

TENZING OF EVEREST

by
YVES MALARTIC





Tenzing wearing open circuit oxygen apparatus. *Wide World Photos*

Tenzing of Everest

BY YVES MALARTIC

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TO MY WIFE

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Y. M.

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Part One

THE MAN

CHAPTER I

The Defeated Man

“Exhausted by the expedition made with the Swiss in the fall, I had caught marsh fever at Katmandu at the beginning of December, 1952. I spent ten days at the hospital in Patna, in the province of Bihar before returning to Darjeeling. My weight had decreased by six kilos.”

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“Tenzing has exceeded the limits of his strength. Worn out by too strenuous efforts, he can move about only with pain and must be helped along.”

RENÉ DITTERT

The Nightmare

A MAN is lying in bed. From time to time he stretches out first one limb and then the other, or turns around to find a cool place between the sheets, which, wet with sweat, cling to his skin. His thoughts roam about in his brain, fogged with fever. Only rarely and momentarily does the remnant of a coherent idea take shape in his mind.

Disoriented by his memories, he confuses the symptoms of the fever with the other weaknesses to which he has grown accustomed: the pains in the joints resemble those felt after many hours of wading in powdered snow where you sink in up to your waist; the parching fever, the burning thirst of high

altitudes; the feverish delirium, the lethargy which lays a man low in the thin atmosphere of the peaks. The man does not know where he is, scarcely knows who he is. Sometimes, in the fusion of his dreams, he returns to friends long since forgotten, some of them dead; or he sees again, pictured in the distorting mirror of the fever, the events of his youth and even of early childhood. In the morning hours, when he recovers somewhat, he regains some coherency and makes use of it to reject the fantasies of the night. Then there is anguish at having clung stubbornly all through life to a task far above his strength; shame, at having disappointed the hopes of those who had held him dear, remorse, which arises from morbid scruples.

Nor is the present of any account to him, no more than he is of any account in this hospital ward, where he is only Number 6, between Numbers 5 and 7. All are as unknown as he is to the nurses and the doctors, who see them only as anonymous patients who will leave some day, either cured or dead.

Number 6 arrived the same night as Number 1. The next morning, as he makes the rounds, the doctor asks Number 1 in Hindi: "So you are the famous Tiger of the Snows?" The old man, spare and lean, but covered with hair like a bear, shakes his head and clearly does not understand. "Well," says the doctor, speaking to the nurse, "the Fathers of St. Francis' College have asked me to watch out for a man, one who has just returned from the Himalayas with a Swiss expedition. I don't even know what's the matter with him—"

The nurse knows nothing. When the doctor comes to Bed 6, he confirms the diagnosis made when the man was received. But he does not remember anything about the story of the Swiss Himalayan expedition. Moreover, the lean Mongolian who dozes in a feverish state of semi-coma is hardly less

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emaciated and looks no more like a Tiger of the Snows than the old Hindu in Bed 1.

The fever patient is being cared for: in the morning and at night the nurse gives him an injection, takes his temperature and records it on a chart. In making his rounds, the doctor sees that the disease is taking its course. Five or six days will surely be necessary before the treatment can take effect. In the meantime, the sick man vegetates on, caught up in a delirium which takes him far away from Patna, from the hospital, from his bed, and from the present.

After dark, the fever rises sharply—it is the time of nightmares.

A Tiger of the Snows is climbing a mountain, roped together with a sahib and a Sherpa. They must pass through a confused *melée* of *séracs*, must cross crevasses and climb, climb without end, in the melting snow which encases their boots. They must reach Wangdi, who lies wounded and abandoned on the snows, all alone since God knows how long, at an altitude of about 21,000 feet. To save Wangdi—that is the obsession of the sick man, though six years have gone by since it actually happened. His delirium transforms the memory of the event. He climbs on with feet growing ever heavier with the snow, his breath ever shorter, his will ever stronger. Roped between Sahib Dittert and the Sherpa Norbu just a moment ago, now he is ahead of them and pulls them on behind him as a wounded bird drags his wings along the ground.

His vision changes again: Dittert and Ang Norbu are no longer there. He is pulling two of himself over the snow, or rather two *yetis*, for he has changed into three Abominable Snowmen. And he is not toiling on the flanks of Kedarnath to save Wangdi, but to devour him.

He has no difficulty finding the crevasse which he has never seen, where the night before last, as he knows, several members

of the expedition had camped. He follows along its edge. Soon he sees the body of Wangdi, towards which he runs, a three-fold greedy monster.

But in his dream, it is himself, Tenzing Bhotia, whom he finds stretched out on the snow which is blackened by the frozen blood that has run down from his throat, gaping with a wound not unlike a second mouth.

And this time the horror is so intense that he is awakened by it.

A Fall of 1,000 Feet

The fever must have spent itself in these fantasies, for the sick man partly recovers his lucidity and his memory reconstructs a more exact version of the drama.

On the 26th of June, 1947, Tenzing was at Camp II when he saw returning in complete disarray the three ropes which had left on the 23rd for the ascent of Kedarnath. Only Wangdi was missing; he had had to be left on the edge of a crevasse.

The evening before, after two days of climbing, Alexander Graven roped together with Ang Dawa, Alfred Suttart with Wangdi, and Norbu between René Dittert and André Roche had reached the summit of the Dôme Blanc, 22,545 feet. The wild wind of the Himalayas had come upon them at the top. But they had gone on, for they would only have to surmount a narrow ridge, bare at one end and covered with snow at the other, and then a plateau, in order to reach the snow incline which would lead them to the summit of Kedarnath, 33,012 feet.

They had set out, full of enthusiasm, but the going on the ridge was more difficult than they had foreseen. It was necessary to cut steps in the ice with the wind blowing more and

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more fiercely and making them more and more breathless. Suttart and Wangdi were the last ones on the rope.

Suddenly one of the crampons on Wangdi's feet caught in the strap of the other crampon and he swung to the right. At the same time Suttart dug his ice-pick into the ice with the rope twisted around it several times. For a trembling instant Wangdi hung at the end of the taut line. But the pick slipped and the sahib, pulled along by the Sherpa, slid down the dizzy slope. A thousand feet further on, they were thrown out into space. They continued falling fifty feet more and finally landed in the snow. Suttart got up, more or less intact, but Wangdi remained on the ground. His leg had been broken at the ankle; his scalp was cut, and the metal spike from his left shoe had penetrated far into his right knee.

The others obviously could not take the same route to bring help. They had to go to the end of the ridge, haul back the rope around a snowed-in ice-pick, and make a dangerous crossing, which took two and a half hours. Finally, Ang Dawa, Graven and Dittert supported and half carried the wounded man, while Suttart and Roche shouldered the packs of their comrades.

The descent was a slow one, along the flank of a slope which they had not dared to negotiate to reach the summit because it was too steep and threatened avalanches. Moreover, they were forced to drag a wounded man with them. At nightfall they made camp in a crevasse at the height of about 21,000 feet, on the flank of Kedarnath. Troubled and weary as they were, they did not have the strength to bring Wangdi down into the crevasse and had to leave him on top where the temperature had already fallen to 4° below zero.

After a bad night, they set out again at about four in the morning, but not one of them was able to carry the wounded Wangdi any further. Three hours later they reached the

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moraine of the glacier. There, three Sherpas who had climbed up to meet them welcomed them with warm drinks. The sahibs had sent these men, who were fresh, willing, and well equipped, to the rescue of Wangdi. There were new tracks in the snow, it should be comparatively easy to find him.

Soon after midday, the three Sherpas returned to Camp II. Looking terrified, they told how the snow had melted so quickly that the tracks had disappeared and the flank of Kedarnath had become impassable. To hear them tell it, they had had just a frightful experience, in the course of which they had faced a thousand deadly perils.

But Tenzing guessed why these novices had not dared to risk themselves on the mountain: it aroused in them a superstitious fear which only the presence of the sahibs could have calmed.

Suttart and Graven had gone down to the base camp. Roche and Dittert were asleep, exhausted. They awoke only towards evening, when, up above, a second night of agony was setting in for Wangdi.

If they had had the strength, the sahibs would have climbed back to him. For they, the sahibs, never hesitated to risk their lives whenever there was the slightest chance that thereby a comrade might be saved, whether he were a Sherpa or even a coolie.

Already, Tenzing, the sirdar, had come to understand that the sahibs would conquer the spirit of the mountain some day: they would never yield a tent or a man without fighting to the last limit of their strength. He realized that, to have the same chance of conquering the mountain, the Sherpas, too, must not hesitate to defy the evil spirits.

The Rescue of Wangdi

The next day, June 27, three ropes again climbed to the rescue of Wangdi. Actually, Tenzing had never pulled along Dittert and Norbu. But during the whole ascent, he kept asking himself what would be left of a poor devil abandoned on the ice for forty hours, seriously wounded and with nothing to drink at an altitude where the lack of oxygen arouses such terrible thirst.

Leaving at five in the morning at the same time as the other ropes, Dittert, Tenzing and Norbu climbed about 3,600 feet and in three hours reached the crevasse near which Wangdi lay. They expected the worst and would not have been surprised to find a man near death with all his limbs frozen, with his lungs scorched by the cold— But an even more frightful spectacle awaited them.

Driven to despair by the hallucinations of delirium, Wangdi had tried to pierce his heart with his *koukri*, the dagger that all Sherpas carry in their belts. But his heavy mountaineering outfit had prevented this. Then he had tried to cut his throat and had seriously gashed himself under the chin.

By good luck no artery had been severed, and the blood of the cut veins had coagulated rapidly because of the cold. Fever set in, and perhaps it was this fever, produced by self-wounding, that had kept Wangdi from freezing to death. He was still alive, but there was need for energetic action.

He was quickly undressed so that fresh, dry clothing could be put on him. His naked body was vigorously rubbed with snow, his wounds were dressed, and he was trussed up in ropes. All the men were harnessed in turn to bring him carefully down the mountain.

Ten hours later they arrived with him at the base camp, 7,000 feet below.

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For ten days the sahibs nursed him. But they did not have anything with which to sew up his throat. They put his leg in plaster. The first attempt did not succeed; a second one did. But the sahibs asked themselves whether the fracture had been properly reduced. Carefully and thoroughly washed and disinfected, the wound in the scalp had begun to heal. But the wounded knee had closed too quickly and the limb began to swell. Neither compresses, nor sulfanilamides stopped the infection. Finally a Sherpa decided to lance it. The pus burst forth and the fever subsided.

Under the guidance of Rahul, the Hindu officer who served as liaison agent, several Sherpas took Wangdi down the mountain. As long as they were at a high altitude, they had to carry the porter on their backs. Three days later they arrived on the trail, where they could place him on a stretcher. At last they brought him to Moussorie, to the hospital of an American mission. In fourteen days they had covered about 186 miles on foot with their burden.

Wangdi reappeared at Darjeeling towards the month of October. But the fracture, badly reduced as the sahibs had feared, shortened his left leg by almost an inch and he would never go back to the mountains.

The Sherpa's Wife

The unhappy Wangdi had not revealed much about his attempted suicide before he had been brought down. "I heard the voices of the spirits of the mountain. My wife came to me in a vision to speak to me." That is about all he had said.

The explanation astonished the sahibs. "Is his wife such a terrible woman?" they asked the Sherpas. And they replied laughingly, "All our wives are terrible. They are the wives of Tigers."

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Six years later, lying in his bed, Tenzing, in his turn racked by fever, at last understood what the vision had said to Wangdi. "Here you are, a cripple. They will cut one of your legs off above the knee, the other, below it. And you will be like an idiot for the rest of your life because of the blood you lost from your head—besides being helpless. Now you will have to be carried out into the sun in summer and to the fireside in winter. I could bring up my children with less trouble, alone. Even now, though they are grown, it would be better for all if you didn't come back in the state that you're in."

If Wangdi's real wife had seen her husband lying helpless on the snow, she would probably have loaded him on her back and brought him, single-handed, to Darjeeling. But perhaps she had irritatedly told him sometime: "Rather than come back crippled, you had better stay on your mountain. The goddesses that you go to court there will be able to nurse you better than I can."

1947, Year of Joy and Hope

At the foot of Kedarnath with his Swiss friends, Tenzing had been less preoccupied with such things, for at that time his mind had not been troubled.

When they had evacuated Wangdi, the sahibs had been optimistic, and the Tiger of the Snows had not asked for more. If the attempt at suicide had made some impression on his mind, the accident itself had had no effect on his morale: he had experienced plenty of others. He knew that the mountain exacts sorrow and life as tribute from those who risk the ascent.

Things are what they are, and they go on as they must go on. Good may be born of Evil, and Evil of Good. *Om mani padme om* (the lotus flower, pure jewel as it is, is born from the mud

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of the swamp). And the joys of the ascent, as of all of existence, are only so many trials that have been overcome.

The Sherpas believe that a man does not feel pity for another, but only for himself, such as he might be tomorrow if the gods so will it. To weep over your neighbor's misfortune is the same as to weep for your own future, and thus to burden yourself with a huge load of fear which will only weaken you for the daily struggle. In order to preserve and succeed, each one must accept his own fate. All the Sherpas run the same risks. He who bends under his load in truth bends under the weight of his sins; another continues his ascent because he has procured for himself the favor of the gods.

This was the first time that Tenzing was in charge of the Sherpas as a sirdar; he outdid himself when the expedition resumed the ascent of Kedarnath. His Swiss companions marveled at him.

"Tenzing is at the head—Tenzing throws me a rope to help me over a bad place—Tenzing climbs with astonishing steadiness—Suttart sinks in the snow, Tenzing runs to help him—" That is what people read in Europe in their papers a few months later. Even in 1938, when he got his title of Tiger for carrying his load up to 27,687 feet with Tarkey, Kusang, Pasang and Nukku—thus beating the remarkable record of the first Tigers, who had in 1924 carried up to 26,961 feet—his prowess had not been acclaimed so loudly.

On the summit of Kedarnath, the eye traveled over Tibet and the neighboring peaks, Kamet, Nanda Devi, Trisul. Tenzing imagined that, very far off in the east, he could glimpse Everest, emerging from a sea of clouds, even less distinct than when he had seen it from the high reaches of Sola Khumbu. He stretched out his hand, with its glove of silk, wool, and nylon. "Chomolungma, Everest, that is where we must go, you, I, we, all of us, and all together," he said. For from the very beginning the

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Swiss mountaineers had won his devotion, just as much as he had distinguished himself in their estimation.

Although unable to read, Tenzing knew from hearsay who the crowned heroes of the Himalayan conquests were. He knew that from the very beginning the Swiss had made companions of the Sherpas in their victories. On the 8th of June, 1939, Dyhrenfurth and Kurt, the sahibs, could have roped themselves together to scale 26,642 feet of Mount Kongsang in the Kangchenjunga massif only five days after two other members of the expedition had done it. But they had granted to two Sherpas, Lewa and Tsering Norbu, the special honor of being on the rope with them to ascend to the summit of the highest mountain yet conquered by man.

Therefore, Tenzing wished to return to Chomolungma with the Swiss. He was all the more anxious to do this, since it seemed that the British had lost interest. In the twelve years since 1935, he had taken part regularly in every one of the British expeditions, but there had been only four, and it was better not to mention the fourth. That was the only dark cloud, as he looked back; aside from that he was perfectly satisfied with his fate.

What more could he have asked of the gods in 1947? He earned a good living, sufficiently good for a child of Thami. During the march of approach, in the high valleys at the foot of Garhwal, he had seen the long trains of animals, reminding him of his childhood. He had noticed that the people of this region lived like those of Sola Khumbu, trading their grain with Tibet. Although his memories of Thami were stamped indelibly on his mind, it had seemed to him that the Hindus of Garhwal were more abject and miserable than the men of Nepal, of his native valley, who climbed over the mountains with long caravans of yaks laden with heavy packsaddles filled with barley, rice, and potatoes. In Garhwal, there were flocks of

goats and sheep trotting along the steep paths in front of the shepherds dressed in rags. Only one animal out of every three or four carried a saddle-pack of jute filled with grain.

In comparing his lot with that of these folk, Tenzing felt proud of his success. He was at last a sirdar, a position which gave him double pay. It permitted his family to live in relative affluence, and at Toon Soong a sirdar of Sherpas was considered one of the dignitaries.

1952, Year of Defeats

Such was his reasoning at the age of thirty-three when he returned from Garhwal. In 1952, at thirty-eight, he no longer regarded his life in the same light; he was defeated. Five years had exhausted him; he felt he had grappled with the mountains to the last limit of his strength.

Dead or alive, the man who leaves a hospital is finished. Perhaps he can still linger around the Himalayan Club at Darjeeling, like the old sirdars who are out for easy expeditions, such as tourist ascents, ladies' walks, or treks of merchants. As for the young Sherpas, not one of those proud of their trade would follow one of these old leaders.

Be that as it may, no group of sahibs would count on him to get to the top of Chomolungma. This year the Swiss had made him a member of their club before starting out on the expedition, but Tenzing attributed to this act the same meaning as the old Mongolian rite of "blood-brotherhood."

In spite of all their kindness to him, he had disappointed them. In the spring and in the fall, he, the sirdar Tenzing, the Tiger of the Snows, had collapsed. And twice the sahibs had carried him into the protection of the camp's tents.

The shame of this defeat and the fever confused his ideas, because he had expended himself without forethought, as if

maddened—had allowed himself to be carried away by his passion for the mountains, by the unexplained conviction that he would realize the ambition of his life, and even more by the pleasure that was his when he was climbing in the company of his Swiss friends, his favorite sahibs.

And now while the sahibs, back in their homeland, edit their notes where one may read Tenzing's praises, the defeated sirdar lies sick, believing that he has betrayed their trust in him.

The Letter

How long do these nightmares, these feverish scruples, last? Perhaps for minutes, when weakness veers towards nothingness. Perhaps for days, with repetitions and recurrences. The fever-ridden man is struck by certain images and above all by the feeling of sharp discomfort which accompanies them. His memory retains no trace of the rest.

At last, one day, he finds himself stretched out on his back, leaning against the pillows, his mind clearer. Without knowing how he got there, he knows where he is. He has recovered his reason with his strength.

His neighbor makes a sign with pointed finger to show that there is a folded sealed paper, lying on the table between their beds. The Tiger picks up the letter and looks at the envelope. He recognizes the English stamps and sees that the address is crossed out and corrected. His effort is limited to that. He puts down the letter without opening it, trying to think who could have written him from England. Perhaps it was Tilman sahib, the leader of the last British expedition to Everest in which Tenzing took part. Or perhaps it was Shipton sahib, who, by enlisting Tenzing as a porter in 1935, had happened to decide the career of the Tiger of the Snows. Since then Tenzing had

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seen Shipton every spring till the outbreak of the war, and twice more since the war ended.

What did Shipton sahib have to tell him in this letter? He would have known right away in Darjeeling, for there he received his mail at the Club of the Sherpas where there was always someone who could read the letters and, if necessary, translate them. His mail? Yes, indeed, for this illiterate man had a correspondence which if not voluminous was at least far-reaching, for he heard from the English, the French, the Swiss, the Americans, and the Italians. And though he could not identify their countries right off on a map, he was at least able to recognize their stamps. To answer them, he would explain what he meant to say to the secretary of the club, who would write it down.

The crossing-out on the envelope indicates that this letter has come to the Club like the others and has been forwarded from there. This means that on the return from Everest the Sherpas have left word at Darjeeling that their sirdar is at Patna, and have given the address of the hospital.

Tenzing falls asleep and does not awaken until the nurse comes to give him the injection. He holds out the letter to her and looks at her intently without daring to say anything. As the nurse turns the letter around and does not seem to understand, he finally decides to explain to her that he cannot read. She reads the letter to him. "So you are that fellow of the Himalayas the doctor was looking for?" she finally asks.

As he acknowledges this, Tenzing cannot hold back a smile of triumph in spite of his modesty and his distress. Indeed, yes, he is the Tiger of the Snows, and even the most famous of all the Tigers! The register of the Himalayan Club is his witness, for there in the register there is a note to this effect: "Tenzing, the best and the most experienced of the Tigers. Has resistance,

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courage, initiative, and devotion without equal. Very good man, porter in 1935, Tiger in 1938, sirdar in 1947. Numerous expeditions of which five were to Mount Everest.”

But the register is not up to date; by the end of December, 1952, there had been seven expeditions to Everest, not five, because during that year he had gone with the Swiss twice.

Suddenly Tenzing asks himself what will be noted on the register when Wyss-Dunant and Chevalley have made their reports on the expeditions they led, one in the spring, the other in the fall. After that has been done, he will surely not receive any more letters like this one from a certain Major C. G. Wylie sahib, who asks him if he would like to take part as sirdar in the ascent of Everest that the British propose to undertake in the spring of 1953.

The next day when the doctor passes Bed 6, the nurse tells him, “Here, Doctor, is the Tiger of the Himalayas that you were looking for the other day!”

The doctor cannot get over it. He had always thought the porters of the mountains were formidable giants. As for Tenzing, he had simply taken him for a Chinese, a merchant probably, for in all of Asia the Sons of Heaven keep shop, and here, at Patna, the native porters cannot afford hospital care. Tenzing has suspected this and guesses that without the generosity of his Swiss friends, he would have been forced to go on to Darjeeling, at the risk of never finishing the journey.

A few days ago when a Father of St. Francis' College mentioned Tenzing to the doctor, this story of mountaineering interested him. But since then many other things preoccupied the doctor, and he no longer remembers much of what was told him. The main thing now is that the sick man is better, that the fever has abated, that the patient can rest, and soon will be able to eat.

The Sherpa as a Child

“My father often pointed out to me the mist-enveloped summit of Everest, and would say: ‘There is Chomolungma (Goddess Mother of the Winds). . . I was a poor boy. At Sola Khumbu everyone was poor around me. A house, a few yaks, that is just about all that we owned, practically nothing. . .”

TENZING

“A pirate? Yes, indeed, Tom went away to seek his fortune in galleons sailing the Caribbean Sea. And when the black pirate returned to the village, ten years, twenty years later, in a velvet doublet with his sword at his side, a black patch over his gouged-out eye, he would knock with his stick on the open square before the church to flabbergast his little comrades who, never having done anything in their lives, would not have grown up at all, and would still be going regularly to Sunday School.”

MARK TWAIN

The Dragons of Wrath

IT IS STILL night in the single room where the whole family eats, spins and weaves, lives and sleeps. The child has awakened. He stays all muffled up in his covers and with mischievous eyes follows his mother's comings and goings, her silhouette scarcely darker than the shadow in which she moves.

The evening before, to go to bed, the little Sherpa had fallen on his knees on top of a coverlet, wrapped himself in a second

THE SHERPA AS A CHILD

one, and rolled himself up into a ball. Nothing more was to be seen of him. His head disappeared entirely under the cover of yak wool. His parents and his sisters proceeded in very much the same fashion, for they had no beds and slept on low benches.

Now the mother kneels before the hearth, a chest sunk into the floor and filled with earth. She uncovers the ashes with the palm of her hand. The live embers are few and tiny.

Below, under the single room, the yaks move about in their stable. The father goes down to give them their morning ration of hay.

The shutters are closed, but through numerous chinks in the walls, the wind whistles into the room where it is frightfully cold and where the fire will not be going right away. During the winter at Sola Khumbu, the Sherpas live at temperatures below zero. Perhaps they are even more accustomed to the misery and cold than they are to the rarified atmosphere of high altitudes.

In the course of the night the little dog has slipped under the child's covers, but now that the sounds of the family's waking up excite him, he tries to get out. The child hugs the dog close to him. The dog struggles. The child laughs and the mother gives an answering laugh, with a tender thought for her son who has just awakened.

The mother has gathered together a few embers that are still smoldering, and has made a little pile of them. She blows on it. The embers begin to grow red. A tiny flame, bluish and thin, wavers for an instant, dies down, and then reappears. Her cheeks puffed out, the mother blows once again, then she puts some twigs on. The flame leaps up. The little twigs begin to burst into flame, crackling and whistling, for the wood is not very dry.

The smoke spreads all over the room, whirls about and set-

bles like a thick cover. It has no place to escape to, except the spaces between the boards of the ceiling. From the attic, it will get out as well as it can between the stone slabs which cover the roof. There are no chimneys in Thami, for lime and cement are unknown at Sola Khumbu. And how could they be brought in? So, at the early morning hour when every Sherpani is stirring up the fire in her hearth, the smoke comes out of the roofs and all the cracks of the walls. One might think that the houses were on fire.

