting. Above us the mists dissolved like foam into the deep green sea of the evening sky. Eastwards between layers of clouds, the pyramidal summit of Pandim stood out like a geometrical proposition set by some heavenly Pythagoras.

Then at Kirken's suggestion we began to to build a circular wall for protection from the wind. With this wall we could have a fire and cook our food and warm ourselves. It was an admirable idea and Saklat, Kirken and myself were the leading surveyors, architects and builders. Stones were hunted for from all corners and piled together and the construction of the wall was commenced. The methods adopted by Saklat and myself were very primitive. We piled the stones on top of each other, filling up the chinks with

clods of earth. Not so Kirken; not for him rocks piled higgledy piggledy but stones that fitted into one another. With that accuracy and attention to detail that are such admirable qualities in the Sherpa, he was building a wall that would stand for all time.

At length the work was done and we stepped back looking with pride at our handiwork. But as the porters were clambering over with the firewood, the part that had been constructed by Saklat and myself collapsed, leaving Kirken's wall alone standing. There were laughs and jeers from the porters. However, Kirken finished the building again. And a wonderful thing it was. Generations hence, when the descendants of Messrs. Thos. Cook & Sons run week-end tours to the Jongri Mahal Hotel and Kanchenjunga, people on their way to the Wanglethang Helicopterdrome for the ascent of Kanchenjunga to see the sunrise from the summit, will stop and gaze in astonishment on Kirken's wall. Honeymoon couples will sit under it in the moonlight and coo and whisper sweet nothings, and hoarse-voiced local guides (descendants of Kirken as like as not) will shout opinions and tell lies as to its origin and antiquity.

We watched the sky anxiously that evening, but the sun dipped into a cloudless west, flooding mountains and snowfields with a peaceful rose. Day drained quickly away. The lights died. The clouds about Pandim shrank grey and wraith-like into the dusk. The ice walls relapsed from red to a cold, malevolent green. A cold and deadly pallor invested the peaks. Frost gripped the world. A sickle moon shed a soft radiance upon the snows; near the moon blazed a great star. In the south were piled-up cumuli, such that their vaporous folds stood out from the night like the duncoloured smoke of some bloody engagement raging over the plains of India. Even Palamkote's presumptuous announcement that any party he accompanied was always favoured with fine weather failed to arouse the wrath of the gods and we turned in with high hopes of the morrow.

We were a happy party that night, happier than we had ever been before. We felt fitter and stronger. Later Sing-ting-rue came to tell us that dinner was ready. At regular intervals his honest face with its habitual happy expression would thrust itself between the flaps and two horny hands would press upon us such delicacies as the cook thought fit to inflict upon us. These included the famous Nepali "kulchas", but this time we found them only suitable to sharpen our knives upon ! These "kulchas" were always causing trouble; either they came very raw or very overcooked. But we didn't mind. We had got used to the varieties of food and cooking our men expected us to stomach. Even the assistant cook, Pemba's confirmed habit of pulling his shirt out of his trousers and wiping the plates with it met with no more than a conventional grunt of disapproval !

We did not take off our clothes as we had done in the lower camps, for it was impossible to do so owing to the cold and consequent risk of frost-bite. As a rule we took off our clothing and donned pyjamas whenever possible, as heavy clothing at night tends to retard circulation. Hence, when sleeping in clothes it is advisable to relieve the body of pressure by releasing encumbrances such as belts and braces and undoing buttons; for anything that retards circulation at high altitudes not only makes sleep impossible but renders the affected portion of the anatomy sensitive to frost-bite.

Night now closely enwrapped our small camp ; a million stars glanced down on a scene of stupendous desolation.

Outside the wind shrilled evilly and the tents shook in its blast. As I crawled into my bedding, I could feel then that "the mystery and thrill of travel is always upon one in the Himalayas, but the mystery is awful and the thrill is sometimes a shudder". Beyond the hills, nations might fly at one another's throats; Hitlers and Mussolinis may rise and fall; anarchy

and revolution may rot the nations. But here on the Chamathang Glacier the only strife would be that of the elements, the only sounds—the wind over the morains, the voice of the stream and the rumble of the avalanche.

A great day was over.

I woke next morning to see the sun stealing across the valley, pushing before it the cold shadow of the rocks we had left behind. There was every promise of a wonderful day. Was Kanchenjunga being extraordinarily kind to us or was she slowly enticing us on and on until suddenly her jaws would close and there would be no escape? There was something almost uncanny in such wonderful weather. It was too good to last.

We experienced some difficulty in starting a few of our men that morning. No doubt it was cold and a strong wind was blowing but nevertheless the conditions could not be called bad at all. They brought forward many complaints and reasons for turning back, saying that their rations were nearly all finished and that they were feeling very sick—all of which Kirken assured us were mere excuses. This is the kind of difficulty that will often be met by Himalayan expeditions. Although a Sherpa feels the cold less than men like us, he has not the strength of will nor the detachment of mind to combat what he does feel of it. He is even less able to withstand wind, and nothing paralyses his faculties or completely dishearteens him so quickly as the pitiless blasts which sweep the upper regions of the Himalayas. It is scarcely to be wondered at that like the Tibetans they believe in a cold hell. Whether education and experience will ever overcome these natural and inborn mental disabilities is doubtful. The intelligence of a Sherpa may be quickened, but as long as he glimpses his hell in the cold of the snows, and the wrath of the gods in the storm, he will be fit only to follow, not to lead on a mountain.

Though Kirken's threats could not move them, it was really Sing-ting-rue, who saved the situation. This fellow continued to regard the expedition as one huge and continual joke aud not even the thin air or the cold or the wind had shrivelled his grin or quenched his natural cheerfulness. Gods and devils meant nothing to him. Of course, it was quite on the cards that there might be a few odd ones knocking about on the summit. Was there not supposed to be a great palace of gold and precious stones, tenanted by a god ? Yet here he was, only a short distance from the summit, and there was no sign of any such thing. Women's tales ! Imagination of lamas, who had never seen all this but who terrorised for their own pecuniary ends the poor villagers ! And these thoughts he conveyed to the porters who had got scared. He told them how each one when he returned would be king of his district. The villagers would sit at his feet in respectful admiration. What a triumph that would be and how proudly would he say "I have been up with the sahibs to the palace of the great god. They singled us out from among so many as being the strongest and the best and without us they could not have got there at all. Behold those whom the gods and sahibs favour.....etc., etc." Thus Sing-ting-rue, a plausible and likely rascal, and one with the lust for adventure in his veins. We truly admired the fellow. None of the porters could withstand such an appeal and all went gaily on.

The Chemathang Glacier over which our path now lay must be one of the most beautiful in all the Himalayas. No less than five great peaks overhang it before it terminates at the most magnificent mountain of all, Kanchenjunga. Occasional patches of snow were found but luckily there was not much of it. We soon crossed—stepped-over would be a better word—the Praig and trudged up the old morains. The going was not very steep for most of the time, for in six miles we ascended not more than 3,500 feet.

Photography can give no true picture of the ice scenery of the Chemathang Glacier. It can but show the outlines and mass of the pinnacles of Pandim as it rises to its cone-shaped summit; it can but show Jubonu, serene and stately mountain that it is, with icy ridges converging to a summit of purest snow; it can but show a host of hoary peaks lifting silvered heads into the sky. But it cannot bring out their gradations of blue, green and grey and their transparent loveliness. Would that some great painter could have accompanied us to Kanchenjunga. The least imaginative of mountaineers must feel, as he watches his companions winding in and out among the great ice-towers, that he is in an enchanted land, where things undreamt of even in his philosophy may occur at any moment. All is silence, save for the murmur of the little Praig wandering over the morains and the occasional creak of a serac.

Nothing is more tedious than to trudge over Himalayan glacier morains. We often toiled to the crest of ridges a hundred feet high only to find that we had to lose the height so laboriously gained by descending an equal distance into hollows on their far sides. Providence seems to have decreed these morains for the express purpose of humbling presumptuous mountaineers. And rightly so. It is only bitterly one will learn that the Himalayas must be approached humbly. Respect their beauty, their majesty and their power and they will treat you as you deserve; approach them ignorantly or in a spirit of bravado and they will destroy you. Other mountains may forgive mistakes but not the Himalayas.

I had gone on ahead to take some movie pictures of the porters coming up and as I turned round Pandim, the tremendous southern and eastern ridges of Kanchenjunga and its great South Col. came into view. It was a magnificent sight and there I waited for them. Looking the way I had come towards the south was a confused jumble of mountains. Before

them stood their queen, Jubonu. It is one of the loveliest mountains in the world; above the broad buttresses from which it springs, its graceful lines lead the eye upwards to a perfectly proportioned summit, a sheer spire of gleaming snow and ice, so fine and delicate that only the Great Architect Himself could have chiselled it with his instruments of sun and frost. Jubonu stands watch and ward over the snows of Himachal.

Slowly the porters came up in that manner so peculiar to them. Their gait is the gait of the hillman —slouching and slow on the level, rhythmical and deceptively fast uphill. Tired as they must have been at nearly 16,000 feet, they burst into breathless snatches of song as the shining wall of the South Col and the long slopes and precipices of the east arete rose before them. All thought of retreat, if ever they had any, had vanished. They had won through. They had succeeded and were proud to be there.

A few hundred yards away and we came to a small expanse of water, which we christened the "Blue Lake". It is the lake of lakes, a placid sheet of water sleeping amid a belt of mountains, wonderful in form and grouping, while at its southern end they stood aside that the heights of Jubonu may take the sunset burning over the glacier and transmuting the little lake into one sheet of liquid sapphire. On our right towered Pandim, rising in its abrupt and rugged grandeur, like a mountain flung up by Satan in defiance of the heavens; while in front, the first summit of Kanchenjunga peeped from behind the shoulder of its southern ridge. Westwards rose those aptly named mountains, the Dome and the Forked peaks. It is the close proximity of these giants, rising well-nigh in sheer precipice from its jet blue waters, which makes this lake perhaps the grandest expanse of water in the world. As if there should be nothing lacking in her beautiful make-up, Nature had deemed that the sky should be of a gentian blue and even as we

watched one solitary cloud suddenly rose like the smoke of a volcano from the summit of Pandim. It seemed to come from nowhere and disappeared into nowhere. Was ever man more privileged? Once and only once before had I seen a sight that could worthily compare with this—and that was in Kashmir when I had seen the little Shisha Nag at dawn on my way to Amarnath. It is visions like these which makes up to a mountaineer for the sordid discomforts and hardships of travel. And a man, who has been in among the mountains and wrestled strongly from them their secrets, appreciates them in this ethereal aspect more than those, who have only viewed them from a distance ever can.

A little further up we came across a big landslide. Imagine what it is to see a whole side of a mountain scooped out by a mighty shovel and you will gain some idea of what lay before us. Once it would have appeared to us perhaps uncrossable but now it was all in the day's work and though we stepped on to it very gingerly, we all crossed it in safety.

The vagaries of the Himalayas are many and man's mind is but too small to understand them. We were again climbing and had not gone far when we reached a vast stretch of sand and rock which continued for a mile or two. Had it not been that these snow-capped peaks were all surrounding us, we would have thought that we were walking on some beach or in the desert and the lake we had just seen was a mirage, a figment of the imagination. How came this sand to be there? Is this a proof that the Himalayas, millions of years ago formed the bed of an ocean? Who can tell.

And as though the day's surprises had not been enough for us, the sand stopped as suddenly as it had begun and gave way to boulder-strewn land only a few hundred yards from the ice of the South Col.

This was the ideal spot for pitching tents and so accordingly Camp 2 came into being. Eastwards rose the Guicha Peak, which was one of our main objectives. Nearer its base than its summit is a curved ridge known as the Guicha La. Our plan originally had been to cross this and then cut over the southern side of the East Kanchenjunga Ridge. But no one had prospected this region before and these tentative plans could only be put into action from what would be seen from the top of the Guicha La.

While we had come up the last slopes of the Chemathang Glacier, we had experienced a thing, which I may call "glacier lassitude". Curiously enough we were all feeling the effects of altitude, though the height was less than 15,000 feet. In our case the lassitude may have been due to the fact that in eight days we had ascended no less than 16,000 feet. But probably it is due to something more than mere lack of acclimatisation; sun and glare may have much to do with it, as does also a curious lifelessness in the air. We all remarked the same feeling of tiredness and listlessness between 14,000 and 16,000 feet. Is it because at this altitude the body undergoes a definite physical change? Acclimatisation would appear not to be gradual, but taking place in stages, though these stages are not necessarily at the same height for everyone. Another interesting point that we later noted was that this lassitude only makes itself felt on windless days and that wind always restores energy to the apparently fatigued body. However as we had all come higher near to our camping place, we had knocked this feeling off and were quite fit again.

The afternoon was still young—it was only 1 o'clock when I had reached the site of our Camp 2—and I thought it was a good chance to make the ascent of the Guicha La at least before sunset. It was no use wasting a single day. As it was, we were already two days behind schedule and our chances would be

absolutely nullified if the route via the Guicha La proved impossible. I waited for the others, but they were too far behind and would yet take a long time to come. It has always been an established rule—and so it was with us—that only in an extreme case must a climber attempt a lone ascent of a peak; for mountaineering is an uncertain sport that requires a companion. But the Guicha La did not seem very difficult, and as there was no time to wait any longer, I determined to go up. The ascent had to be completed before dark and telling Kirken of my intention, I left the camp.

The sun above was in its zenith of glory. The sky was a clear blue. As I started I looked at my watch—it was 1—30.

THE GUICHA PEAK.

Had it not been that this ascent of the Guicha Peak materially affected our future plans, I would not be describing it. Nothing is more abhorrent to me than to bring even a trace of the "ego" into this account. Of course, there has been already any amount of "I think" and "I this," but that is because of the nature of the work, and there's never much more than a pen behind it. I agree with the French philosopher who said: "Do you wish men to speak well of you? Then never speak at all of yourself". But unfortunately the "I" has to be used here, much as it is regretted. The reader will however forgive me for it. I could easily have left this chapter out; but the conquest of the Guicha Peak was, as I have said before, our main objective from the very beginning. Also those expeditions, who notwithstanding our experiences still persist in using this route, will do well to leave the Guicha La severely alone. On paper, this had seemed to be the obvious way to reach the east ridge before an attempt to go higher could be made, but it is not so in practice. The Guicha Peak is a mountain in itself, and it is a steep and a rocky mountain at that.

It has been well said that the first three rules of Himalayan mountaineering are: "Reconnoitre, reconnoitre, and again reconnoitre". Kamet was not conquered at the very first assult; Everest has been surveyed and tried often, yet a way up the final summit has not been found; Kanchenjunga is still too much of a mystery. The far-flung ramparts and monarchs of the Himalayas are of such bewildering intricacy, that only repeated attempts and repeated failures will perhaps one day lead to success. Experience is everything—it teaches much and it teaches sharply.

About four hundred yards from our Camp Two, The Guicha Peak rises high for over 2,000 feet. What is most striking is the knife-like ridge which projects as a hump near about its middle. This arete is known as the *Guicha La* and it is a curved one stretching

between two precipices. The southern precipice seems to terminate at a small terrace; but immediately the mountain steepens terribly and two great rock walls lead abruptly to the summit. There is also a buttress situated some distance below the top leading gracefully from the final precipice to the summit of Pandim. Such are the broad outlines of the Guicha Peak.

The small precipice at the northern end of the Guicha La (by "La" is meant "Pass") terminates by itself in a flat table-top and does not rise very high. It is separated by a great gap on its left from the South Col and from a high snow and ice peak. This unnamed peak we had seen from a distance and it was from behind its shoulder that Kanchenjunga's summit peeped out as though to take a sly look at the little cavalcade of men, who were about to dare its stronghold. It was a lovely peak rising nearly 22,000 feet high, terminating in two fine pointed summits. So pure, so beautiful, so stately, calm and serene did it seem that we christened it later by common consent as the "Madonna Peak"—for its sweeping robes of snow and ice suggest an unapproachable virginity. Although a towering landmark, it was not to be found in the map; but that was no new surprise, for we had long, however, already come to the conclusion that the map was useless to us.

As I approached the foot of the Guicha Peak, I soon found out that it was going to be somewhat more difficult than I had estimated. One of the peculiarities of the Himalayas is that their mountain-sides invariably prove to be steeper than they look, unless they have been viewed exactly in profile. This optical illusion is fostered by the vast scale on which these peaks are built and consequent foreshortening; and it is also due in part to an exceedingly clear atmosphere. From the camp the lower slopes and rock precipices had appeared only moderately steep but presenting no obvious difficulty. Now as I commenced to climb

they became more formidable every moment. What had appeared from the camp to be rock slabs set at an easy angle became rock slabs set at a steep angle, whilst steep but apparently climbable rocks were resolved into vertical or overhanging cliffs. Besides, the rocks were of that dangerously loose character, which necessitated careful handling.

Before the ascent of the precipices could be made, it was necessary to gain the Guicha La. A ridge is always not only the safest but the easiest way up a mountain and the present case was a good example of this truism. To reach it however the best route seemed at first sight to start from the right, then slant diagonally upwards to the left across the face to a point about half-way up it and then straight up the final slopes to the right of the steepest portion of the arete. The rock slabs jutted out in a most curious manner and sometimes hid surprisingly big crevasses. I did not realise this, till I suddenly collapsed into one of them and it was only with difficulty that I could extricate myself. As I did so, I remembered the wise words of an American, who falling into a crevasse the first time he was escorted on to a mountain exclaimed: "Never again! I guess its *terra firma* for me in future, less terror and more firmer".

Our previous idea had been to commence the climb up the Guicha La at about two or three in the morning to save time. It was a plan, which happily did not ever have to be put into action. To have done so would have been really suicidal. No one can attempt these slabs in the dark with any degree of confidence. Such mistakes, however, will often be made as long as the Himalayas remain so little known, but future expeditions should note them.

For a time, the going became easier and I was happy. I was making a long almost horizontal detour across to the right but as there seemed to be no more difficulties, I tried to take a short cut by going directly

up. But short cuts on a mountain seldom pay a dividend of saved time. Although for a while the gradient seemed less steep and the slabs more firm, my joy was only short-lived, for it soon became worse than ever and I had again to revert to my original plan. Frequently even hand-holds had to be applied to clamber up. However, after about an hour since I had started the ascent, I was at the "La".

But I saw almost nothing from the top. It may seem strange but nevertheless it is true. When I say so, it does not mean that there was bad weather. Far from it; I could not have wished for a clearer day. But Kanchenjunga's summit ridge was still rather obscured from sight. The great East arete could be seen but only in parts. The Guicha La is on a subsidiary Kanchenjunga ridge and is separated from the east one by the width of the Talung Glacier. Only a moment's inspection was sufficient to show that it was a waste of time and energy to approach the East Ridge by way of the Guicha La as we had intended. One important point however was gained. This was the gap that I have mentioned before between the Madonna Peak and the northern precipice of the Guicha La. It was full of promise. It is easily traversible and appears to be the best method of approaching the Talung Glacier. Its only disadvantage is that it is open to avalanches sweeping down the Madonna and its nearby peaks.

Having come so high it was useless to go back without some positive result. The summit was now not very far and there seemed to be time enough to reach it. While resting on the "La" I had some chocolate and a couple of honicose that I had quietly abstracted from Mr. Bapasola's rucksack the previous day. And meantime I studied the rock walls that led to the summit.

It was the sort of place that our novelists would make much of. Their descriptions would be full of "beetling precipices", "like a small tiny insect on a wall" and so forth. In a Himalayan mountaineering guide book, if there was one it would be described simply as a "four hundred feet absail" and perhaps as a grudging compliment to the place, might be added the word "sensational". In this case, however, the fiction-writer would perhaps convey a better picture to the mind of the reader than the guide-book author. Immediately above the "La" rose a great semi-detached mass of rock, then there seemed to be some almost flat portion and beyond that towered the great pinnacle in over four hundred feet of slabs set at an angle not far removed from the vertical. These slabs had been forced apart in many places and some rested dangerously unstable against the face. Where this pinnacle terminated, there rose a third wall of rock, but much smaller than the second. Obviously it was the middle bit that was going to be a rather formidable proposition.

Without any trouble I was able to get on to the top of the semi-detached mass and then found that what I had previously thought was a small terrace, was really a gap some fifteen feet down above which rose the great pinnacle. The only thing was to descend again, and then began what was to be the crux of the whole climb. The exertion of hard rock climbing at such an altitude is severe and after every few upward heaves, I was forced to halt and rest. My ambition was to go up about thirty steps without halting, but I do not remember having done more than seventeen.

At last I managed to reach a small stance, a tiny almost square recess, where I was able to take a longer rest. I distinctly remember thinking, a trifle morosely, what a grand finale it would be, if the thing collapsed and toppled with its human load into the "unfathomable abyss" of the fiction-writer! Above this recess rose a slanting ledge, the upper part of which bulged

out unpleasantly. A slip here was not to be thought of. It was no place to linger over and I did not linger. A foot wedged into the wall, a few quick upward caterpillar-like movements with only tiny hand-holds to prevent a backward topple and one of the hardest parts had been accomplished. In such silence, the scratching of my feet on the wall and the crumbling stones, produced alarming sounds. A few feet more of difficult, but not such exacting climbing brought me to a sloping shelf.

So far, so good. For some way up, the work was easier. Then the slopes steepened once more. In a few places, they were dangerously ice-glazed and I had to use my pick to clear holds. As I climbed higher, loose flakes of rock were dislodged. And as they hurtled madly down, they loosed other rocks until there was a perfect torrent of crags. Never have I seen more rotten rocks. There was scarcely a firm hold. The safest method of climbing such rock is to have always three points of attachment. This means that the climber should never trust to one hold only, but distribute his weight between at least three hand-holds and footholds. This sounds simple in theory, but is not really so in practice. There were times then when a single sure hold could not be found.

Next came what I think was the hardest bit. A huge ledge projected out and it could not be traversed either to the right or to the left. I tried it once but immediately edged down again. But as soon as I had done so, I persuaded myself that I was making quite unnecessary fuss over an obviously climbable place and tried again. This time though I got a bruised knee in the bargain I succeeded in getting up. I was quite near to the top now and a few minutes saw me on at the foot of the small final summit-wall. Just below this a steep sloping shelf led to the buttress that was connected to the summit of Pandim. It would have been quite possible from here to reach the top of that superb peak, but it was nearly four o'clock and

the remaining fifteen hundred feet of very difficult climbing and most of it ice would take at least another three hours. Besides my boots ! From being heelless, they were also now soleless and I doubt whether rocks have ever been climbed with such remarkable foot-gear ! To go on meant being benighted and the great Himalayan mountains have no sympathy for the solitary climber. The foolhardiness entailed in my going on would be fair neither to my companions, nor to myself. Under these circumstances, it was only the lateness of the hour that rendered the summit of Pandim inaccessible.

It was somewhere near my highest point that I was startled by a tremendour roar, like a crash of thunder. I turned round and gazed across at the summit ridge of Kanchenjunga from which direction the sound had come. Even as I watched, the snowy lips of the giant writhed back and an avalanche was spat out from between its teeth. Sweeping downwards with fearful force, hundreds of thousands of tons or more of ice were being poured down on to the eastern Talung Glacier. Huge masses of ice as large as buildings, were toppling to destruction; in their van came billowing clouds of snowy spray, and these resembled some new and deadly form of gas attack. The god of Kanchenjunga is evidently well up in the technique of modern warfare. It was merely one of Kanchenjunga's little jokes to amuse all those who come to her, but to me it sounded like the growl of an aroused watch-dog. It seemed like a warning shot fired across our bows to proclaim defiance and a warning.

Only a few feet now remained and at last I was able to put my head over the top like an evil-disposed boy, peeping cautiously over the wall of his neighbour's fruit-garden. The next moment I had hauled myself up. Sunlight and shadow chased about me. A bitter breath of wind sallied out of the west, causing me to knock gloved hands together and shuffle

chilled feet. The ascent had taken longer and had been more exhausting than I had anticipated, but it was worth it. And here was I at last standing on the high summit.

What was the view like from this great height ? In a country that boasts of the clearest atmosphere in the world, I was lucky to be up on an exceptionally clear day. Already the devil of doubt was gnawing at my heart as I looked across the Talung Glacier. Tower after tower interposed, tremendous ice walls, ridges that seemed unclimbable. Despair ruthlessly replaced hope, and the first general impressions were superseded by a closer analysis; the easy became difficult, the difficult impossible and the impossible appalling. There was a wild tangle of snowy peaks and winding glaciers. To the left rose Kabru. If Kabru turns a serene and benevolent countenance towards Darjeeling, it has, like a two-headed giant another face, and this face is bloody and cruel. Wedge-like in formation, with two summits set at either end of an almost horizontal ridge, it rises in precipices lifted in one smooth, terrible facade of granite. Just behind it could be seen Jannu, one of the most appalling of rock mountains in the world.

Directly ahead was the unknown peak, I have had occasion to mention so often. From Camp Two I had been unable to appreciate the vast scale on which it was built, but now it could be seen in all its grandeur. Swelling snow-fields, shattered ice-falls, curling cornices, polished ice-slopes, tottering seracs, knife-like edges and granite precipices—such is the Madonna Peak, one of the noblest and loveliest of mountains. Just above me towered the final summit of Pandim, the finest of Kanchenjunga's satellites, but an incident only in the vast array of peak upon peak.

Men become philosophical at great heights and are impressionable in the highest degree, when they

are alone, far from their companies. I was in the very midst of the most inspiring region on this earth; surrounded by an amphitheatre of ice, snow, and ice-covered rocks; in the near presence of God. And revealed now were the might and the majesty, the purity and the calm, the sublimity and benevolence of the Great World-Spirit. Even as I watched the sun passed behind Kabru; the thin wisps of cloud, rising uneasily from the crests of the ridges, were illuminated until it seemed that I gazed at some astral body fringed by the flames of the sun's corona. The ice walls of Kanchenjunga stood out like the fortifications of some aerial Verdun steeped in the blood of stricken attackers, while Jubonu was transformed into one mass of shining gold. As I watched this miracle along the snows, I could feel that strange exaltation and mystification that come to some in the presence of great mountains. I knew then, as the hill-folk know when they turn their eyes towards the snows, that the mysteries of life and of death must be sought for here. Gazing over the wide expanse of space from my lofty stand, those distant rocks over which I had laboured up seemed remote and out-of-place. There was beauty and ugliness before me. Alas, Nature has perfections to show that she is built in the image of God, and defects, to show that she is only His image.

How were we now to proceed any further on Kanchenjunga? Besides its obvious difficulties, the East Ridge really presented no feasible route up it, for the great couloir we had seen before stopped short suddenly at a tremendous ice-wall, a thousand feet or more in height. The South Arete presented even greater difficulties. But it had a subsidiary range running at a right angle to it, which deserved to be better explored. It seemed specially inviting at one point, a great wall of ice which had come to be named the South Col, and which lay near the Madonna Peak. It would be very difficult work but it was the only remaining route left which gave any promise

at all. Optimism's flower was already withered as I rose to clamber down the rocks again.

I was not sorry to leave, for I had had my hour alone on the mountain. It is the wanderer in the High Himalayas who experiences the genuine meaning of solitude. Some may not appreciate its charm, but the true mountaineer, even if temperamentally of a gregarious nature, realises the value of occassionally parting from his companions in order to contemplate mountains as they should be contemplated, alone. On such expeditions escape from ones' companions is seldom possible, not that it is often desired, but there are times when an inexplicable and fierce longing demands temporary release from the bonds of sociability.

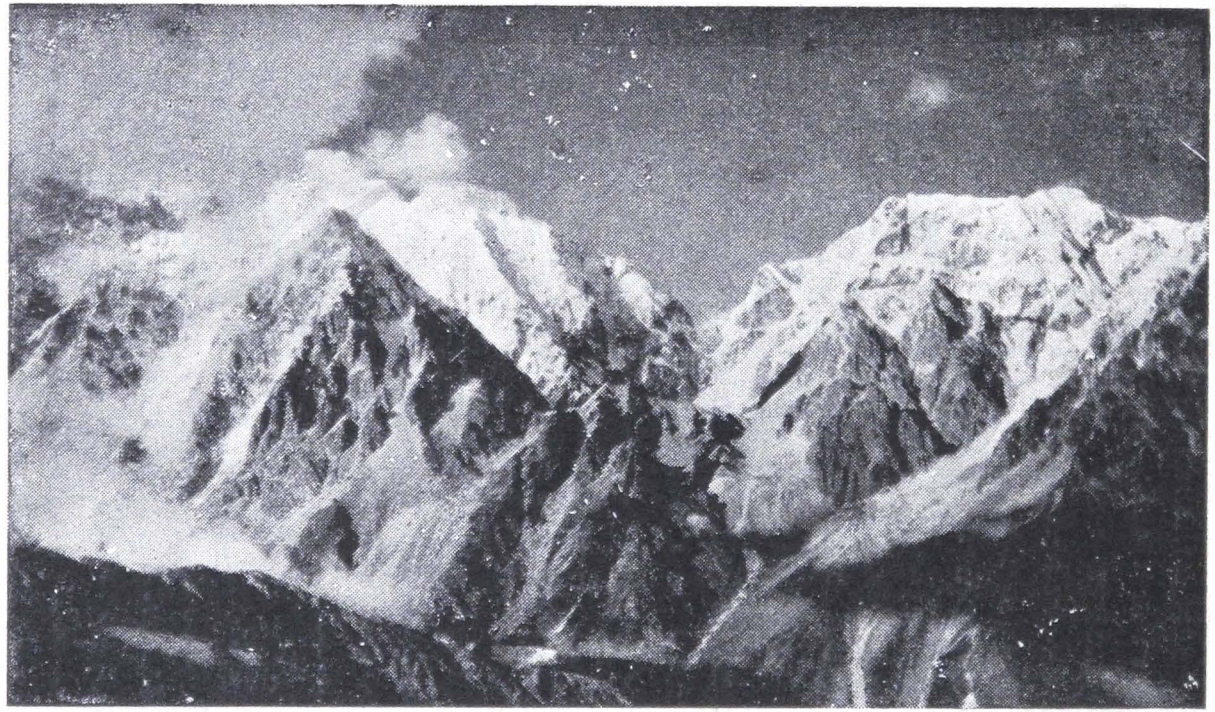
Before leaving, however, I gazed down the other side of the pinnacle by which I had come up. My sensations were no doubt similar to those of one who gazes out for the first time from the uppermost window of a New York "skyscraper". One glance was sufficient and I popped my head back again. The downward view from my own side was sufficiently nerve-harrowing. Leering, gargoyle-like heads suspended from thick goitrous-like necks of rocks peered over into the abyss. I would have been only too glad to avoid going down it, but it could not be helped and a sigh of thankfulness escaped me as I lowered myself at last on the ridge of the Guicha La. From there the way down was much easier and tired as I was, I allowed myself to come down very quickly and paid for it. At one point a small protruberance on which I put my foot came clean away. Luckily my pike was well jammed in a crack at the time, and a severe fall was prevented. It was a near thing, but seemed a trivial incident then.

I will mention here one curious phenomenon that I experienced on this climb. It is with great diffidence that I do so and then only at my friends' request.

I prefer to draw no inference from it, but merely to describe it. What I am going to say is by no means unique and has been experienced in the past by solitary wanderers. All the time that I was climbing alone, I had a strong feeling of being accompanied by somebody else. So strong was this feeling that it completely eliminated all loneliness I might otherwise have felt. At times it seemed I was even roped to him and that if he sat down, I had to sit down too. I remember constantly glancing back over my shoulder and once on the "La" when I was eating some chocolates, I turned round to offer some and it was a shock to find no one to whom to really give it. This presence seemed a friendly one and it was only when I came back near to the Camp, that this link was suddenly broken and all at once I felt utterly and completely alone.

It was getting dark as I came in sight of our tent. Sing-ting-rue and a couple of porters hurried to meet me, bringing a stimulating warm mug-full of cocoa. Soon willing hands helped me in. My friends had begun to get anxious, for I had been away for nearly five hours; they had my bedding all opened and saw to my comfort. So ended an arduous climb—made pleasant by the wonderful attention of those in camp. It is memories such as these that remain when everything else is forgotten; it is memories such as these that help to make Kanchenjunga very much worthwhile.

The evening was strangely still save for an undercurrent of sound, as though the goblins and witches, who haunt the cliffs of Kanchenjunga above were murmuring at our coming. It was nothing but the wind. Mindless of the growing cold, we stood outside our tents entranced by the glorious spectacle. It was the death of day. The sun was setting calmly. The Madonna took to itself a glowing, golden, aureole of light.



Towers and ice-walls of the terrible Eastern Ridge leading to the summit of Kanchenjunga on the left of the picture.

For a while, Time stood still as I gazed upon the loveliest woman I had ever seen. The World was truly beautiful, her wind-blown hair was spun from the golden clouds, her eyes were violet shadows, her breasts of purest snow. And Night, seeing her beauty, rushed eagerly from the east and threw his dark mantle at her feet. But alas, beauty faded quickly from the World and Night was left with a cold dead thing in his arms.

Barely had the last rays faded when they were replaced by a silver moon sheen behind Pandim. Imperceptibly its upper snow-slopes were resolved from the darkness; ghost-like, unreal, they shimmered far above the world. At long last the laggardly moon peered over the ridge in a shy, self—deprecating sort of way. It seemed to wither and shrivel as it mounted into the frosty sky and its radiance, at first soft and wan, became a hard cold electric blue. And Orion, girt with his shining belt of stars, was standing on the farthest rim of a mighty mountain, behind which he was about to plunge, to be resurrected again by the revolution of the circling universe. Details stood forth as clearly as in daylight. Only the shadows were black and in these lurked the darkness of a pit.

I gazed sadly at this symbol of human destiny. Of birth and death; of resurrection may be and new-born glory; a never-ending process between, at the farthest, every three score years and ten. But to what end? Who can guess? I thought it to be a strange book that none may read. No, not by a single step. It is a dark and gloomy vista, and he who hopes and he who doubts may well be fooled at last. I remember wishing that some directors of cinema films, who find it so very hard to think out a good "plot" had been up there with us. I fear that they would have shivered, but they would have seen the universe's greatest plot, a plot hatched between day and night, enthralling sky and earth with its majesty and beauty.

The wind suddenly increased in force to send us in. How cold were its gusts! It seemed as though Death himself breathed on us. We crawled into our tents and with numbed fingers laced to the flaps. It was of such a day's end that Winthrop Young once wrote:

When in the hour of mountain peace,
The tumult and the passion cease,
As the red sunfloods sink,
And the pale lords of sovereign height,
Watch the cold armies of the night,
Mustering their first assault.

It was bitter cold that night. Twelve days ago we had lived in the moist heat of Calcutta; now the snow slashed our tents and the mercury of the thermometer shrank into its bulb. How long will it be before man again visits this lonely corner of the World?

That night in camp we held a council of war. The agenda for discussion was what should be done next. My story of the ascent of the Guicha Peak was soon told and opinions then started coming forth. It was decided that a second ascent of the same peak should not be made. Rather a further attempt should be made to go higher up on Kanchenjunga itself. From the account that I gave my friends of what I had seen from the top, it was agreed that the Eastern and Southern Ridges should be left out altogether. My own suggestion was to make an ascent either of the Madonna Peak or Pandim, but it met with no support. At length it was finally decided to try to go up the last remaining route, the South Col, or what would be better to explore the gap between the northern precipice of the Guicha La and the Madonna Peak. For this, two parties were formed. Mr. Antia and Avari were detailed for the latter work, while Metha, Palamkote, Saklat and myself were to attempt the Col.

A final hot mug of bovril put us in a warm glow, which lasted throughout a cold night. Although we could not eat much, a dinner of tinned roast mutton had been good. For a long time I lay placidly on my back staring vacantly at the roof of the tent, taking little account of the passage of time, while I recalled the events of the day. Already they seemed a past chapter of life, and, as drowsiness gradually overcame me, they receded farther and farther into the forgotten. My friends were all sleeping well and such was their enthusiasm for the morrow's task that I believe they already assumed themselves as good as on the summit! It is such an assumption, so selfless as to rise superior to bodily infirmity, that will one day take mountaineers to the summit of Everest. Slowly, quietness fell upon the whole camp. The trailing garments of Night were fast sweeping through her marble halls, as the wind blew harder and harder. And down the glacier the fairies held their midnight revels on the frozen waters of the Blue Lake. I remember thinking last that we were sleeping higher that night than any of our fellow-men.