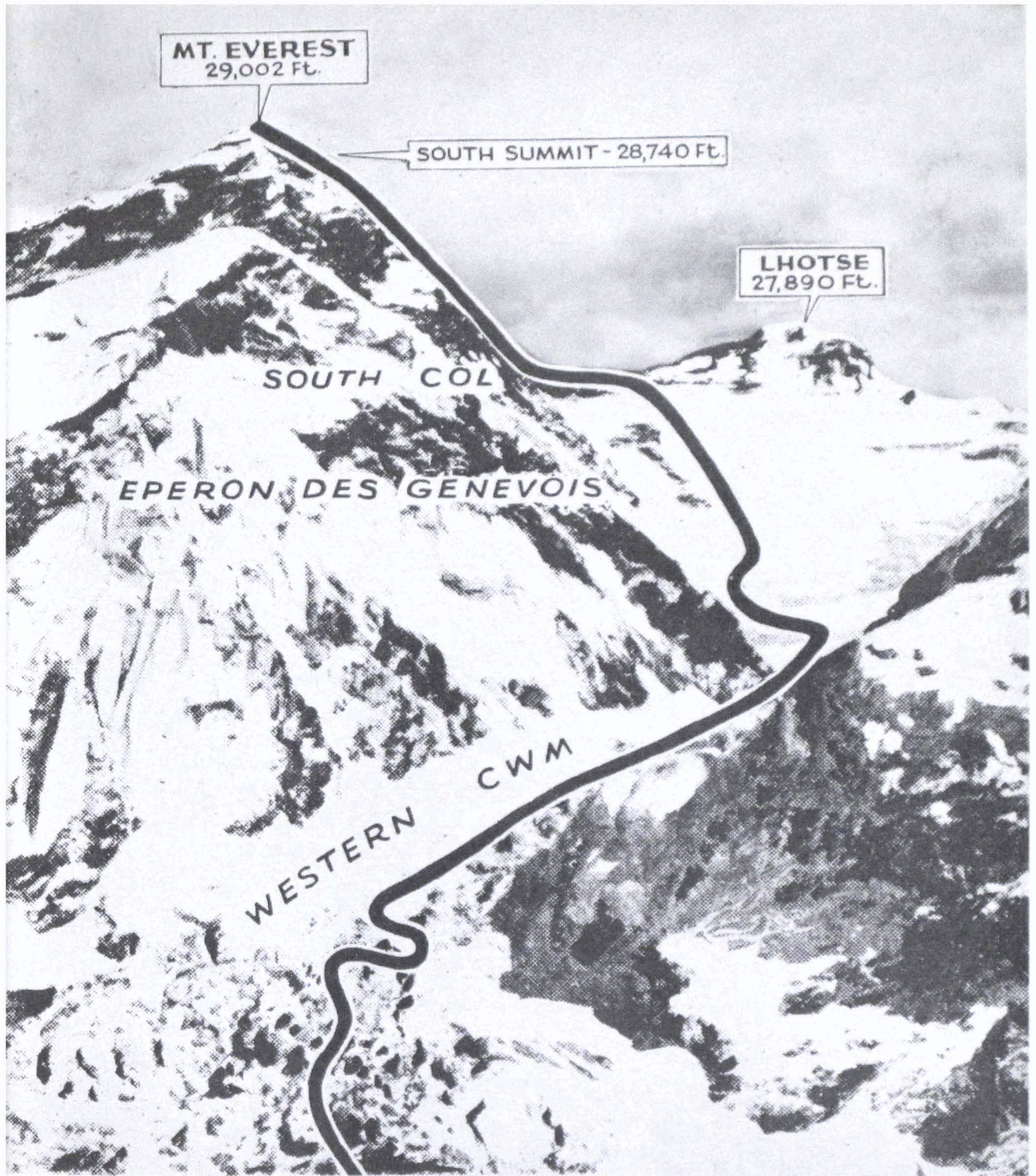
The mother gets up and goes towards a corner of the room where some faggots are stacked halfway up behind a low wall. She breaks off some small branches and throws them on the fire. When the bright flame lights up the room, she places an iron tripod on it and an earthen bowl that the flames have blackened and discolored through the years.

The child has released the dog who makes his way to the hearth, sneezing. From the ceiling, the mother unhooks a yak-skin bottle containing rancid butter. She takes from a small low table a briquet of tea from which she cuts a small piece, and throws it into a cylindrical wooden cup. Then she pours water on it. The tea leaves spread out at the top. The mother stirs them with a little stick, then she adds to this liquid a good-sized slice of butter.

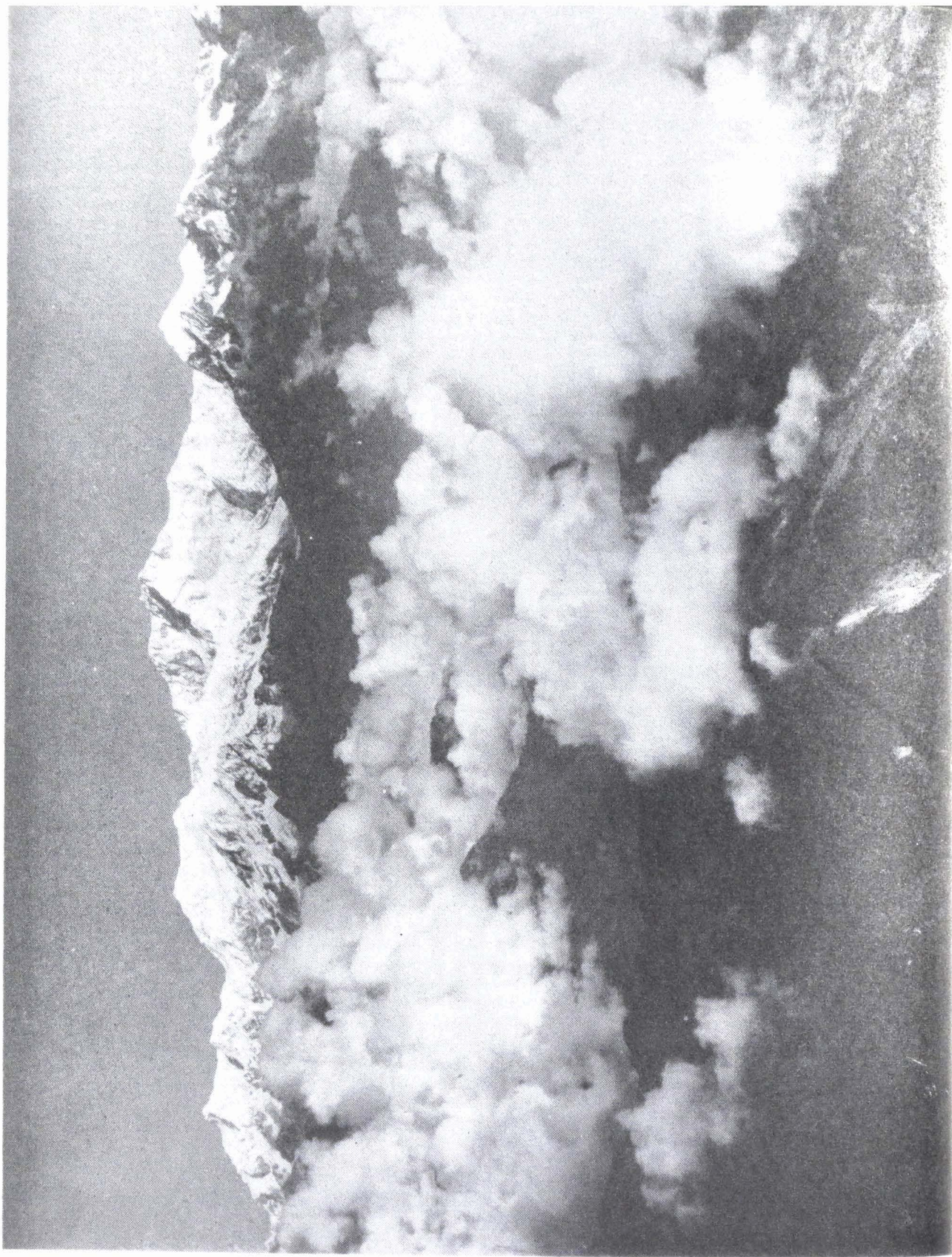
The family breakfast is now ready. All day long, while the women weave and the men spin, they will be drinking Tibetan tea without which the natives of these mountains believe they could not survive.

The father is heard coming up from the stable. At that very moment, the mother pulls on one of the inside shutters. Across the wooden lattice which takes the place of glass, for glass is unknown at Sola Khumbu, the day appears, wan and snowy.

“It is daylight!” the child yells, jumping up. Seizing his cov-



Solid black line in *New York Times* diagram shows route of expedition, Western Cwm, Eperon des Genevois (Geneva Spur), and the South Col. *Wide World Photos*



Mount Everest as seen
from Darjeeling in Ne-
pal. *V. Underwood and*

erlet in one hand, in a fit of excitement, he rushes towards the door.

His father, who is just returning from the stable, bars his way.

“They’ve gone!” the child cries. The day has dawned.

His parents smile. “Why, yes, they’ve gone, little one. They say that the *yetis* are plentiful on the road this year, and they would have crunched you to death between their teeth.”

“They went without me,” the child repeats. And overcome by disappointment, he falls down and stays seated near the door.

His mother brings him his mug of tea. The child spurns it with an angry gesture.

“Look,” says his father. “The evil spirits have gotten into his head. Look at those dragon eyes!”

The child turns to the wall, leans against it and hides his face in his arms, sobbing.

They cheated him!

For weeks, the young men of Thami, who at the beginning of spring were due to cross the Nangpa La to rejoin an expedition at Rongbuck, kept promising all the village boys that they would take them along. The child believed them. Last night the Sherpas of Chomolungma had said good-by to the village, ready to depart in the morning before daybreak, and the child had gone to bed, his heart beating with joy, certain that he would be awakened in time. This betrayal leaves him in despair.

Exorcism

Along the trail which follows the precipitous course of the Bhote Kosi, the father, the mother, and the three children have been trudging since the break of day. The parents are carrying loads of rice and butter on their backs. Their packbaskets are

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hung from their foreheads by a strap. The father has knotted his two braids above this strap in order to hold it. The children, a boy and two girls, walk on ahead. The boy walks by himself, his hands thrust into the cuffs of his Mongolian coat. He is thinking, and his mood is somber.

Ever since the morning of his wild rage, his parents have been looking at him with misgivings. He seems to be resigning himself to the betrayal of which he was the victim, but a sorrowful look about him shows his parents that the evil spirits are still inside his little head.

It is springtime, still cool, but pleasant, for the Himalayas are near to the tropics, and a mountain range 19,800 feet high shelters Sola Khumbu from the sharp winds from the west. At this season the yaks leave their stables and graze outside the village. The children tend them, for the parents have to busy themselves with the spring sowing on the cultivated terraced plots of ground. They also have to patch up these terraces that the melting snow has damaged in many places.

Every evening when the throng of youngsters returns behind the yaks with their triple bells, the village celebrates. The long winter night is over, when everyone has had to shut themselves up for months. Even though there are still patches of snow on the slopes, the grass has sprung up all over and the water from the melting snows runs off in a thousand rills. The time is over when a visit to a neighbor is a real expedition in the frightful wind, when boots sink into the snow up to the knees.

The village dances in gratitude to the gods for having brought back the good weather. During the winter, the men have spun, the women have woven, everyone has been patching worn-out and torn garments. The girls put on their new aprons and the jewelry obtained by barter after the monsoon in Tibet. Every girl proudly wears a necklace with blue-green turquoises alternating with white bone beads made from human

skulls. The more beautiful of these necklaces are adorned with a few coral beads, carried to Tibet God knows when or how, or from what warm southern sea. Each woman also carries a little toilet kit pinned to her shoulder: comb, pincers for plucking out hairs, and various small implements decorated with turquoises. The richer ones who have too many rings to fit on their fingers hang some of them on their belts.

The older folks sit on the ground in a circle. The young people form a line with their arms intertwined, and move forwards and backwards as they sing; the parents sing, too.

The family which left Thami this particular morning follows the course of the river which flows to their right. Khumbila raises its dizzy barrier of 19,470 feet before the travelers. The path goes right down to the river, and at two points it is necessary to cross bridges made of loose and shaking tree trunks. The rhododendrons are already in full bloom, mauve, scarlet and vermilion.

At last, after having proceeded in single file into a narrower gorge in order to circle around Khumbila, the travelers reach a broad valley. Almost directly before them, behind the chain of mountains rising tier upon tier, there stands the Goddess Mother of the Winds. Its appearance is always greeted with cries of delight. But this time there is no sound, and it is in silence that the parents address their prayers to the highest peak. The Bhote Kosi descends towards the bottom of the valley, and the travelers leave it to follow a better marked trail which leads to Namche Bazar. The family proceeds then, bearing right towards Thyangboche.

An old man in tatters walks in front of the travelers. He carries slung over his shoulder a heavy prayer mill into whose axis is fitted his blue umbrella. At the ends of the bamboo strips, which serve as the ribs of this umbrella, there hang tiny bells,

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each tinkle of which is a prayer. As he walks along, the beggar keeps twirling his mill.

The country is rough. The two girls begin to slacken their pace. All morning, during the trip, they have been gathering flowers to weave into garlands. Now they are tired and fall back behind their parents who, from time to time, turn around and call to them.

Now the beggar with the blue umbrella is on the knoll of the monastery. He passes to the right of the *mani* (wall of flat stones) and of the *chörten* (tomb). A moment later, the family will pass on the left. The beggar is from Tibet, the family is Nepalese. Nepalese and Tibetans are not vulnerable to the attacks of the evil spirits on the same side.

In a little street of stairs which leads to the temple, the family comes upon an old Tibetan woman who greets them according to the custom of her country, that is, by sticking out her tongue to its full length. A moment later, the father knocks at the gates of the temple. An inferior monk with shaved head, barefoot and wearing a long black robe, appears. They enter into conversation.

“It is to give a name to this child.”

“But he is already grown. Has he lived till now without a name?”

“We had a son like him, whom the evil spirits carried off.”

The monk nods his head with an air of understanding, and leads the family into a great hall at the end of a dark passage filled with the smell of rancid butter. Some ritual lamps glow before the small brass Buddhas in niches all along the wall.

The monk leaves the family in a large hall sparsely lighted by windows set very high up.

Great tapestries hang from the walls, red, green, maroon, and yellow. They depict scenes from the life of Buddha. The mountain folk of Thami see nothing familiar there among all those

important personages. But the father notices a tapestry showing a village set in a circle of snow-capped peaks. This village consists of houses that are certainly superb compared with the poor huts of Thami. Still, the father points it out. The two little girls go up close to it and smile, as does the mother. Only the son remains motionless before the altar.

The whole array of mysterious objects frightens him. There is the *thod krag*, a long skimmer with an iron handle at the end of which a mythical figure holds a scooped-out skull between its claws. A magic drum, made of the tops of two children's skulls on which some skins are stretched, is set in a corner of the altar. Here the child also sees some *drilous*, or sacred bells, very wide open, almost like little cymbals, the clappers of which are made of human bones; a delicate trumpet made from the femur of a tiger; a *purbu*, the ritual dagger with a triple blade; a cane of brushes, an inkwell, a brass thunderbolt, or *dorje*. All this disturbs the child, for up to now he has never seen anything like it.

Besides, he knows why his parents have come to the monastery. His name has not protected him against the evil spirits, so they are going to confer another name upon him. As he was born on a Thursday, he was called Purbu. Now little Purbu will no longer exist. Soon he will be born again in another form. Even though all death is followed by resurrection, that of others as well as his own, at ten it is hard to accept death with a light heart. But the child is brave and says nothing.

The father has left the tapestry he was examining and has led the women away with him, whispering: "Since his anger had something to do with the mountain, let's not look at these snow peaks at this particular moment." Then the family wanders along the walls, their eyes wide open and curious. They stop for an instant before the Goddess Lha Mo, deity of hell, yet at the same time the protectress of religion. She has five

heads. The three heads of Bodhisattvata united at the neck and crowned with tiny skulls support a large head of Siva, and Buddha is enthroned above. Lha Mo reigns over the infernal regions common to both Brahmins and Buddhists. The mountain folk from Thami see in it only an amusing curiosity and they admire the sculptor's skill. The masks hung between the tapestries amuse them even more. They represent real animals that no one has ever seen at Sola Khumbu and other animals, which are imaginary but which scarcely seem so to them. Certain masks show demons that, like the three heads of Bodhisattvata, wear a crown of tiny skulls.

The monk returns with a more important lama. The latter wears several robes of different colors, one on top of the other. His bare arms seem to emerge from the multicolored petals of a flower. The family stands transfixed in awe, then approaches with hesitant steps. Each one prostrates himself, and the lama places his hand on their bowed heads. Then the father explains again what it is that he seeks. He makes clear that he has brought an offering: "A little leather bag of butter and a load of rice. . . . I have promised a handful of rice and a slice of butter to the old woman. . . ."

These are but little people, these mountain folk from Sola Khumbu, full of piety and poor, and they do not deserve any grand ceremonies. The lama goes into a small adjoining room where the family follows him.

Here, there are no tapestries, only a bare room with an altar behind which the priest sits down, like a business man in his office. The furnishings are simple. Here are the case with brushes, the tube which contains the Chinese ink, and the inkstand. These three objects are made of the same brass as the handle of the sword with the triple blade and the ceremonial thunderbolt formed of a double twist of metal cord.

“And what was the name of the boy whom the evil spirits took away?”

“He was called Purbu because he was born on Thursday.”

“Ah, ah! Purbu. That makes the thing more complicated. . . .”

It is a fact that the sword with the triple blade is also called Purbu. So that there is the danger that it might be useless to annul this name. Then the lama gets up, comes closer, and armed with the *dorje*, draws some circles around the head of the little Sherpa. This thunderbolt will then replace the purbu, but God knows up to what point this substitution may not have disastrous consequences. *Om mani padme om*. Meanwhile, the little monk blows on a flute made of a hollow tiger bone. At last the lama tinkles a magic little bell around the head of the child, and sits down. The monk then seizes the little bell, and attaches it to his ankle. Thus, when he conducts the family to the gate of the monastery, the evil spirits which have been exorcised will not jump on him.

“And when was this child born?” asks the lama.

“We wish that it may have been an auspicious day.”

“How did the evil spirits carry away the other one?”

“They glided into his head and inspired him with wrath. Then his eyes flashed like those of a dragon.”

The lama meditates upon this. He turns towards a little lamp in which some butter is burning, murmurs some words in a very low tone, and goes towards a heavy prayer mill which turns around a vertical axis in a framework of large wrought beams. He gives it a strong shove, and the brass cylinder begins to turn on its axis. When the mill stops, the lama gazes upon the design which appears at the point where he was fixedly looking, but actually he is not paying much attention. All these ceremonies are to gain time while his meditations provide him with a judicial solution.

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“Since it is his head which needs to be protected,” he says at last, “let us call this child The Preserver of Tradition. It is a name of wisdom. *Om mani padme om.*”

“*Om mani padme om,*” answer the father and mother in chorus.

The mountain folk prostrate themselves. Once again the lama lays his hand on each lowered forehead; then he withdraws.

The monk again leads the people from Thami back to the court where the old woman is waiting near the leather bag and the sack to receive her share of the offering. As the monk walks along, he shakes his leg to sound the bell which serves as a protection.

While they were descending the hill from Thyangboche towards Namche Bazar, the parents kept whispering to each other. The Preserver of Tradition—there’s a name which would be an excellent one if a youth of sixteen surnamed Sonam who bears that very name had not gone this very year with the man who had come from afar to climb Chomolungma. The father and mother smile at their mishap as at a good joke that the gods have played on them. The little sack of rice, the skinful of butter, the day for the journey—bah! these are not great losses. For the people of Thami, the pilgrimage to Thyangboche is always a consolation. They have done their best and God does what he pleases. *Om mani padme om.* Perhaps the exorcism turned out less well than they had hoped because the father had looked too long upon the tapestry consecrated to the Nameless God who cures the mountain sickness. Perhaps also the divinities are insisting that this boy, like so many others, should go to Chomolungma. All that the parents ask is that he should be cured of his rages.

Meanwhile, the child who has been exorcised feels himself an entirely new person after the ceremony. The unbelievable

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adventure that he has just lived through seems marvelous to him; between the moment when the little sacred bells carried away his old name and the moment when the lama gave him the new one, he passed a small space of time without any identity, like someone who is not yet born or someone who is no longer alive. So, he had actually been in the world of the dead. Here is a far from ordinary experience, and up to the turn off of the road at Khumbila, the child is afraid to glance back, he is fearful of feeling behind him the presence of Chomolungma and of the spirits who inhabit it.

The High Pastures

Yaks, goats and sheep have consumed all the grass near the village. The snow continues to melt; there is no longer any of it on the mountains in the neighborhood of Thami. The time has come to lead the beasts up to the high pastures. The entire village goes out in a body, each family climbing up to the hut it owns at a higher altitude.

A chorus of tinklings accompanies the band. Each yak carries around its neck a huge bronze bell, the clapper of which is itself a small bell which often contains a third. These tinklings on two or three notes are pleasing to the gods. The provisions are loaded on the heavy wooden packsaddles.

In the early afternoon, the caravan passes 13,000 feet. They bleed the largest yaks to make that strange black blood pudding which nourishes man, and to prevent a rush of blood to the animal's brain. It is the occasion of a joyous festival around the fires on which the black blood pudding is cooked.

When Chomolungma appears on the other side of Khumbila, the caravan utters cries of joy. Then, still on their way, each one addresses a silent prayer to the Goddess Mother of the Winds and of the Country. Certainly she will grant winds

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propitious for agriculture, but this prayer is a tribute rather than a request.

Since Chomolungma has appeared, the father looks about for his son among the children who are scattered everywhere. At last he finds him and calls him particularly to point out the Sacred Mountain to him. "See," he says, "the strongest tooth in the maw of the dragon of the mountain. That dragon has already devoured quite a number of men of the village. Respect it, but do not go near it."

The child agrees. Yet he smiles inwardly. When one has had the experience of death during several minutes, one no longer fears anything.

Further on, on a crest of the mountain, those at the head of the caravan see a wandering lama who is climbing towards them, attracted by the tinkling bells of the yaks. This one does not wear a robe. He is dressed like the countrymen in a great woolen cloak in which are mingled the wool of yaks, goats, and sheep, spun together by the men, woven by the women, and worn until it is threadbare. He is shod in Tibetan boots like the people of Sola Khumbu: great boots of felt embroidered in vivid colors, the thin leather soles of which are folded and stitched on to the uppers. But the lama wears a red scarf over his cloak and his baggage is slung from his shoulder: a flute made of a hollow bone, a magic bell, and a *dotje* to strike with thunder the evil spirits who might impede his journey.

Toward the end of the afternoon, the young people in front turn back towards the center of the caravan. There is still snow near the huts. The yaks would have nothing to eat. So they will camp where they are. And everyone will sleep under the stars.

The Legend of Genghis

To prepare the *tsampa* (flour of roasted and ground barley), a fire of rhododendron wood is made. Then, the meal over, they feed the fire with yak dung. The old folks clap their hands, for they would like to have the young ones dance, the way they do in the village. But the young ones are tired from their climb, and a friendly argument takes place between the generations.

“Dance,” say the old ones.

“Tell us stories,” say the young ones. “We have walked too much today.”

The children take part in the conversation. Since the end of the winter, they have seen enough dancing. Yes, someone should tell them a story.

“Tell us what is happening to those men up on Chomolungma who left at the end of the winter.”

But in 1922 seven Sherpas of Sola Khumbu met their deaths buried under an avalanche, and the lama, who has remained with the caravan, asks them not to anticipate what the mountain will decide to do this year.

“Tell us a story then, Old Dawa,” cries someone.

Old Dawa allows himself to be persuaded. It has been a long time, too long a time for his taste, since anyone called upon him for legend-telling.

“Yes, tell us, Old Dawa,” old and young insist.

“I will not talk of the climbs. In other times, our fathers used to tell us the story of men who were not seeking the glory of slaves who carry loads. In other times . . .”

The old man holds out his cylindrical goblet towards the one who is distributing the *chang*. Like the epic poet and the troubadour, he drinks and eats before he begins his entertainment.

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And who is this Old Dawa? What meaning is to be given to the legend he is starting? Is it simply a memory which serves to soothe the Mongols in their wretchedness? Could it not also be a spark to arouse them? Already mysterious men are over-running Asia and whispering strange words. They breathe on the live coals which seem to have gone out, and they light new fires with the embers of a misery which is believed to have lasted forever and which unbearable humiliations are aggravating even more.

Old Dawa slowly empties his goblet of *chang*, then he gets up. The lama blows on his flute. Everyone is silent. Those who are tending the yaks approach the campfire. The children slip into the inside of the circle. Open-mouthed they wait.

“Genghis . . .” says Dawa in a very low voice. And some of the young children repeat it with a whisper: “Genghis.”

Here is the legend which the old Sherpa tells. It is of a crippled child born at the foot of the Altai, the mountain of the Mongols. For several decades the winds were gentle and the rains abundant. Miraculous pasture land sprang up on the Gobi. In the worst heat of summer and in the depth of winter, sheep, horses, and camels found at least some sustenance there. The herds multiplied, so much so that the men did not always have time to break in all the colts. Those were fine years, indeed. And the men multiplied also. Even the weak children survived. Thus it came about that his parents could raise the little crippled boy.

But everybody thought he did not amount to much. He could not keep up with the wild games of the healthy children. For a long time he stayed near the women, and when he became a man, the girls turned away from him. A weakling!

One day a runaway horse came dashing through the encampment. The child threw himself at the horse's mane, and was carried off. Surely the little cripple would never be seen again.

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It was a fine horse which ran away, and one was sorrier for it than for the poor little cripple. However, the child came back that same evening, mounted on the beast which he had subdued. From that time on he was a horseman. What did it matter that he limped!

The years of fertility were at an end. It no longer rained on the Gobi desert. From springtime on, a hot wind scorched the grazing fields of Altaï. The herds melted away; the weak children died. There were no longer any old men at the encampment, and hunger gnawed at the vitals of the adults.