Early next morning as I unlaced the flaps of my tent, we saw the dawn come up fiercely, ruddily, a tremendous conflagration sweeping the upper regions of the sky. The nearer mists dissolved and as though signalled by the rise of a curtain, peak after peak became visible on the snowy stage, their summits glowing like the white helmets of a besieging army reflecting the glare from some burning city. As they lifted their torn yet defiant pinnacles in the crimson light of the rising sun, with banners of fleecy clouds waving above and gleams of icy pinnacles, like glittering spears around them, I was irresistibly reminded of that scene in Milton's "Paradise Lost", where, after their dire defeat and consignment to perdition, Satan summons his fallen legions to "share with him their part in that unhappy mansion, or once more with rallied arms to try what may be yet regained in Heaven, or what more lost in Hell!" So fitting were the surroundings, that I should have been scarcely amazed, if from the Blue Lake, we had left below, Lucifer, son of the Morning, had reared his mighty stature, and the splintered peaks, at his terrific call, shaken off their marble sleep, and surged forward in the shock of grand titanic war!

A cold morning had slowly filtered into a cold world. We spoke but little; our minds were busied by thoughts of what the day might bring forth. Now would be the time to start, but it was too cold—the coldest morning I ever remember in the Himalayas. So we waited. This decision was also dictated by the possible danger of avalanches from the Madonna Peak. If the mountaineer is ever forced to expose himself to the risk of ice avalanches, by traversing beneath hanging glaciers, he can minimise that risk considerably by avoiding the hours of dawn and sunset. Such avalanches may occur at any hour of the day or night, but they are more likely to sweep down during these two periods.

Breakfast was a hurried affair. We craved for sugar more than any other substance, but a steaming

mug of cocoa and a few biscuits went down well. The sun was not long in coming and we emerged thankfully from our tents into its life-giving rays. It was decided that Mr. Antia and Avari should leave beforehand and explore the gap. If they succeeded in finding a good route, we should all then give the Col a "go by" and try for any other possibility for what it was worth. The second party would start an hour behind the first and meet it at the foot of the Col. Thus the day's work commenced at 6-30 a.m. when our two companions left the camp with our "good lucks" in their ears. A little while before, everything had been in the grip of intense cold and now, miraculously, life had returned to the white corpse of the world.

The porters were, however, in poor shape. Several of them were suffering from the effects of altitude and were *hors de combat*. Kirken, Sing-ting-rue, Pemba, Kusum and one or two others were their usual cheery selves. Kirken begged so hard to be allowed to come with us that we could not refuse him. And so we were a party of five that later bid goodbye to Mr. Bapasola, who wished to remain in camp. The hour we were to have waited was over, and we set out to see what luck had in store for us.

Here and there lay patches of snow. At the outset we trod the slopes with extreme caution, but, although soft, it was not in a dangerous condition, and our feet plunged through a layer of loose incoherent snow into firm consolidated snow beneath. Breaking the trail was an arduous business, and my companions must have chafed inwardly at my slowness although their patience was commendable. Being at such a high altitude we had now to conserve our strength and proceed with the minimum expenditure of energy.

We had not gone very far, before we saw Mr. Antia and Avari returning. We knew that their chances of success had been nullified or at least greatly diminished by the new snow on the rocks, and were

not surprised when they told us of their bad luck. Nevertheless in spite of such great difficulties, they had climbed over the gap on to the Talung Glacier. They had traversed it for some distance hoping to find an easier approach to the south face of the mountain than by the Col. But they had been baulked on every side. At one point they had even been able to climb high, but after a certain distance were forced to turn back. The ice, too, on the glacier was in bad condition. First Avari had a severe fall, then Mr. Antia. Confronted by such difficulties they had decided to turn back. They had really made a great and splendid effort and were able to advise us as to the route to be followed. From what they had gleaned during their reconnaissance, it was obvious that we had to attempt the Col. After warning us once more of the difficulties to expect, they left for Camp Two, following our tracks and for some time we watched them methodically traversing the shelving slabs and the treacherous snow. Then we struggled onward.

The South Col is an accursed mass of ice, snow and rock. In its lower part it is made up of steep slopes and small rock precipices placed one above the the other. These led gradually to a small almost level terrace of snow about a hundred feet across, above which rises an almost vertical wall of ice and snow. It towered high for over three hundred feet, cold and blue, in tier on tier of ice, laced and friezed with snow. There was no avoiding this for it was the only way to its knife-like summit ridge.

The first question was how the terrace was going to be reached. It was not easy to chalk out a route through the maze of rocks, seracs and little couloirs. Between the ice bulge of the Madonna Peak and the red cliffs of the Col, is a glacier flowing downwards and ending abruptly in an ice-fall which overhangs the rocks in walls of ice two or three hundred feet high. Occasionally, masses of the glacier are detached, which fall in cataracts of ice-blocks to the glacier

plateau beneath. Though we were a little out of range of these avalanches, it would be extremely perilous to venture upon the precipice beneath this hanging glacier. Between the glacier and the cliffs, however, there was a breach formed by a long couloir which connected the glacier plateau to the upper slopes. Assuming safe snow conditions, the most serious objection to it was the risk of stones falling from the flanks of the great cliffs, but from where we stood these appeared to be built of firm material. The chief advantage of this route was that it was not very steep.

The sole alternative to this was a direct ascent of the precipices to a shelf just below the terrace, which could be reached from there by cutting a few steps up a small ice slope. In its upper portion this route was really very steep, but its advantage lay in being much shorter than the first one. Once the terrace was reached we would have to go up the great ice wall. And whether it would be climbable would entirely depend on in what condition we found it.

My companions' countenances expressed feelings similar to mine. Both the proposed routes were rather dangerous. Only Kirken seemed unaware of the general pessimism, and his broad grin came up from the depths like a fine day in an Indian monsoon. If I have gone into some detail as to the pros and cons of the problem, it is because I would have the reader form some idea as to the many factors leading up to a decision in Himalayan mountaineering. Those who know mountaineering for the craft it is, know that one false move on a Himalayan peak may result in checkmate, with the mountain as master of the situation.

Opinions as to the most promising line of attack between these two routes were not unanimous, so we decided to divide into two parties. Saklat and Palamkote with Kirken were to attempt the couloir. This

route had an initial disadvantage of commencing with a steep pitch formed by several jammed boulders which had wedged themselves into the narrow neck of the breach. Mehta and I waited to see them solve this problem. And we were privileged in witnessing a grand, superb, mountaineering effort. Higher up, their route was more promising and did not seem to present any great difficulties, and at the same time would take them a long way up to the terrace.

We then turned our attentions to our own particular affair and started up the shelf. The angle of the rock slabs was such that when standing upright, the slope could be touched with the outstretched hand. The first twenty feet must have taken us as many minutes to climb. Even when the holds were discovered and cleared, raising the body by them was no easy matter. Above these preliminary rocks we found ourselves in a very steep shallow couloir. Climbing here was hard work, but not technically difficult. At the very outset before entering it however we were scarcely gratified to observe a block of rock, the size of a portable gramophone come bounding down from above at a terrific rate before plunging below into the soft snow. This in itself was a damning indictment of the couloir, and it seemed the sooner we were out of it the better.

Before turning back, we decided to satisfy ourselves beyond all reasonable doubt that no route could be found up it. The couloir was only a small one. Besides the cliffs on the left seemed firm. By edging away as far as possible from the right then and traversing quickly, we should perhaps be able to get over. I glanced downwards. The place allowed little latitude for life but an overwhelming margin in favour of death, and an unchecked slip or a torrent of boulders coming from above would bring about certain destruction.

It was with considerable relief then that we emerged sometime later from the other end of the

couloir in safety. But the going became more difficult, for the angle steepened greatly. It was with savage resentment that I realised how much better was the alternate route of Saklat and Palamkote. Toiling upwards we reached the foot of a rocky wall. There was no avoiding this, for an outflanking movement was impossible—it had to be climbed. The wall was not more than fifteen feet high and it was all that separated us from the snowy shelf that led to the terrace. Loose powdery snow had to be shovelled away with hand or axe and what rocks showed through the snow consisted entirely of granite slabs. I retain very vivid memories of the place. The holds disclosed were barely sufficient. There was at one spot a splayed-out shallow groove from which the snow had to be cleared. The upward movement was an awkward one and the landing on a sloping glacier of rock, snow and ice still more awkward. Friction was at a discount and the temporary exhaustion due to altitude was great. It was a wonderful feeling to haul ourselves over the top and plunge the axe up to the head in the firm snow above.

As we gained the shelf above the wall we heard voices and discerned Saklat, Palamkote and Kirken on a ledge to our right. We also doted with satisfaction that no impassable obstacle intervened between either parties and the top of the terrace, and we were all soon together again. The only difficulty now to be overcome before we could reach the summit of the Col was the great ice wall. Was it climbable? We wondered. Half the fun in mountaineering lies in being beaten or in the risk of being beaten. Not only does the mountaineer conceive an increased respect for his adversary, but he returns to the attack with a new zest. Should the citadel fall to his next assault he accepts its surrender not arrogantly, but humbly, for only by humility can the precious moments on the high hills be captured for ever! We had hoped against hope that the snow on the terrace would be

hardened into a crust sufficiently solid to enable us to walk comfortably without having to do anything more than kick steps. Our hopes were not fulfilled; we had not marched more than a few yards before we were sinking in boot-deep. But fortunately the snow, if disagreeably soft, was at least consistent in its softness, and it was possible to maintain a rhythm.

We sat down for a rest. As we sat, our thudding hearts and hard-pressed lungs gradually eased to a more normal rate. We had climbed over 500 feet in an hour, and had reason to congratulate ourselves. Down below on our right was the gap through which Mr. Antia and Avari had crossed over on to the Talung Glacier. Even from where we were, the rocks, snow and ice below the Madonna Peak looked very uninviting. They were so steep and dangerous that it was amazing how our companions had got over. Theirs was truly a remarkable feat of mountaineering. Far away through the gap in the distance could be seen a massive mountain mass standing aloof from all the rest. It is well over 23,000 feet high but is unnamed. Lolling in the snow, I felt languid and sleepy. Further advance seemed unnecessary, even absurd. Why not continue to sit and drowse the day away on this terrace? I forced myself to take some photographs and change a cinematograph film. It was simple and easy work, yet it involved expenditure of both physical and mental energy.

The few minutes that we allowed ourselves soon passed. My companions rose to their feet and started up the slope. Even the effort of rising to our feet served like the touch of a foot on the sensitive throttle of a powerful racing car, to set the machinery of heart and lungs pounding furiously. Kirken was now breaking the trail. It was really interesting to watch them. As they toiled through the soft snow, I trained the cine-camera on them and "shot" some film. I remember wishing as I did so that I had not burdened myself with the work of taking a film of the expedition. I

had to take my thick gloves off for a moment to work the shutter and even that short time was sufficient to numb my fingers. I had to beat them for some time before the blood would return. How easily circulation is lost at 21,000 feet and how slowly and painfully is it restored!

As we approached the wall, it became steeper every minute. It is a well-known optical illusion that a slope looked at from below appears considerably less steep than looked at from above. The ice-wall before us was a notable exception; it looked steep and it *was* steep. A little way up there yawned a huge black crevasse, the entrance of which was decorated by beautiful slender blue stalactites and stalagmites. Our plan was to start from the left edging away from the great crevasse, then curve up almost horizontally to the right and then up the final slopes to the summit ridge. But almost the whole way up, steps would have to be cut.

If the snow had been avalanchy we should have turned back at once, but though reasonably firm, it was of that exasperating type the mountaineer must expect to find at the end of the monsoon season. Two or three steps are taken, the snow holds—will it hold another step? Apparently it will. The foot swings forward and the weight is gingerly transferred. Good! It holds. The other foot is swung forward, then—crunch! For no reason, the crust has given way. The rear foot sinks deeply. Rhythm is lost. Balance is regained only after an effort. Mind and muscles must be braced anew. Imagine the same series of disappointments repeated time after time at this great height and the sum becomes a weary one.

As I went up I could not resist the temptation of gazing down that big crevasse. It needed careful handling as the ice was very soft there and broke easily. The rocks and snow yawned in a well of darkness. It was very deep and must have been more

than twenty feet. A little higher we came across a big rocky ledge. It was a difficult one and involved a good deal of hard labour. After my own heavings and strugglings, it was somewhat disconcerting to see Saklat ascend after a few moments' pause with leisurely elegance. True, the work of clearing the holds of snow and rendering the place climbable had been done, but Saklat's six and a quarter feet of height, combined with a porportionately long reach, enabled him to grasp holds far beyond the reach of ordinary mortals.

But above this ledge was no longer the soft snow we had met earlier, but ice, hard, cold, an electric blue, which needed step-cutting. As we were about to commence there came several loud growls at intervals. They were probably the sounds of distant avalanches falling from Kanchenjunga. It was as though the giant was at last awake, pulsating to the fierce beats of its restless heart.

Here was work of the most exacting and arduous nature; a few steps at a time were as much as we could manage. Himalayan blue ice is of a terribly tough quality. As many as fifteen to twenty strokes are needed to fashion one good step. The condition of my axe, all bent and twisted even today bears witness to the hardness of the ice encountered. To the mountaineer who revels in the art and craft of icemanship, there is no music finer to his ears than the ringing thump with which an ice-axe meets the yielding ice and the swish and tinkle of the dislodged chips beneath him. But such aesthetical and poetical sentiments were not for us. We wearied of the dull sound as the pick struck the ice. The musical ring had no answering one in our hearts. We felt no excitement, no enthusiasm, no hope, no fear. Such an ice-slope is never to be welcomed as providing a test of skill; it is an implacable enemy, mute yet savage, passive yet resistant. It hates.

Thud, thud, thud. A step is made. The foot lifts slowly and the nailed boot grinds into the ice.

Thud, thud,———. The ice-axe has dislodged but a few chips. It has got stuck and has to be wriggled about in order to detach it for the next blow.

Thud, thud, thud. There is a less confident ring in the sound of the axe striking the ice. The work stops. Heart and lungs are striving for oxygen. The wall swims uncertainly before the eyes of the exhausted mountaineer. He doubles up and gasps and gasps and gasps. Presently he recovers somewhat, and making another effort, strikes the green face of the ice again.

Thud, thud, thud.———Thud, thud, thud.———

And so it goes on and on.

Two hundred feet up from the terrace—an hour's unremitting toil. Another two hundred feet remained. We had to hurry now. Time was passing. We experienced suddenly a subtle thrill. The ascent was not without its dramatic interest. What were we going to see from the summit? Only snow and mountains, but snow and mountains perhaps never seen before by human eyes. We toiled upwards. I began to feel confident and happy, a feeling, I believe, shared by my companions. We were now tasting the real joys of mountaineering, joys of work doing, of work done and its forthcoming reward.

In with the ice-axe and on. The plates of hard snow and ice swished away into the abyss, a gentle sibilant whisper. When I was leading, there was naught but the blank snow before me. When others were leading, my vision was limited to their feet. Everyone was getting excited as the summit-ridge came closer. Each of my companions now went up the slope with the energy of a boxer who, after days of training, sees his opponent before him. Directly

above us the sun illuminated a small flake of snow projecting from the summit-ridge with a calm gleam. It seemed always so far away. Then suddenly to my surprise I could touch it. Driving the ice-axe in before me, I hauled my body up. For perhaps a minute I lay gasping like a stranded fish, then pulled myself up together. Presently we were all congregated on the ridge. A little distance away was the gentle sloping summit.

We started to toil along the ridge. There must be no mistake now. Tiredness was replaced by a fierce exhilaration. The numbed brain leapt into renewed activity; we were thinking men again, capable of realising our amazing position on this snowy edge of the world. We refused to look at the Kanchenjunga summit which stood before us—we would see it only from the dome-shaped top of the Col. It would be sacrilege otherwise. I remember trampling and crushing the delicate snow edge with a careful yet savage deliberation. Only a few feet remained.

Kirken was just behind me and we seized hold of him and shoved him in front of us. I could hear the breath jerking from him in wheezy gasps. I do not think he understood what was being done. He was like us too, all fire and dash again. The way he ran up the last bit almost made me laugh. And so he was the first to tread that snowy summit. It was the least, the only deserving compliment we could pay those splendid men, our porters, to whom we owed the success of our expedition. To this day I deeply regret that I did not take a picture of him climbing to the top.

The view? It was a god's view of things. The southern face of the summit of Kanchenjunga. Savagely it rises from the snowslopes below, savagely it terminates. In its lower part there are some terraces which look accessible; but below them is spread a formidable horseshoe of precipices and there are steep places surmounted by crevasses and seracs filled or

beaten down by avalanches from hanging glaciers and ice-cliffs above. Its very aggressiveness challenges the mountaineer, yet what mountaineer would accept the challenge? One might imagine that the whole face of the mountain must have been constructed by the Demon of Kanchenjunga for the express purpose of defence against human assault, so skilfully is each comparatively weak spot raked by ice and rock batteries. Look at it through glasses, if you will, and seek a way up the sliced granite precipices, but when your gaze has passed up these, it will halt aghast upon the ice slopes above. Even imagination will boggle at the thought of having to climb them, at cutting and cutting for hour after hour and getting—nowhere. Even imagination slips and is cast headlong down the precipices. It is a sight that might well cause even the most hardened mountaineer to shudder. Turn to the summit, that most sacred place of all. There, ice, sharp-edged and unbroken, but ice hacked and tortured by the winds, clings to the ridges; thin flakes of ice through which the sun gleams with a cold fire; pinnacles of fairy-like delicacy, elegant busts, daring minarets, a strange goblinesque procession, drunken and tottering, frozen in a downward march.