Then the cripple Temoudj gathered together several young men of his own age. They departed, galloping deep into the desert. There, they slashed their wrists. Their blood flowed into an earthen bowl, and all of them in turn partook of it. Now they were blood-brothers. They came back at a gallop. The ten horsemen won over the whole camp. Wherever scarcity prevailed, they aroused tribes who followed in their wake. The league of several clans became a horde. They passed beyond the peaks of Tarbagataï, reaching out into the steppes of Turkestan, and everywhere the men with slanting eyes folded their tents and seized their lances to follow the warriors. They passed over the Urals, filed out over the Russian plains, entered Poland, hurled themselves upon the gray sea, and retraced their steps to shake from his throne the Son of Heaven. Their empire extended from the snows of Siberia to the sun of the Adriatic, and from the Baltic, the sea of amber, to those seas of China where naked slaves dive into the water to bring up precious coral.

But it is no longer just the history of Temoudj, the Genghis Khan, that Old Dawa tells. He mingles with it the story of Tamerlane, Ogodai, Aurengzeb, and Kubla Khan. All of Mongolia and all of the yellow conquerors file past in the fantastic entourage of his Genghis. And other legends are woven in

from the beginning: that of the seven fat kine and the seven lean kine, the proverbial tale of nomads; and the story of the refractory mount which a frail infant masters is the history of Alexander and of his horse Bucephalus, for the memory of this Macedonian survives in Central Asia where he is known as Iskander.

In short, the legend told by Old Dawa is an inspired tale recreated in each generation, its cloth continually re-cut and enhanced. It retraces not only the triumphs of Asia but also the dread of Europe, for always the men of Gobi return to the fray. The name they go by alters nothing. Huns, Avars, Hungarians, Mongolians, Tartars—always it is the same people with their slanting eyes, more or less white, more or less yellow, frugal, fearless, despoilers, whom one man, one clan reassembled as he gave his name to the new outbreak.

Who were these Mongolians? Were they Tibetans like the Sherpas, like the Bhotias, like the Chinese? The Chinese are very direct on this subject: the men with the slanting eyes came from the mountains where, lacking roads, everything was carried on a man's back and the leather strap over the forehead pulled at the eyelids.

Sherpas and Bhotias call themselves Tibetans, but the name of the Sherpas actually signifies "Men of the East." No doubt what is meant is a wandering horde which dwelt for some time in Tibet and there adopted the religion and assimilated its ways, but did not follow them precisely, and ended its wanderings in the peace of Sola Khumbu.

That is why the legend of Genghis is still handed down from generation to generation. (That is why, also, the Sherpas give so much acclaim to the man from their own group who conquered the top of the world. "I will make my horse's back the world's roof," said Genghis Khan, the great ruler, the unyielding Emperor, the Son of Heaven, the Master of the Earth.)

The excessive pride of the Mongolian survives among them, but it is tempered with Buddhist gentleness.

The Sherpas of Sola Khumbu sleep under the stars. Around the campfire, where the embers turn to ashes and from which a slender wisp of smoke rises, everyone is asleep.

Only a child rolled up in his covers smiles as he presses his dog close to him. The mountain is forbidden him, the mountaineers betrayed him. He will depart to conquer the world, the way Genghis did. But he will return to Thami to lay his empire at the feet of his parents who have protected him from the demons.

The Col of Time

Some days later, they reach the high huts. Shortly afterwards, the Sherpas of Chomolungma return with their stories of catastrophes and wonders, as well as with some empty tin cans.

They cannot stop talking about their mighty exploits and about the sahibs who come to the mountains bringing along so many things that no one is able even to count them. And no one knows what demon each thing guards against.

In this, their third contact with the Westerners, the men from Sola Khumbu have performed marvelous deeds. Fifteen of them bear the title of Tiger, and four, that of Tiger of Tigers. One of these is from Thami. Most of the rest are men who live at Darjeeling in India.

But the Sherpas are sad: two of these sahibs climbed so high that they never returned. Surely the gods must have invited them into their palace of snow, yet their companions are inconsolable. One does not weep this way for mere men. These sahibs

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must themselves have been gods, and if they have lost two of their number, perhaps they will never come back again, either. As for the seven Sherpas entombed two years before, what does that matter! They would not have lived forever in any case!

And Sonam, the sixteen-year-old who accompanied them, what marvels he accomplished! He left the party at Rongbuck before the ascent, to follow a caravan of Hindu merchants who were leaving for Lhasa. He had thought it over. Since he was called The Preserver of Tradition (like the child listening), he expected to become a lama. He was young enough to learn. Perhaps he would be accepted at the Nepalese College in Lhasa.

And what of this caravan of Hindu merchants? Did it carry as many round boxes as the Sherpas brought back? It carried a thousand wonders even more beautiful, beautiful beyond description: silks, trinkets, jewelry, spices! It had no less than a hundred yaks.

The child recovering from the emotions of his exorcism continues to dream. Shall he be a Genghis? Shall he be a Tiger of the Snows? Like Sonam, will he follow the destiny of his name, and go to study at Lhasa? Perhaps he will become a great Indian merchant.

His people will hear the rattling of the empty tin cans which his yaks are carrying even before they arrive at Thami. And a hundred yaks more loaded with silks, another hundred with spices and various goods. He will even bring back to Sola Khumbu a cargo of those marvelous things which do not exist except at Katmandu: nails. Then when he, the great Indian merchant, arrives, the Sherpas of Chomolungma, so proud and haughty today, who do not even blush for shame at having betrayed him on the morning of their departure, will still be merely wrought up about the disappearance of two sahibs.

With the coming of autumn, when after the monsoon the

yaks are brought back to the high pastures to fatten up on the fine fresh grass the rain has brought, the child crosses Nangpa La to go to Tibet.

But in the dreams of the feverish man, several years become confused, and similar events are superimposed upon each other. Is it a boy of ten climbing the icy slopes of Nangpa La with his family, or is it rather a young porter crossing the Kongra La Col in a caravan led by the sahibs? The packbasket has worn through his shirt and now it rubs against his bare skin.

And the return of the men of 1924 becomes confused in his memory with the arrival in the village of those who in 1933 told of an ice-axe found far above the clouds, on the rocks of Chomolungma.

In 1924 as in 1935, there were great marvels and great joys. Was it on this occasion or that, that he saw rice, potatoes, and barley bartered near the monastery at Rongbuck? Was it this time or that, that Shipton sahib led his caravan as far as the glacier and that the Sherpa made his first portages on the heights? Both times he entered the monastery at Rongbuck and the Grand Lama gave him his blessing. But on that second trip, there were at first ponies, then yaks, and finally small donkeys. The first time, hanging from ropes, the men of Thami descended into the crevasses to look for the honey that the Tibetans do not dare to steal from the bees.

A child in 1924, a young Sherpa in 1935. Yes, he actually did succeed in getting himself hired by Shipton sahib. But the boys of Thami cut a poor figure as compared to the bold Bhotias of Darjeeling. The Nepalese did not even own a packbasket, while the people from India already possessed some pieces of equipment similar to those of the sahibs.

And then, one day in 1935, a man rejoined the caravan at Camp II. He went up to Shipton sahib and said: "I was in

Tibet. I heard that you wish to climb to the summit of Chomolungma. I will carry my load." This man from Tibet was a better porter than most of the others. But in the camps he kept singing in a sepulchral voice a song that had no end. One day he had found that among the Sherpas there was one who bore the same name as he himself, the Preserver of Tradition. They gossiped together and found out that both of them came from Thami. It turned out to be the famous Sonam, Uncle Sonam he was called in 1935, who had followed the Indian merchants as far as Lhasa, nine years ago. . . .

Kongra La? Nangpa La? What does it matter? It is a Col that a mountaineer has just crossed. As the sailor rounds the cape, so the Sherpa climbs mountains up to the top of the pass. It is the Col of Time.

The Road to Darjeeling

In this entanglement of dreams and memories, the Tiger of the Snows has seen pass in review the childhood of a little Sherpa, visions clearer and fresher than the nightmares at the beginning. And the feverish man smiles. One morning, the doctor stops at his bedside. The sick man says that he is well, he wants to leave.

"Take care of that heart of yours just the same; often fever leaves its mark."

Then the doctor sees a gleam of panic in the eyes of his patient, and he is astonished. Why does it mean so much to this "porter" to ply this trade? For after all it is a trade to him, isn't it?

And then the Tiger's emotion bursts forth. It is his "trade," yes, and he must depart each year for the mountains because he knows how to do nothing else and he must support his family. But what a trade! How could an individual as lowly

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and as poor as he lead so exalted an existence any other way? Every year he goes to seek out the sahibs who treat him as a sahib, who are tied to him as Genghis was bound to his ten companions, by ties of blood-brotherhood. A sirdar! Not everyone who wants to can become a sirdar.

He loves his family, his daughters, and his wife as much as on the first day. But when the hour arrives for him to leave with his fine European equipment, to conduct his team to Katmandu, to Raxaul, to Patna, to Lahore, to Srinagar, to Tehri Garhwal—when he once more comes upon the silence of the eternal snows, the deafening wind of the mountains, the strenuous effort which makes him forget all his troubles, then he lives again. He has but a single goal: to reach the pinnacle of the mountain—and for him nothing else exists.

He explains all this in his broken English. But his eyes speak, too, and they are even more eloquent. The doctor and the nurse are astonished by them.

Two days later Tenzing leaves the hospital. He gives a coolie two annas to carry his bag because he does not feel any too strong yet on his legs.

And the long trip continues. Through the train window, he sees Bengal pass by, a thousand times more poverty-stricken than Toon Soong. At the various stops, troops of beggars assail the compartments and the peddlers offer their glasses of drinks on which the dust has already formed a crust. The first evening, he sees far off in the distance the red glow of the hearths from the foundries of Patna which hurl their red flames into the sky, like those which dragons spew forth. To live there? To work there? How much better—Everest!

He falls asleep.

In the summer of 1933 as in that of 1924, several men from Thami were porters for the sahibs of Chomolungma. But in

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the meantime, nine years have rolled around. The child Sherpa has grown up. He has carried stones to repair the terraces destroyed every year. With his hoe in his hand, he has cultivated the family plot of ground. He has borne on his back hay cut where even the yaks cannot climb. The backbreaking toil of mountain dwellers has made a man of him at an age when others are still in their adolescence. Like the other boys of the village, he listens open-mouthed to the marvelous tales brought back by the men who have been carrying loads on the glaciers of Chomolungma. And yet he is a very wise young man because he will preserve the traditions. But what tradition holds him fast to Thami? The Mongolian is essentially a nomad; those of Sola Khumbu no longer are nomads except in a small way in their mountains, but for some twenty years now, there have been many who work at Darjeeling in the winter.

Up to the end of the last century, the story goes that the Sherpas only traded with Tibet. But about 1890, a certain Tenzing Wangbi* departed with his son to sell musk at Darjeeling. Had a flow of trade existed for a long time? No one can recall, either at Darjeeling or at Sola Khumbu. Tenzing Wangbi was successful in his business affairs and started back to his village. But he was set upon by thieves in the middle of his journey, and returned to town with his son. There they worked on the construction of a road leading to Kalimpong. The needs of these mountaineers were modest; father and son saved their money and bought things not known at Sola Khumbu. They began to dress well.

When they came back, they caused a sensation. It was during the fine weather, and when they made their appearance in a village, everybody assembled to see these sumptuously attired strangers. The news spread from hilltop to hilltop. At their

* Evidently no connection with our Tenzing.

village, unknown visitors were expected when Tenzing Wangbi and his son arrived.

From that time on, the men of Sola Khumbu went to work in India for some months each year. Cheerful and strong, they were much sought after as day-laborers in the tea plantations which were numerous and prosperous around Darjeeling.

They felt themselves at home among the Bhotias, Tibetans like themselves whose language was much the same as theirs. Some of them took wives at Darjeeling, founded families and lived together in the outskirts of Toon Soong, notably a certain Norbu Jhan, nicknamed The Bearded because he had a full beard, a thing extremely rare among the Tibetans.

To distinguish themselves from the native Bhotias, they called themselves Sherpas. When, before the First World War, Dr. Kellas made reconnaissance expeditions into the mountains of Sikkim province, he hired porters who were then called the Tibetans of Darjeeling. A natural selection occurred: the Sherpas had more resistance to the altitude than the Bhotias. They explained that beyond the mountains, to the southwest of Everest, there were to be found high valleys peopled with a race like themselves. From then on, the word "Sherpa" has been used to designate the porters of the Himalayas, and certain Bhotias are Sherpas just the way a man may come from Amiens and be a Swiss.

In 1935 when the rumor spread at Thami that a new expedition was in preparation, some of the young men decided to take part in it. Tenzing was among the number. But certain customs were already established: the sahibs would recruit only a small squad of Sherpas at Darjeeling, and would send their agents ahead to hire others at Sola Khumbu who would lead them to Rongbuck by the Nangpa La Col. Candidates were numerous at Sola Khumbu, and those who had already

had experience in carrying loads on the glacier enjoyed priority rights by virtue of this experience.

Fearful of being eliminated, six young men resolved to go to Darjeeling and offer themselves to the sahibs at the time the expedition started out. In order not to hurt the feelings of the seniors of Chomolungma, they left in great secrecy. But far from their homes, they felt more daring, and asked for shelter for the night in the villages through which they passed. Everywhere they were offered, in addition, a goblet of tea with butter, and a soup of *tsampa*.

During the day, they felt that they were world-winners, and were sure of themselves. Certainly the sahibs would not hesitate for a single instant to hire tough characters like them, and the Thami dwellers would certainly be astonished to find them at Rongbuck.

But when their shadows lengthened out before them, and not a single roof was in sight, then their doubts began: there were plenty of experienced Sherpas at Darjeeling. Why should the sahibs burden themselves with novices like them? They began, too, to think of the bears and the evil spirits. They took to singing then, and engaged in contests of bragging.

At Salpa Bhanjyang, the snow-covered mountain pass frightened them. Was it really necessary for them to take chances at such an altitude and in such weather? Had someone fooled them in the last village in pointing out the road to them? Or perhaps had even they themselves made a mistake?

The snow was falling in huge flakes. They were sinking down in it up to their knees. Never before had they gone so far from their own village. No one dared to mention giving up, but each one secretly suspected his comrades of having such thoughts, because they were all thinking of it themselves. Night started to fall while they were in the middle of the pass. Would they have to turn around? Pasang suggested spending the night in

a cave. They did not find one until night had fully fallen, and then it turned out to be no more than a narrow winding opening in the rocks. They settled down in a heap, close to each other to keep themselves warm, and tried to go to sleep.

But with night, the wind rose and the tempest roared. Every noise made them jump. Was that a bear prowling around outside? Perhaps bandits had followed them. Evil spirits and demons of the mountains are particularly active and malevolent on nights when the wind is high—everyone knows that.

And then there was the *yeti*. The six young men from Sola Khumbu kept thinking of the Abominable Snowman, but they were so scared of him that they did not dare to mention him. Since their earliest childhood, they had heard a great deal of talk about him. But as they were growing up, they had stopped believing in him, and would laugh him off the way we make fun of the bogey man, of goblins and legendary ogres. Yet all the Everest porters declared that they had seen his footprints high up on the Rongbuck glacier. These people undoubtedly exaggerated a good deal and bragged endlessly so as to arouse admiration. . . .

But what about those soft sounds of footsteps on the snow?

To dispel his fear, Nima cried out: "Come on in, then, Mr. Yeti, welcome to you!" Relieved, the other five burst out laughing, but the noise became even more distinct, as if the abominable creature was actually accepting the invitation.

"Let's close our eyes," said Dorje. "Anyone who exchanges glances with the *yeti*, dies of it within a month." They all did as he suggested, and to make doubly sure, they pressed the palms of their hands over their eyelids.

Next morning when they continued the ascent of the pass, numbed and stumbling, frozen to the very marrow of their bones, they could see traces of bare feet in the snow. The first footprints of the *yeti* that Tenzing had ever seen.

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In spite of them, the group climbed on. Soon the Arun valley came in sight. Below, the snow had stopped a long time ago. Many-colored flowers were growing on the grasslands. Still lower down, rhododendrons and wild orchids mingled their flaming colors.

The spring was even earlier in this valley than at Thami. And the six boys from the mountains discussed the causes of this phenomenon. They all agreed on one explanation: in walking toward the rising sun, they were approaching the summer. But from that point on, opinions differed. Some of them maintained that in making the same trip in the autumn, they would be getting nearer to winter. Others held that the countries in the east are always warmer.

Now, so many years later, what was left of this great adventure of theirs? Norbu, Dorje and the other Norbu were not hired by Shipton sahib. The first mentioned returned at once to his native village, and the other two had been working on a tea plantation at Kalimpong ever since. Pasang made two expeditions, then he began to train race horses. He established his own stable; he had at first prospered, but now that the English were no longer masters in India, he was in danger of failing. At one time it happened that Tenzing worked for Pasang during the winter, which is the slack season for Sherpas. And what other work had he not done to support his family? Still, he had gone on as a Sherpa, and now, twelve years after his first expedition, he was a sirdar! Nima left Darjeeling towards the end of 1935, but he had not been seen again at Thami, and no one knew what had become of him.

A Sherpa's Career

"During almost twenty years I have climbed many mountains large and small, and I have spent very little time indeed with my family; sometimes only six months of the year, or even four, as happened last year.

About this I am unhappy.

"But I never learned any other trade than climbing. I am the only one in my family who works. I have a wife and two daughters; they are nice folks. But we are poor; I have neither house nor land, and very little money. If I did not climb, my family would die of starvation.

"However, I love to go off on an expedition; I love the mountains. I do not strive to conquer the peaks. I go on a pilgrimage."

TENZING

"My husband is a daredevil. He does not like to sit by the fireside."

ANG LAHMU, TENZING'S WIFE

Wilson Sahib's Secret

AT TOON SOONG, each one in his own garden, separated from each other by a hedge of intertwined bamboo branches, two young people were talking in the shade of a sycamore tree. He was a young Sherpa but recently come to the town; she, a Bhotia from Darjeeling.

"Listen," he said, "last summer way high up on the glacier in the cold and the snow, we came upon a dead sahib. The

body was very thin but well preserved and all frosted over like a stone at the first autumn frost. A bad omen. To reassure us, the sahibs explained to us that this man had tried to make the climb all by himself and without any help, up to Chomolungma, the goddess who dwells high up on top of the highest mountain in the whole world.

“At the monastery of Rongbuck, the servants of the lamas told us that the year before they had seen this Wilson sahib as he left in the direction of the North Col. The two Sherpas who went with him came back the next day because they did not have confidence in this sahib. However, the lamas, and especially the Grand Lama of Rongbuck, held him in higher regard than all the other Westerners who had passed by the monastery, for he did not break the rocks with hammer blows, at the risk of letting out the evil spirits who are shut up in them, and he did not have a gun or any other arms to kill the wild beasts of the mountain. It seems that he had told them he would climb Chomolungma so that he could teach the values of fasting to all the men on earth.

“I, for my part, do not understand how he was going to teach whatever it was that he was going to teach, this sahib who was found frozen near the supply of food left behind by the expedition in 1933. On the way back, though, Uncle Sonam explained it all to me.

“These sahibs who climb the mountains do not even know that they will find the gods there, and they laugh among themselves at what the lamas have to say on the subject. Just listen to me, these men are very ambitious, Sonam told it to me. The one who reaches the highest peak of the Himalayas will become famous through all countries. Then he will possess the powers and the treasures which they call ‘world fame.’

“Just you listen carefully to me. I want to learn to climb the way they do, and if I carry the load very high up, up to the

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last camp that they install under the clouds, perhaps some day a sahib will choose me to climb with him. Well, then, when he claims this 'world fame' among his fellowmen, he will turn to me who will be behind him, and he will say: 'I got there. This man knows it; he is the one whom I led up here attached to me by a rope, so that he can be my witness.' Then perhaps I, too, will have my small share of these powers and treasures."

"And you believe what Sonam told you?" the girl asked, laughing.

Then, anxious because her laugh might attract the attention of her parents, she ran away towards the house.

That is the way this young and naïve mountaineer from Sola Khumbu interpreted the strange and fabulous adventure of Maurice Wilson.

This thirty-seven-year-old Englishman whom the Great War had profoundly moved, had set himself to study the various systems of fasting designed to bring about an Eden-like purity in his fellows. According to him, anyone who deprived himself entirely of nourishment for three weeks reached a state of Nirvana where, in the calm between life and death, the soul and the physical body were one. After this experience a man was reborn to a new life: freed from all imperfections, he remained rich by reason of the experiences through which he had passed.

Wilson had visions. God had charged him with spreading the Truth among his contemporaries; and no one knows why, but the word "Everest" kept flashing like lightning into his delirium. Wilson undoubtedly imagined that the highest mountain peak in the world was also the highest judgment seat, and that in raising his carnal being to such a great height, he could spread all over the surface of the globe the spiritual treasures that his fasts had revealed to him.

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Now this man knew absolutely nothing at all about mountain climbing. He bought himself a small airplane so that he could rise as high as possible onto the side of the mountain on which he hoped to crash his engine, to continue his ascent on foot. His machine was confiscated. He then betook himself to Darjeeling and in secret negotiated with several Sherpas who had taken part in the 1933 expedition. They agreed to conduct him secretly to the foot of Chomolungma.

To cross Sikkim province, Wilson traveled during the night and hid himself during the day. In Tibet, he avoided the convents, the fortified places, and the villages. Finally, he presented himself to the Grand Lama of Rongbuck, and on the pretext that he had participated in the 1933 expedition, he claimed some of the materials left behind on deposit at the lamasery.

Wilson's aims touched the heart of the Grand Lama, and he permitted him to take whatever he wanted from the British reserve supply.

Wilson started out alone on the glacier. As his entire baggage, he carried with him a small pocket mirror which was to serve him as a heliograph for signaling his presence on the summit of Everest. As for food, he was content with a little rice water. Wilson was sure that he would arrive at the summit in three or four days, thanks to his fasts, to his purity, and to divine assistance.

The spring storms obliged him to beat a retreat, and he turned back to the monastery. About two weeks later, the unfortunate fanatic again left for the assault, but this time with his Sherpas who showed him a cache of food abandoned on the glacier some 2,600 feet above Camp III.

The Sherpas stayed at this Camp III, and Wilson labored mightily, like one possessed, to reach the North Col. From time to time he returned to the depot to sustain himself with ovomal-

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tine, chocolate, sardines, and biscuits. The Sherpas left to return to the monastery, and got back to Darjeeling where they did not do any bragging about this mad enterprise.

Wilson was growing ever more and more feeble on his glacier. He kept a diary of his comings and goings. His thoughts became confused. Finally he lay down near the depot without any tent, and died in his sleep, probably on June 1st.

The 1935 expedition found the frozen body of the prophet. The wind had carried the tent off. There remained nothing but a few shreds of it attached to some heavy stones. The last notation in the journal was dated May 31st.

If this adventure had made an impression on the lamas of Rongbuck, it had made an equally strong impression on the young mountaineer who now recalled the story of "world fame" that Uncle Sonam had told. In that winter of 1935-36, he had only taken part in a single expedition as yet, but he was firmly resolved to return to Chomolungma with all the sahibs who might be attempting the ascent. He would be a Tiger, a sirdar, and even more, perhaps.

And to beguile her whom he loved, he boasted of a fabulous plan: he would climb up to the very summit of Chomolungma.

However, during these same winter evenings, at the back of every garden in Toon Soong, some young Sherpa would be telling almost the same tale to his particular beloved.

As for the older men, they would drink in the bazaars, and they would perhaps brag even more. Like the sailors of the great voyages of exploration of the past, they would try to astound each other, and to have drinks offered to them by the naïve folk who would listen open-mouthed to their tall stories which grew more fantastic every day. Because of the embellishments, they were no longer able to distinguish between what was true and what was false. As, not so long ago, the least little

midshipman who had never even set foot on land during the whole voyage held forth, on his return, about the fierce savages, the monstrous animals, the virgin forests, the mountains of diamonds, so also one could see at Toon Soong the talkative coolies, after a few drinks, fancying themselves Sherpas, the novices attributing to themselves the exploits of Tigers, and the Tigers building up the accounts of their own exploits until they became scarcely believable. The older ones among them, those who had known their hour of fame when Tenzing was but a baby at Thami, could not recall any longer in what year, on what particular mountain, and with what sahib they had won their titles. But everyone made much of his efforts, exaggerated his former exploits to the tenth degree, and each one waited impatiently for the end of winter so that he might depart once more towards the summits on which he would come to life once more, like a fish returned to water.

A Pair of Ankle Supports

The young Sherpa who was thus shaping for himself an ambition out of all proportion to his means, was still nothing but an unknown of the most lowly sort even among his own people. No one would have dared to predict whether he would ever go back on an expedition. So many others before him had refused to shoulder the packbasket a second time and risk themselves in the realms of the terrors, where the winds rage that cut one's breath sharply, where no one can make out whether the fogs are made of the snow which is rising or of the clouds which are falling. Where the high altitude makes you giddy, and where on the vast expanses there appear from time to time the footprints of the Abominable Snowman, hideous, foul, and devouring. But no one knows if he devours bodies or souls, whether he does not also extinguish every

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possibility of reincarnation in a higher form...*om mani padme om.*

As for him, in his solitude, he was sometimes bothered by the memories of Thami: his mother's smile, the house where he grew up, the triple bells of the yaks as they left for the high pastures, the campfire around which all the villagers were seated, the voice of Old Dama which followed after the lama's sacred flute, the fabulous legend which made shivers run up and down a child's spine and set a sparkle into the eyes of the girls, the little dog, who, digging with his nose, hollowed out a burrow for himself under the coverlets to share the warmth; his sisters, and his father who worries about his son's future. In order not to succumb to homesickness, he set over against these temptations more recent visions of his: limpid mornings in Tibet where the farthest mountains seemed to be as near as your own hand, the sudden appearance of Kang Cho, lying like a lion at the foot of a hill, and the infinite plain which stretched out in the distance, and the Tsan-Pou, a sacred river, one of the most sacred which flowed through the center of this plain.