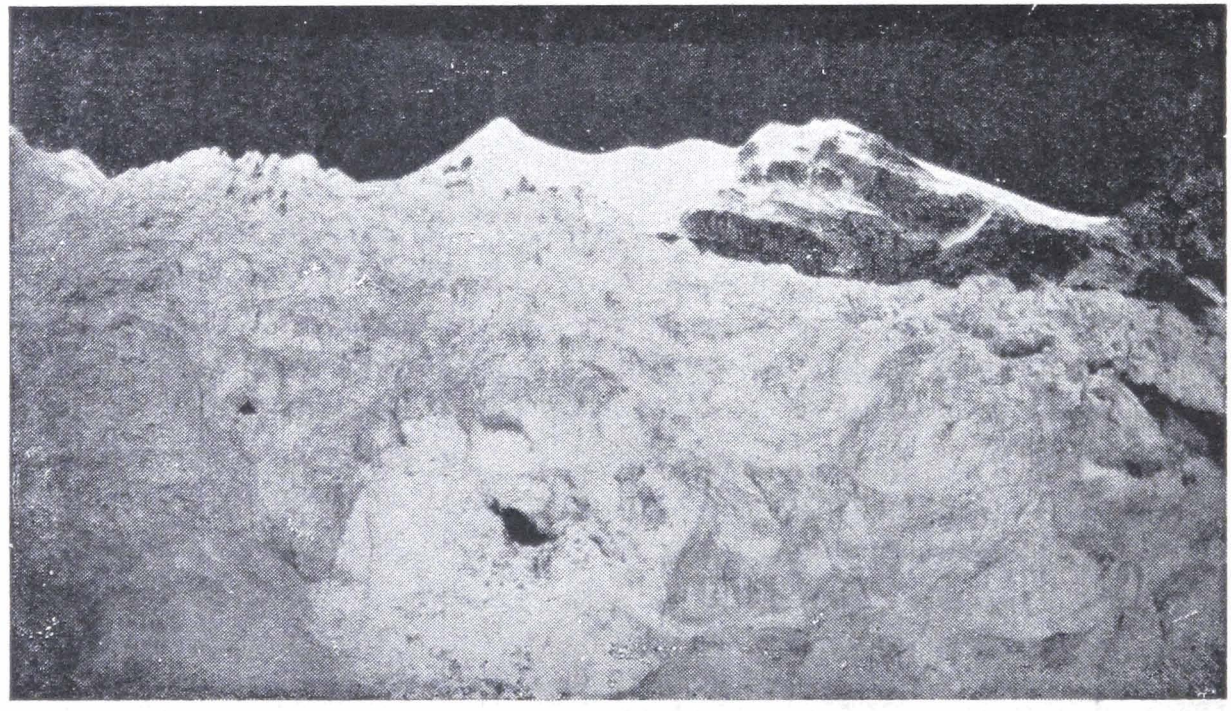
I tore eye and mind away. My idea of what the last effort of any Kanchenjunga climber could be, had been that of crawling, half blind and exhausted up an even slope from the last camp. Now I saw, it would not be that sort of grind. Climbers—expert climbers would be needed—and not half-dazed ones either. Anyone who treads that final lap treads the physical limits of the world.

On our right were the two fine pointed summits of the Madonna peak. From there our vision swept eastward past an isolated and graceful mountain to the snows of Pandim and beyond it lovely Jubonu. Westwards rose Kabru, while beyond the Chemathang Glacier, the Himalayas fell away in brown waves of mountain after mountain into the golden plains of

Bengal. Were it not for this glimpse, the mountaineer standing on the summit of the South Col might fancy himself in a world given over to an eternal and awful desolation. Our eyes feasted on that little strip of golden earth as the eyes of a shipwrecked mariner feasts on a distant shore. On those plains men dwelt and moved; we were not the sole inhabitants of a frozen planet.

We munched some chocolates as we sat on the summit. And then from my pocket to my companions' surprise emerged a small bottle of sherry. I had been given this before we left Calcutta and told to drink it on the highest point I reached. Now the time had come when the bottle should be opened. Whether or not we enjoyed drinking it is another matter. At all events, this offering to the Goddess Alcohol deserves to be recorded. The empty bottle I have with me still and that with a couple of stones I picked up from the summit form treasured souvenirs !

Before departing I glanced up once again at Kanchenjunga's summit. And as I gazed, another mood appeared to creep over her haunting features. There seemed to be something alluring in that towering presence. I was almost fascinated. I realised that any mountaineer must be thus fascinated; that he who approached close must ever be led on and oblivious of all obstacles, seek to reach that highest and purest place of all. I have experienced fear many times, but never the dull, cold, hopeless fear that I felt then. Mountains are like men, some friendly, others unfriendly. Kanchenjunga is something more than unfriendly, it is imbued with a blind unreasoning hatred towards the mountaineer. But it has every claim to majesty and though the mere slaughter of those who attempt to reach its summit can scarcely add to it, the deaths that have occurred and will occur, testify to the greatness of the mountain and its supreme contempt for its wooers. She is too beautiful a woman and a beautiful woman is always dan-



The upper reaches of the great ice wall of the South Col.

gerous. The path of beauty never ran straight. Strip Kanchenjunga of her icy robes and she would become weak, defenceless, a mere skeleton. In her dangers lie her beauties and no right thinking mountaineer would ever have it otherwise.———When we die may our spirits linger on the high places to which we have dedicated our youth!

The reader must forgive me if the pictures I paint in his mind are done so with a brush steeped in the blues of pessimism, but the more we examined that mountain-summit, the more difficult and dangerous it appeared. Retreat in the face of such obvious difficulties was not dishonourable. Mountaineering is after all not to be classed with one of the modern crazes for sensationalism; it is an exact science, a perfect blending of the physical and the spiritual and is not, and should not become a desperate enterprise. After all there is no sport, worthy of the name that has not its own peculiar risks; and we were all prepared to take great risks, but no one has any business to walk deliberately into positive danger. We saw that we had reached almost our limit. Besides we had no more time to spend. Others in our places might perhaps have done better though I wonder if they could have gone much further.

We rose wearily and stiffly to our feet, and tramped back along the summit ridge. Now that the job was done, we began to realise how tired we were. It is at such times of mountaineering anti-climax that accidents occur. The cold, the fatigue, the desire and impatience to return as quickly as possible to camp, all combined to tempt us to rush down the upper slope. To have done so would have been mountaineering folly of the most elementary character. Steadiness was imperative; our speed had to be curbed. How slow we progressed! Impatience and resignation flared up alternately. Yet we went down carefully, efficiently. From the terrace we all returned down the great couloir and retraced our tracks to camp and our companions. It had taken us

about six hours and as Metha remarked, "O man, we had truly a grand day's mountaineering."

Soon we had lunch. Out came the familiar tin of sardines. As usual the key that is optimistically supposed to roll back the lid broke. Almost savagely I drove the big tin-opener into it. How good those sardines were! How well the thin oil lubricated our parched throats! And after those sardines a mug of cocoa made life some good. There was no use lingering any longer and later that same afternoon, we went down to Camp One at Wanglethang without any mishap.

As we turned round the corner of Pandim, we had one more look behind. Clouds were coming in, but the icy wall of the South Col could still be seen. Fugitive patches of sunlight were chasing affrightedly across its upper slopes, and from behind the snowy shoulder of the beautiful Madonna, Kanchenjunga gleamed down palely white, like a nun, disdainful of the world, yet peering curiously upon it from some high window of an unapproachable convent. The mists were closing in about it as though to say "The curtain falls". Should we ever raise it again ?

Then the clouds came down for good. We had done with it all.

We had examined every portion of the face of the mountain above the Talung Glacier. Nowhere was there a route at which the mountaineer might look and say with confidence "Well, it will go". Those who are sceptical as to the truth of this, may follow in our footsteps, but they will probably return disappointed. Like us they will tremble at the roar of the great ice avalanches that seek their destruction; and like us their hope and optimism will be ruthlessly crushed beneath the icy heel of Kanchenjunga.

The sun sank behind the western snowy peaks, its red rays lighting the spirals of wind-tossed snow. Almost we could fancy ourselves gazing upon flames,

not of heat, but of cold, rising from the frozen hell which the Tibetans believe exists for the eternal damnation of the evildoer. Night rapidly drained the red wine of day from the peaks. And soon a number of fires were burning, where groups of porters were cooking their evening meals. Saklat and I preferred the warmth of one of these fires to the coldness of our tents. If ever in civilisation I wish to recall the memories of that great day in the Himalayas, I have only to sniff the smoke from burning rhododendron. Still more vivid memories will be recalled by the taste of rhododendron, for most of the things that we cooked over it were impregnated with its acrid smoke. The cocoa tasted of rhododendron; the meat reeked of it; however strong the bovril, rhododendron invariably won.

It was bitterly cold. The leaping flames of the fire illuminated the faces of the porters squatting round it. They were strangely silent. At periodical intervals the sinewy arm of Kirken grasping a wooden ladle shot out to stir the rice gruel that constituted their dinner. As I sat by the fire with the front part of me roasting and the back part of me freezing, I wondered of what were they all thinking. Was their enjoyment of such a day merely an adventurous enjoyment? Was it only the excitement of soon returning to their homes that appealed to them, or could they see further than the brown rocks, and the snowy peaks blazoned on a shield of awakening stars?

We heaved and stretched ourselves to our feet. The moon was rising. As we were about to enter our tents our attention was suddenly arrested. We saw Pandim. It was bathed in brilliant moonlight and was framed by the dark walls of nearer mountains. It was difficult to believe that it was a mountain and not some product of the infinite manufactured by the stars.

Later when the camp was sleeping, I lay awake gazing through the doorway of my tent at Pandim; later still, in dreamland, I sought refuge on that serene summit from the uneasy phantasms that beset the wanderer through the valleys of sleep.

AND SO TO DARJEELING:

Through Tropical Sikkim

October 8 dawned evilly. I was woken up early by Kirken shaking me by the arm and saying "Hurry, sahib, hurry; tent go; strong wind; snow coming." I had passed a very comfortable night, in fact the best since I had left Darjeeling and poor Kirken would have heard a torrent of abusive language, had he not flung the flaps of my tent wide apart and pointed out in the direction of the eastern mountains. The clouds that had been massing in the south for the past few days had now spread a menacing pall across the zenith, and the summit of Pandim was smoking a wrathful pipe of wind driven snow. A storm was raging over Jubonu, while the glacier by which we had descended was already being snowed up in its upper parts. There was no question of wasting any time at all, for soon the storm would be upon us. We pulled our tents down hurriedly and started for the Base Camp.———The Base Camp! The very words seemed to have a homely ring.

As we trudged down the glacier into the jaws of its great gorge, the mountain walls on either side, concealed behind leaden mists, seemed full of an indescribable menace. If we could not see, we could at least visualise the unstable walls of rock and ice above us, waiting only for the monsoon's last breath to sweep the glacier in cataclysmic avalanches. I could not help thinking that here was Kanchenjunga's last chance for revenge. For a while we walked downhill in the gathering mist, then emerging from the mist found ourselves on the level plain where the glacier bends round a corner before rising steeply towards the Base Camp.

As we were climbing up, we were suddenly arrested by great gurgling sounds. Huge boulders were breaking off and falling over the mountain-side. They afforded a horrid spectacle, for in the way they fell they might have been human. They slid sedately yet helplessly for the first few yards down the smooth

rock-slope. In a second or two their paces increased, they turned over and commenced to roll. The rolling became faster and faster, increasing to such a fearful velocity that we could hear the rush and the wind of them. They then struck the rocks hundreds of feet lower, leapt insanely into the air, and turning over and over disappeared into the depths. I could scarcely repress a shudder as I watched. Supposing they had been human bodies! I climbed up to Jongri with something more than ordinary caution.

At the Base Camp, everything was as we had left it. But there to our surprise we found a man tending his small herd of yaks. Why had he come so far up when he might have remained on the more fertile valleys lower down? Was it because he wished to cut himself off from his fellow-men? Those who wish to escape from the hypocrisy of our presentday civilisation should follow his example. Some like me might even envy him. How could such a man employ himself when he could neither read nor write? Knowing nothing of the city, he was content. He belonged to no modern society; he recked nothing of financial crises; the income-tax office knew him not. He had never heard the silly music of our ball-rooms or breathed the stuffy air of an office. His domains were the great boulders and the little alps; his walls were the mountain peaks; his roof the ever-changing sky. He had a sack of grain with him and a handful a day was all that he needed. Time was not something to be cajoled or defied—it passed. He would discover joy and laughter in the beauty of Nature; the stars would be his nightly canopy; he would play on his flute and sing to the mountains; he would watch the slow passing of the clouds; he would share the sunset and the dawn with God.———Yakherd, live thy free and open life. Thou art perhaps far happier than many of us poor fools, who think they have all they want!

We were now no longer in the danger zone but the gloom increased. Snow began to fall, at first in

desultory flakes, then more heavily. We ate a cold, uncomfortable lunch in the lee of the stone-huts, of biscuits, butter and jam. The scene was inexpressibly desolate. Pandim and its neighbouring peaks seemed all but gone. Through rifts in the massing clouds sawed menacing fangs of rock and ice. From above came a dull sound, more felt than heard—the orchestra of the storm. It was like the beginning of the "Finale" of a Tchaikovsky symphony! To appreciate mountains they must be seen in gloom as well as sun. When only the black ribs of the peaks glare through the mists, when the snowslopes are blank and shadowless and not even the deadly ripple of the masked crevasse is visible, the mountaineer feels himself to be encompassed about by the forces of death and the awful solemnity and majesty of his surroundings strikes at his very soul. Seeing them thus, it appeared to me as if some of the mightiest of those rebel angels, who brought death into the world and all our woe, had been turned into stone and ice, and compelled to stand as long as the earth endured, with bowed heads and veiled faces, before the insulted majesty of the Eternal.

Kirken emptied the huts of all our belongings. The porters squatted down on their haunches, slipped their head-bands over their foreheads, heaved themselves to their feet, wriggled and shifted their loads into a position of comfort, and lumbered off in their ungainly way down the slopes. We trudged behind.

Then suddenly the storm with all its fury burst upon us. In a few seconds Nature seemed to go mad. The far horizons vanished as the voice of the wind rose to a scream and the snow tore past in blinding sheets. It was not an ordinary wind. It was not merely a strong wind or a cold wind. It was somehow a frenzy that lived all around us, a master stamping and ranting over his own domains. The effect upon the tired men may be well imagined. Their world disappeared. Eyes began to pain and eyelashes froze

together making it very difficult to see. Small little icicles hung from our beards. There was only one thing to do—hurry, hurry and hurry down.

After about an hour, as we were coming to a lower level, the storm abated somewhat. The sun shone through the gently falling snow, illuminating its crystals, until they gleamed like showers of diamonds distributed by the prodigal hands of the mountain fairies. The snow gave place to a drizzle, which continued interminably. One minute we were on land as flat as a golfing green, the next the wooded jaws of the great Ranjit valley had enclosed us.

Soon we came to a belt of giant rhododendrons, which led into a magnificent primaeval forest. None of us had ever seen an Amazonian forest, but it can scarcely be finer than the forests, that line the trench-like valleys of the Himalayas. These primaeval forests are grand, savage and untamed. Their great trees lift themselves proudly from a tangle of impenetrable under-growth, draped with tendinous creepers, and their dim aisles are pregnant with mystery. At the same time, there is something indescribably depressing about such a place. As we descended rhododendrons gave place to firs, firs to oaks and chestnuts and they to other wild trees. The dense walls of vegetation on either side of the narrow straggling track and the interlacing canopy of vegetation far above the head shut out the health-giving sunlight and breezes. From all sides came a shrill symposium of innumerable insects and the harsh clatter of frogs. An awed silence seems to hold in its arms a breathless suspense. There exists undefined menace, suggested perhaps by the dank odours of rotting vegetation. I experienced a feeling of being imprisoned in a vault and longed to escape into more open places. Even the creepers that writhe about the trunks of the trees, or hang snakelike from the branches, appear ready to grip the traveller and drag him to some horrible death in the gloomy recesses of

the forest. There is little of good, and much of evil about such a place.

As I emerged from a thicket, I came upon Avari upbraiding his porter, Tulabir, in a true "civic guard" style, for keeping his bedding lying on some wet bushes. After Sing-ting-rue, this fellow was our best load-carrier. He was a little chap, was Tulabir, and the load that he carried was as big as himself. No one however could credit him with intelligence or initiative. but as Mr. Antia said to console Avari, "What he lacked in grey matter was more than compensated for by his prodigious strength". On this account his leg was pulled unmercifully by his comrades, who called him "Purkhea" (the dwarf) and I fear that his lot was not altogether a happy one. I shall always remember Tulabir as the good-natured and willing horse of the expedition—one who never ventured a complaint, and who conscientiously strove to do his best. As Avari's servant he made many mistakes—he was no Jeeves—but he tried so hard and he laughed in such a charming manner when scolded that it was impossible to be angry with him for his slow-wittedness. He was a pearl of great price.

At long last we camped for the night at a place called Bakyim, close to the eastern branch of the Ranjit River, where it divides south of Jongri. It was a very wild spot. Mountain and cloud seemed to roof us in; the air was very damp and chill. The glacier-born river roared sullenly over its rocky bed; cold spray beat upward from its grey waters. Even more than in the forest did we feel enclosed and shut in. Tropic night then rushed to meet us, dragging by its locks a white mist. As Palamkote said, it might have been the end of the world.

In my diary that night I wrote "Misty morning. Started early. Heavy snowstorm at Jongri. Rain in the forest. Camped near Rathong Chu. Rain. Seems rain will continue all night." Much lies behind those

terse phrases. It had been truly a heavy day in bad conditions. Towards the later part every step was almost an effort, and all of us felt very tired. And we spent an uncomfortable night. It rained all the time and the water leaked through the tents. Only a few beddings were opened and shared by all. The blue glares of lightning were answered by majestic crashes of thunder. The very echoes were indicative of vastness. In a flat country the thunder seems to dominate, but in the Himalayas, it is but the mouth-organ of the gods.

We started late next morning. It was still drizzling slightly as we crossed the Rathong Chu over a crazy rickety bridge. The path led into the forest again and up the hillside, where the feet sank into leaves rotting into leaf mould or crushed into blackened debris and decayed branches. No doubt my recollections are rather prejudiced but like the previous day's, I hated this march as well. The path is very bad in this region. Here and there it is built up of bamboos and logs against the sides of steep crags. It has been described as "a great trial of temper." So, too, did we find it, or perhaps I should say, the porters. For loads such as tent poles are a considerable nuisance in such a place.

The paths in this part of the world are a fair indication of the character of those, who make them. The native, of course, lives only in the present; the future holds no interest for him. Therefore he goes about everything in the easiest possible way and the thought that by a little extra trouble he might save himself work in the future never occurs to him. Thus the path was continually climbing up or dropping down to avoid the direct traverse of a steep piece of hillside. It was an extremely irritating path to our minds.

As Metha and I descended the steep upper pitch of a gully, there came a sudden clatter. We glanced

hurriedly upwards, but before we had time to move there was a whirr and a whizz, followed by several dull thuds, as the stones plunged into the soft earth. We never saw the stones—they were moving too quickly to be visible. Metha shouted up to Purnama and Tulabir, who were behind us, to hurry up. His words had no effect, and the little Sherpas descended nonchalantly, with broad grins; obviously they considered falling stones a huge joke and an occurrence calculated to add zest to an otherwise dull descent. Himalayan porters seldom worry about anything until it actually happens. Theirs is indeed a fatalistic outlook.

It was really unfortunate that the expedition included no good botanist amongst its members. Had there been one, he would have found that there is much of interest and beauty in the flora of these forests. Quoting from another: "The vegetation consisted of oak, maple, birch, laurel, rhododendron, white Daphne, Jessamine, Arum, Begonias, Cyrtandaceae, pepper, fig, Menispermum, wild cinnamon, Scitamineae, several epiphytic orchids, vines and ferns in great abundance."

I was forever discovering some new quality in Kirken. He knew very little English and his favourite phrase, which he used quite often and was proud to do so was—"very much thank you". Another that was an invariable favourite was "*thora dur hai*" (it is a little further off). And he used it equally whether the place in question was one, ten or even twenty miles off! To him everything was always "thora dur hai"—even death itself. There is a whole philosophy in this "thora dur hai".

But for once his answer proved correct for hardly had he spoken before the plateau of Yoksam came into view. As we neared the place, a little boy came playing in our direction. As soon as he had seen us he stood stark still. We shouted a greeting, but he suddenly turned round and bolted precipitately,

crying out in alarm as though all the devils of the district were at his heels. No doubt in our beards and expedition clothes we must have looked a sight and the little fellow probably took us for some "migos", who were thirsting after his blood. Such was our amusing meeting with the first human being since we had left Phalut, so many days ago. Then came a furious clamour of dogs and a few instants later we approached a rude hut, long and wide-eaved, with the board of its roof weighed down with stones.

Yoksam is situated on a shelf clothed in pasture-land, rice and wheat-fields. All the men had gone to work and the village seemed deserted, except for a few solitary women and children standing outside their huts to see our grand procession! The novelist would say that "once again the lonely and weary travellers had returned to civilisation, once again they were where men should belong" or some such hocus-pokus. But is it really something pitiful to go far away from *civilisation*? The thought then passed through my mind. I wondered. And even as I thought we beheld a strange sight. The light of the glorious sun suddenly shone through a break in the clouds. It was beautiful and the spectacle one of glory. But there seemed to be a black spot on the sun—humanity, perhaps God's only mistake in the great plan of creation. And the shadow cast by humanity tempered, even surely conquered, the light. A picture flashed before me of civilisation, its hateful clamour, its treachery, its meanness, its immorality, its corruption. This little village was its outpost and symbolical of it all. But four days ago, we had been up *there*, where all was peace. When we had left, the shrieking wind had filled our footsteps with snow and remodelled once more the majesty of the great ice wall we had trampled under foot. All would be the same and forever continue the same, undefiled, pure and beautiful!

Kirken had some friends in this village and so we were able to spend the evening and the night in a

hut. It was a two-storied affair, the lower one for the pigs and the upper one for the inhabitants. Climbing a rickety, wooden ladder, we entered a low-roofed room. The atmosphere was close and heavy, and the strong reek of pungent smoke from burning rhododendron branches fought a losing battle against a stronger odour of bodies unwashed since birth. Immediately above our room was an attic opening below through a trap-door. This attic contained the live stock and consequently emitted a strong smell, but it was by no means a perfume ! And to crown it all, as we found out later when we went to sleep, the whole place harboured an unpleasant form of tick, a crablike insect the size of a little finger-nail, the bite of which was both painful and poisonous.

When we went down to scrub our dirty hands and faces, there were peals of laughter from the big crowd that had by now collected near our hut—what fools, these strange men with bushy beards were to splash their faces; who had ever heard of wasting water like that; what fools indeed ! Unlike the morose, sullenfaced, suspicious men of our plains, these mountain folk are a friendly, cheerful, happy-go-lucky people, reflecting in their broad grins and graceful salutations the freedom and *camaraderie* of the hills.

As the evening advanced, the weather rapidly improved and the near mists slowly dissolved. We seemed to be hemmed in by snow peaks. Only a little distance away was one, which at first we could not make out. It was Jongri. The snowstorm had really been one of great severity and it was difficult to believe that had we been delayed only by a day or even a few hours, we might have been fighting for our lives in death-dealing cold and a *tourmente* of wind-flung snow.

The condition of our shoes and boots was causing great anxiety. All the soles were torn and we never knew when they would become absolutely unwearable. I had been wearing a pair of sandals

lent me by Avari for the last two days, and they now mutely spoke of not going more than a couple of miles. However, we here got the heartening news that a "mochi" was sure to be found at Pamionchi. For this reason, it was decided that Saklat and I should start very early next day and take with us as many shoes as we could for repair, while the rest of the party would follow later. Things had really come to a bad pass, but the situation was however not without its humour. For the past few days some of my companions had been coming to me for "medical treatment"—not for themselves of course but their shoes. They wanted them to be bandaged! I grimly reflected on what the Medical College authorities would say if they were to see such gauze pieces and bandages wasted to protect our shoes. For what a purpose had I brought them and for what a purpose were they used! It was rather degrading to be relegated to being a shoe-doctor.

Before we went to bed Saklat and I opened one of the store boxes and hunted for a couple of tins of Nestle's milk that would serve for our breakfast on the following day. As we rummaged about we found tied in a neat bundle, two big slabs of chocolates, which we quietly took possession of without anyone excepting Kirken noticing it. A day or two after this episode, Avari when checking his list of stores, announced with joy that so far as he could remember there was still some chocolate left. Feeling decidedly uncomfortable, I volunteered to go and get them. Luckily no one but Saklat accompanied me. After some jabbering with Kirken, we returned and announced to the effect that Kirken regretted it, but the chocolates had been eaten. A more literal and true translation would, however, have been to the effect that Saklat and I had eaten the chocolates and he, Kirken, did not see why he should be blamed. Now, alas, I fear that the disgraceful truth as to the fate of those two slabs will be known to all our companions.

It was still very dark when the two of us started next morning for Pamionchi, Kirken was to show us the way out of the village and put us on the high-road. There were shoes in our rucksacks, shoes slung over our shoulders and shoes also in our hands! To save making a long detour, Kirken was jumping over fences and, as there were no boards of "All Tresspassers will be Prosecuted," boldly walking through private fields. My own impressions as I followed Kirken were probably somewhat similar to those experienced by a house-breaker, who sets out on his professional job for the first time. I was constantly gazing about in the dark not knowing, when I would have a watch-dog clinging on to my ankle, or the proprietor of the land emerge suddenly and "sock me on the biscuit"! Anyway we reached the main road in safety and then Kirken returned seeing us off. Had he known about it, he would have said that we looked like a pair of Dick Wittingtons going to London town to seek our fortunes.

It was not yet the time for the blooming day to bud in the blushing East; not yet had the victorious Star of Morn chased from the early sky the fainting splendour of the stars of Night. All was silent save the light breath of Dawn, waking the slumbering leaves. Even now a golden streak broke over the grey mountains. Hark to the shrill chanticleers! As we walked through beautiful pastures and between fields of ripening grain, life was beginning to live again on the cold earth. Man rose sooner than the sun and already the ploughman and the mower set out for their daily work. Hark to shrill chanticleers' feathered rivals! The mountain-birds sprang from the sullen branches and welcomed with their hymns the coming day. The golden streak expanded into a crimson crescent and slowly a great ball of fire appeared in the rose-enamelled East.

The sun was up—the generating sun! And huts and trees, the broad fields and the distant hills burst into

sudden light. Quickly upcurled was the dusky mist from the shining river below us—quickly was the cold dew drunk from the raised heads of the green bushes. Never before had I fully understood the enchantment of green, quite realised how happy a choice was made on that day of Creation, when it was showered prodigally over the world. But now as I walked almost secretly down the hillside with my friend, I rested my soul on countless mingling shades of the delicious colour: the rough, furry green of the creepers–the silver green of the laurels—hot, sultry green of the bamboos —the faded green of the rhododendrons—rich emerald green of begonias—the black green of the distant trees on the opposite hill from which the sun held aloof—dully drowsy green of mulberry trees and brooding chestnuts. It was a choir of colours in one colour, like a choir of boys all with treble voices singing to the sun.

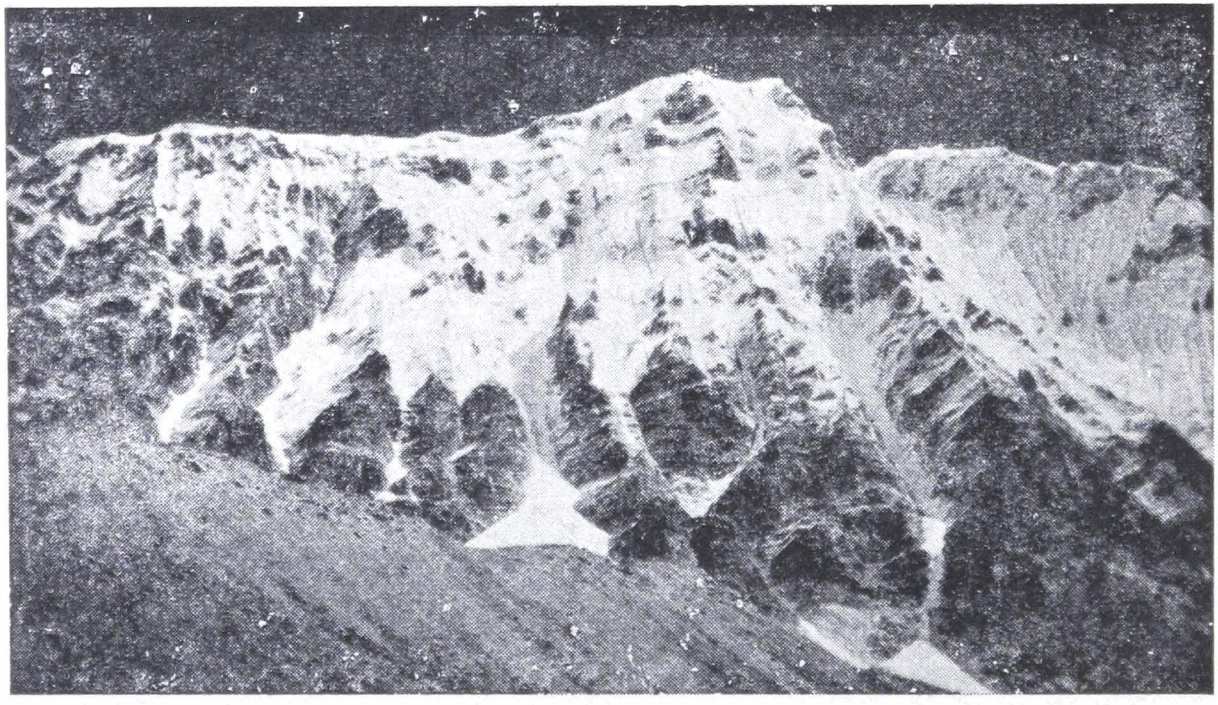
The trudge down was a hot one but we were fanned by a fresh southerly breeze. The valley here begins to narrow and bold crags jut out through a tangle of vegetation on its steepening sides. Here we crossed a swift flowing stream and immediately had to make a sharp ascent to the crest of á wooded ridge. As we breasted the last rise, we saw that as usual, it meant only one thing and that was to go down again.

An hour later we arrived at Tingling. There we found a "modi-shop" owned by a gentleman from Bhagalpur. Saklat told me to keep quiet and that he would do the talking. And talking he was and so much so that he didn't give the other fellow any time to talk either. I was so surprised, I did not quite follow everything; but in a few moments I heard the man calling us his "poor brothers" and inviting us in and ordering a feast for these lost travellers who had been wandering hungry and exhausted in the mountains for days! I now thought that it was high time that I should put in a word too and that as he was ordering a feast, he had better order a good one. So I asked

whether he had any meat or chicken, to which he immediately turned round in surprise. I was about to speak again when I heard Saklat say : "My friend, asks that because he is a strict vegetarian". I wanted to protest but by sundry eyesignals that Saklat made to me, I knew something was wrong and I had better stay quiet. Only later I found out that these people hate chicken and meat and the man would have thought himself polluted had he known that we touched those abominable things ! I wonder what would have happened had my rucksack tumbled over at that moment and disclosed its contents, not the least interesting of which was a small bundle which contained a leg, a wing and the neck of that "abominable thing"!

After a tasty dish of *puri* and vegetables, we bade our friend goodbye and attacked the road again. The path in the way that Himalayan paths have, played a bad joke upon us that day. We were congratulating ourselves on having all but reached Pamionchi, when it turned up hill and we found ourselves confronted with an ascent of some 2500 feet. We rested for a while in a cool shady spot by a small brook before beginning the long climb up. Once again we were ascending through terraces of rice-fields. It is a very long and tiring path. The sandals which I had been wearing could stand the strain no longer and completely gave way. And walking in bare feet, when one is not accustomed to it, is, as I can tell you, by no means very pleasant or amusing.

The principal advantage of taking photographs on a mountain is that the mountaineer is thus enabled to stop at frequent intervals and recover his breath. That is why most mountaineers carry cameras. Taking a photograph is a much more convincing excuse for a halt than a bootlace or button that needs adjusting. All those liable to be touched in the wind should take a camera. With what the reader will no doubt consider admirable foresight, I had brought my camera and not left it behind. And many were the times when I had to use it !



The summit of Pandim—finest of Kanchenjunga's satellites.

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On the way we passed a well-built, modern looking temple. It was here that the Dalai Lama stayed during a tour of Sikkim. As, in view of his extreme holiness, it was thought necessary to erect a temple at every place at which he spent a night, such a tour must be something of a drain on the purses of the local taxpayers.

At length, after one of the most tiring marches of the whole trip we reached Pamionchi. As we were trudging up to the dak-bunglow, we passed a large plot of ground, encircled by fences and prayer-flags, and some local music band seemed to be playing within. We peeped over and saw a strange sight. The men were arranged in a straight row while their instruments consisted of very long metal-chased and ornamental horns, flutes, drums and cymbals.

My first impression was of a hideous medley of sound, which seemed completely tuneless and unintelligible. But as my ears gradually grew accustomed to the din, I became aware of a perceptible rhythm. Like most Eastern music, it was rythmical rather than tuneful. I seemed to be carried away, mentally, from the Twentieth Century, conveyed on the wings of this strange music into the very heart of this mystic mountainland, where time and space are limitless and man is re-incarnated through eternity. The bass note of the great horns and the beat of the drums boomed of the might of the gods, the thunder of their avalanches, the roar of the wind, the solemn roll of the storms that beat about the buttresses of their mid-aerial thrones. There was a *motif* of mystery and sadness and acceptance of life, but now and then a cheerful upward trill from the flutes seemed to denote courage and hope, while the clash of the cymbals spoke of the torrent hastening between the ranks of high mountains. In this country, one day is but a repetition of the last, and music is but an echo of life itself. A couple of rupees will perhaps purchase a Tibetan musical instrument, but a king's ransom will not pur-

chase its music. Play the same music on the plains or in the city and it would sound but mean, but played on the slopes of the Himalayas it spoke of the greatness of Nature and man's eternal struggle with her.

It was late in the afternoon when we arrived at the dak-bunglow. We had been blessed with glorious weather throughout the day and though it had been very exhausting, we had enjoyed every mile of a march which, as Mr. Antia said later, was worth an expedition in itself. To our inquiries about the "mochi," we were told that he had left just that morning for Kewsing. We were however assured that we should surely get him the next day. It was a big disappointment but———well, it could not be helped !

Two hours later, the rest of the party had also arrived. Now we were all longing to reach Darjeeling as quickly as possible. Our biggest grouse was the food. This had not worked according to plan. Even on our high camps—not to speak of the return—we had constantly craved for something more substantial than corn-beef and sardines. We had thought that altitude would dull our appetites, but our policy of acclimatisation had proved so successful that tastes were different. Mr. Bapasola's constant plaint was, "Oh for some ghirum nu dhansak"—by 'ghirum' he meant a big fat chicken; Saklat wanted some "pork bindalu"; and I sighed for a "Magnolia Tiffin" or "Pie"!

Towards evening, the sluggish monsoon mists drifted asunder. Summits peered through from immeasurable distances. Far up the valley a lonely peak glowed in the declining sun. Day's cold fires were drawn by the dark stokers of night. Peace and contentment were ours as we sat round the dinner-table. Between whiles we yarned; yarned of incidents already almost forgotten, of delights and difficulties, of humours and hardships. Of what we had done and what we might have done, of Calcutta and Camp Two, of hot steaming bath-tubs and the cold on Kanchen-

junga, of our favourite restaurant in town and the cooking of Kirken & Co. We were not the only ones to make merry. From the direction of the porters' quarters came a constant chatter of voices punctuated with guttural laughs—the care-free laughter of men, who had found happiness in the knowledge of work well accomplished.

It was late when we turned in for the night. Felt rather than seen were the mountains all around. A million stars eyed us. Later, Silence, the great voice of the Universe, lulled us to sleep.