He recalled one morning particularly. Everyone in the camp was asleep. The mules stretched out at a distance scarcely raised their heads from time to time. The young man had left the tent; it was still dark. Scarcely did the rays of dull gold streak the heavens in the east which the caravan had left behind.

And suddenly, even before it was actually day, the rays of the rising sun from below threw their light high up, well above the clouds, onto the sublime face of the goddess.

No one was yet awake. The naïve child of Thami, maddened with awe, prostrated himself. A breathless communion was established between the dawn, the summit of the world, and a mere porter.

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After several days of marching, the yaks took the place of the mules, then little donkeys replaced the yaks, and there came the bedazzlement of Shekar Chong, the crystal fortress. This prospective mountaineer, fresh from his native valley, knew already splendors that most of the sahibs would never glimpse.

From this expedition he returned with some rupees tied up in his kerchief. Some of the men had lost all their pay gambling, even before they drew it. Others had drunk it up in the bazaars on the way home. As for him, he had found a place to live with an old woman from Dolalghat who had been living at Toon Soong since her young days, and who was glad to let the place under the roof to a young fellow from Sola Khumbu, who was quiet, willing, and obliging.

The rupees from Chomolungma were not enough to keep him while he waited for the next expedition, so he did heavy jobs, here and there, for the rich Bhotias from Toon Soong and the English sahibs or Hindus from Darjeeling. His fine simple dignity and his bearing of a proud man of the mountains did not serve him ill, far from it. Everyone was glad to give him work, for everyone could see at a glance that he had but recently arrived from his native village, and that the city had not yet spoiled him.

Perhaps it was precisely for these very reasons that Shipton sahib had hired him a few months before. He was dressed like a man from Thami, that is, loose trousers of wool trimmed with fur inside his Tibetan boots, a long Mongolian cloak which took the place of a jacket, and a woolen cap covered with fur. That was the way he still dressed.

In his loft he sometimes gazed upon his one treasure—a pair of leather ankle-supports.

When they were about to leave Rongbuck, the sahibs made an inventory of what had to be carried back, and what was to be left behind. The Sherpas and the coolies watched with

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greedy eyes. One sahib had opened a packing case. He had found a sheet of paper and read from it; he had dug down and had called one of his comrades to show him the contents of the box. Both of them were amazed.

Was it some kind of magic that had changed what they had been carrying in this box? Or were the sahibs themselves astonished at having loaded themselves with it? One of them threw the cover away and, looking disgusted, let everybody at the treasure.

It was a mob scene. They shoved. Whoever raised up out of the box was assaulted, robbed, trampled sometimes. And all this with mad ruses, jealous glares, and dark insolence.

All the objects disappearing were so many relics for the child of Sola Khumbu. Even when at Thami he had heard the stories the Tigers told after returning from Chomolungma, he had never imagined that the sahibs could possess such an abundance of varied and perhaps sacred objects.

He did not rush into the *melée*. Sober and timid, he stood aside. When the pillagers scattered, he furtively approached the chest and saw two copper objects in the bottom. A quick glance around. He plunged his arm in and hurried away with his prize: a pair of leather ankle-supports.

It was a wonder he did not burn a little butter in a lamp under these amulets that came from the West.

Disappointment

"The 1936 expedition to Mt. Everest was a bitter deception"—that is what Eric Shipton wrote.* If this enterprise deceived the sahibs, it was perhaps even more of a disappointment to the young Sherpa who was eager to pass his test and to win the title of Tiger.

*Eric Shipton: *Upon that Mountain*. London, Hodder and Stoughton.

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The caravan arrived at Rongbuck on April 25th, that is, well in advance of the monsoon. This time at last they were going to be able to profit from the relatively brief period between the end of the harsh winter winds and the start of the warm summer winds. (The winds of the monsoon which carry the snow on to the Himalayas.)

Camp III was set up on the 7th and 8th of May. On the 13th, the sahibs and Sherpas installed themselves at an altitude of 23,000 feet on the North Col, at Camp IV. But ever since the 30th of April, the snow had been falling and when the camp was set up at the pass, it continued to fall so thick and fast that an attempt at an ascent had become practically impossible. From the 20th of May on, that is, at least two weeks ahead of time, the monsoon had struck with its greatest impact. It became necessary to evacuate the North Col. And the young Sherpa was beside himself. He could not understand. Since the very beginning of April these sahibs had talked of nothing but of reaching the summit of Chomolungma, and here they were, preparing for a retreat without risking the slightest real effort! Were there then some heavenly configurations or oracles which were turning them away from their projects? Had Chomolungma warned them by some mysterious means that she did not wish to receive them this particular year?

This time upon his return the young Sherpa brought back with him some half boots and a sahib's suit—but what was that in comparison with what Sonam was flaunting? At the end of 1935, Shipton sahib had taken Uncle Sonam along with him as far as Bombay, and at parting had given him a complete high-altitude outfit. For several years, then, one could see this unfrocked monk running about the streets of Darjeeling, even in fine weather, in a down-quilted overlapping coat, with a jacket of sailcloth to protect him against the wind. In addition he displayed a head covering of sheep's wool, and dark glasses.

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With his sack on his back, in heavy climbing boots, and with his ice-pick in his fist, he made his little tour of the town to be admired.

The following summer, the young Sherpa waited in vain for the departure of another Everest expedition. No sahib had decided to make the climb. So, for want of anything better, he joined up with a caravan which, without any glory at all, traversed the mountains of Sikkim and reconnoitered the buttresses of Kangchenjunga without even attempting an ascent. The escapade had at least one advantage: it lasted sufficiently long, and brought in scarcely less than an assault would have done.

That was as it should be, for the boy from Thami had got married after his return from the Ruttledge expedition.

When he arrived at his hut in Toon Soong, early in the fall of 1937, his young wife had just had a baby which she was nursing in the shade of a rhododendron with scarlet blossoms, at the foot of the garden. A little daughter had been born to them.

The parents admired their little Pem Pem more than they would normally, because they had very much wished for a son. But it is not fitting to raise objections to the decisions of the gods.

Now he was a family man. And suppose he were really to find a talisman on the summit of Chomolungma? He already believed a good deal less in anything like that. How could anyone trust the talk of a Sonam? But he would return again and again to Everest—it would be his mountain.

Tenzing's Third Departure for Everest

Tilman and Shipton sahibs finally undertook an expedition after their own hearts: an easy, inexpensive expedition. They

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arrived at Darjeeling on the 15th of February, 1938. The celebrated sirdar Ang Tharkey had alerted his work crew, and the rumor had spread through Toon Soong. There must have been at least one hundred candidates who offered themselves for hire.

Tilman, the leader of the expedition, chose a dozen of them for Everest itself, and set aside twenty for the three British caravans which were to start at once towards other Himalayan peaks.

The sirdar Nursang offered extra pay to the men in order to assure the collaboration of some experienced Sherpas for an expedition to Nanga Parbat. But he was handicapped in this by the bad reputation which this peak had. Since 1895, no other peak had so bitterly defended itself against mountain climbers. In 1932, half the members of a German-American expedition had lost their lives there, with the majority of their Sherpas, and their agony had lasted no less than nine days. In 1937, seven sahibs and nine Sherpas had been buried by an avalanche the first night they were in Camp IV at some 21,450 feet altitude. This Nanga Parbat, whose name literally means Naked Mountain, had become the "Frightful Mountain" for the Sherpas of Darjeeling, and they had put it on the blacklist.

Nursang went about from one man to the next, whispering promises of larger salaries and marvels never yet seen. "You won't have to carry at all. It will be just like a little outing for you. An airplane will drop the supplies to the camps even before you get there." In his enthusiasm, he flapped his arms, imitated the throbbing of the engine, and squatted down from time to time like a chicken laying an egg to show them how the immense bird would drop the great bundles which ordinarily weigh so heavily on the backs of the Sherpas.

However, the only candidates were novices and some veterans whom the sahibs hesitated to hire after they had applied

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a little horn to their hearts (no doubt in order to measure their courage), and porters whose reputations were not good. When even this residue hesitated, Nursang began to taunt them: "So what! You die on Nanga Parbat—yes, but you die other places, too—you die everywhere. You don't expect to live forever, do you? Well, then—?"

Ang Tharkey's team was made up, besides Tenzing, of an élite of Sherpas who seemed to have specialized in Everest expeditions. There was Pasang, one of the first fifteen Tigers of 1924, Lapka Tzering, Wangdi, and Norbu who in later years often worked with Tenzing, as we saw, in 1947. There were also Rinsing, Nukku, Ang Karma, and Kusang who left very soon for Sola Khumbu to recruit other Sherpas who were to join them at the Rongbuck glacier.

The caravan got an over-early start which made the trip troublesome when they reached the mountains of Sikkim. Laryngitis, angina, bronchitis, and pneumonia were prevalent from the first mountain pass. Morale was quite good, however, and the Sherpas displayed perhaps even more verve than ordinarily. This time the sahibs ate *tsampa* like the Sherpas, and they had made an effort to equip the work crew almost like themselves.

Kusang reached Rongbuck with forty-six Sherpas, among whom was the redoubtable Sonam Tenzing. Tilman had asked for only thirty, and it was Sonam who, on his own responsibility, had brought the additional fifteen. These men, however, had not arrived empty-handed. They had climbed Nangpa La (almost 19,800 feet) with more than half a ton of provisions for the expedition: potatoes, rice, and roasted barley flour. The sahibs kept all of them, and on April 9th, fifty-seven porters deposited their loads at the base camp.

27,687 Feet—A Tiger at Last!

It was now seven weeks that the twelve Sherpas of Darjeeling and the seven sahibs had been traveling and living more or less together. They knew each other well, and besides, more than half the Westerners had participated in former expeditions, and the faces of certain of the Sherpas had become familiar to them. Tenzing was no longer the young mountaineer fresh from his native mountains. Although his modesty prevented him from being aware of it, the sahibs already looked upon him as a seasoned Everester.

In other ways, too, they had taken note of this gentleman-Sherpa. They did not apply this term without a smile, of course. He was not the true gentleman that England, that all Britain, knew— There could never be any question, no matter how well liked he might be, of making a gentleman out of one of these natives, excellent porters without any doubt, men who were faithful and generally loyal, among whom one might discern even a certain sporting spirit, but who never went climbing by themselves without any sahibs, for by themselves they would be full of fears, obsessed by imaginary terrors. And we must not forget their poverty, their general appearance which is, on the whole, unattractive, and their noisy gaiety.

No doubt about it, Tenzing was quite “the personable young man” who found favor with his bosses. And, furthermore, a sincere enthusiasm glowed in his eyes. He had, too, an open countenance which would leave no one in doubt as to his sincerity. He was every bit as willing and obliging as the other Sherpas, even more so than some, yet without the slightest appearance of servility. One felt that he actually took pleasure in giving service. Already one sensed something exceptional about him. And soon those who would get to know this Tiger

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of the Snows would unconsciously begin to think: the Gentleman of the Snows.

When the sahibs joked with the sirdar and drew up in advance a tentative list of men on whom they could rely to carry the highest—always higher, Tenzing's name was mentioned with confidence.

"Is he a good man, that one?"

"Very good!" Ang Tharkey answers. And then he adds, laughing: "Why, naturally—he comes from Sola Khumbu."

From the instant when the caravan came to grips with the Rongbuck glacier, Tenzing felt his courage increasing tenfold. Would he be able to climb high enough this time so that he could attain his coveted title of Tiger? He hoped—and he did not spare his efforts. Besides it seemed that since he found himself at the foot of his beloved Chomolungma, his blood was running more swiftly through his veins.

The climb proceeded without any undue difficulties. On April 13th, Tenzing reached Camp I, and it was there Tilman distributed warm outfits, Primus stoves to the best ones, and cigarettes to everybody. Three days later the advance guard was at Camp II, at an altitude of 19,140 feet. The sixty-four men of the expedition came together there. For more than a week, there was a great coming and going of porters piling up supplies. At last, the ropes departed one after the other for Camp III (21,120 feet). They had to go around most of the side of Changtse (North Peak, 24,866 feet) from which avalanches might hurtle down at any moment. The problem now was to gain the North Col by making a spurt of over 1,980 feet in a single day. And there, too, there was the danger of avalanches.

Four sahibs and thirteen porters made the climb up to the North Col. The operation was performed without any unusual

difficulties. They set up two tents—one for the British climbers and the other for the five Sherpas who were to remain at the pass. The eight others climbed down, led by Ang Tharkey.

Next day, Warren, Tenzing, and Tilman pushed forward a reconnaissance march on the North Ridge, and Warren took advantage of this to try out his closed-circuit respirator.

The caravan had been having a good deal of trouble with its oxygen. Several of the tanks were put out of commission during the long portage through Tibet. The sahibs explained to the Sherpas that, thanks to these English air cylinders, they would be able to romp like the *thars* (Himalayan chamoix) up to the very highest peaks, for now the oxygen equipment was in good condition.

The three men roped themselves together. Tenzing no longer looked upon the rope as something magic. He knew that the sahibs were not taking him up to the summit so that he might serve as their witness, but that he, who was second, should watch out for the safety of the one ahead. Besides, he had much to do, for, far from romping like a *thar*, Warren sahib was stopping at every single step, visibly in pain. Soon his oxygen equipment choked him, and he had to give up.

Tenzing continued on alone with Tilman sahib. The snow which lay eternally on the summit of the North Col extended up to 25,080 feet. Beyond that the ridge was bare and the rocks were covered with hoarfrost. It might be dangerous to go on up there, and Tilman sahib stopped. Yet he did not appear to be exhausted. Why not continue? The two men sat down. Tenzing's feet were icy cold. "Bad boots," said the sahib. "The snow must have leaked in, and your feet are wet." Although the Sherpas were better equipped than on earlier expeditions, they still did not have boots as watertight as those of the Europeans.

They caught their breath for a moment. Tilman sahib got

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up and began the descent. The next morning the whole party abandoned the North Col. Was this the retreat? However, Tenzing had not seen anything which would make giving up necessary.

No. Tilman sahib just judged that the weather was still too bad, and that his men had been having too hard a time of it. So he led them to the Kharta Valley where everyone would have a chance to recover from his weariness. Then, on the 6th of June, four sahibs and sixteen Sherpas were once more on their way to the North Col.

Next day there was great excitement. The loads were being divided among the seven Sherpas who would be portering to Camps V and VI. Two tents were to be established, one for the two Europeans and the other for the seven Sherpas, at Camp V. At Camp VI there would be only a small tent for two.

A single tent for the assault party of two! Tenzing soon learned that the party would be composed of two sahibs. It would certainly not be this time that he would climb to the very summit of Chomolungma. But he was firmly resolved to carry his load to the uttermost limit of his powers—and even beyond, if need be. However, the ascent was difficult. At the edge of the snow, two Sherpas sat down and refused to go any further. They were already exhausted. From now on, the entire team of porters began to show signs of weariness, all except one. And as Tilman sahib commented on this ascent, “Tenzing kept going magnificently, but none of the others seemed to be in good shape.”

The line had thinned over the ridge. The distance separating the first man from the last seemed to be getting steadily greater. While some sat down, others rested on their ice-axes. It was at that moment that a storm arose and surprised the caravan in complete disorder. Each man clung to his place so that the wind would not blow him away. The sahibs shouted at the

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top of their voices. They seemed to be repeating Nursang's exhortation: "So what! You don't expect to live forever!" But the Sherpas turned a deaf ear. The snow fell; the flakes whirled, blown by the tempest. No one could see anything clearly any longer. Each man was isolated on his particular spot on the ridge. There was nothing to do but wait for the storm to end. At last, around four o'clock, the storm died down, just as suddenly as it came up. Although snow had been falling heavily, it did not remain on the ridge, for the north wind carried it off. Each man once again took up his load, and the trek began once more up to a small snow-covered platform that was sufficiently broad for their purposes. This was to be the location of Camp V at 25,938 feet.

When they started to pitch the tents, they noticed that the largest one which they had planned for the sahibs was missing. No use searching for it, it was 990 feet further down, where the two Sherpas who could not go on had stopped. Now there was at Camp V only a tent designed for two, to take care of the four sahibs, and it was this tent which was to have been carried up to Camp VI the next day, for the assault party itself. The whole operation had gone wrong because of the two who weakened.

Tenzing nudged Pasang and indicated the ridge to him with his chin. That was all that was needed for them to go stubbornly off to get the tent which had been left below.

"For the two men to climb down and to get back right away with their loads, on top of the hard work which they had already done that day, was a remarkable feat of vigor and vitality, carried out with great courage, and it was proof of an untiring selflessness."* That is the way Tilman sahib expressed himself on the subject of this particular exploit.

* H. W. Tilman: *Mount Everest* 38. Cambridge University Press.

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By quarter past six, Camp V was fully set up, and those who were not to remain there had gone back to the North Col.

At daybreak on June 7th, a violent windstorm, the terrifying wind of the Himalayas, forced them all to shut themselves up in their tents. There they slept. There they chatted, but **only** now and then, for they got out of breath quickly if they tried to talk a lot.

Among the Sherpas there was a certain Lapka who liked to play the boss. "And what about you, little cow dung, will you be portering all the way up to the top this time?" he asked Tenzing.

"I will go as high as the gods permit me to," replied Tenzing, good-humoredly.

On June 8th, poking his head outside the tent before the break of day, the sirdar Ang Tharkey noticed that the weather was clear. Not the slightest trace of a cloud in the jet-black sky. This would be the day of the great effort. On to Camp VI!

But above Camp V, the ridge was once more covered with snow. They sank into it up to their knees and the sahibs were worried. What would this snow do? Might it not suddenly begin to slide down over the sharp slope and carry the men along with it? This time they had to rope themselves together, and progress was slow, very slow.

Before reaching 26,400 feet, the men in the lead found themselves facing a small projection which would be easy to climb over if the snow were not so dangerous. But they had to go around it.

One sahib was the first to take a chance on the snowy side of the ridge. His companion gently let out the rope, ready to pull it back in case of a misstep. Tenzing watched carefully. Up to now he had carried loads while walking on terrains that undoubtedly had been sufficiently varied and difficult, but this time he got his first lesson in alpinism.

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The sahib had made it, he had gone around the projection, and now he had once more reached the ridge. A fixed rope then had to be set up, and each one was to follow the new trail while holding onto to this rope which was like a helping hand. But God knows why—the second sahib took off in his turn while the first one was still uncoiling the rope.

And now came the turn of Pasang and Tenzing. Tenzing had not seen what the man had to do who was on the other side of the projection, to assure the safety of his comrade, and he gave Pasang the signal to go ahead. The latter started out in the footsteps of the sahibs, and Tenzing, in his turn, let the rope slide out. But Pasang was carrying a heavy load. His movements were less free than those of the sahibs, and suddenly he began to slip. Tenzing held tight to the rope. It became taut. The snow began giving way under Pasang as if an avalanche were starting. The weight was too much and Pasang's arms were too tired. Tenzing saw the catastrophe threatening. He lay down on the ground, held onto the rough places of the rock, became veritably a part of the rock—and saved Pasang.

At one o'clock, they reached the old Camp VI that Norton and Somervell had established at 26,961 feet in 1922, during the first attempted ascent of Everest. There it was, at a height of more than 26,000 feet that the first Tigers won their titles. The sahibs did not fail to point this out. Tired as they were, the Sherpas felt a wild exaltation fill their hearts. And yet Pasang was growing weak, and Wangdi's voice was growing hoarse. To beat the record of the Tigers, their five comrades helped them along. It took three and a quarter hours to climb the 726 feet. At last, with their tongues hanging out, their eyes glazed, and their hearts beating in their throats, the seven Sherpas let themselves drop to the ground at 27,687 feet. "I have never seen the Sherpas exhausted to such a degree, and

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they still had to struggle mightily to reach Camp VI before nightfall," wrote Tilman.*

Before going further, the porters caught their breath. Tenzing had stretched out flat on his back. His throat was on fire, but he had not let anyone notice what shape he was in, and he had even been able to help his old comrade Pasang. It was not exhaustion alone that caused Tenzing's heart to beat, but also an enthusiasm which was boundless. Tiger! At last he was a Tiger. The same as the great ones, the most famous ones, those about whom one spoke with respect in Darjeeling as well as in the most remote villages of Sola Khumbu. Napbou Yichay, Lahakpa Chedi and Sen Chumbi—even these great ones had not carried as high as the Tigers had just done today.

Tenzing Bhotia, Tiger of the Snows

And the newly born Tigers began their descent. There were no longer any sahibs with them. Ang Tharkey led the party and directed the operations when it was a matter of getting around the dangerous projection. As soon as they arrived at Camp V, the Sherpas got into their tent and stretched out to sleep. Even while falling asleep, they were excited, and Lapka, who had been just as exultant as the others, turned to Tenzing and asked him: "Well, little flea from Thami, are you satisfied at last?"

"I'm no more a flea than anyone else, and my name is Tenzing Bhotia," replied the man who was falling asleep with his throat on fire.

Why did he adopt this name of Bhotia, as the Tibetans of Darjeeling and Sikkim do? Was it to pay his respects to his wife, herself a bonafide Bhotia? Now that he was a Tiger, she could well be proud if he were to adopt her name. Was it to

* *Mount Everest* 38.

snub the boss? Was it perhaps simply because he was dropping off to sleep and no longer knew just what he was saying? Or, according to Tibetan custom, was he changing his name in order to mystify certain malevolent demons? Perhaps those of laryngitis, or those of poverty? Now that he was a Tiger, it was time for him to rid himself of the latter.

Next morning at break of day, Pasang seemed to want to say something, but only incoherent sounds issued from his throat, and they asked him in vain to get up; he stayed stretched out, rolling his eyes like a madman. They had to leave him behind and the six others took their departure. Wangdi and Tenzing were in fact in such bad shape that as soon as they arrived at the North Col, Warren sahib took them to the Base Camp so that he could look after them. He had only limited medical supplies at his disposal, and so he treated Tenzing's laryngitis as well as Wangdi's pneumonia with oxygen inhalations.

However, to go back to Pasang at Camp V. Actually, he had been laid low, not with insanity, but with hemiplegia. Since his jaw was half paralyzed, his voice had taken on an unaccustomed tone, and no one could make out what he wanted to say. His comrades roughly suggested leaving him where he was. "The mountain," they said, "will claim its victim, and if we stop it, another member of the caravan will be taken in Pasang's place, preferably one of those who did the great evil of robbing the mountain of its due."*

Really angry now, Tilman made Ang Tharkey, Kusang, and Nukku go back and carry their comrade Pasang down to the foot of the mountain. And this was no small matter.

While the slope permitted, they pulled the paralyzed man by his feet. Where fixed ropes had been fastened to hoist the loads, the poor devil was attached by his belt to get him across

* *Mount Everest* 38.

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some hundreds of feet of the mountain. Then, Nukku, staunch fellow, carried him on his back for a dangerous stretch. Then they tied him up once more, but this time by his feet, so that he could be slid down the length of the slope.

During the 1938 expedition, an unprecedented phenomenon occurred: some of the Sherpas stole! A cargo of boots disappeared. The twelve Sherpas of Darjeeling were above suspicion, and so the blame fell on those who, with Kusang and Sonam Tenzing, had joined the party at the Nangpa La pass.

This shortage of footgear brought one comical incident. Ang Karma, the cook, who had completely lost his voice from laryngitis, could not, because of this, venture out on the glacier. As he had been well shod, he was asked to surrender his boots to one of the more able-bodied men. But the sahibs who had suggested this to him did not realize the enormous, almost mystical value that the Sherpas attribute to European things. Perhaps it was precisely this mysterious attraction which had been the motive for the theft in the first place.

Ang Karma refused to give up his precious boots. He was threatened with being sent home. Rather than give in, and in order to assert his firm resolve not to quit Everest before the others, he lay down on the ground. And despite his laryngitis, which up to that moment had completely robbed him of his voice, he burst forth in a raucous voice with: "A lakh!"* That was the ransom he was going to exact for his boots. Such a price was incompatible with the principles of Shipton and Tilman who believed in easy and cheap expeditions. Without the means to buy him off, they had to permit Ang Karma the pleasure of keeping his boots.

But the theft, of which they had been the victims, outraged

*Lakh: a monetary unit employed by the rajahs and maharajahs, particularly in legends, which represents 250,000 rupees!

the sahibs and their wrath fell on Sonam Tenzing, the sharp character who had recruited fifteen Sherpas too many at Sola Khumbu. They threatening to confiscate his equipment.

This Tenzing was really quite a rascal. First he joined the expedition on the glacier clad in a summer outfit of linen cloth; then he appeared wearing the regular outfit of the mountaineers of Sola Khumbu and kept this on during the entire expedition, so that he could sell as completely new the outfit the sahibs furnished him with.