For the first time since I left Calcutta, I lay in a bed. No one but an adventurous traveller can know the luxury of sleep. Careless of the future, reckless of the past; with a mind interested by the world; with the consciousness that nothing can regulate the fortunes of the morrow—this is the fellow, who sinks into such a repose, that nothing can disturb his rest. Mr. Bapasola was usually the earliest riser and he was wont to rouse the camp by a stentorian bellow of "Rustomjee, what's the time?" or occasionally he used to vary it with a "Pestonjee". And one must remember that the volume of his voice is commensurate with the inches of his frame.

His method was generally very good. But on this particular morning, as it happened to wake me, I just turned over with a sleepy grunt and tried to enjoy another forty winks. Alas, it was not to be; for soon there came a whole series of bellows from the "boss" !

As I rose, I watched through my window dawn's alchemist transmute to pearl and gold the distant leaden snows. The weather promised to be good. At last after days we saw Kanchenjunga and its satellites clearly again. The mists had rolled back and had relinquished their hold on the mountains and had retreated to the valleys below, where they congregated in sullen battalions ready for a further assault on the heights.

I tried on Mr. Antia's tennis shoes—my fourth pair—for the march to Kewsing. A couple of miles down is the bazaar of Gezing. The path from here onwards is so broad that a baby motor-car might be driven along it for miles on end, but Heaven forbid that these solitudes of the Himalayas should suffer such a fate: let civilisation cherish its noise and the Himalayas its quietude.

The bazaar is a quaint little place. Like other villages in this part of the world, it is built anywhere and anyhow, and its streets, if such a name can be applied to the refuse-stinking channels between the houses, run in any and every direction. Yet even this remote little corner possessed its social amenities. There is a school, a collection of ragged little urchins every whit as impudent and potentially intelligent as their Calcutta prototypes, ruled by a headmaster even more ragged and disreputable in appearance than they were, while his long melancholy face wore an expression of patient martyrdom. On the entrance of the school was drawn a big V and scribbled underneath it were the words "For Victory"! There were also several fruit-shops and a couple of tailors, who were the proud possessors of an aged sewing-machine. But, alas, there was no cobbler.

From here we descended for about five miles before we arrived at the Ranjit Chu. There is a small village on its right bank consisting of a few huts. Our porters were in great spirits and I noticed that most of the men deviated from the path in order to visit this village. After a very pleasant lunch, we crossed the river over a fine bridge and started to climb a sloping gentle ridge. We had been warned that it was a very lengthy one so we took it as easy as possible.

We had not gone very far up before we at last met our long-delayed friend the leech, when Saklat pointed out to us his bleeding leg. Apparently they

have their own telegraph system, and leeches all along the road seemed to have been warned of our coming. We got used before long to watching our shoes and flicking the creatures off before they had got a real hold on us. These pests are the most unpleasant feature of journeying through the tropical valleys of Sikkim. They are especially numerous during the monsoon. Ungorged they are about the thickness of a match, and a little shorter. Gorged, they attain the dimensions of a large slug. They are blind and attack by scent alone, but their nasal acuteness more than compensates for their blindness. Stop for but a few moments and they approach from all directions. Their method of progress is peculiar and comical. Raising their heads in the air, they bend forward and attach themselves, apparently by the mouth, to the ground in front. The tail is then brought up against the head with the body arched between, and the head makes another forward lunge. Had it not been annoying, it would have been amusing to see these eager little blood suckers.

The powers of insinuation and penetration of a leech are great. It can get in through the eyehole of a boot, while the drill-like head is capable of boring through even a layer of puttee ! It is a mistake to pick a leech off once it has become attached to the skin, as its head may be left in the wound and this may lead to blood poisoning, or at least a nasty festering sore. Salt is one of the few things it dislikes and the usual method of forcing it to release its hold is by dipping a bag of salt in water and letting the brine drop on to it. Another excellent method practiced by the porters is to apply something hot, like the burning end of a cigarette. Incidentally, while on this subject, I have been told that it is a useful tip to put tobacco leaves in the stockings. Although leeches enjoy one's blood, they object to having to chew tobacco first in order to get it ! In the absence of human beings and beasts, how do leeches manage to exist ?

On our way up, we passed a little rivulet fringed with mosses and that most beautiful of Himalayan flowers, the mecanopsis (blue poppy). Its petals are as blue as a glacier lake and its stamens as golden as the sunset glow on the great peaks beneath which it grows. These were the first we had seen for a long time and we greeted them gratefully. And from between these lovely blue flowers rose the great white lilies of the Sikkim valleys. All flowers are said to have a meaning, and the lily means duty; that is why it seems so cold, even cruel, in its waxy spotless whiteness. But the mecanopsis which stands for homely happiness, looked well in graceful clusters round the stern centre of duty! What would mountains or mountaineering be without their contrasts between the little things and the great things? These flowers were as important to us as Kanchenjunga for their diminutive petals were symbolical of the small and homely things of life and these things the mountaineer turns to with rejoicing and gratitude. Only by knowing the ugly can we adore the beautiful and only by seeing the small can we appreciate the great.

As Metha and I walked along the path, we noticed one of our porters ahead of us. While we approached him, we saw that his walking both in execution and direction, was decidedly very erratic. We watched him a trifle anxiously for the edge of the path was unprotected and there was a sheer precipice of several hundred feet into the Ranjit river. As we passed him we received a foolish grin. It was Kirken. And a Kirken who had partaken of spirituous liquor. Kirken, the stolid, the sober, the respectable was drunk! Now we knew why our porters had visited the village below near the river. Kirken was not the only one. As we went on, we passid Tulabir, laughing at the top of his voice, all entangled in the rope with which he carried his load and Sing-ting-rue, looking preternaturally solemn, a rare thing for him, fumbling about in vain to untie him. These were not the least

amusing incidents of the day and were solely the result of the local firewater.

Kewsing is a large village and boasts of a bazaar of its own and a splendid dak-bunglow. But otherwise, it has nothing very special to recommend it. Once again, we were told that the "mochi", so badly needed now, had left but a few hours before us. I do hope that all the curses we showered on him then do not really take effect.

During the day, one of our best porters, Pemba, had complained of a severe pain in the abdomen. I now gave him a dose of Chlorodyne and followed it up later with some Epsom salts. This drastic treatment worked ! Within a few hours, there was a magical change, he was quite all right and had knocked out as he told me afterwards some worms. I had not expected this at all. I may mention, however, that "worms" seems to be a very common complaint with all these hillmen. At the same time these people love to take medicine. Seeing Pemba cured, some of the others suddenly developed complaints and they were followed by the chowkidar of the dak-bunglow and many other villagers. They all demanded the same medicine that had cured their comrade. I do not know whether Pemba to play a trick on them told them that the medicine had tasted wonderful ! Whatever it may have been, here was I landed with a clinic of some twenty patients. As I had no adequate supplies to deal with such a situation, I was forced to content myself with the administration of Epsom salts and castor oil, given with a feeling of thankfulness that I should not pass this way again.

A little later a number of people might have been seen imbibing large quantities of these purgatives with every appearance of gusto and enjoyment, whilst an old monk lay on the ground in order to have some salts poured into his ear, for as he himself said, he was possessed for his sins of a terrible earache. Grati-

tude then arrived in the form of every comfort that the dak-bunglow and village could give us. I can imagine no more satisfying holiday for a medical man than a tour through the valleys of Sikkim adequately equipped to treat these charming people with the skill and care they deserve.

Amid these lower foothills of the Himalayas there are few signs of commercialism. True, man has hacked a way here and scraped a clearing there, but generally speaking the country is the same as it always has been. Very touching indeed are the signs of human industry and patient tillage, where human need seeks to wrest its supplies from the rocky and reluctant hand of Nature. Up here in the evening stillness, I experienced for the first time in my life that subtle feeling of joy and sorrow intermixed which comes to all who are born with the love of the mountains. Joy for the vision and hope of the unknown, and sorrow in realising how many adventures there are to seek and how pitifully short is the life in which to seek them. Was it a feeling akin to this that prompted the French poet to write:

"La rose a toujours son epine,
Chaque bonheur a son lendemain,
La joie a son heure chagrine,
Un ciel tout bleu se cherche en vain."

I thought of what I had once heard a beautiful woman say: "Life is sad—no, not life, but the silliness men make it." But it cannot really be so. It cannot be a silly thing with no meaning, inconsequent, without an answer. There must be an answer somewhere. The beauties of Nature and the unexpected nobility of man under severe travail are perhaps sufficient justification for our living on and on.

Night fell; a delicious coolness and fragrance of moist turf ushered in her stars.

Our last objective, before reaching Darjeeling, was Namchi and the road is an easy one, As usual

there is a big descent which continues for about three miles before it gives way to an almost flat, even path. Near about noon we arrived at Damthong, where we had a quiet lunch and Mr. Bapasola some forty winks thrown into the bargain.

On the way the porters became very confidential. They narrated their past experiences with the big expeditions on which they had been employed. Some had been with the International and Bavarian parties on Kanchenjunga, while others boasted of Everest. We tried to join in by occasionally putting in a few words of Nepali that we had learnt. This caused them great fun and earned us much applause. Mountains can overcome barriers of race and language and have a knack of bringing men together. Beneath the ragged and odorous exteriors of these Sherpas beat true hearts of gold. I have said it before, I say it again—they are adventurers.

No account of this fairyland can be complete without a word of the butterflies which have made Sikkim so famous. It is truly delightful to see these gorgeous creatures—big and small, yellow, blue, sea-green, magenta, purple and a host of lovely colours—constantly flitting about, visiting a multitude of flowers from small buds hardly an inch above the ground to the great white lilies. While the soft moss that covers every bare patch lodges the deep-resonant beetle whose long constant whine echoes and re-echoes through the glades. I have always found it remarkable that there should be so many more beautiful creatures in the world than man, which suggests a doubt of man's boast that he is made in the image of God. Most people believe that the image of God must transcend in its beauty the finite conceptions of man. If that be so and God chose to create any animal in His own likeness, man must have trailed at the far end of that celestial beauty contest.

As though each place tries to compete with the other, Namchi possesses a really superb dak-bunglow.

It is admirably situated on a grassy, sparsely wooded ridge and commands lovely views to the north and south. The dak-bunglows of Sikkim are theoretically run by the government of that State, but actually it is the British Government that is primarily responsible for their upkeep. Each one is in charge of a native caretaker. All those we stayed at were clean and comfortable. Their positions are also admirable and the sites were obviously chosen by someone with an eye for scenic beauty. A pass is required to stay at these bunglows, but as we did not have one, we always had to ask for permission from someone on the spot.

Mr. Bapasola had a great flair for quoting, and when the Namchi caretaker, who spoke quite good English, asked how many we were, our 'boss" in a grand theatrical tone replied: "Seven in all, she said, and wondering looked at me." I could not suppress a giggle, but it seemed to impress the other fellow and it was a pass as good as any other!

Avari, Metha, Saklat and I made up a "four" for bridge; and we spent hours together in shuffling and dividing a pack of cards with the usual conversation in high spirit which accompanies this game of why he had not returned that diamond, or led the club or trumped the queen with the ace. Saklat and I were in luck and we won rubber after rubber. As Mr. Bapasola was again suffering from one of his most acute attacks of chicken-egg-fever, a man was dispatched post haste to the bazaar with orders to go through the place with a small comb and bring back with him the largest chicken he could procure and every egg he could find, irrespective of age or quality. Alas! Though his efforts were successful, we were not able to indulge in an orgy for the chicken proved too tough to be eaten. But we were nevertheless in great spirits. The end was in sight. Tomorrow at this time it would be all finished. Another adventure would be then over.

The scene outside was truly beautiful. The moon hung low over the eastern hills, which against her

honeyed radiance were silhouetted in frozen grandeur. Overhead the stars spangled the fathomless sky with a myriad frosty scintillations.

Man's reign was suspended; Nature ruled supreme.

In the dark face of the dak-bunglow, all through the night, two dimly lighted windows, like steadfast human eyes, looked pensively out on that world of cold and passionless beauty.

We were all up very early next morning and it did not require Mr. Bapasola's "Rustomji" to do it either. It was a very long march. This last journey can be divided into two parts—seven miles down to the Great Ranjit River at Manjither and then seven miles up to Darjeeling, included in which is an ascent of nearly 6,000 feet. The weather was even clearer than it had been hithertofore. The woods through which we descended were whispering the secrets of the slow dawn wind; the call of a cuckoo came joyously from a distant ridge. Day was already fashioning her twisted pillars of cloud.

It was really a pleasant and easy trudge down. At Manjithar the Great Ranjit River makes a huge bend, slowly eating away the rocks. This river forms the frontier of Bengal and Sikkim. A magnificent suspension bridge hangs over it, and there is a British frontier post at its other end, with a Gurkha soldier in charge. We were once again challenged for our passes but as at Tonglu we passed over safely.

Once over, up and up we tramped. Mr. Bapasola and Metha had gone ahead as the latter wished to meet his younger brother who is in a school at Darjeeling. It was extraordinarily warm. Gusts of heat met us, and the sun scorched us from above. Runnels of sweat coursed down our foreheads as we passed through tea-garden after tea-garden. Late that afternoon we arrived at Lebong and from there took a bus to Darjeeling. This vehicle was as curious as that

in which we had started our journey. The engine would stop every short distance. The lorry would have to be pushed back a few yards, when it would suddenly start again. As Avari said it was a "back-starter".

As soon as we alighted at Darjeeling I went directly to a shop and bought a pair of sandals, for my feet were rather sore and it would be days before I would be able to wear shoes again—Mr. Antia's tennis pair had split somewhere near Lebong. At the latter place and also at Darjeeling crowds were collecting and staring at us. We were a pretty sight to see no doubt, but we had to answer their questions of where we had been, how high we had climbed, what had happened and sundry other things. Saklat was our publicity-agent and he had to give several impassioned speeches which were a curious mixture of English, Hindustani and Gujerati all in one. Our men swaggered nonchalantly through the throng, bearing with them tents, ice-axes, beddings, store boxes and other expedition equipment.

At the station, Mr. Davar was there to greet us. Metha and the "boss" had already arrived and their clean-shaved features were in such remarkable contrast to ours that I could not help saying "I believe, I last met you gentlemen in Darjeeling about three weeks ago, didn't I?" A dinner of "ghirumnu dhansak" had been ordered by Mr. Bapasola—there were five "ghirums" in the *dal*—and it was surprising how the seven of us were able to polish off that enormous amount.

Some of our Darjeeling friends then came over and they listened to tales of great success and bitter disappointments, of frozen camps, of glorious sights—all seeming of so long ago that a conscious effort was required to realise that such were indeed our memories of the past. The old things we had left behind claimed us now, and at the time we would not have had it otherwise. A real appreciation of life is made up of

contrasts. Comfort can only be judged by discomfort. Civilisation cannot be properly appreciated unless you have lived in the wild. No man can claim to be a gourmet until he has sampled native cooked food. For the past three weeks we had lived as men can only live in these unknown regions. Our eyes had searched wide horizons and great mountains; we had experienced hardships; we had sweated and we had shivered; we had known comradeship; we had gazed upon ugliness and beauty; we had found peace.

Later, Avari, Saklat and I went to a cinema and saw the "Thief of Bagdad" and I wished that a *jinn* had come and carried me to that mighty summit that I had so longed for. As we were returning, I put in a trunk call to Calcutta to assure all our people that everything had been just "okay." As though the "dhansak" had not been enough, we stopped at a small restaurant and filled ourselves with curd and many queer sweatmeats. Replete to bursting-point, we tottered back to the station and spent the remainder of the night sleeping off our shameless gluttony.

Next day, we took leave of Mr. and Mrs. Davar, who had been so kind to us and of our other hospitable friends as we left Darjeeling. When memories of physical suffering have faded away, the spirituality of an adventure makes itself felt. A little word here, a comic event there, or some great sight presented to the eyes—these remain. They are little things perhaps, but they are the eternal things. Of that last journey from Darjeeling, there are two events that are memorable for me. The first is that I shall always remember Kirken's horny hand, as they grasped mine in a last good-bye while the train moved out of the station. May I soon see him and all those wonderful porters again.

The second was a little later. It was a glimpse of the glorious snows that are seen from Darjeeling. Silently I gazed at Kanchenjunga as we jerked on. It had given us and had also taken some hard knocks. It

was a giant with all a giant's meaningless passions and illogical rages. A range of towering cumuli clouds rested on the foothills, whose crests were sharply defined against a saffron sky. Grand, solid, immovable they stood, as eternal as the great mountain over which they stood watch and ward. And as I gazed at that wonderful mountain, her haunting features came over my mind as I had seen them from the South Col and it was difficult to believe that we had actually been there. But the rattle of the carriages broke my thoughts. Into the stainless air, and at an immeasurable distance from the common things of earth rose those everlasting hills. One last regretful glance at that brown valley, silver peak and blue sky—and as we turned round the corner, they were to be seen no more.

But ever shall I remember that glorious sight from the top of the world, one wintry morning of those "Five Treasures of the Snow" whom the natives call Kanchenjunga—the home of the great Kangmi of HIMACHAL.

APPENDIX I

PHYSIOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF HIGH CLIMBING

Let me confess at the very outset that as the "Medical Officer" of the Kanchenjunga Expedition of 1941, I am an "impostor." My qualifications for the post were wholly inadequate, and at the same time, my opportunities for doing this kind of job thoroughly were naturally rather meagre. Knowing this well enough, my companions must indeed have been very brave to risk me for the post with that grand old argument that "something is better than nothing." Nevertheless it was lucky not only for me *but also for them* that the health of the expedition was, throughout, extremely good! Yet it is dangerous to take such risks and a good qualified man must always be taken. All expeditions cannot expect to be so lucky as us.

We may divide the evil effects of great altitudes into three parts: mountain sickness, acute and chronic, and altitude deterioration. Mountain sickness in either form is due to oxygen lack. The acute type does not concern us. It is met with where civilisation has made it possible for men to ascend to great altitudes before their bodies have accustomed themselves to the changed conditions. The chronic form is met with in all those who attempt to climb the greater peaks of the world. Its manifestations vary according to the physical fitness of the individual, the rate of the ascent and the conditions under which it is made, and his power of "acclimatisation." There may be breathlessness on the slightest exertion, lassitude, headache, sleeplessness, cyanosis, and an insidious impairment of the mental powers. Besides these, frostbite and snow-blindness are also common dangers to be guarded against.