When he walked along the streets of Darjeeling, like Tartarin—even in midsummer in gaiters and boots, gloves on his hands, helmet on his head, dark goggles on his nose, making an awkward appearance in his outfit for a high altitude—it was not so much to dazzle the women as to attract potential customers.

The expedition of 1938 was the victim of another theft. A small case containing 800 rupees and deposited by Karma Paul, the interpreter and paymaster, at the monastery of Rongbuck, had disappeared. When Karma Paul accused them, the lamas were about to excommunicate him, but thanks to the intervention of the sahibs, and in return for a goodly remuneration, they proceeded to a solemn ceremony of adjuring the thief to return the 800 rupees if he wished to avoid eternal damnation, that is, reincarnation without end in all the most abject forms, from earthworm to infernal demon. Some days later, Karma found the case broken open in front of his tent, but it contained no more than 400 rupees.

The Council of Tigers

A jolt woke up the traveler in the train from Patna to Techpur, which he would be leaving soon, to take the line for Darjeeling. He smiled to think of the joy experienced when he had

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returned to Darjeeling after the 1938 expedition. The following winter, the Sherpas often came together for serious discussions. A sort of council was established, almost a syndicate.

The new Tigers were not like the early ones.

Those of 1921, '22, and '24 were adventurers caring enough to thrust themselves into a quarrel between divinities. They wore themselves out on the high mountain peaks in order to get along with the sahibs, and the famous Golden Book had a mystical character that the sportsmen from the West could not conceive of. That is the way it was among the Sherpas, for, in their eyes, the sahibs shared in godlike characteristics because of their physical stamina and their wealth. All the objects with incomprehensible uses, which the sahibs had carried up to help them assault the mountain, surrounded their heads with halos.

As for these objects, they appealed forcibly to the imagination of the Sherpas, whose simplicity and extreme poverty we have already noted. But the Sherpas were Tibetans, that is, they exhibited an unbelievable love of comfort where the practice of their religious rites was involved.

The Westerner moved from place to place, warmed himself easily, surrounded himself completely with complicated mechanical equipment to assure his material comfort, but he never thought out a way of utilizing electricity or gas to carry his praises and his prayers to God. He utilized the wind to fill his sails and had made use of it to grind his grain, just as he used flowing water.

By contrast, the Tibetan makes use of the wind to cause his prayer flags to flutter and dips his string of beads in the water of his rivers so that the current may carry beyond the horizon the proof of his piety. In his house, religious objects are more numerous than are objects for daily use: large thunderbolts of brass, three-bladed swords to chase away the evil spirits, vials

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decorated with ribbons of such a nature that the purification water does not lose its qualities, and so on.

The Sherpas were convinced that all the goods transported by the sahibs could not serve any other purpose than for exorcism against the evil spirits and demons of the mountain. Accordingly, they had the impression that they were participating in an epic adventure of which one could have only an approximate idea by referring to the tales of the Round Table where knights battled evil spirits.

The next generation looked upon their carrying labors less as a mystical adventure than as a calling that was exceptionally well recompensed, for manual labor, but one reserved for particularly hardy souls with stout hearts and tried and true characters. The expedition changed its character. The exploits of the porters became a matter of sportsmanship rather than epic heroism.

The new Tigers continued to respect the sahibs, who did not entirely lose their majestic quality of demigods. But there were good divinities and less good divinities. The sahibs were good in this sense, that they offered the Sherpas a means of earning their living, and at the same time satisfied their taste for inordinate competition and for seasonal nomadic life.

To rub elbows with divinities seems natural enough to simple souls and the pure in heart, but it also permits studying them, men or mountains. At first, the Sherpas put on the blacklist certain peaks that were particularly murderous. Without the repeated benedictions of the lamas of Rongbuck, that is what would have occurred with Everest after the great catastrophe of 1922.

Shortly before the war, a new current of opinion appeared among the Sherpas. Like the majority of illiterate, the workman of the East is an observer beyond compare. Because the Sherpas had ceased to be seekers after adventure and had become

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professionals, they went hard at their jobs by carefully observing the sahibs on the mountains. They were not long in noticing the mistakes committed by certain ones, and took to dividing them into the good ones and the less good ones. It was not a question of ruling out one or the other of them, since all of them paid. But it was a matter at least of putting on guard those who might agree to accompany an unskillful sahib. Attention! *Husiar!* (Watch out!)

Just the way the Tigers and Sherpas were classified on the register of the Himalayan Club, so the sahibs were labeled in the minds of the sirdars and the principal Tigers. These worldly preoccupations, however, had nothing in them of sacrilege, and the sahib did not thereby lose any of his divine characteristics.

But divine as he might be, taken all in all, he was only a subsidiary divinity whom the demons of the mountain were able easily to see through. If the sahib committed a mistake in his mountain climbing technique, that was simply because his heresy alienated him from the superior divinities who, from the height of the mountain tops, arbitrate the conflicts between the climbers and the evil spirits.

A Chitral Scout

In 1939, the British Army in India lost its best units who together with the Dominion troops had gone to protect the Middle East. To fill the gaps, the Army recruited and formed, as far as possible, some specialized units. The majority of the Sherpas found their places, quite naturally, in the mountain troops, and it is thus Tenzing was mustered into the Chitral Scouts. The war had overtaken him in the massif of Baltoro where he had followed Ang Tharkey and the bara-sahib, Ship-ton.

Accustomed to obey and to perform hard work, he readily

accommodated himself to this new existence. What else would he have done to support his family in the five long years during which the sahibs had something more important to think about than organizing expeditions to the Himalayas? And meanwhile Tenzing had another mouth to feed.

In these native units of the British Army of India, recruited during the war, the work consisted less of the manual of arms than of marches and carrying and hoisting loads on the mountains. Tenzing was thus doing his own kind of work; he was perfecting himself in his trade. Later he trained on skis, and there he did marvelously well.

The man who was dozing in the train from Patna to Techpur recalled the absurd adventure of one of the Chitral Scouts.

It was a Sherpa like himself, a fine young fellow by the name of Dorje who had tried for several years to have himself taken into Ang Tharkey's team. In 1939, for want of anything better, he had followed old Nursang to Nanga Parbat.

This expedition remained as a happy memory for Sherpa Dorje, now a Chitral Scout. But a curious rumor was circulating in the camp to the effect that in a nearby prisoners' camp, located at Dehra Dun, there were some German sahibs from that expedition to Nanga Parbat. Dorje was a simple-hearted fellow. He had never quarreled with any Germans; the latter had treated him well, and paid him well. He would give a little gift to these sahibs, since they were now down on their luck, confined behind barbed wire, like wild beasts.

But Dorje did not dare to do this all by himself. He was a timid man, and so he confided in one of his comrades, a Tiger of Everest, whom he trusted completely. This Tiger, too, was a man of simple heart. He saw nothing wrong in Dorje's idea. Quite the contrary, to him it appeared to agree both with the principles of Buddhist charity and courtesy, and also with the

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interests of the Sherpa corporation, for the British expeditions alone would not suffice to give a livelihood to the huge number of Sherpas who had been specializing in the trade for the past twenty years.

This Tiger was well thought of by his superior officers. First of all, he was an excellent skier. Then he was very well disciplined, and what was even more important, his natural ease of manner made for pleasant relations with his superiors. He was in the habit of associating with sahibs. This soldier had, somehow, the airs of a gentleman.

The Tiger went with his friend Dorje to find a British officer so that they could ask permission to visit some prisoners in the camp at Dehra Dun, to offer them a small proof of their deference and friendship.

The reaction of the major sahib to this request stunned them completely.

This officer, whom life in the tropics had "deteriorated" the way the high altitude deteriorates mountain climbers, lived in a state of blind panic. To him it appeared that the entire population of India was just about ready to join the Japanese. He was under the impression that he was living on a volcano, worse yet, in a hostile jungle sown with traps, a jungle where the serpent of treason roamed and where hideous insects of rebellion swarmed.

And just what was it that this cursed native was about, he who stood at attention before him, a smile on his lips? That smile, it was nothing else but the smile of hypocrisy, and that too-frank glance of his surely concealed perfidies such as were only possible in a plot hatched out by Orientals. But there was something even worse. He was a man of yellow skin, he had slanting eyes, and the shadow of his shaved mustache left a faint black trace on his upper lip. All of a sudden he recognized him as a Japanese spy!

Whereupon there burst forth a string of questions from the lips of an officer apoplectic with rage: "When were you last in India? What is your name? Why have you been hiding your true nationality? And that idiot who is holding his tongue right next to you, is he a compatriot of yours, a spy like you? What unit do you belong to? What's this uniform? The Chitral Scouts? Come, come, there aren't any Japanese in the Chitral Scouts!"

So, in the prisoner's camp where they had come as visitors, the two Sherpas were locked up, and from time to time the major sahib came with more questions to which they gave awkward answers because they did not understand them correctly. Finally, they got to the point where they wondered whether, everything considered, they might not actually have been guilty of some horrible misdeed with regard to the English sahibs.

Fortunately, the officers of the Chitral were well acquainted with these two men. One of them had a reputation for the most unquestionable loyalty, like the majority of the Tigers of Everest. And so the two Scouts got back to their own camp.

The Sherpa's World

Towards the end of the war, Tenzing changed units, and found himself in an all-Indian mountain formation which was on guard duty over the Assam frontier. The Japanese were not far off. Masters of all Burma, they could, at any moment, launch an attack on Manipur which lay at the foot of Mt. Japyo (9,851 feet).

This situation posed a serious problem for the conscientious Sherpa. He respected and liked the English sahibs. He owed them a great deal. It was by imitating them that he had learned his profession. They had enabled him to gain his livelihood by

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paying him good wages, in exchange for hard work, it is true, but work that was also satisfying. He was a nomad, the descendant of nomads, and the Himalayan expeditions made it possible for him to fulfill an ancestral instinct. He loved caravans, the rivalry of the mountain, and the fraternity that it imposed.

The Nepalese is a faithful creature. Submissive towards his masters, he is capable of dying for them.

If it is necessary, he will die for him. But to kill . . . ?

To Sherpas, Bhotias, and Tibetans, it is repugnant to kill. The Buddhists of Sikkim and Nepal are willing to sacrifice domestic animals in order to assure their subsistence, for their resources are extremely limited. But the murder of a human being, even of a criminal, even of an assassin, even of the most impious—that is something of which they cannot conceive! But now the sahibs demanded of him that he should intervene in the destiny of other men, precipitating their reincarnations!

And, furthermore, the enemy was a man much closer to him than the sahibs—a man with yellow skin and slanting eyes.

In nine years, the Sherpa of Sola Khumbu had learned a great deal.

Up to the age of twenty-one, he had lived in a valley completely shut off from the world. The universe for him was limited to a small number of things: the monastery of Rongbuk, beyond the Col of Nangpa La; the sahibs who come from far distances to climb the mountains and give some of the Sherpas exceptionally fine boots and well-made, well-rounded metal cases, empty the greater part of the time, but now and then even full of good things. And then there was, beyond the gorges of the Bhote Kosi, Namche Bazar, the great capital with its three hundred inhabitants and the monastery of Thyangboche. Still further away, there was Nepal over which there

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ruled an absolutely unknown ruler, of a race and religion different from those of the men of Sola Khumbu.

The remainder of the world was nothing but myths—historical as well as geographical. Everything that Tenzing knew of it, he had learned in legends similar to those that Old Dawa had told at night around the campfire up at the grazing fields.

Dawa spoke of the immense deserts of the north and of plains to the east where there lived men, white or yellow, with slanting eyes. Of mountains. Of marvelous cities. Moscow, Kharkov, and especially Kiev with its hundred towers. Beyond that, still more plains and still more marvelous cities, but there the inhabitants did not have slanting eyes; and enormous rivers, a hundred times, a thousand times, larger than Bhote Kosi.

Since Old Dawa added the names of all the cities he had ever heard mentioned in his life to the legendary ones, his Genghis had conquered London, Calcutta, Bombay, Benares, Srinagar, and Lahore. And inevitably they were the fabulous capitals which stored within their gates riches beyond the imagination.

For a child of Thami, Namche Bazar was a metropolis, a capital. When one spoke to him of cities where there toiled not three hundred but three million inhabitants, he could not grasp it, he could not even conceive of anything approaching that reality, and for him, these cities were nothing more than marvelous enchantments, fit to nourish one's dreams.

But for nine years, Tenzing had been traveling far and wide. He had seen with his own eyes Srinagar, Peshawar, Amristar. Darjeeling whose immensity had astounded him when he had first come there, timid and ignorant, had since assumed normal proportions in his eyes. He succeeded in figuring out what these metropolises of several millions of inhabitants were like, since he already knew cities which boasted of several hundreds of thousands.

He now knew that the earth was inhabited by many different

A SHERPA'S CAREER

kinds of men—the great big white Moslems from Afghanistan, Sikhs, big, too, but very sunburnt, Hindus, white or black, small and big; Gurkhas, yellow, with slanting eyes like the Sherpas, but having a different religion. And then he had seen the men of Burma, Chinese like himself, but who did not speak the same language. Besides, he had associated with sahibs at close range, and they had not all been British, either. He had known Americans, and he had heard of Germans; he had seen French and Swiss.

He had thought—had thought much, as only he can think who does not know how to read and write. He had glimpsed within the immense diversity of Asia a certain unity in its misery and degradation.

Such was Tenzing in the years between 1939 and 1945. Later he would get to know the sahibs better. He had followed some Americans, and also an Italian up to Tibet. He had accompanied some Frenchmen and some Swiss into the mountains. He had noticed the differences between them. He still loved and respected his old master Shipton sahib, his friends Smythe and Tilman. But so many others were nearer to him.

Tenzing had discerned underneath the differences between Orientals and Occidentals, between educated men like the mountaineers and illiterates like the Sherpas, certain qualities in common which spring as much from the heart as from the mind. Even more striking, the Tibetan masks from the monastery of Thyangboche had not seemed grotesque to most of his Swiss friends, and had not even astounded them. Certain of them noted that the monstrous apparitions were not unlike the *Fasnacht Masken* (carnival masks) used not so long ago on their own mountains in certain villages at high altitudes. And his friend Ang Tharkey was speaking of going to Paris the following spring! How the world had grown round about him in eighteen years!

TENZING OF EVEREST

In his compartment in the train, he smiled as he recalled the astonishment of the Sherpas when they came into contact with sahibs who were not Britishers. The Sherpas called them the "sly ones," because these sahibs spoke English to the porters, the sirdar, and the liaison officers, but among themselves they chattered away in a language no one could understand. To get back at them, the Sherpas, although the sahibs never knew it, spoke to each other in a false language which made no sense. It took several trips with the Germans, the French, and the Italians before the Sherpas realized the truth.

During the war, Tenzing had thought a great deal about the meaning of his life. He tried, to the best of his ability, and without departing from his Buddhist sense of resignation, to understand humanity.

He was being asked to fight and to kill for the imperial country to which he felt himself more or less allied by his affection for the sahibs. But that is the point at which his idea of patriotism ceased. A Tibetan of Sola Khumbu transplanted to Nepal among the Tibetans of Sikkim, he did not feel himself any more a citizen of India than of Nepal or of Tibet. His ancestral nomadic instinct led him to limit his native land to the ground on which the family pitched its tent. But Tenzing's family had already been scattered, his wife, his children, and he himself at Darjeeling, his sisters and his parents at Thami. . . .

Finally, if he himself had had to choose a fatherland, he could have selected only one—Chomolungma. It was there, at the foot of the mountain, on the glacier of Rongbuck or of Khumbu, that he felt at home. His flag was the plume of clouds over Everest, that cap of snow that the wind whirls on the summit. His compatriots—Everesters like himself: sahibs, Tigers, porters.

Tenzing Bhotia, the Sirdar

"I hired twenty Sherpas at Darjeeling and took them by train to Raxaul. Afterwards we went on foot from Bhimpedi to Katmandu."

TENZING

"The duties of a sirdar are to command the carriers, to give encouragement and precious advice to the leaders and to carry a heavier load further and higher than anyone else."

H. W. TILMAN

The Secret Expedition

HARDLY HAD THE WAR ceased on the Far Eastern front, when Tenzing left in the crew of Ang Tharkey for the western edge of the Himalayan range.

The following year he accompanied American explorers to Tibet.* When he was not setting out on expeditions to Chomolungma, it seemed to him that he was just marking time. The career of a Sherpa does not last long. There are only a few who can keep it up beyond the age of forty. For Tenzing, only eight years were left in which he might make real the dream of his life.

The general situation served to aggravate his uneasiness. Since the war, the number of English sahibs coming to the

*During the Second World War, many American airmen had flown across the Himalayas and the mountains of Eastern China. Several of them alleged that they had "discovered" mountains higher than Everest. The expedition of 1946 had as its purpose the verification of these statements. It did not achieve its purpose, and Everest has remained the world's highest peak.

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Himalayas was considerably less. The ground wave which was to drive them from India was already apparent. Darjeeling was about to experience the fate of those ports which die when the ocean lanes are closed. Sailors begin to look for work on land, but don't feel at home there; boats rot in the mud of the harbors, and life becomes more and more difficult. At Darjeeling, the Sherpas could perhaps find work in the tea plantations as they did before, but they, like the sailors, would not feel at home there. The fine equipment earned with so much labor would no longer be good for anything, and would become nothing more than a museum piece, hanging on the wall of a hut, a remembrance of times gone by.

Tenzing no longer could hope to climb the very high peaks. When, after the close of the war, the Himalayan Club of London tried to renew its contact with the sirdars, Ang Tharkey made it clear that he preferred not to go beyond 20,000 feet.

Accordingly, Tenzing was thinking of leaving his sirdar when, at the beginning of March, 1947, a stranger arrived at Darjeeling. Instead of going directly to the Himalayan Club to get information and to meet the sirdars, he went down to the suburb of Toon Soong between the bazaars and talked to the inhabitants as they came along. That sahib intended to go to Everest alone. All he wanted was one or two Sherpas. He was certain that he would succeed.

Thinking of the mysterious Wilson sahib, whose undertaking in its early phases had so astounded him, Tenzing asked himself if Wilson and Denman were not more or less one and the same man; perhaps a reincarnation, at least a disciple.

But Denman did not mention holy fasts nor any divine mission. He was going up Everest for a very definite reason: that is, for world fame, the precious talisman of which Tenzing had once dreamed. But now Tenzing knew that this world fame had no magical properties, and at best it might perhaps bring a

little more well-being and contentment to him who went to seek it on the summit of Chomolungma.

Aside from these considerations, Tenzing liked Denman; he was the undaunted sahib who was not fazed by anything. He promised a great deal, and seemed ready to gamble on the good-will of the gods of the mountain.

The Canadian, Denman, was attracted by Tenzing's experience. He had no permission to go into Tibet and so had determined to travel in secret.

All this seemed queer enough, but Tenzing saw only the opportunity of returning once more to Chomolungma, for the first time in nine years. And, who knows . . . ?

Accordingly, Denman sahib, Phou Tharkey and Tenzing left Darjeeling in secret on March 2nd. Denman was disguised as a Tibetan, and kept silent. And no one would have been able to distinguish the two Sherpas from the natives. It was still the cold season. The terrible wind from the west slowed down their progress and robbed them of breath. At last they reached the Rongbuck glacier. Tenzing and Phou Tharkey would have liked to visit the monastery. Had not the lamas spoken in the highest terms of Wilson sahib? And perhaps some of the stores abandoned at the close of Tilman's expedition in 1938 were still to be found there.

But Denman was full of suspicions. He imagined that the Tibetans would imprison him or sell him into slavery (God only knows to whom?). Besides, the high altitude seemed to accentuate his self-confidence.

He was actually a good mountaineer. With the help of the Sherpas he reached the North Col in a few days. But there was no question of a camp. Every morning the tents were taken up and everything was carried along. Shipton could never have dreamed of a lighter expedition.

When he thought of his youth and of the time when the

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cowardly sahibs beat a retreat for incomprehensible reasons, Tenzing would admire Denman, for he, at least, would go straight on without complicating matters.

Denman signaled "battle action" for his team. Like the snail which carries everything it possesses on his back, the trio was to proceed at once to the assault of the arête; if anything barred the way, they would install themselves and rest, wherever they might happen to be. Never was the problem of Everest simplified to such a point.

And so the three men went on, over the blanket of snow which extended to a height of 25,080 feet. And the mountain rose in its wrath. The wind from the west began to roar angrily like a tempest. Great masses of snow loosened behind them and slid towards the glacier.

It was impossible to go any further; the white whirling wind blinded them, they could not see thirty feet ahead of them, not even three yards. They had to pile up against each other, lying flat in the snow to prevent their being carried away by the raging gale. They stayed this way until about noon, at a height of 23,760 feet. Then the storm died down and the snow began to fall in big, heavy flakes. Visibility was poor. The fresh snow, lying ever thicker on the ridge, soon became unpassable. The men sank into it up to their knees and yet Denman wished to continue. Why, why should they stop? he said now. When night fell, they would camp wherever their strength gave out.

The two Sherpas halted. To go on would be to court death, either through exhaustion or through a fall of over 6,000 feet to the Rongbuck glacier below, in a mighty avalanche. Their action was effective in terminating the climb.

Back outside Darjeeling, Denman sahib calmed down. This trip had been only a first attempt, he said; he would return next year with better equipment and greater resources.

But a trip by three strangers could not remain hidden in the

small settlements of the extreme south. The Tibetan authorities got wind of it and made known to the Indian government that Denman sahib was an "undesirable" on their territory. Besides, the two Sherpas had no inclination whatsoever to undertake the trip with him again.

Denman, Phou Tharkey, and Tenzing arrived at Darjeeling on April 28th. Their fantastic venture had lasted less than two months. It was late now to undertake another expedition, but fortunately a Swiss group was asking for Sherpas at the Himalayan Club. Tenzing assembled some of his old Everest comrades who had not been hired by other sirdars, and left with Alfred Suttart, René Dittert, Alexander Graven and André Roche for the Garhwal massif, while the Canadian, Denman, returned to his home in South Africa.

The Separation

An unusual combination of circumstances had led to a separation of Tenzing and Ang Tharkey. The former had desired it, the latter resigned himself to it. There was no spite in the heart of the sirdar, Ang Tharkey, whom H. W. Tilman had described in these words: "A concentration of Master Jacques, Pico de la Mirandola, and Napoleon, but who in no way takes himself as seriously as did those august personages." Ang Tharkey was so anxious not to risk his life and health any longer on dangerous ascensions that he preferred to be the cook of an exploratory expedition rather than to be roped with anybody for any possible final assault. But he understood perfectly that men like Tenzing, or a young enthusiast like his brother, had to try to acquire reputations which would assure them work until the end of their careers. Tenzing's reputation now had brought him the rating of sirdar.

The make-up of the groups under the command of the two

sirdars pleased everybody at Darjeeling. It made it possible for many young men to get ahead and to win through, if they deserved to do so; it permitted the audacious as well as the more prudent to live in peace with one another, without any cause for further quarrels.

However, in 1948, there were few sahibs ready to equip and start out on important expeditions, and Tenzing, far from seeking glory, had to content himself with spending eight months in the company of the Italian Professor Tucci. There was no question of ascents or of extraordinary exploits; what he had to do was simply to assure the transportation of the professor and his baggage between Darjeeling and Lhasa and from there to some Tibetan monasteries.

In 1949, nothing better offered itself than an exploration of the Himalayas on the slopes of Nepal. The two groups once more came together to accompany H. W. Tilman, sahib.

With the coming of spring in 1950, the two sirdars again had a choice between two expeditions. On the one hand, the French—sahibs little known in the Himalayas—were about to undertake the study of the possibilities of a grand ascent in the Annapurna-Dhaulagiri massif. On the other, the old Himalayan trotter, H. W. Tilman, meant to explore the region to the east of this same massif, attempt the ascent of Annapurna IV, and perhaps push ahead to explore the south slope of Everest.

There was no difficulty about assignments between the two teams. From the moment that Chomolungma was included in the program of the second expedition, Tenzing declared his preference for it. Besides, Tilman asked for only four Sherpas, and the newly created sirdar did not have a large team to offer potential employers.

As for Ang Tharkey, everything drew him towards the French. Curious as he was, always on the alert for something

new, he was glad to enter into a region almost unknown, in the company of sahibs of whom he knew nothing. The route, as it was planned, passed about 9 miles from Rumin-Dei where Buddha had been born, and most likely would go on as far as Muktinath where the Nepalese Buddhists who can afford it go to pray at least once in their lives, at a stone bearing the imprint of the Buddha's foot. Although he had been a great traveler, Ang Tharkey had never had the opportunity to go there and could profit from this expedition to appease his pious Buddhist's conscience.

As for the possibility that there might be a great climb involved, that did not trouble the sirdar. Taught as they had been in the school of the meticulous English mountaineers, the experienced Sherpas of Darjeeling were convinced that the sahibs would never attempt the assault of a Himalayan mountain the first year out. One or two reconnoitering expeditions had always preceded any attempt to climb, and often a defeat, if it were decisive, would be followed by renewed reconnaissance expeditions. Relying on this experience, Ang Tharkey-Sancho was not afraid of being enticed beyond 20,000 feet, the height which he had fixed as his limit since the close of the war.

Finally, and this was not the least advantage and not the least important consideration, the French asked for eight Sherpas. With his customary shrewdness, the sirdar would use this opening to provide for those who had for many years relied on him to assure a living for them.

As for Phou Tharkey, the possibility, no matter how unlikely it might be, that there would be a sensational climb, persuaded him to follow his brother.

And so Ang Tharkey, glad of heart, departed to meet the French at Lucknow, while some days later, Tenzing left to join his old employer, Tilman sahib, at Katmandu.

The First Return to Sola Khumbu

The Tilman expedition proceeded up the valley of the Marsyandi Khola and arrived at Manangbhot several days after the French had passed through. But, while these latter had gone on to Muktinath by way of the Col of Thorungsé to follow the course of the Kali Gandaki down towards the gorges of the Miristi Khola, the English turned south to skirt the mountain chain of the Gangapurna-Annapurna IV (26,192 feet)—Annapurna II (24,829 feet).

Several climbs were attempted without success; finally, Tilman went to join the American climbers who were to accompany him to the south slope of Chomolungma.

In Nepal, the absence of roads and railroads makes it hard to get about. To get from the Dhaulargi-Annapurna massif to that of Everest, it is easier to go to India and take the train. To do this, one must follow a river down and reach the frontier. There rather slow trains take the travelers into another valley from which they can again reach the heights.

Accordingly, the railroad took Tilman and his four Sherpas to Joghani. The caravan joined that of the Americans, Houston, Bakewell, and Mrs. Betsy Cowles. A truck took them, with all their baggage, as far as Birat Nagar. From there, the march on foot began.

At the beginning, the landscape, the fields, in fact, the whole picture, remained like that of India. But from Phalikot and Dingla on, in the valley of the Arun, a progressive change was noted. The unevenness of the terrain was more noticeable, cattle raising prevailed rather than tilling the soil. The mountains were more clearly visible. The population was sparser and the villages less crowded. The Mongolian characteristics of the inhabitants became more pronounced. They entered the Ti-

betan region of Sola Khumbu. Men here spent less time meditating on life and more time on living it. Their outlook on life was less austere. The Sherpas were glad to see the world around them change in this way, and they went on with lighter hearts. Once the Col of Salpa Bhanjyang had been passed, the coolies who were hired at successive stops clearly showed themselves to be Tibetan and spoke something approaching the language of Sola Khumbu.

In going down this Col again, Tenzing was haunted by memories. First, he saw once again the escapade of six young fellows from Thami who had gone secretly to Darjeeling. He looked for the cave where they had taken refuge and where the dread of the Abominable Snowman had made them tremble so during that long, stormy night.

He had the feeling that he was returning once more to his youth, and in spite of himself, he went over in his mind the road he had traveled since 1935. Was it fifteen years ago? He had left home full of enthusiasm, impelled by the exalting hope of reaching the summit of Chomolungma, if not on the first trip, then surely on the second or the third!

To dream in 1935 or even in 1938 of the possibility that a sahib would be roped together with him for the assault had been nothing more than an illusion born of the fantastic tales told by Uncle Sonam. But in 1950, nothing seemed more likely than this very thing. More and more frequently the sahibs shared their victories with the Sherpas. It had become common practice.

The stage of the journey which led to Namche Bazar was one of the longest of the whole trip, and the wild trails that bordered the Dudh Kosi made walking difficult. It was quite late before the camp was set up.

Next morning before dawn, a Sherpa left the encampment

and climbed down towards the Bhote Kosi. The mountain Khumbila which, twenty years ago, on a similar morning shadowed a family making its way up-valley to Thyangboche, was now lit with the light of dawn. The Sherpa quickened his steps. It would take him three hours to reach Thami on these difficult trails.

All went well, and at the end of an hour and a half, the traveler saw the fields rising in terraces; on the terraces, twenty or thirty huts, all alike: two stories—down below, the stable for the yaks; above, the single room reached by an outside stair. He hesitated for a long time. Which of these huts was his home? In which of these houses without a chimney had he grown up?

It seemed to him that it might well be that one up there, the last one in the third row. But he was not quite certain of it; he would be told in the village. But how did it happen that at this early morning hour there was no cloud of smoke hanging over the village houses the way he used to see it when he was a little boy, and as he had just seen it at Bung and at Khiraunle, the last two settlements that he just passed on the way. Didn't anyone live at Thami any more?

The fact is, there was no one! Tenzing remembered his native village well enough to be able to solve the riddle of why the village was deserted: on the neighboring hills there were great tufts of grass which had grown up since the monsoon, and which the snow had not yet covered. So the Sherpas had returned to these pastures so their yaks might benefit by the windfall before they had to winter in their stables.

There would be no one to point out to him his childhood home. Yet he went on from terrace to terrace, and as he did, he found a memory in every stone. But they were confused, indistinct memories, he was not certain that he would recognize his own home.

And yet, this flight of steps with its first three steps steeper than the rest, that must be it. Yes, that was the place where he grew up and where his old mother was still living. He climbed the steps to the little vestibule, exactly like the one in all the other Sherpa houses. On the left the toilet, its floor covered with leaves. On the right, the door which his father opened every day, early in the morning, when he went down to feed the yaks.

Yes, this was the room where he learned to spin and to carve the dishes made of hard wood, while his mother and sisters were weaving. Here, on this bench, he slept, wrapped up in his blankets, and here the little Tibetan dog snuggled close to him when everybody was asleep.

Along the shelves on the windowless walls, the same utensils were set out: a large copper basin, several wooden bowls shaped like cylinders, two churns of bamboo for making butter from yaks' milk. There was also a porcelain cup from China which the traveler remembered well. Nobody ever used it and nobody remembered when it came into the possession of the family who prized it as their greatest treasure. In the back of the room behind a wall made of boards, the firewood was piled up; surely his mother still used these to light the fire in the hearth. The prodigal son sees the mattocks, the sacks of grain, the wooden plows. From the ceiling there hung bags made of skin, full of butter.

He had been carrying a tin of sardines and three biscuits as food for the journey. He thought that he might sit down on the bank of the Bhote Kosi for breakfast, but his impatience to see his native village once again drove him on. Now he put the box of sardines on the little table nearest the hearth, hesitated while he looked at his biscuits. Then he left two of them there, and went down the steps once more.

TENZING OF EVEREST

Bakewell and Mrs. Cowles remained at Thyangboche. Tilman, Houston, the Sherpas, and several porters went on to establish their camp on the Khumbu glacier at about 15,000 feet. They expected to explore the Western Cwm formerly glimpsed by Mallory from the top of Lho La. But to get there they would have had to climb an icefall, the sight of which struck Tilman with fear. The drop in the terrain (about 2,600 feet) broke up the glacier. As it penetrated the glacial clefts, the sun with its heat had enlarged them. The separated masses formed in this way were 150 to 180 feet high, veritable towers, and sometimes there were blocks of ice almost a thousand feet high. Carved out by the sun, sliding down the slope, these moving masses were frequently in unstable equilibrium, and they constituted one of the great dangers of the southern route. Tilman was terrified by them.

Tilman and Houston climbed to 18,150 feet on the barrier which separates the Khumbu glacier from that of Chola Khola. Unfortunately they could not distinguish clearly, from the observation point which they had reached, either the Western Cwm or the South Col. However, it seemed to them that between the bottom of the Cwm and the Col, there rose a wall of almost 5,000 feet, on which no ascent was practicable.

Mallory, a long time ago, when he had seen the South Col, had said of this approach: "Very difficult, if not impossible; from every point of view, this is not a reasonable route for attempting the ascent of Everest." After his exploration in 1950, Tilman gave the following verdict: "Since the very best climbers in the world have failed in taking the Tibetan route, who would be able to succeed on an even more difficult one?"

As a result, Tenzing returned to Darjeeling completely disappointed at the end of autumn, 1950. The sahibs would never go to Everest again, he was convinced of it, and his fifteen years of dreams had a sad awakening.

A Hero in Spite of Himself

On his return to Darjeeling at the beginning of summer, Tharkey was dumbfounded by the truly Homeric adventure which he had had. Was he the man who had not wanted to start on any dangerous or difficult undertakings? Truly the gods had played him a mighty fine trick, and he could not help but laugh with them.

“And to think that they asked me to come along and share their victory, to go with them right up to the very top? Me, with my poor health!” says Tharkey-Sancho.

But as he was not one to boast, he said nothing of the prowess of Tharkey-Quixote, who organized the rescue of three helpless men on a route that was barely passable for men who were able-bodied. Eight Sherpas carried the three injured men on their backs, dragged them along, held them back on the slopes or lifted them on stretchers made of skis, the like of which the Sherpas had never yet seen. They performed such improbable deeds of valor that even the sahibs could hardly believe their eyes.

For the fact is men had been hurt. The expedition had ended in a frantic battle between demons in a whirldwind of snow, from which there emerged men with bare feet and bleeding hands, their faces no longer protected by dark glasses. The mountain spirits stood faithful guard around the Goddess of Abundance. The sahibs may have won, but they paid dearly for their victory. Their feet and hands began to freeze when the storm forced them to take shelter in a crevasse. They took off their shoes to rub their feet, and tried to revive their frozen limbs already becoming stiff. In the middle of doing that, an avalanche of snow engulfed them in the crevasse. They emerged from it with their hands and feet unprotected, without glasses, without equipment, and they were forced to remain

that way for several hours in the storm until they found Camp IV again.

The French expedition to Annapurna took the Sherpas back to a time twenty years ago. While listening to the tale of his old friend, Ang Tharkey, Tenzing seemed to hear once more the stories told by the old Sherpas of the first Himalayan expeditions, the Sherpas for whom the expeditions of the sahibs were like mythological struggles between divinities fought using mysterious weapons for equally mysterious ends. The French sahibs had given back to the western mountaineers something of the divine quality which had been theirs before the war.

Ang Tharkey was more impressed by the sufferings of the sahibs than he was by the exertions of the Sherpas, the men who had been hurt had cried out in their anguish as if they had been beasts. Well and strong when they started out, Herzog and Lachenal sahibs were mere skeletons when he left them to return to Darjeeling.

But the customary Mongolian cheerfulness again got the upper hand. Ang Tharkey had not gone to Katmandu, but he was about to go to Paris, the city which these intrepid sahibs called the most beautiful in the whole world.

The two men of the mountains from Sola Khumbu looked at each other and smiled. Now one of them was off to the ends of the earth! The pioneers of the exodus to Darjeeling had seen nothing at all compared with the sirdar who was going to fly as far as Paris! Surely the old folks cannot complain about the new generation. Even Old Dawa will cease blaming the Sherpas for being nothing but carriers of loads.

As they laugh, Ang Tharkey-Quixote murmurs in admiration. "Yes, they are gods, gods of the mountain, demons of courage!" And at the same time, Tharkey-Sancho continues

TENZING BHOTIA, THE SIRDAR

with: "But mad gods, maybe. It's you, the daring one, the unafraid, who should have gone with them."

Tenzing was very much tempted.

When another group of Frenchmen applied to Ang Tharkey, asking him to go with them to the Nanda Devi, the sirdar of Annapurna advised them to choose Tenzing.

Even after having climbed Chomolungma, Tenzing continues to think of the ascent of Nanda Devi Orientale (24,519 feet) as the most extraordinary exploit of his career. He climbed it with the Frenchman, Dubost. In the course of that expedition, two men, Duplat and Vignes, were lost, and Tenzing was literally overcome with grief.

But unexpected news awaited him at Darjeeling. His friend Ang Tharkey told him that the ascent of Everest from the south was possible. Eric Shipton, their old sahib, the oldest and most experienced of the Everesters, declared it was.

Hope was born anew in Tenzing's heart.

The most remarkable and most admirable fact in his whole career is that he had always sought the same goal, the ascent of Chomolungma. He had gone from hope to dejection. Through force of circumstances, he had often been obliged to stray from the path, to follow the sahibs up other mountains, but he never abandoned his great purpose. Wherever he went, he dreamed only of Everest, as he himself says: ". . . Going up other mountains, I was trying to train myself. I knew that one day what I had learned from other mountains would help me to reach the highest peak in the world."

Part Two

THE MOUNTAIN

The Mountain

"You would have to be a superman, a supernatural being, to go beyond 28,000 feet without a mask. I believe, in fact, that nobody will ever reach the summit of Everest without breathing equipment."

TENZING

"It is the secret of Everest to know that it is the realization on this earth of the threshold between life and death. That it is the passage from earth where man, semi-conscious, dies as he walks on, losing consciousness. As he actually goes from one stone to the other, he is going from this world to the Beyond."

JOSEPH PEYRÉ

Thirty-Year Balance Sheet

THE ENGLISH HAD TRIED to climb Everest long before 1935 when Tenzing had taken part in his first expedition. In 1951, they drew up a map of the massif (15,444 square miles, an area equivalent to that of Switzerland). In 1922 two ropes in succession pushed up to an altitude of 27,140 and 27,475 feet respectively. In 1924, Norton reached a height of 28,285 feet. From that time on, it seemed that time was against the Everest-ers, for in 1933, '35, '36, and '38, they never surpassed this record.

Since Nepal was closed to foreigners, the expeditions went by way of Tibet which consented, not without difficulty, to grant them passage through its territory. Accordingly, it was by way of the north passage that the mountaineers went to the assault of Everest. They found themselves facing a narrow

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ridge sloping from the summit to the monastery of Rongbuck. Halfway between the principal summit (29,172 or 29,330 feet in height) and the Changtse (North Peak, 24,875 feet) the ridge slants down to a height of 23,123 feet at the North Col.

In order to reach this Col, the English ascended the Rongbuck glacier, sometimes at the left, sometimes at the right of the ridge, to a height of about 21,000 feet. Following this, they had to make a first dash of some 2,000 feet in one day, for no intermediary encampment was possible. It was with great difficulty that they established their Camp IV on the Col, where they arrived so badly worn out that a single day of storm forced them to retreat. These storms of the West Wind are very frequent on that slope of the Himalayas.

From the North Col on, they had the choice between two alternatives, either to climb up to the summit along the ridge while crossing two abrupt dips, one after the other (with vertical walls almost 150 feet high), or to cross obliquely by a short-cut on the northwest face of Everest, along the famous winding mountain tracks, the "yellow bands." In 1924, Mallory and Irvine had been lost on the first-mentioned route. In the same year, Norton beat the pre-war record by taking the second route.

In 1938, Eric Shipton reconnoitered the base of the second dip and considered it to be highly impracticable at such an altitude. As he studied the reports of those who had entered upon the winding mountain tracks, he noted that all had been forced to halt at just about the same point, and he understood what obstacle they had encountered, without their being aware of it.

Due to its position, the northwest face of the mountain gets the sun only very late in the day. Those who climb it risk being frozen if they start too early, but if they start too late, they are not able to complete the ascent in one day.

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For this reason, two reconnoitering expeditions, five official ascents, and two unofficial ones, had all ended in complete failure. During seventeen years the English had spent veritable treasures of energy, of courage, and of money in a battle that was doomed before it began.

By 1938, Everest had already claimed twelve victims. In 1931, on the first expedition, to the organization of which he had contributed so much, Dr. Kellas died of a heart attack as he was crossing the first Tibetan pass. In 1922, seven Sherpas perished under an avalanche. In 1924, the shoemaker Manhabadur, a Sherpa, succumbed as the result of the amputation of his two frozen feet, and the Ghurka noncommissioned officer Shamsher died of a cerebral hemorrhage. That same year, Mallory and Irvine disappeared. Ten years later Maurice Wilson committed suicide, as has been related in another chapter.

In 1950, the occupation of Tibet by Chinese troops would have cut off Everest from the Western world, if Nepal had not opened its frontiers to the mountaineers.

In 1950, as already told, Tenzing took part in the Tilman expedition which tried to reconnoiter an approach route from the south. The conclusions of the bara-sahib were not optimistic. However, in 1951, Eric Shipton succeeded in ascending the icefall, and stopped before the crevasses on the threshold of the West Cwm. He noted that the ice which fills the Cwm rises gradually toward Lhotse, and that the South Col is no less accessible than the North Col.

However, Shipton's report was not entirely favorable. He admitted that practiced mountaineers could penetrate the Cwm, but he doubted whether the cascade of ice could be climbed by Sherpas carrying heavy loads.

It was left to the Swiss to show, in the following year, despite their own failure, that the ascent of Everest was a

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possibility, and to the English to gather in the fruits of victory, earned by their thirty-two years of effort.

“In the Himalayas,” as Raymond Lambert wrote after the Swiss attempt in the autumn of 1952, “every expedition climbs, you might say, on the shoulders of the preceding one.” As a matter of fact, the British expedition of 1953 would not have succeeded if thirteen caravans had not preceded it on the way to Everest. Nobody had so far reached the summit, but thirty years of effort had made it possible to formulate accurately the elements of the problem, and above all, to realize the difference that exists between mountain climbing in the Alps and in the Himalayas—a most important difference.

The ambition to climb to the top of the highest peak on the face of the earth comes quite naturally to alpine climbers. But from the very beginning of the first reconnaissance expedition, there arose unfamiliar problems of administration and equipment. Everywhere in the Alps, the climber is maneuvering over perfectly well-known territory, it is a simple matter to get to the foot of the mountain to be scaled, provisions are to be found near at hand, a single day's journey suffices for reaching the summit and returning from it; there are abundant huts and shelters. In short, there are almost no great loads to be carried along.*

In the Himalayas, everything has got to be carried along, often on the back of a man, over difficult roads, sometimes through unexplored regions.

* That is the way things are today. But in the early days of Alpine climbing, M. de Saussure carried with him a most impressive outfit to make his “trip to Chamonix and to the summit of Mont Blanc.” Here is the inventory as it is recorded in his “Diary”: Two green frock-coats, a traveling suit, and a white suit with two jackets; long and short gaiters, boots, shoes with pointed toes, two pairs of low shoes with pointed toes, slippers; vests of flannel to wear next to the skin, double and single waistcoats; a parasol, two pairs of underdrawers, five shirts and four nightshirts; stockings of lisle, of silk, and of heavy wool; fur gloves.

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The amount of material carried in a caravan represents a weight of many tons. Even if we cite only the more recent expeditions, we will find five tons for the ascent of Annapurna (French expedition, 1950), three and a half tons for Nanda Devi (French expedition, 1951), six tons for the Swiss expedition in the spring of 1952, seven and a half tons plus 3,300 supplementary pounds of oxygen for Hunt's expedition (Everest, 1953), and ten tons for the Austro-German expedition to Nanga Parbat.

Before they left on their first expeditions, the Everesters knew that they would have to solve serious physiological problems. The heights of the Caucasus, at 16,500 feet, and those of the Andes at 19,800 feet, had already given food for thought concerning the effects of altitude, notably that of suffocation which in some ways is almost funny. When climbers get into a discussion at an altitude above 19,800 feet, it may happen that one of them will collapse at the completion of a sentence. He gets up again without much harm having been done. At this altitude, the air is so rarified that at the end of a too greatly prolonged exhalation, there is sometimes nothing left in the lungs.

For it is the presence of oxygen in the lungs which causes the nerves of the respiratory system to function. When this is wholly lacking, the lungs are no longer capable of performing their function adequately.

At such altitudes as 23,000 and 26,000 feet, such symptoms become even more dangerous, for there man has abandoned his natural environment. He becomes subject to frightful physical and psychological tortures.

Besides, Everesters encounter degrees of cold and winds immeasurably more severe than are met with on the mountains of other continents.

The Winds and the Cold

The violent west wind coming from Pamir, from the glaciers of Karakoram and from the Dhaulagiri-Annapurna massif blows steadily on Mount Everest with the velocity of a hurricane. Certain days of calm do occur, but Everesters have only a very limited interval, between the end of winter and the beginning of the monsoon, of which they can take advantage. At best then, they exhaust themselves, bending forward, shaken by gusts of wind which rob them of breath and at times seem ready actually to carry them off.

When the full force of the storm is released, the wind forces the climbers to stay in their tents for days on end; they are thus compelled to stay for too long a time at altitudes which have a deteriorating effect on them.

In the Alps, the cold comes on as soon as the sun goes down. In the Himalayas, this cold is even more rigorous. It pinches and plagues the Everesters, who run the danger of having their hands and feet frozen. And the problem of the cold is interwoven with that of lack of oxygen.

Smythe noted that actually acclimitization to a high altitude increases the danger of frostbite. In order to compensate for the lack of oxygen, the red corpuscles multiply to such an extent that the blood becomes thicker and does not circulate as freely, especially in the small capillaries of the extremities.

The photographs which showed us the first climbers of Everest pictured these hardy, bewhiskered men wrapped in a muffler, perhaps two mufflers, but on the whole their costumes were more suitable for going hunting in the provinces than for the conquest of the equivalent of the North Pole. Thirty years of assault have given the mountaineers the opportunity to adapt the outfits of the Eskimos, the Siberians, and the Canadians to the demands of Everest. To sum up this evolution,

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one may well say that on Chomolungma, masculine fashions have changed from the "hunter's silhouette" to that of the space traveler.

As we have seen, the members of the early expeditions took their rest under the canvas of their tents, rolled up in simple blankets. Now, the climbers have air-mattresses, sleeping bags filled with eiderdown; their tents have double thickness, are lighter in weight, and provide better protection against the cold. Only in exceptional circumstances do some of the climbers let themselves be deprived of these comforts for a single night, rarely for two.

The Physiological Effects of Altitude

In rising to a height of 23,100 feet, man crosses beyond the layer of air, 20,000 to 23,000 feet deep, which protects him against certain solar and cosmic radiations. In this region of polar cold, men at times suffer from an excess of heat which is even more debilitating than the heat of the equatorial jungles. The physiologists attribute this phenomenon to the actinic rays of the sun, that is, to solar radiations which affect certain chemical substances in the body and bring about a deterioration of the tissues.

If one recalls that the observatory of the Jungfrau-joch was built at an altitude of 9,900 feet because at that height it is easier to study solar and cosmic radiations, it becomes readily apparent that these same radiations are even more virulent at 20,000, at 23,000, and at 26,000 feet.

These radiations do not make themselves felt too strongly when, in his trek over rocks and snow, a man is exposed only to the rays of the sun directly above him. But when the rays are reflected by a glacier, the individual undergoes an intense bombardment coming from all sides—striking his body from

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above and below. This causes a condition of extreme weakness.

On the South Col of Everest, at a height of 26,000 feet, the atmospheric pressure is as low as 23 mm., that is, less than one third the normal pressure. At that height men live as if they were under a glass bell from which part of the air had been withdrawn, and as a result they are subject to headaches and sore throats, vomiting, loss of appetite, and dizziness. At this altitude the saliva becomes thick, it is difficult to eat, and the mountaineer must content himself with liquid nourishment.

This lowering of the pressure brings about a lack of air, and it is this rarification of the atmosphere which causes the most harmful effects on the human organism.

The ordinary breathing rhythm that is sufficient for the oxidation of the blood at normal altitudes becomes insufficient, for with every single breath, less air is taken into the lungs. The breathing rhythm, already irritated by the low pressure, is accelerated, and this dilates the blood vessels; the throat is made even more sore by the rapid intake of the icy air. As a result, angina, laryngitis, and dry coughs are frequent occurrences.

The acceleration of the respiratory movements and the thickening of the blood produce tremendous thirst. In his concise account of the 1953 expedition, Tenzing affirmed that the victory over Everest was attained largely with the help of lemon juice.

But there is a limit to this acceleration of the respiratory rhythm. When a man is lying flat at a height of 23,000 feet, he must take two breaths for every one that he takes in a reclining position at a normal altitude. When he walks, when he climbs a slope, he loses his breath very quickly. He chokes. This is purely and simply a phenomenon of asphyxiation, often fol-

lowed by cardiac symptoms in those who have exceeded the limits of their strength.

And, finally, the lack of air brings about such a condition of physical oppression that even men who are exceptionally strong and thoroughly in training cannot go further than about 330 feet in an hour. All say approximately the same thing: they do not have the impression of being weak, but they just simply cannot exert whatever strength they have, in the regular way.

The Psychological Effects of Altitude

Except for the final prostration, most of the troubles mentioned above are similar to fever, that is, they represent a spontaneous effort on the part of the body to adapt itself to a new condition. But the adaptation is not complete, and men are affected to the very depth of their being. The actinic rays of the sun deteriorate the cells at a time when these are not sufficiently oxygenated by the blood. Consequently, there are grave psychological lesions.

At medium altitudes, we come upon mountain intoxication, a state of euphoria which is particularly noticeable among young people.

At higher altitudes, this euphoria is accompanied by hallucinations, sometimes even mirages. One of the most renowned of these Everest experiences is related by Smythe. In 1933, at a height of 26,000 feet, he saw flying high above him on the ridge, two black forms like insufficiently inflated balloons, which seemed to be agitated from within by some pulsation. One of them had a pair of stunted wings; the other, a sort of beak, like the spout of a teapot.

Fully conscious as he was, Smythe undertook a number of experiments in order to determine what the true nature of this illusion was. But every time he looked towards the ridge, he

found the phantom balloons in exactly the same spot. A cloud of fog passed over the ridge, and doubtless carried the mirage away with it, for when it lifted, the mirage was no longer visible.