Physiologists have made many assertions and have devised a number of tests which the prospective climber has to pass before he may be considered as fit. But the capacity to hold the breath for a long period,

or to blow up mercury to great heights has little or no bearing on the subsequent fitness of the climber on the mountain where only genuine stamina, physique, and will-power avail. Before we went, we had undergone these examinations and one of us had been pronounced unfit owing to a weak heart. It subsequently happened that he was one of those who went very high and was none the worse for it. So much for the text-books !

Breathlessness in the thin air of high mountains is the symptom of oxygen lack which impresses itself most forcefully upon the climber. The normal pressure of oxygen which is 152 mm. Hg. at sea level goes on decreasing at higher altitudes and conseqently the tension of oxygen in the air is also correspondingly decreased. Gradual fall of oxygen pressure, however, causes no great inconvenience. It is only when a person rises very high rapidly that "mountain sickness" symptoms set in. In this connection it is interesting to note that at Sandakphu (12, 000 ft.), some of us experienced it in a slight form for the first time. Those who had previously been high, Metha, Saklat and myself were not at all affected by it. This shows what quick acclimatisation can do and I believe that proof is forthcoming that acclimatisation lasts over a period of some years, or that men who have recently been high have a greater acclimatising power.

Lassitude affected very differently the several members of the expedition. It is a symptom a little difficult to evaluate, for the spirit of competition is ineradicable among even the most intimate friends ! I have already once before remarked of this peculiar feeling which came over us while traversing the Chemathang Glacier.

Headaches were a very common complaint but fortunately were never sufficiently severe to interfere seriously with our enjoyment. They seemed to strike through the head from the back of the neck to the eyes and were probably induced by the intense sun glare plus of course an altitude to which our bodies

were not yet acclimatised. We found aspirin or vegenin tablets the best remedy and under their influence the headaches disappeared in a few minutes.

Despite careful observation, no cyanosis (blueness) was observed in any member of the expedition, whether at work or at rest. On the great ice-wall of the South Col, we encountered a very cold wind, and it was impossible to determine whether the blueness of my companions was due to lack of oxygen or to cold. My own opinion is that they were no bluer than they would have been at sea-level in such wind.

The mental effects of great altitude have wrecked the pleasure of many expeditions. The impairment of judgment and control produced by insufficient oxygen often makes men irritable and quarrelsome. That no quarrels occurred on the Kanchenjunga expedition is, I think due partly no doubt to our getting soon well acclimatised but chiefly to the fact that most of us belonged to the same generation. The special senses at great altitudes are frequently blunted, though this was a change not noticed by the majority. Prof. Haldane has written how, in his experiments with Dr. Kellas on the effects of low air-pressure, he sat in his steel-chamber with the pressure gradually rising towards the normal, and how at a certain level, the electric light glowed suddenly more brightly. At first he thought the current had been increased, but later came to realise that the change was in himself and not in the current. For us, shut in no steel chamber but walking slowly down the Chemathang Glacier to the Base Camp, depressed by wind, weather and painful feet, the whole aspect of life suddenly changed as we came down to a lower level. The sky seemed a brighter blue, the snow whiter and more scintillating and one began to smell and to hear more acutely. Not only are one's senses dulled at high altitude but one's mental processes suffer a like fate. The mountaineer, when faced by a problem "has to think twice before turning over in bed." The reader should also realise, that men under physical and mental stress have ex-

perienced many curious things on mountains. I have already narrated my own impressions during my solitary climb above Camp Two. Another strange affair was that of one of my friends who was always getting nightmares and would go on shouting until he woke up. I make psycho-analysts a present of these phenomena !

Frost-bite is a constant danger at great altitudes. It may occur as a dry gangrene or a moist form with large blisters full of fluid. The danger is greater on high mountains, not merely because of the extreme cold, but because the heart deprived of its proper supply of oxygen, works with diminished efficiency. It is well to remember that circulation once impaired is hard to regain over 18,000 ft. The brunt of this disease is borne by the skin, where the blood becomes almost stagnant at the point where the skin is subjected to pressure. There are three stages. The first is merely a temporary numbness, a loss of circulation which may be restored by rubbing or warmth. In the second stage, forstbite manifests itself in blisters and swellings charged with fluid. And lastly comes that worst stage of all in which the whole area affected becomes gangrenous. The best treatment in the very early stages would be to rub the affected area with more snow. Excepting for two porters, none of us were ever bitten, and even they soon recovered completely.

There is, perhaps, no real excuse for those who suffer from snow-blindness. It is extremely painful and is due to the fact that precautions are not taken by wearing goggles to protect the eyes from the unusually large percentage of ultra-violet rays, reflected from snow surfaces. Its first effect is by straining the optic nerve to put the vision out of focus. A profuse discharge follows and the eyes ache abominably. It is impossible to open them in the light without great pain, as the light seems to strike through them almost like a blow. There is a severe

hyperæmia and conjunctivitis. Fortunately, it is as brief in its effects as it is painful and two or three days' rest in the dark and treatment are usually sufficient to effect a complete recovery. We had no complain of this dreadful thing at all.

High climbing presents some problems for digestion as well. I have said somewhere that contrary to our expectations, we had a craving to eat all kinds of food. But I must mention that it was only a craving. Though we used to eat with relish, no great *quantity* could be swallowed. Really speaking we had only one meal a day which also was much smaller than that of an ordinary man. We had, just before starting in the mornings a cup of cocoa with a few biscuits. At about midday we usually had a couple of slices of bread, butter and jam—the bread being later replaced by chuppatis. Rarely as a delicacy, we also opened a tin of sardines between the seven of us. After pitching tents in the evening, we had a cup of cocoa or tea again with biscuits. And later in the night we had our single meal, which consisted of bully beef, or sausages with vegetables (while they lasted). From this, one can see that we truly existed on a Spartan diet. Although we had hard work to do all day and expended so much energy on it, we still had a very poor appetite. Height also impairs the power of the stomach to assimilate food, and the strongest constitution may be laid low by gastritis and other "tummy troubles". It is really difficult to keep the appetite up and consequenty rapid deterioration of strength is to be expected. We all lost weight, some about 7 or 8 pounds and a few as much as a stone. Lastly I must mention another evil effect of high altitude, which is to make the stomach very acid, and food tends to ferment rather than be absorbed by the normal processes of digestion. We found that bismuth tablets are a splendid neutraliser of this uncomfortable condition.

Before describing the third effect of great altitudes, the so-called high altitude deterioration, it is

necessary to explain "acclimatisation". Altitude has, metaphorically speaking, given you a straight left in the solar plexus and you double-up gasping for life-giving oxygen. But the body has remarkable powers of adapting itself to gradually diminishing oxygen pressure. If the spirit of man—his love for adventure, his pride in himself, his joy in exerting to the fullest—will drive him on to climbing the highest heights, he will find himself rising to the occasion; he will find both body and mind responding to the call of the spirit. The changes in the body which make this possible are :-

(1) Deeper and more frequent respirations, which withstand the rarefied air better than shallow and rapid ones. Oxygen want is the greatest cause of all the trouble experienced at high altitudes. Prof. Haldane has accounted for acclimatisation by assuming that the lungs actively secreted oxygen inwards. This oxygen secretion increases the oxygen supply to the blood at a very early stage of the ascent. The cells of the lining of the lung actively remove oxygen from the air and transfer it to the blood. The existence of any kind of oxygen secretion is, however, denied by a great many physiologists. In this battle of the giants, it is impossible for one like me to take part. All I can say in this connection is that our breathing was greatly increased to nearly twice the normal rate at an altitude of about 17,000 feet.

(2) There is an increase in the amount of haemoglobin and a great increase in the number of red blood corpuscles. At an early stage, oxygen-want causes a contraction of the spleen, which forces out into the blood stream a part of its store of red corpuscles. Thereafter by a more gradual process, the bone marrow—the factory of these corpuscles—enlarges and steadily increases its output. But this increase will not make possible the continuance of life at great altitudes. The R. B. C. are the means by which oxygen is carried from the air to the tissues. The new corpuscles cannot do their work unless at the

same time more oxygen is supplied for them to carry. This is brought about by an increased affinity of the haemoglobin for oxygen and increased absorption of oxygen into the blood by the most important aspect of acclimatisation, deep breathing, which we have mentioned above. An important point to remember is that oxygen-want increases the susceptibility of the respiratory centre in the brain to changes in the acidity of the blood. As the climber breathes more deeply he washes carbon dioxide out of his blood and so lowers the acidity of the latter. An "alkalosis" thus results. The most important element in acclimatisation is the overcoming of this alkalosis by an increased excretion of alkalis by the kidneys. Hence a compensation towards "acidosis" is produced and permanent deep breathing, with an increased oxygen supply, follows. A good suggestion of accelerating the process of overcoming this "alkalosis" is administration of ammonium chloride, a salt which is split up in the body into ammonia and hydrochloric acid.

(3) The heart rate rises and the cardiac output increases. I found that at rest, the rate of an individual at 16,000 feet had increased from the normal 72 to well over 100. At the same time there is also an increase in the total volume of the blood.

Now slow acclimatisation is a great disadvantage, considering the short time at one's disposal in which to attempt the mountain. How can it be done quickly? Possibly there is no short cut to it but I mention here two things that have been suggested to me. These experiments, I believe, were tried out in the past by an European expedition, but with what results it is not known. The first is that about 200 c. c. of blood should be withdrawn from each climber. The object is to lessen the blood presure, in order to counteract to some extent the low pressure of the atmosphere. It is difficult to see of what practical use this can be. As far as it is known, it is only by increasing the amount of haemoglobin that the body is able to adapt itself to the low pressure and lack of oxygen at high altitudes.

Also it is a well known fact that the body quickly remakes and replaces any blood that is lost. Another fact against it is that taking such a large quantity of blood away must inevitably result in a temporary weakening of the body, and therefore the climber's powers. It was with all this in mind that I had refused to part with any of my blood, even as an experiment. As I have mentioned blood pressure, I should also mention one interesting fact. Before I went, my blood pressure had been taken several times and found to be $\frac{128}{85}$; when I returned it had fallen to as low as $\frac{105}{70}$ and remained at that level for several days. Does the body in some obscure way make such a compensatory change? Physiologists have always maintained otherwise—that the blood pressure should rise instead of fall. However, from one single instance, a deduction can never be drawn.

There is more to be said for the second suggestion, although it has really no physiological basis. The state of an acclimatised body at high altitude closely resembles the effect of anaemia at a normal altitude. Although the haemoglobin is increased, it is still proportionately much less to what is actually required, and the mountaineer thus suffers mostly from poverty of blood. Now anaemia is a condition where there is a poverty of blood due to the lack of red corpuscles and haemoglobin and it has been found that ordinary liver eaten by the patient has the effect of improving the condition. Hence if tablets of concentrated liver are swallowed by the climber regularly, it might help in some way.

Whether to take oxygen on a mountain or not will always be an open question. Where a man has become well acclimatised, oxygen will be useless. If oxygen could be continuously used on the upper part of a peak, its effects would be good, but used intermittently it serves only to stimulate the body for a short time, while the subsequent reaction is severe. The weight of the present-day apparatus prohibits prolonged use

and by tiring the climber neutralises the effect of the oxygen. There have been five men in the past who have reached over 28,000 feet on Everest, and three of them did it without oxygen. Presumably then if 28,000 feet could have been reached, it would not be impossible to go a thousand or even two thousand feet higher. Besides the thought of oxygen has always been abhorrent to mountaineers. I confess to a similar prejudice. There seems something almost unfair in climbing a mountain by such artificial means. Nevertheless, I think oxygen should always be taken, for it might be of use in resuscitating an exhausted man as its effect is surely superior to that of alcohol.

A word of warning must be sounded here against alcohol. Besides other deleterious effects, brandy has a reputation among the lay public of helping to keep the body warm. It is really just the contrary. Alcohol is a mild antipyretic and thus increases the heat lost from the body. It is therefore harmful to take alcohol during exposure to cold, for although there is a subjective sensation of warmth, it lessens the power of the body to conserve heat. Hence during a climb, alcohol is more dangerous than useful. But against this is the fact it is valuable when taken as a night-cap for it has the power of inducing good sleep.

I have left to the last the discussion of the problem of altitude deterioration. By some its very existence is doubted. To others its importance ranks equally with that of acclimatisation. It is of no significance for a climber to say, "I have lived for many days over 20,000 feet and I have never seen it". As well might a doctor deny the existence of malaria because in his passage through a mosquito-ridden valley he had never seen a case. Its occurrence depends on many factors and it is shown that it can sometimes be avoided.

With us, the deterioration was slight but in my view, none the less present. Though we could climb even at 18000 feet quite swiftly, we were also con-

scious of symptoms, slight but definite, of degeneration. If I read to the other members of the expedition what I wrote in my diary during our return, which is in substance, what I repeat here, it will be agreed to by all as a fair account of our condition. Our appetites had begun to suffer. We ate less heartily on our return though we were gradually getting lower and lower. A lack of energy began to show itself. The delights of Darjeeling and Calcutta were more frequently mentioned. In general, a tendency to go home began to be manifest.

In the face of this body of evidence it is idle to deny that deterioration occurs. We cannot with such certainty ascribe it to a definite cause. There might be some psychic reason. Men become stale, and "sick of the job" and their changed mental attitude is reflected in a diminution of energy. It has been suggested that the C-Vitamin shortage may have something to do with the case. But I think, of all possible causes, prolonged oxygen-want must take the first place. Experience points in this direction. Argyll Campbell showed that rabbits, rats and mice, well fed and acclimatised can exist in a decompression chamber for at least seven days under continuous exposure to low oxygen pressure equivalent to that at the top of Everest. The animals exhibited some activity but deteriorated rapidly. Cats and monkeys could not tolerate the condition for so long a time. The animals lost appetite, weight and energy as do human beings. On post-mortem examination, degenerative changes were found in the heart, liver and kidneys.

It is argued, with truth, that we do not know that what happens to another animal happens to a man. But animal experiment was ever found to be a useful indicator of changes occurring in man, and until human evidence in either direction can be obtained we must bear in mind the probability that degenerative changes occurring in Campbell's animals occur to a certain extent in man. It has been argued that all Everest climbers became fit on their return to low

altitudes. So did the animals. No mountaineer has also yet been found who will on his return submit to an autopsy in the cause of science ! Probably there are many other factors which enter into this problem. The importance of the subject to climbers is great and further work should be done to find out something about it.

I have mentioned all this so that future expeditions might go prepared to face the difficulties and be well equipped. Such parties also should remember that these great problems do not obscure the little ones. Each member should carry with him his private store of medicine, most important in which are laxatives. The best laxatives are not irritant vegetable preparations but salts. Not more than twenty-four hours should elapse without a dose. On the contrary some may suffer from diarrhoea. Blisters on the feet and even corns are occurrences from which none can escape, hence precautions should be taken. Lastly as I have said before, one should not venture out in the heat, without adequate head protection, for it is possible to get sunstroke. Sunstroke is much more common on high altitudes than at sea level. In Florida, for instance, though the summer sun is intensely hot, sunstroke is unknown. There are some who sneer at such precautions; I think they are thick-headed in more senses than one.

APPENDIX II

LESSONS OF THE EXPEDITION: RETROSPECT & PROSPECT

It is not so easy to be wise even after an event—especially when that event was a Kanchenjunga Expedition, for any attempt to lay down a rule or set of rules, to govern future effort is sure to be shipwrecked on the quicksands of those mysterious phenomena over which there can be no human control. What has happened one year will not, cannot, be exactly repeated in another; and so intricate and indeterminate are the forces brought into play that dogmatism is a waste of time. Nevertheless, the experiences which we have undergone, might go some way towards the placing of facts and theories in their proper relationship. To make the same mistake as one's predecessors is inexcusable. That these mistakes may not be made, I propose in this last chapter to attempt an analysis, critical, and explanatory of the past; and to offer a few suggestions for the future, in the hope that they may be of service.

1. THE ROUTE

The route that takes the mountaineer via Sandakphu and Phalut to Jongri is one of immense difficulty. It means the entire crossing of the Great Singalila Ridge, which is the longest mountain range of the Himalayas. At the same time, there are many steep ascents over rough and dangerous roads to be made and they take a lot out of a climber. This seems to be a useless waste of energy before the mountain is reached. At the same time it must be remembered that the party may be faced like us with the disagreeable situation of finding no water for days, at least till they arrive at Migothang. Compare this with the road by which we returned. The journey is shorter, the roads are good, the mountains are not so steep and there is enough water to be had all the way through. Thus the latter route seems to be the ideal one by which to reach the mountain.

But the crossing of the Great Singalila Ridge has one big advantage—that of acclimatisation. The mountaineer is daily at an altitude of above 14,000 feet and has got used to the rarefied air before he has reached the base. On our return journey through Sikkim, we never reached an altitude over 6,000 feet. This is an important point to remember.

The route, however, will depend, on which side of the mountain the party decides to stage its attack. If from the north-east, then the road from Gantok to the Green Lake has to be selected; if the north-west or the Yalung Glacier route, then from Jongri the Kang La has to be crossed into Nepal. Whichever is selected the points to remember are:

(*i*) The route must not be unnecessarily difficult and tiring;

(*ii*) It must be one which will help the party to acclimatise quickly.

2. THE WEATHER

There is no other factor, which plays so important a part in the fortunes of any expedition as the weather. It makes for success or failure. There are only two short seasons in which to attack Kanchenjunga, before and after the monsoon; and, alas, both are pitifully short, the total time available being no longer than four or five weeks and even this is liable to be interrupted by local bad weather.

"Mountains make their own weather", and there is no better example of this truism than Kanchenjunga. Generally speaking, the more isolated a mountain or mountain group, the greater are its fluctuations of climate. Standing as Kanchenjunga does, towering above all its satellites and rising straight out of deep humid tropical valleys and exposed to the full blast of the south-west monsoon, local bad weather is only to be expected. Data can only be gathered by experience, and so very few have visited this region that it is not possible yet to say definitely whether it is better to attempt the mountain before or after the monsoon.