But the most frequent mirage of the heights is that of the "presence of another." It happened to Smythe, particularly, that he would feel the presence of Shipton so intensely, that when he stopped on the march to eat a biscuit, he would break it in two in comradely fashion, and turn around to give his companion the other half. That the latter was not actually present made him literally jump in amazement; but did not prevent him, however, from continuing to feel that Shipton was just behind him.

That year, as he was climbing Nanga Parbat, Hermann Buhl was in some way separated from Kempter, his companion on the rope. Nevertheless he continued for some time to feel that he was still being followed. Then the mirage changed its theme. An enchanting voice, like that of a Lorelei, called to him: "Hello, Hermann! Hello, Hermann! Come on, Hermann!" This voice continued all through the night comforting him while he stood on the ice waiting for the day to dawn.

When Tenzing told of having "felt" Lambert near him on the summit of Everest, it was not just a symbol. He actually had the impression of a presence, that of a comrade with whom he hoped at last to realize the aspiration of his life.

Too long a stay at a very high altitude overstimulates the nerves, a fact which increases the actual dangers of the mountains, and makes life with others extremely difficult. Mallory, who may well have perished a victim of some imprudence caused by this condition, had noted how an unimportant incident would degenerate easily into a quarrel on the slopes of Everest.

Like all intoxications, that of the high peaks becomes dan-

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gerous when it exceeds a certain degree, and breaks down moral barriers. The subconscious takes over. One person may become mean, another sad, a third will swagger, a fourth becomes a coward or a daredevil without anything in his previous conduct having given reason for supposing that he might behave that way. Finally, the euphoria, hallucinations, and over-excitement give way to lassitude. At first it becomes impossible for a man to write, difficult for him to think and to draw conclusions. His ideas float away, vanish like clouds, and the man is unable to fix his attention on anything. He struggles against the fogginess of his mind, as he struggles against the wind from Everest; he makes every effort to cling to the guiding lines, which, however, elude his grasp.

The lassitude gets worse, he becomes obtuse. He sees, hears, in a word, he continues to perceive, but he can no longer reason, or if he does, then only to a slight degree. The impressions that he receives no longer enter his mind. That is why those who undertake such extraordinary exploits, such superhuman efforts in the mountains, can for the most part give only uncertain, vague, extremely terse reports of what they have done. They have such difficulty with those who question them that sometimes it seems to the latter that they are dealing with liars, stripped of any imagination, so distorted becomes the tale of the adventurers.

Certain intermittent troubles appear even more ridiculous than the shortness of breath. Thus, for example, one day, Shipton was struck with an inability to speak coherently; he could only utter words out of order that made no sense. "If I wanted to say give me a cup of tea, I found myself saying something entirely different, as for instance, tramway cat meter," he explains.

The Infernal Abode of the Gods

As he starts out to climb Everest, Western man, versed in science, believes that there are neither gods on its summit nor demons on its slopes. He knows well that the weatherbeaten rocks, the glaciers, the snows, frozen and freshly fallen, will pursue their eternal solitary existence in spite of small men exerting themselves in a laughable task, so unimportant as compared with the forces of nature.

But when he has traveled over more than a hundred miles in the foothills of the Himalayas, in the tropical forests, the jungles, the unexplored valleys, surrounded by strange people, even he begins to have his doubts. Once he leaves the Base Camp at 16,500 feet, everything around him is strange to him. Nothing remains to remind him of the earth where he has been living until then.

He will still be full of enthusiasm. The joy of taking part in a great enterprise will exalt him, and he will refuse to see clearly the horror of the lunar landscape to which he has come to risk his life. He will persist, and go further. Up to about 23,000 feet, everything will happen as has been foreseen. The doctors who have accompanied the expedition will be prompt to cure a sore throat, to send back to the Base Company anyone whose heart falters.

Beyond a height of 23,000 feet, a man's intelligence will be affected. As his physical troubles increase, the phantoms of Tibetan mythology will obtrude themselves on his mind.

Then the man will find himself surrounded by demons who torture his flesh and penetrate his soul to stretch out their hands from there to other still gloomier spirits, which he believed he had already overcome. He will struggle in a nightmare world. After dark, under his tent, he will sleep badly; his difficult breathing similar to that of respiratory coma

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(Cheyne-Stokes) will disturb his comrades. He will awake suddenly from a bad dream which has left him with a feeling of discomfort. A single sentence, written by Dr. Chevalley, leader of the Swiss expedition in the fall of 1952, gives some notion of the atmosphere which prevails in the camps of Everest: "I find Gross anxious, Buziou too happy, Dyhrenfurth (Norman) ill, Spohel depressed, Reiss incomprehensible."

Then lassitude will follow. Exhausted, man will refuse to move, will remain stretched out in his tent, satisfied with the bit of heat that he can preserve inside his sleeping-bag. If the weather gets bad, if a retreat becomes necessary, he will refuse to help break up camp, and even be unwilling to return to a lower level where he might recoup his strength. He would willingly die in a state of bliss approaching Nirvana, if he were left alone.

Unquestionably the cold has as much to do with this condition as the altitude. We need only recall the stories of soldiers on the retreat from the Beresina. The time came when the soldier, poorly dressed for the wind of the steppes and the snow into which he kept sinking, badly nourished as he was, stretched out to go to sleep and condemned himself to death, just so that he might have a few hours' relief—nor did he ever rise again.

When a sahib or a Sherpa reaches that point, his comrades have to shake him, yes, almost beat him, if they would save his life.

When all is said and done, even if the great mountain is only a waste place, indifferent to man, what happens is what would happen if legions of demons really watched over its slopes.

The Oxygen Apparatus

Ever since 1922 explorers had thought of the idea of taking along compressed oxygen to compensate for the lack of air at high altitudes. A first experiment of theirs appeared conclusive to those who had no prejudices in the matter. With the use of this apparatus, a second assault rope with a novice of a mountaineer who had had no experience whatsoever was able to reach a height greater than that attained by the first rope, made up of mountain climbers of exceptional experience and strength.

Nonetheless, the use of oxygen gave rise to a number of controversies. Some asserted that it was a scandal and called it an out-and-out form of drugging. Others foresaw the worst possible consequences: there would be a complete nervous breakdown once the inhalations ceased, and even sudden death, should they stop all of a sudden by accident, at a very high altitude.

Nothing of the sort occurred. Beyond 23,000 feet, a mountaineer who was climbing at the rate of about 330 feet an hour, for example, was able to double his speed and even to triple it, once he began using the oxygen apparatus. When he was sitting or lying down or even simply standing still, he was able to do without the oxygen, and could breathe the air that surrounded him, without nervous collapse or sudden death.

The climbers began by using what were known as "open-circuit cylinders," which they carried on their backs. They weighed about fifty-five pounds. This load will paralyze a man who is already forced to move with difficulty, at a high altitude. Besides, the cylinders become empty after a while, and the user is assured of only a limited period of easier breathing.

It became necessary to find another solution: either the

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apparatus would have to be lighter or of a different type; or else it would have to be used in some other way.

The celebrated alpinist, Edward Wyss-Dunant, suggested that one single apparatus be used by the participants of an expedition. One of the Sherpas would carry it, and the climbers in turn, one after the other, would inhale the health-giving oxygen, as they had need of it.

Others thought that the oxygen could be made on the spot. All that would have to be done would be to exhale carbon dioxide on peroxide of potassium, which would bind the carbon and release the oxygen. However ingenious the plan, and in spite of the years of preparation for it, this system proved unreliable. It permits a man to remain alive as long as he remains sitting down or recumbent at a very high altitude, but it does not allow for any effort which might force the user to consume more oxygen than the apparatus can provide; for the carbonic acid gas passes too swiftly over the peroxide of potassium, and does not renew itself sufficiently. Worse yet, the reaction which releases the oxygen from the carbonic acid produces heat so that, after a certain period, the apparatus becomes hot, and the oxygen enters the lungs at too high a temperature.

The war contributed a great deal to the perfecting of the oxygen equipment because of its use in aviation. It was scarcely profitable to manufacture oxygen appliances for a dozen Everests, but the delivery of tens of thousands of them to the various air forces impelled the manufacturers to spend time and energy on research, experimentation, and careful manufacture. Thus, in some measure, the war facilitated the conquest of Everest.

Drugs

The climbing of Himalayan mountains involves such physical and mental exertions that there is often a certain temptation to use drugs that will overcome fatigue.

But it is generally known that the intoxication of Pentothal or alcohol has a literally explosive power. It is likely that the intoxication produced by high altitudes has the same effect, namely, that it breaks down moral scruples and affords a release to the subconscious. That would mean paying dearly for the suppression of fatigue.

Perhaps the best men are those who can suppress the worst tendencies within themselves, who fight the worst demons from within. When these demons suddenly burst their chains, we can see all sorts of ridiculous, astounding, and frightening things happen. Even elsewhere than on Everest, mountain climbers have given expression to a murderous complex. Others whose exceptional courage needs no proof have given way for a brief moment to crises of panic which are sharply out of character.

Those in favor of stimulants say that they would facilitate an increased use of energy the effects of which are inevitably felt later under normal conditions. Those who make use of such stimulants appear to be acting in a state of semi-consciousness. It becomes hard, often even impossible, for them to explain afterwards (or even understand) what they have done. Furthermore, these drugs heighten the insomnia which is prevalent on the mountains, and make it necessary to increase to alarmingly large proportions the doses of sedatives which practically all climbers are in the habit of taking every night.

Shipton notes that, in 1933, the Grand Lama of Rongbuck distributed to each of the mountaineers and to every Sherpa certain pills "to be taken when they felt the need of spiritual

comfort." If the lamas of Tibet know the prescription for certain pills which can give spiritual comfort without affecting the physical organism, they perhaps solved the problem of Everest long before the European mountain climbers did.

The Profession of Sherpa

And, finally, the Everest expeditions have given Westerners the opportunity to establish contact with the population of Khumbu, the Sherpas. At the same time that the existence of these simple folk was turned topsy-turvy by such contact, a new occupation, that of "Sherpa" was created for these people.

In the expeditions in the Himalayas, the Sherpas began as simple carriers of loads. They had no notion whatsoever of mountain climbing, and they were sought out only because of their acclimatization to the altitude. Their loyalty, their taste for hard labor and a job well done made them more and more highly valued.

As we have already noted, mountain climbing in the Himalayas and mountain climbing in the Alps have but little relation to each other. In the Himalayas there is no need for acrobatics in climbing. In the East, the easiest route will be the one to be selected, while in the Alps, preference is given to the most difficult one, thus making the victory all the more glorious. As a rule, the Sherpas do not even care to learn the art of putting in the pitons or of cutting steps in the ice with an ice-axe. Perhaps they are timid about this, perhaps they fear that by so doing they will release the evil spirits imprisoned in the ice. Yet they have acquired a certain degree of experience and are able to negotiate dangerous paths just as well as they do the easy routes.

A Sherpa performs his work like an honest workman and a faithful friend. But he is often tempted to engage in senseless

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contests. Thus, one sometimes sees a young Sherpa carrying a load as heavy as he is himself for several miles with an upgrade of from 1,500 to 2,000 feet.

Worn out and exhausted by the altitude, wounded by rocks which had fallen on them, those four Sherpas who first won the name of Tigers decided to carry their loads further for the simple reason that they had been promised that their names would be inscribed in letters of gold in the history of Everest. This Mongolian trait of valuing fame is one of their marked characteristics.

But perhaps there was another factor that spurred them on. The Oriental is by nature secretive, and is apt to assume that anyone who speaks to him must have some ulterior motive. Ever since the time when the sahibs had begun to attempt the ascent of Everest, a strange rumor had run through the mountain villages. These demigods who had come from so far away were trying to deliver the Goddess Mother of Winds from her captivity by the demons. This deliverance of Chomolungma was to be followed by a kind of meteorological redemption, which would guarantee fine weather in perpetuity for the valleys of the Himalayas. Perhaps the Sherpas do not fully believe this, and they do make a pretense of laughing at it. Yet, without wholly believing it, what if there were something to it . . . ?

For the superhuman labor which they perform, the Sherpas receive a relatively high remuneration from the Eastern point of view, though it may seem ridiculously low to us. For the past several years they have been paid by the month. A high-altitude porter gets about 100 rupees a month. A sirdar gets double that amount. As a very great exception, and because his help was indispensable, Tenzing in 1953 received triple pay in the Hunt expedition.

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But this pay is clear gain. During the expedition, the Sherpas receive all their food. In certain instances, they eat exactly the same rations as the sahibs. This is the case among the French and the Swiss climbers. We shall see later on that the leaders of the British expeditions, particularly in 1953, preferred to practice certain economies in this respect.

As a bonus, the Sherpas are allowed to keep the equipment which they themselves have used on the mountains. For them that is a veritable treasure. They may sell it or keep it. In the latter case, it assures them of bonus equipment the following year.

Furthermore, the expeditions take out insurance for their Sherpas. Here are the rates: Loss of a finger or a toe: 30 rupees for the loss of the first finger or toe, and 10 rupees for every succeeding loss. The thumb is worth 100 rupees, making the value of a hand, 160 rupees. For the loss of an eye: 200 rupees; of both eyes, 400 rupees. For the death of an unmarried man, 200 rupees; for that of a married man: 500 rupees.

When the sahibs finally leave their Sherpas, the gift of the equipment is usually accompanied by bakshish. The Sherpas do not consider this in the nature of a tip, and they see nothing degrading in accepting it. It is a present to prove that the sahibs have been satisfied with them and are pleased to give a reward to those who deserve it.

As for the sirdar, he is the leader in charge of the Sherpas and the coolies. He generally has a great reputation among his subordinates who obey and respect him. But he never abuses his authority. In some cases, it is he who chooses his team, in others a member of the expedition goes ahead to Darjeeling to hire the Sherpas himself. However, the sirdar has the right of veto which he uses only very rarely. In general, he contents

himself to warn the sahib, when necessary, against those who seem undesirable to him.

In the countries of India, the word *sirdar* means prince, powerful one, policeman, leader. In Great Britain, the word was formerly used to designate a British officer who was the commanding officer in some detachment of the Egyptian army; in military slang it had become synonymous with V.I.P. (very important person). It is undoubtedly with this meaning that this word of Persian origin came to be introduced into India by the British. The English, therefore, were using this word jokingly when they applied it to the man in charge of their porters. The majority of the sirdars have brought back the original meaning to this title.

The coolies who carry provisions and loads to the foot of the mountain are paid three rupees per day for the advance march, and one and a half rupees per day for the return journey. Consequently they seem to be earning more than the Sherpas, but they take part in the expeditions for a very short time only.

The Abominable Snowman

As soon as the Westerners had passed beyond 16,000 feet on the Himalayan mountains, they were amazed to find tracks of bare feet in the snow. Sometimes these footprints were clearly those of a human foot. Sometimes they appeared to be those of a creature with four toes.

The native porters showed much less surprise. "Those are the tracks of the yeti," they said. The Tibetans called them: *mi-go*, *kangmi*, and more often *de metch kangmi*. Yeti is equivalent to monster or savage. In the Tibetan language *kang* means snow, *mi*, man; *go*, ugly. Consequently, for them, the yeti is the man of the snows, or the ugly snowman. As for *metch*, that is an adjective applied to things and beings that are dirty,

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evil-smelling, repugnant, repelling. The English translate the word by "abominable." Yet this word does not give the exact meaning of *metch*; monstrous, inhuman, not of this world, would be more exact. When Tilman in writing about the phenomenon wanted to use a scientific expression, he referred to it as "homo niveus disgustans" (the disgusting man of the snows).

The first one to point out these mysterious tracks on the snow at a high altitude was a certain Colonel L. A. Waddell. In his book, *Among the Himalayas*, published in 1898, he states that he saw footprints on a snowfield at a height of some 16,000 feet, at the boundary of Bhotan, in 1898. But the Himalayas were not yet sufficiently fashionable at that time for this piece of news to have created any sensation.

Only later, when Howard-Bury, leader of the first expedition to Everest (reconnaissance of 1921), noted in one of his cabled reports that he had seen the imprints of the "wild man of the snows," did the world press make use of this news, and the public became interested.

Ever since, that is, for the past thirty-two years, most of the great Himalaya-trotters have likewise seen these footprints.

Generally the footprint is that of a short, broad foot, with only four toes. Some people explain this deformity by the successive phases of the melting and the freezing of the snow. This might bring about an uneven imprint, and the fine details would readily disappear. But why should it always be just a single toe that is missing?

These footprints have astounded and continue to astound us for obvious reasons: Who would think of walking about in the snow with bare feet at an altitude where the cold is so severe? What food can the being who has made these tracks find on the uninhabited summit, where nothing can grow,

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nothing can live? And, finally, how is it possible that no one has ever set eyes upon the creature?

From 1921 on, it was suggested that these tracks were those of a bear or a monkey. Now, if there are any bears in the Himalayas, their imprints are perfectly well known, and there is always the mark of a claw, which has never been observed on the track of the *yeti*. As for the monkeys, those sometimes found in Nepal are tropical animals, jungle beasts. It is hard to understand what they would be doing in the snow. Besides, no matter how fast they may be able to flee, bears and monkeys in the long run become visible. No one can say that of the *yeti*.*

Sen Tenzing, the eccentric Uncle Sonam of the earlier chapters, reports among other things that he also has seen *yetis*. Shipton relates that on November 8, 1951, on the Col of Melung La, Sen Tenzing told him, "that he had seen one of those creatures and described it as a being half man and half beast covered with reddish brown fur."* He added that the face of the *yeti* is beardless.

As for our Tenzing, he declares that since his first trip from Thami to Darjeeling, he has often come upon the tracks of *yeti*, but he has never laid claim to having seen the creature itself.

Since the hypothesis of the bear was not an especially con-

*A single European, the explorer A. M. Tombazi, believes that he has perhaps seen a *yeti*, but under such unfavorable conditions and at an altitude sufficiently low that the silhouette of which he had a glimpse disappeared in the thick woods. Tombazi followed to search out the tracks. Still fresh, they were absolutely identical with those of a human foot.

*On June 12, 1953, there appeared in a Parisian newspaper, a dispatch dated as follows: "Khumbu-Everest glacier, June 5 (by porter and cable). The author of this dispatch reports an interview with Tenzing, the conqueror of Everest, in these terms: "Tenzing claims that he has seen one of these creatures whose tracks have been noted several times in the snow. It was, he declared, a being half man and half beast, covered with reddish hair."

Thus it would appear that an "abominable reporter from the snows," "special reporter" of a big French daily newspaper, must have carried some very heavy tomes on the literature of mountain climbing up to the "Khumbu-Everest glacier" whence he transmitted his interviews "by porter and by cable."

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vincing one, the idea that it was a hermit was suggested. There exist in India certain men who go into retreat on the rocky slopes of the Himalayas, live there almost naked, and train themselves to endure such long fasts that they can well get along without nourishment for periods up to a month. When they are thus occupied, are they capable of walking about in the snow? Some believe they can, and declare that there are anchorites like this in Tibet as well. There are such, it is true, and the Everesters tell of them, but the ones that they talk about are the hermits of the glacier of Rongbuck, walled-in in their caves, and fed by the lamas of the monastery. Walled-in as they are, how do they come to be walking about in the snowfields?

But there is still another hypothesis: the *yetis* are the criminals who have been banished from villages in Tibet. Yet the numerous writers on Tibet have told us that on the contrary, in that country, criminals are treated with pity.

The non-believers would have us believe that the *yeti* is either an animal, a bear or a monkey, an anchorite, or a criminal. But all these explanations are so unsatisfactory that certain scholars are almost ready to suspect that the Snowman is the survivor of a race of human beings who inhabited the entire world during the glacial age. The description which was given to Shipton by Sonam Tenzing corresponds strangely with the picture of men etched on reindeer horn, which are found at Laugerie-Basse, in the Dordogne, in France.

For a long time it was believed that the Magadalenians had tried in their pictures to depict monkeys. In his book *The Nomads*, Pierre Hubac explains with great clarity that these drawings are merely men enveloped in the skins of animals. Proof of this appears plainly at the neck and the wrists in the pictures. Only the face and the hands are bare. Did not the Preserver of Tradition tell Shipton that "the being half man

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and half beast covered with reddish brown fur" had no beard?

In the same work Pierre Hubac likewise shows that the Magadalenians of the caves of Laugerie-Basse of La Madeleine, Marsoulas and Les Eyzies lived in the glacial period, and that one finds similar races at the present time "in Lapland, in Greenland, in the Behring Straits and in Siberia," sewed into their fur, as it were, and considered *metch*, in various languages by their Norwegian, Swedish, Russian or Canadian neighbors.

But how could these last survivors of a dying race nourish themselves? They might be able to do so after centuries of acclimitization—to winter in the caves and crevasses, and come down during the monsoon, to the Tibetan slopes where the lamas and the peasants believe firmly in their existence.

However persuasive and coherent this hypothesis may appear, it has one grave defect: its chief argument, that of the beardless face and the body covered with furs, rests upon the testimony of none other than Uncle Sonam!

Finally, we have a poet's solution, the one by Tilman. In 1938 he held a long discussion with the lamas of Rongbuck on the subject of the Abominable Snowmen.

The monks declared that they were sure of their existence, and alleged that they had often heard them roam about during the night in the vicinity of the monastery. Five lamas reported that they had met several of these monsters face to face. Frightened, they had fled as quickly as possible and—since the Snowman had the Evil Eye—the unfortunate monks had remained prostrate without consciousness, for several days. Tilman attributed this weakness to exhaustion brought on by great physical effort, and probably also by the heightened sensibilities experienced at such altitudes. The monastery of Rongbuck lies at an altitude of about 16,000 feet.

The monks noted the skepticism of the English and took

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them to an inside chapel, a Holy of Holies, as it were, to which, according to the lamas, Tibetan laymen are never given access. Tilman and his friends saw a huge block of greenish-black rock, probably crystallite about twenty-one cubic inches square, and weighing about 110 pounds. On its flat and smooth surface, the imprint of a foot was plainly visible. This block, the monks said, had been found at the foot of the Rongbuck glacier and was the object of worshipful apprehension. The footprint seemed to be authentic, and since the stone was preserved in one of the sanctuaries farthest removed from the gaze of the vulgar throng, it appeared that here surely it was not a case of counterfeiting or an imposture carved by the hand of man.*

Found, as it was, on the glacier of Rongbuck, this block of rock had come down from Everest on the moraine. The mysterious being whose footprint was marked on it must have lived in the snows of the summits, or rather he might have lived at a time when the rock was still soft as wax. And Tilman concludes with these rhythmic lines:

“Who has walked on this stone?
A being of flesh and blood?
Who is he? Whence comes he? Oh, mystery!
Only the snow knows it, high up yonder.”**

There are still other hypotheses. The lamas were accustomed to make strange tracks in the snow outside the villages during the night, in order to encourage superstitious fears among the peasants. They might have done the same in an attempt to frighten the members of the European expedition, and espe-

*Footprints on a rock such as this are found nowhere else but at Rongbuck. A similar imprint on a stone exists at the temple of Muktinath, but there it is attributed to the foot of the Buddha.

** H. W. Tilman: *Mount Everest* 38. Cambridge University Press.

cially the Sherpas who accompanied them. Others again say that the Sherpas are such practical jokers that they would be quite capable of making footprints as a hoax and of causing the sahibs to wonder.

Be that as it may, the tale of the *yeti* has no connection whatsoever with the tales of legendary beings in the mountains of Europe. In former days, the "Maennlein," Nibelungs, giants and dwarfs were called upon to explain the noises of the avalanche, and the creaking of the glaciers. But though they were feared, they were also respected and were even credited with playing the part of popular judges and avengers. The name *yeti* indicates that this being is despised—though it may also be feared—and that it is repugnant. Besides, the *metch kangmi* is not identified by the noises of the avalanches, nor by the creakings of the glacier, but by his footprints.

The Abominable Snowman is the last mystery of the Himalayas. Perhaps he is one of the last of the mysterious animals of the earth.

Part Three

MAN AND THE MOUNTAIN

1952. The Swiss on Everest

"The Swiss and the French treat the Sherpas on an equal footing in all respects as regards food, clothing, and equipment. That is not the case with the British."

TENZING

"Let me repeat that we had with us some wonderful Sherpas, who gave us of their best. . . . Our relations with them were excellent, and we continued in the traditions of the Swiss expeditions to treat these men as our friends, and not as our servants."

RENÉ DITTERT

The Return of the Prodigal Son

AS LONG AS the English were masters of India, and while their influence prevailed in the neighboring capitals, they reserved for themselves the monopoly of the world's highest peak. But in the year 1952, at the end of April, the Swiss, in their turn, installed themselves at the foot of Everest, on the Khumbu glacier.

As sirdar of the expedition, Tenzing found his friends Dittert and Roche there. For this return to Chomolungma, he had selected the best Tigers of Toon Soong; among them were Arjiba, Panzi and Sarki, graduates of Annapurna, besides Ang Dawa who had been with Tenzing at the ascent of Nanda Devi in the preceding year, as well as Da Namgyal, Ang Norbu, and Gyalsen. There was also Phou Tharkey, the venturesome younger brother of Ang Tharkey, and old Dawa Thondup, the oldest of the Tigers who was still active; though he had wanted

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to end his career at the age of forty-nine when he returned from Annapurna, he continued to laugh, to carry, and to drink whenever there was an opportunity. As the only one who had survived the expedition of Nanga Parbat in 1936, Dawa Thondup had nothing more to fear from the mountain, for apparently it wanted none of him. The team also numbered some young men: Gyalsen II, Ang Nima, Ang Chumbe, and Pasang Phutar, the sirdar's aide.