Wind will always be man's greatest enemy on the mountain. If it was gentle in the mornings, there was usually a gale of great violence blowing in the afternoons. This was naturally a source of considerable danger to the parties on the mountain and greatly hampered the work. On the day I was climbing those rocks above the Guicha La, I found that my eyes were burning, at times furiously, due to a very strong wind. On my return to Camp 2, I found that my companions had not experienced any such storm. This shows that on occasions these storms occupy a horizontal stratum of no great vertical thickness, and their approach is invariably sudden and most disconcerting.

The Munich Expedition of 1929 had approached the mountain at the same time of the year as we did. They had experienced but little wind, but they were on the sheltered side of the mountain, and the wind blows almost invariably between south and west, and west and north. The great disadvantage of attacking the mountain after the monsoon is that every day is bringing the winter nearer. The Munich party, who were overtaken by a snowfall of seven feet towards the end of their attempt in October, considered that they were exceptionally unlucky, but although we had a similar experience, I consider them exceptionally lucky, like us, not to have had it before! The International Expedition of 1930 which made an attack early in May, had no such snowfalls but experienced tremendous wind; while the Everest expeditions in the last few years have shown that any attempt in the Himalayas before the monsoon is almost doomed to failure.

It will be recalled that Dr. Sur, the Meteorologist at Alipore had warned me that the monsoon was exceptionally late and due to the prevailing westerly winds, we must expect a series of western disturbances, resulting in blizzards and heavy snowfalls. His prophecy was unhappily too correct!

It was a pity that we had no maximum and minimum thermometer. No party should go into the Himalayas without one, for interesting data can be

obtained if its readings are studied on a mountain group such as Kanchenjunga. Another useful instrument would be a wet and dry bulb thermometer. With these two simple pieces of apparatus, combined with an aneroid, some valuable observations of weather could be made.

To sum up then, we might say that as regards weather the Kanchenjunga region is not favourable to the mountaineer. Sudden storms of wind and snow are liable to strike with but little warning. Wind in particular blows on the upper ridges with paralysing intensity. Remember that porters will face most things but wind demoralises them completely. Perhaps in its fury they recognise the wrath of the gods !

My own suggestion is that the most favourable time is just after the monsoon. But the monsoon must not be delayed. The beginning of October is perhaps the best time. The opportunity should be grasped as soon as it comes and the expedition go into battle for what it is worth.

3. EQUIPMENT & STORES

An expedition which expects to be away in a region like the Himalayas for a great number of days has an infinity of needs. Unfortunately we had no list at hand. And as this was our first experience of the Greater Himalayas, there were many things lacking, which meant as many hardships.

First and foremost is the question of the tents. We had large single-fly Bell tents, which were good as far as they went. But they were not wind-proof nor waterproof, and although they had sewn-in ground-sheets, the dampness was perceptible. An ideal tent would be one which has both these qualities, and on top of the ground-sheet there should be a thick tarpaulin. At the same time it should be as light as possible. The best thing of all among the camping equipment, is a synthetic rubber ground sheet for each climber. It is only necessary that it

should extend from the knee upwards and should be about one third of an inch thick. Not only does it keep one dry but it insulates one from the cold ground or snow, and are soft enough to eliminate the "inevitable stone." It was indeed unfortunate that we could not secure any.

I also hold that there should be several small tents to one or two big ones. This will help to increase the speed of the work on the mountain where the expedition will be broken up into several parties. But there is also another reason. The dweller in civilisation may argue that for each man to have his own tent is unnecessary and unsociable. Travellers and explorers, however, know the psychological value of privacy. During the days of monotony and hardship of a Himalayan expedition, the best friends may become sick of the sight of each other, and little habits of speech and manner that count for nothing in civilisation may jar intolerably. Only by being able to escape for a while is a man able to tolerate things, which normally he would not give a care to.

The question of high altitude boots requires close study. In an earlier chapter I have taken up this question at some length. Comparatively light boots, sparsely nailed and waterproof, will prove effective, so long as they are large enough to hold several pairs of socks. I think that the Kashmiri mountain foot-gear with slight modifications should prove to be very good and comfortable, though one would hardly care to go to a dance in them !

From boots to goggles seems a far cry, but the latter are just as important in their way. Snow-blindness is a most painful complaint, and the wearing of goggles was always insisted upon above Camp I. I used a pair of flying goggles, lent to me by a friend. The glass was orange-tinted, the curious property of which was that the lower part was less coloured than the upper, allowing one to see clearer. As they were also very large and fitted closely on the face, a good field of view was secured. These are important ad-

vantages for the mountaineer when climbing steep rock or cutting steps in ice. One has yet to find the man, brave enough to appear publicly in Calcutta with such a thing on his face, but of its utilitarian value there can be no question.

Heavy clothing does not necessarily spell warmth. It has now long been known that two layers of thin woollen material are warmer than one layer of thick. This was remembered when taking underclothing and shirts, pullovers, stockings and socks, and so forth. Mr. Bapasola had a leather windproof jacket and a cap to match it, which kept one exceptionally warm. Suitable gloves are difficult to design but they are essential. The hands must be kept warm while retaining a firm and fairly sensitive hold on the ice-axe. Otherwise accurate step-cutting becomes impossible. Perhaps the best gloves are those made of sheepskin. Puttees, especially those made in Kashmir, which consist of a strip of loosely woven and elastic woollen material, are also very useful. Lastly there should be some protection for the ears and face in the form of balaclavas or monkey-caps.

Mountain pikes are of course a necessity, but for higher work an ice-axe is essential. An ice-axe is as important to the high-altitude mountaineer as his bat to a cricketer. Ice-axes are of various forms and a good ice-axe is difficult to get. The ice that we encountered on Kanchenjunga was of a rubber-like toughness and many blows were needed to fashion a step. Usually about fifteen to twenty hard strokes were required. The axe I used was a very short one with a long and heavy pick; and to this day it bears striking witness to the hardness of the ice for the pick is bent round out of alignment.

Often were the times, when I regretted that none of us had a pair of crampons—those arrangements of spikes which when tied to a boot enable you to walk on fairly steep ice without the trouble of cutting steps. Although we took about 400 feet of rope I think that

future expeditions should take much more. Also some wooden pitons or stakes, used for fixing ropes on the steep upper slopes, for the safety of laden porters should not be forgotten.

The feeding of climbers at high altitudes is a very real problem. A mountaineer climbs on his stomach even more than a soldier crawls on his. Happiness or unhappiness, even success or failure are determined by the amount of food that can fill a man's internal anatomy. It may be an excellent thing on some obscure grounds of self-immolation to subsist in acute discomfort on a Spartan diet, but a Spartan diet is not going to get a man to the highest summits of the world. A mountaineer going to high altitudes should look after his stomach with as much care as most millionaires are forced to look after theirs. Variety is as essential as quality, for lack of it inevitably induces boredom, and boredom on a mountain is tantamount to a defeatist attitude of mind. I am dealing with this all-important question in detail, in the hope that the lessons may be of value to future expeditions.

An expedition must be fed first of all on its journey to its Base Camp, and then above its Base Camp on the mountain. I have said before that for a small mobile expedition, it is easy to live on the country. But that is not always possible, as we found. Beyond Phalut, we were not able to get anything. Rocks and rhododendron bushes cannot be eaten. On our return, however, after Yoksam, we did not open our stores at all but could buy everything from the villages. By everything I mean chicken, eggs, flour and vegetables. Hence very careful inquiries should be made beforehand as to what food will be obtainable.

Some of us were often afflicted by stomach disorders which manifested themselves in mild forms of colic, constipation and diarrhoea. How is this to be avoided? I believe that the cause of it is due to

extraneous matter and dust, including mica, in the food, and particularly to particles of mica in the local drinking-water. For this reason I strongly urge future expeditions to filter their water whenever possible. Another cause of stomach trouble, as I know to my cost, is due to eating improperly cooked chupatties. I know of no more indigestible dish than the improperly cooked chupatties that our cooks thought fit to impose on us. If these are to be eaten, though they are best avoided altogether, they should be as thin and crisp as a water biscuit. I do not know what is the ideal campaigning substitute for bread, excepting biscuits. The loaves that we carried with us from Darjeeling could not be eaten at all after four days.

An important consideration, and one that is liable to be neglected, is the adequate provision of food containing the vital anti-scorbutic vitamin C. How much the so-called "altitude deterioration" is due to lack of this essential vitamin is difficult to determine, but there is a strong probability that the deterioration both mental and physical, experienced by past Himalayan expeditions—and we were no exceptions—was partly due to lack of it. It may be possible at low altitudes to go without fresh food of any kind for a considerable time, but over 16,000 feet the slightest ailment is magnified many times. Our stock of vegetables and fruits came to an end at Churung, and thenceforward we had to fall back on our tin provisions. This resulted later in nearly everyone developing incipient scurvy which was evidenced in sores and boils.

For food above the Base Camp, precedent was to a large extent, our guide. From accounts of the Everest expeditions, we had found that any kind of food was unpalatable at 18,000 feet and nauseating above that. This idea was further strengthened when Metha, Saklat and myself recounted how we had been obliged to force ourselves to eat on the upper slopes of Amarnath, which was only an altitude of 15,000 feet ! In the event, however, all our preconceived notions went by the board, probably as a result of

acclimatisation. The painful spectacle was observed even at Camp 2 of climbers, who should have been languidly complaining of loss of appetite, in fact riotously demanding the commons of an ordinary robust man at the altitude of Calcutta. At greater heights we found that light sugary foods were most suitable such as jams, biscuits, chocolate, condensed milk and sugar. Tinned fish was also in great demand, but not any kind of meat. The only kind of way in which meat was taken was by drinking bovril at bed-time. It was a great favourite with all.

At high altitudes the body resembles an engine that must be constantly supplied with fuel for heating and running—not fuel in large quantities at a time, tending to choke it, but small quantities at short intervals. This fuel is sugar. It is by far the most important food and particular attention should be paid to it. Sugar is to the mountaineer climbing over 18,000 feet as petrol is to a motor car. It is an excellent plan to carry it in the pocket in the form of chocolates and honi[illegible]se sweets, that do not induce thirst. Estimate for as much sugar as you think you will need, then double that estimate or safer still treble it—and you may with luck have enough ! A point to remember is that porridge can be eaten at any altitude and so also can eggs, which also supply any meat that the body may require.

Good cooking equipment must also be provided. A couple of Primus stoves should be taken with large quantities of kerosene. Meta solid fuel is excellent where a Primus stove cannot be employed. Aluminium utensils should not be forgotten, nor as with us, there should be a dearth of water-bottles !

Before bringing an end to this question, a final word is due to Avari and Saklat, who were in charge of the commissariat, and whose task it was to carefully ration and apportion the food ! The work of rationing is more likely to evoke blame than praise, and the fact that everything worked without a hitch goes to prove how efficient were the arrangements of this pair.

4. PORTERS

I have already taken up this question at some length in an earlier chapter. We paid our men a rupee a day as wages and four annas as the daily ration-money. This was pretty expensive. Kirken was, however, given a sardar's pay which was an extra rupee a day. On Everest in 1933 and in later years they were given only twelve annas a day as wages and six annas of rations. But our men insisted on higher rates than the regular ones, as this was the first expedition to an unknown district and no one knew what difficulties they would be up against.

It is best to leave the question of porters to someone experienced. At the same time preparations should be made long before the start, so that the best set of men can be selected. The real "old soldier" must be avoided like plague. Another type to be avoided, though often willing enough to do his best, is the man whom some mountaineering accident has caused to lose his nerve. He may seem cured at Darjeeling, but he cannot be trusted, for his trouble may return, and it is infectious. A good lot of picked men, are the best augury of success for the expedition. These porters have now developed an *esprit de corps* which ensures that any future expedition will have no difficulty in obtaining a fine body of men. Get to know your porters individually. We have found that, if only the porters like and trust a climber, they will follow him right to the top.

As I have pointed out Himalayan porters appreciate difficulty, but not danger. They place implicit confidence in their sahibs, whom they are prepared to follow anywhere. This confidence should not be abused. Their tireless gait, telling of perfect timing, coupled with a grand physique, makes them the finest natural climbers in the world. To us they were not merely porters, but genuine mountaineers and adventurers, who enjoyed a tussle with a great mountain as

much as we did and were as keen as we were to get to the top. About the splendid work they did, I can only say: "Let the records show."

Except when I go on a long trek, I hardly ever wear a hat, preferring to get God's good ultra-violet rays rather than to avoid the imagined dangers of sunstroke. But if I *had* a hat, I would take it off to this small loyal band of men and women, who accompanied us and whose names are recorded below.

Men	**Women**
Kirken Sherwa	*Peloo*
Sing-ting-rue	*Daphtee*
Kusum	*Singlamo*
Pemba	*Nimaroma*
Pasang	*Paljum*
Tulabir	
Purnama	
Anthile	
Ondi	
Mota	

5. PHOTOGRAPHY

These notes, based on three Himalayan expeditions, are intended to give some idea of the special difficulties of photography and cinematography in the Himalayas. Before leaving I had been especially warned as to the peculiar lighting conditions. In the valleys, sunlight appears brilliant, and the photographer is tempted to "stop down" his lens to a small aperture. Even assuming that one of the modern fast films is being used, this temptation must be resisted. Owing to the presence of water vapour in the air in addition to the cutting down of the light by towering valley sides, exposures in the lower Himalayas must be much longer than appears necessary. A good

average, using Super XX Kodak film, is an exposure of 1/25 second at F. 8 or even F. 11. The higher a climber proceeds, the quicker is the exposure required, until at 20,000 ft. at mid-day he will find it difficult to under expose. Many of my best exposed photographs were made at 1/50 at F. 16 and I often "stopped down" to F. 11 at 1/100 second, using a yellow filter of moderate density (k2). Above 10,000 ft. it is safer never to use a shutter speed of less than 1/50 second. I have however been told that I would have obtained better results had I used a red filter instead of a yellow one.

As regards cinematograph film, only Kodak panchromatic film was employed and 200 feet of this was taken. I used a 16 m. m. Magazine Cine Kodak taking 50 feet reels of film; this camera which was very kindly lent to me, is most easy to handle and the magazine can be replaced in a moment by another while still in use. On the whole, the results were quite satisfactory. It was very unfortunate that a colour reel was not obtainable at the time, or some really glorious "shots" could have been taken.

So much for the technicalities. People have told us that 200 ft. is nothing at all and that at least a few thousand feet should have been taken. I agree; but cinematography is a very expensive affair. It is impossible for a small expedition, which is a private enterprise and unsupported by public funds to spend so much on bringing back a big film. Besides films of these types are of not much interest. Let future parties remember this. The physical difficulties are considerable. Often one has to risk breaking his neck to get a good picture. In fact I do not remember taking some of the photographs and cinema "shots" on the upper parts, so dulled was my brain by altitude. The adventurer who would take a record of his work should remember that unless he has something very thrilling to offer the public, his film will not prove acceptable; he must concentrate on "human interest". He must remember that his pictures of scenery and

his miserable efforts at the authentic count for nothing against the sensational products of Hollywood and Elstree. His photographs of toil, danger and difficulty on the "Top of the World," which meant so much to him, are as naught when the "accidents," "avalanches" and "blizzards" are dramatised and faked by mechanical means in our studios. The public no longer recognise the unvarnished truth as anything but boring. Truth has been prostituted on the altars of "art". The cleverness of the faker has encompassed the death of truth and those who sit breathing the disinfected air of a cinema are incapable of realising the efforts of the mountaineer, who fumbles with frozen fingers at his ice-axe on the snows of the Himalayas. They have only their "personalities," that are best seen flat, on the film—flat personalities in two dimensions, imponderable and touchless. They will turn with relief from the sobriety of manhood, of truth and great enterprise, to the insobriety of vice, of the cabaret and dance-floor, and the murderous antics of the screen "gunman". Manhood exists no longer; Truth is dead and those, who contemplate a big unfaked film record of their expeditions will do well to mark the fact.

6. THE DOOMED MOUNTAIN

If someone asked me to-day whether our attempt was worth it, I would without hesitation answer, "Yes and Yes and yet again Yes." And if the chance should come again, we shall be the first to return to the mountains. We suffered hardships and difficulties but I maintain that it was worth it, worth it every time. It is the climbing that counts, whether the top be reached or not and the biggest task Nature has yet set man was too much for us. I do not think any of us felt any vain regrets. We had done our best in wretched circumstances. Due to lack of funds we were a peculiarly ill-equipped expedition, perhaps the worst that has ever gone out into the Himalayas. But human endeavour alone is not enough. A tremendous measure of good fortune must attend the climbers who would set foot upon that distant summit.

But will Kanchenjunga be climbed? That is a more difficult question to answer. Should the mountain be attacked from the south-east side, the anwer must be, no, unless the climber is prepared to take his life in his hands. Just by one narrow strip in space do the lower towers seem vulnerable but higher up the summit is surely unassailable. There is no other mountain in the world where the climber is exposed to greater dangers than he is on Kanchenjunga, for not only has he ice avalanches to contend with, but uncertain weather as well, weather incalculable both in cause and effect. The tremendous destruction wrought by these avalanches is truly dreadful. Millions of tons topple down in one single moment to destruction. Kanchenjunga was not in reality built for the mountaineer.

Perhaps it will be climbed after all, but most likely not in this generation and not by present-day mountaineering methods. The only route offering any hope would appear to be that attempted in 1929 by the Munich Expedition. But the difficulties are likely to be so great on the final rock pyramid that, taken together with the effects of altitude and inevitable wind, it is doubtful whether they can be overcome. Both mentally and physically it is going to require a supreme effort to climb the last 2000 feet or so. In all probability it may be one day reached by thoroughly acclimatised men, but the odds against them are great.

Col. Norton, who with Dr. Somerville reached 24,100 feet on Everest in the historic expedition of 1924, compares the respective dangers and difficulties of the two great mountains of the world and recalls that the highest point yet reached on Kanchenjunga even after repeated attempts is barely 24000 feet. He concludes by saying that technically Everest is an easy peak and that Kanchenjunga is in everything but actual height an infinitely more difficult mountain than Everest.

Nevertheless let us hope that the mountain is doomed for all that. We should take heart from the young of animals and birds as they daringly find their legs or wings. Man's capacities are never ending and if he exercises them they always expand. There are plenty of grounds for having more faith in ourselves.

Surely, surely it is worth while to pursue one of the last great adventures, which the surface of the earth has to offer.