No better team had ever been assembled, nor had more carefully selected equipment ever been distributed. There were mountain boots of untanned reindeer leather, felt shoes, socks of wool soft as down, overshoes for the boots, made of waterproof linen, which covered the footwear completely and to which crampons could be attached; everything—caps, double-weight silk gloves, mittens, soft woollen greatcoats like those of monks, made of nylon lined with silk, to make sure that this year none of the Sherpas would return to Darjeeling with frozen limbs.

The Swiss had brought along hand grenades with which to release avalanches, as a precautionary measure. They had radio equipment to speak to one another across many miles of space, little pennants to mark the track, and finally a whole stock of firecrackers, magnesium lights, and cowherd's horns for accoustical orientation in case of fog; there were cans of gasoline, canned pemmican, and bouillon cubes which could be dissolved in hot or cold water.

The porters who had been recruited at Katmandu could barely go beyond 13,000 feet, and so the caravan sent ahead messengers to hire others at Namche Bazar. The whole population of Sola Khumbu accordingly flocked to the capital. Everyone was going to have a look at these famous Everesters who had been haunting the imagination of the Sherpas for over twenty years.

When the child of Thambi arrived at Namche Bazar with his knapsack like those worn by the sahibs, his fine suit of Swiss wool, his linen hat, his sturdy hobnailed boots, the people who had come up from his native village could scarcely recognize in him the little boy from the mountains who had left them eighteen years before. Among those who came to see was a very old woman with wrinkled face, weatherbeaten by the winds of the mountain. She was wrapped in a fur coat, wore a woolen cap and Tibetan boots. It was Tenzing's mother. She had no difficulty at all in recognizing her own son in the guise of this big fellow. He was married now, the father of a family, but she had never yet seen his wife nor his children. She had heard that he was doing very well, but she had not expected to see him arriving like this, dressed like the sahibs.

The camp pitched above Namche Bazar was invaded by a crowd of gay Sherpas. Everyone found some relative, a cousin, a brother, a son among the Tigers of Darjeeling, and offered them rounds of *chang* and *rakschi*. The opening of the Nepal route made it possible to renew contacts which had very nearly been severed. Tenzing noted that the Swiss sahibs took part in this family festivity, something which his former English employers would never have done. He was touched by this.

In this spring of 1952, Tenzing had but one hope: to climb Chomolungma. From the professional point of view, there was nothing left for him to wish for: the sahibs treated him more like a companion of high adventure than as a boss of the porters. The little mountain boy, former coolie, railroad porter and stable boy, had made his way. Every expedition brought in almost a thousand rupees which helped him to carry on without too much trouble during the months of winter idleness. In case of need, he could always sell a part of his equipment, and the sahibs would be sure to renew it the following year.

But since 1933, he had never been able to bring himself to sell his first trophy from Everest: his pair of leather ankle-supports.

The caravan climbed toward the Khumbu glacier by way of Thyangboche, where the lamas gave it their benediction; thence through the tiny high villages where Sherpas lived—Dingbache, Phérice, Lobuje. Supplementary personnel was hired to cut and transport the bundles of juniper brush which would make it possible to save fuel at the Base Camp and at Camp I.

Chomolungma seemed propitious to the Swiss. The winds were none too violent. In the evening, when the shadows descended into the gorge of Khumbu, campfires were lit on the moraine. Their reflections ran over the glacier like red waves, and made the ice ridges on the abrupt slopes of the Nuptse sparkle in the light. In the morning, when the haze lifted, the camp awoke to a marvelous scene. Opposite, the white and green ice slabs stood out on the black rocks which gleamed like mahogany. Further on the left, there was the procession of white ice pinnacles rising like steps towards the foot of the icefall; they were grouped in peaks and chains like mountains sinking to a lower level. Beyond the glacier rose the wall of Nuptse, with its base black for hundreds of feet, and crowned with a rocky confusion interspersed with snow and ice. Towards the right, there were almost no ice blocks, but the ice was still melting very slowly, and in a dry bed the water ran in a narrow stream over rocks and black pebbles. Much farther on, some green could be seen: tiny tufts of rhododendron and juniper. On the left, Mount Pumori was lost in the clouds, its slopes pellucid and greenish. Lintgren, which was much smaller, was covered with snow, as was also the saddle of Lho La which surmounted the glacial chaos at the foot of the Western Cwm. One could also see the sharp ridge of the

pyramid-shaped peak which the English called Lho Peak because it was the highest point of Lho La: a very poor name, because *lho* means south and *tse* means peak; the real Lho Peak is the Lhotse which is situated to the south of Everest.

Such was the location of the Base Camp from which Asper, Dittert, Roche and Tenzing left on April 18th, to select the site for Camp I at the foot of the icefall. Fog overtook them on the march, and suddenly they caught a glimpse of delicate shadows noiselessly fleeing at some distance in the fog. A moment later they found numerous tracks of yetis in the snow. Had the Everesters put to flight a horde of Abominable Snowmen?

The Conquest of the Western Cwm

As soon as they had established their Camp I on an island of rocks at the foot of the icefall, the Swiss pushed forward to the assault of the mountain. On the Tibetan slope, the English had formerly advanced on the Rongbuck glacier to an altitude of 21,000 feet without meeting any serious obstacles. On the Nepalese slope there is a difference in altitude of 2,400 feet between the threshold of the Western Cwm (19,500 feet) and the Khumbu glacier (17,100 feet).

All the ice from the Cwm slides gently towards the narrow gorge between the Nuptse and the "Lho Peak" where the rocks fall steeply under the Cwm at an angle of 45°. The glacier breaks up into crevasses, and is dismembered. The sun shines into the fissures and enlarges them. Then it warms up the upper parts of the ice blocks, and they become points. The wind has its share in this transformation. As they glide towards the Khumbu glacier, these great white blocks of ice jostle, clash, and bump on each other and pile up with a sound resembling

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the thunders of the approaching monsoon. Even in cold weather, the swift pace of the glacial torrent is such that it struck fear into the hearts of Shipton and Ang Tharkey, in 1951.*

In this chaotic landscape resembling the broken up regions of the moon, the advance ropes looked for a route on the south slope in order to avoid passing under the hanging glacier which falls from the south ridge of Everest. Up to the end of April the sirdar spent his time getting the loads up forward between the Base Camp and Camp I, to which he returned each night to get reports from those who had been struggling to get up the icefall. In this way, he was virtually living in two worlds.

During the day, bustling activity prevailed at the Base Camp. The women slaughtered and cooked lambs on the juniper fires. The Swiss already wrapped in their orange-colored down-lined coats stood side by side with the Sherpas in shirt sleeves, or in pullovers knit for them at the base of other mountains. Everyone was busy.

At night at Camp I, the scouts told of their treks between the steep walls of green ice with its fantastic reflections. There were barriers everywhere. They had barely climbed them when they found themselves faced by another abyss. Sometimes they crossed from one block of ice to another. Sometimes they wormed their way through the icy darkness. They traversed dangerous snow bridges to face once more a crevasse too large to be crossed or a wall too high to be scaled.

Shipton's verdict increased their anxiety; it was not enough merely to find a way, it would have to be one sufficiently safe for the Sherpas carrying their loads.

* They spent one night at 18,500 feet after having cut their way into the ice. Next morning, their fine upright ladder zigzagged to such an extent that an earthquake could not have done more.

All these attempts were stopped at a vast plateau which cuts the icefall in two at a height of about 18,500 feet. Beyond that the south bank was impassable. And the Swiss finally had to admit this. The alternative was either to capitulate before it, or to risk the passage on the other bank, namely, under the hanging glacier.

On April 2nd, Asper, Flory, Hofstetter and Roche took their lives in their hands. Several hours later they arrived at an altitude of 19,500 feet, at the threshold of the Cwm. As Shipton and Ang Tharkey had done before them, they stopped in front of the tremendous crevasses which stretch from the "Lho Peak" to Nuptse, at the point where the bottom of the Cwm begins to be hidden under the ice. They informed the sirdar that they would return the next day, determined to cross the crevasses.

The first crevasse they came upon was sixty-six feet deep and twenty-six feet wide. Supported by Flory and Hofstetter, Asper went down into it, hanging on the rope as it was let out. As soon as its length permitted him to try for the opposite wall, he had himself rocked to and fro, in order to get some impetus, and with a sudden movement, with ice-axe raised in front of him, he pushed with his foot against the wall of ice in order to get a grip on the opposite wall. The ropes became tangled, he missed his objective and was knocked violently against the side from which he started. It was a hard knock, and with aching shoulder Asper tried again, and again failed. Accordingly he climbed down to the bottom of the crevasse and looked for a favorable spot from which he might make a vertical ascent of the other wall. Cutting steps in the ice with his ice-axe, and clinging to the rocks which were embedded in the ice, he scaled the wall to its summit, over sixty feet above.

At last he was on the other side, and his doubled rope was the beginning of a bridge. Asper attached it to his ice-axe, which he struck deep into the snow at the bottom of a hole,

and Flory, lying on his stomach on the two cables, crossed the abyss in his turn. The bridge now had four cables, and the battle was won!

The location of Camp III had now been chosen. Now all that was necessary was to reinforce the rope bridge, to anchor it in the ice on crosses of wood, similar to the supports of a trestle, and thus to provide a hanging bridge.

The vanguard returned to Camp II, and now the Swiss had achieved the mastery of the Western Cwm.

The Occupation of the Cwm

From now on the greater share of the task devolved on the Sherpas. Tenzing entrusted his lieutenant and aide, Pasang Phutar, with the work of hauling the material from Base Camp to Camp I, to Camp II, and subsequently to Camp III, and took it upon himself to bring provisions to Camp III where, at the earliest possible moment, all the loads were to be piled up that were intended for the following depots.

The route over the icefall was so close to the hanging glacier that no one could risk himself on it after eleven in the morning, that is, when the sun was affecting the ice. On the steep slopes of this glacial wilderness, carrying would have been an impossibility if the track had not been carefully indicated with markers, for the Sherpas had to travel in veritable corridors of ice, unbelievable labyrinths of rocks and ice masses. At one moment they would enter a narrow passage between greenish walls, where everything around them had a nightmarish aspect, at another they would come up to the surface where they would sink into the snow and have to cross regions of ice-covered rocks. But they climbed on valiantly up to the rope bridge, where they attached their loads to the pulley of the hanging bridge. That amused them a great deal, for it was a great novelty to have such an apparatus on Everest.

Tenzing installed himself at Camp II, as soon as it had been established. Never before on the north slope of Everest had he had such a lively impression of having penetrated into the very heart of the Everest massif. From its height far above them, Chomolungma looked down scornfully upon the men, while the great Lhotse Face seemed to bend down to greet them. From Camp III, they could see the coping of the wall of Lhotse-Nuptse with its fluted rocks, its ice pillars that resembled the pipes of an organ, broken here and there by rocky spurs, cut, eroded, and torn by the continuous sliding down of the glacial masses. Opposite them was the frightening hanging glacier. The members of the expedition often tried to estimate its height and with their glance measure the distance which separated them from it, as if they were about to ask themselves up to what point an avalanche would ravage the Cwm.

The caravan had taken on a different appearance. Over the furred coats which the Sherpas as well as the sahibs wore all during the day, they wore the smocks of waterproof stuff which protected them from the wind. Dark goggles, furred caps, boots, and overshoes had become indispensable. To avoid the severe sting of the sun, made more biting by the slap of the wind, everybody smeared his face with sun-protecting ointments. The season was advancing, summer was coming on, but the caravan was making its way into the eternal winter of the mountain peaks. The men became so ugly to look at that they would certainly have frightened even the yetis.

Every morning fog enveloped the Cwm, and often the wind howled furiously, shaking the tents and keeping everybody awake. Soon, however, Camp III became a way station instead of a terminus, for Camp IV had already been installed at 21,200 feet, at the bottom of the majestic staircase which leads to the threshold of Lhotse.

From this point, access to the South Col had to be found,

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and here once more the expedition was faced by an obstacle as dangerous as the icefall.

The ice which comes down from Lhotse is piled up at the bottom of the Cwm, because at that spot, as well, the gradient changes markedly, that is, instead of being steeper, it becomes less steep. The result of this is apparently the same: the ice is displaced and divided up, it cracks and piles up to create what can only be described as a monstrous chaos.

The Battle of the South Col

On the 14th of May, Dittert, Lambert, Roche and Tenzing slept at the floor of Lhotse at about 22,000 feet, where they decided to establish their Camp V. And the next day they began the assault of the South Col. It took them three hours to climb the 1,650 feet and reach the base of the rocky buttress which they named Geneva Spur (Épéron des Genevois).

This spur, which had heretofore attracted them, now disappointed them. The rock was at a 40° angle, and the ice covering it and making it slippery was not thick enough to permit their foot irons to get a firm hold in it. After advancing about 165 feet on it, they were compelled to give it up.

The weather became worse, and made them halt for two days; they devoted this time to making Camp V comfortable. On the 17th of May, the storm had not quite abated, the wind was still raising spirals of snow at the foot of the Cwm, and carrying them like cyclones towards the Col. In spite of this, five men left on their way to the South Col. They were Aubert, Chevalley, Dittert, Lambert and Tenzing. They started off very early in the morning, in frightful cold, made worse by the fact that the sun was not yet shining at the bottom of the Cwm.

So that they might not exhaust themselves by attempting a vertical ascent, they made a long crossing of the Lhotse Face

in the direction of the Geneva Spur. They reached it at its peak, where the rock is easier to negotiate. On this day, they surpassed their first attempt by only 500 feet. Seemingly a poor accomplishment! But from the point which they had reached, the Col seemed accessible to them by a route which rose to 26,460 feet only to descend again to 26,000 feet.

For this tremendous ascent Tenzing chose five Sherpas: Da Namgyal, Arjiba, Pasang Phutar, Phou Tharkey, Dawa Thondup, and, as possible substitutes, Ningma Dorje and Ang Norbu.

For several days the storm raged in all its fury. It raised so much snow in the bottom of the Cwm that visibility fell to zero. Shut up in their tents, Sherpas and sahibs asked themselves anxiously whether perhaps the monsoon would begin before they had reached the Col. A first rope started out as soon as there was a slight clearing, but the wind redoubled, and it became necessary to turn back to the camp. Was the storm to go on? How long would it last?

At last, on May 25th, in the morning, when Tenzing stuck his head out of his tent and looked at the Summit of the World, he got this message from Chomolungma: Everest no longer wore its white plume of flying snow, the weather was fine, certain to remain so for several days.

Quickly Aubert, Flory, Lambert, Tenzing, Da Namgyal, Pasang Phutar, Phou Tharkey, and Arjiba got into their equipment, were roped together, and shouldered their loads. The substitutes, Ang Norbu and Ningma Dorje, left together with them, so that the sirdar might judge how well they were able to carry at high altitudes.

Towards eight in the evening, it became clear that the column could not reach the South Col before nightfall. The Sherpas shoveled and packed the snow to make a platform. The tents were put up. It was a bad night: at sundown the wind had regained its force, the canvas of the tents continued

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to flap, and the snow blew in on all sides. The next morning everyone felt so weak that part of the load was left behind at the encampment.

Finally, at noon, the spur was ascended. The sahibs gave the name Peak of Pity to its summit, and the seven men turned back towards the Col to set up Camp VI. Tenzing returned alone to get the material that they had left at the previous encampment. And this night, four Sherpas and three sahibs slept, for the first time, on the South Col.

But this night of victory was even more uncomfortable than the one spent at the improvised encampment of the night before. Even when it does not blow in the Cwm, the wind always rages around the South Col. The lack of oxygen was felt sorely. Climbing 3,600 feet in two days, and coming down to 26,000 feet had been too much of a change for these seven men. They slept badly and suffered from the wind which shook the tents and made hellish noises all around them.

Next morning, on May 27th, Tenzing alone of all the Sherpas was still full of energy. Phou Tharkey and Da Namgyal, the two giants, could not go any further and Pasang Phutar was not much better off.

But the South Col had now been occupied. After the departure of the men who were disabled, three tents were set up, completely equipped with mattresses, sleeping-bags, and enough provisions to last for three or four days.

A Night at an Altitude of 27,700 Feet

When they left Camp VI on the morning of May 27th, Aubert and Flory were roped together; Tenzing went with Lambert. They crossed the Col to explore the ridge which overhangs the Kang Cho glacier, which, from this distance, seemed more favorable for an ascent.

This southeast ridge proved to be impassable. They had to retrace their steps, go round a rocky promontory and climb a torrent of snow, up to a platform situated at 27,700 feet. When the mountaineers reached it, the south ridge looked different. It was no longer razor-edged in appearance as it had seemed before, but a slope which looked to them almost gentle and relatively easy to scale.

Here would be the right place to pitch a Camp VII, from which to take off on the final assault of the summit. All four of them agreed upon that. This solution would assure them of victory, but it was out of the question to stay here this evening. At this height, a tent would not be sufficient protection; they needed sleeping-bags, air-mattresses, an alcohol stove, sufficient provisions of oxygen, and a great deal to drink. Nonetheless, Lambert and Tenzing looked at each other, asking: Why not try it?

To wait until tomorrow would be to risk the storm. At times a day won on Everest is worth as much as a whole year. Tenzing did not speak French and Lambert knew no English, yet they had understood each other ever since they met. The mountains were their profession, both of them had the same faith that this year's expedition would succeed.

The die was cast: Tenzing and Lambert would spend the night in the tent. Before leaving them, their comrades Aubert and Flory gave them encouragement, but yet they were anxious about the night. What would happen tonight? Suppose the storm should start again in full fury? If it should bar their way and make it impossible for them to return in one day, perhaps two, perhaps three, how would Tenzing and Lambert be able to survive under that thin canvas shelter?

They all sat down together, before the others took their departure, to refresh themselves a bit. Then Lambert got up and took a picture of his three comrades. Flory and Tenzing

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were standing side by side. At that moment Flory put his arm on Tenzing's shoulder, and said "Good luck!" to him.

Tenzing saw more in his eyes than this simple wish would indicate. To him the words that he heard meant "My brother." Nothing could be a source of greater encouragement to him than that. In a flash as it were, he saw the life that he had been leading with the sahibs during the past two months. Once again he saw the gathering at Katmandu, the march up to this point, the great family festival at Namche Bazar. What difference could there be between these men and himself—were they not truly brothers?

Flory and Aubert, two great big blimp-like fellows, left in the direction of the small encampment on the South Col. They looked back. Several weeks spent on the Western Cwm had made their beards grow, and they were no longer the same men they were two months ago. Already the high altitude had caused them to walk all bent over, and their steps seemed much heavier.

Tenzing and Lambert remained alone. The Western Cwm and the Kang Cho glacier were enveloped in fog. Soon the South Col too disappeared under the mists which the wind dispelled from time to time.

There was nothing to drink, and their meager meal had made them thirsty. There was only a single candle to light their tent. It served, but only with great difficulty, to help melt the snow in a tin can.

The sun had disappeared behind the wall of Gyachung Kang, which, seen from this altitude, blotted out the horizon and with its elevation hid the summit of Pumori. Shadows mounted up to the highest point on Everest. Soon Tenzing could see only a reddish spot way up there at the end of the ridge, on snow which no human foot had ever trod.

The wind was raging in its fury; they had to shut themselves

up in the tent. The night was worse than they had expected. They passed it by huddling together to keep their limbs from freezing. They did not dare take off their shoes for any length of time, for fear that their boots would become frozen stiff and they would not be able to put them on again.

Yes, if they only had everything that they needed in this tent, they would be sure to succeed the next day. But now they had spent three nights above the altitude where acclimatization is possible—three nights that had lowered their vitality more than they dared to admit even to themselves.

They had breathing apparatus, it was true, but these were not very effective, like all those with "closed circuit." As soon as Lambert and Tenzing made any move, they had the sensation of choking.

Needless to say, they did not sleep that night. Not for a minute! Before dawn the next day, they both put their heads outside the tent to look for the light of their deliverance.

Like the evening before at sundown, a red light gleamed on the snow there at the top of the world. At first scarcely visible, from a very dark red glow in the black sky, it spread out as it became brighter, became longer and descended until it reached them. At dawn, the rays of the sun are not very warm, up on Everest. But they bring hope with them, nonetheless.

28,400 Feet—A World Record

It would be useless to wait any longer. The ascent would take the chill out of their bones and put a little warmth back into their stiff joints. At any other altitude, the trip would have been child's play. But above 26,000 feet, walking is slow, movement is uncertain, and breath is short. Tenzing and Lambert stumbled in the snow, stopped after every step to catch their breath, and went on again, stopping before the

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smallest rock, to inspect it and touch it, before scaling it.

At first the weather was good and the wind not too strong. But soon snow began to fall, covering the whole landscape above with a blinding overlay. They climbed on and on. The cold of the night had been dispelled, their muscles were now able to stretch and contract without pain. It seemed to them that they were in good shape. And yet, in five and a half hours of walking on the crest, they had barely negotiated more than 660 feet in altitude.

Now they had to stop at each step, to get a little oxygen from their tanks. But as soon as they started up again, the apparatus was not sufficient for their needs, and, breathless, they gasped in order to inhale the greatest possible amount of the rarified and icy air surrounding them.

Despite all these hardships, their morale was good; it even improved from one hour to the next. From time to time, Lambert turned around to his companion, and questioned him with a movement of his head. Tenzing nodded and pointed to the peak. He was very happy, for everything was going well. Chomolungma was up there, awaiting him on her throne of snow.

Seated side by side, the two looked first to the right towards the summit, then to the left, to the South Col. Visibility was too poor for them to be able to see the tents. Some thousand feet below them, a group roped together was waiting to support them, and had prepared warm drinks for them. Soon they would come down in triumph from the top, for now there was no longer any doubt—they had won. It was perfectly clear now. They nodded their heads, looking at each other to share their joy.

But time pressed on, and the day was short. It was necessary to go ahead. They were ready to fly, they were ready to leap like young goats up to the end of the ridge. But progress was

becoming slower. Their high spirits dropped and lassitude came upon them. Tenzing and Lambert dropped down in the snow. At last they faced the truth. At this rate, it would take them even more than one day to go to the top, and they would not be able to return the same day.

Now they were stumbling towards the South Col, drained of all their strength, going almost as slowly as when they had been climbing. The hours passed, the snow continued to fall, their feet were heavy and their crampons slipped on the snow. Their oxygen tanks weighed them down heavily, and it was to no purpose, for the oxygen they supplied was less and less able to sustain them. The rock barriers seemed to have grown higher since they passed there before, and they were even more difficult to cross. Without seeing it, Tenzing and Lambert passed the tent where, during the whole night, they had dared believe that victory was possible. They came down the snow stream like drunken men. They were trudging toward Camp VI . . .

A quarter of an hour later, they awoke to find themselves in a tent. An insignificant obstacle had stopped them, and they fell down in the snow, unable to go any further. Flory and Aubert pulled them into the shelter of the tent, and were doing their best to cheer them up.

Next day, Tenzing did not seem to be himself. An old man, advancing hesitatingly, he accompanied Aubert as they climbed down to Camp V, while Flory looked after Lambert, who had never been seen in such condition. After having passed the platform where they temporarily bivouacked—it seemed like three long centuries ago!—the four men met the team that was ascending the South Col for a second assault. They were Asper, Chevalley, Hofstetter, Roche and Dittert. Their Sherpas did not appear to be in good condition. Arjiba had fever, Dawa Thondup was hoarse and had a sore throat,

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Sarki had barely recovered from the fever which compelled him to rest soon after his arrival at Camp III: Ningma Dorje and Ang Norbu hoped that this time they would get to the end of this stage, but already mountain-sickness made their breathing hard. Among the sahibs, Roche had laryngitis and Asper still showed the effects of the reconnaissance trip that he had made the day before. Of the eight sahibs, there were only three, Hofstetter, Dittert, and Chevalley, who were in really good condition.

While the first team was resting at Camp V, a second one climbed in one move as far as Camp VI. Three of the Sherpas descended the following day. The storm raged on the South Col for three days and everybody was forced to remain in the tents. When the weather cleared once more, there was no longer any question of attempting any ascent, and the Sherpas were so bent with fatigue that they did not even go to look for the small tent they had left 660 feet higher up.

With difficulty, the sahibs came out of their shelter and decided to beat a retreat. This was good news for the Sherpas, except for Sarki who was sorry that he had to go. He felt good in his comfortable sleeping-bag, and he did not want to get out of it. Chevalley and Dittert had to rally him and shake him hard to get him up. He started out, but he fell down every few minutes, and they had to beg him and almost jostle him to make him descend where there was life.

At about seven, the caravan arrived at its former light encampment at 26,000 feet, which had been serving as a way station. Chevalley, Asper, and Dittert stayed there with Sarki. Roche, Ningma Dorje and Hofstetter went on to Camp V, to get two Sherpas to come to the aid of their comrade.

Next day, Arjiba and Dawa Thondup were roped with Sarki and brought him down in the morning to Camp V where everybody was now assembled.

It was June, and the monsoon was due any day now. The Cwm had to be evacuated.

Before their departure, Lambert and Tenzing pointed out the spot where they sat down for the last time before lassitude overtook them. The telescope helped to locate it. But what road did they take after that? The two men did not know; but the point which they indicated with certainty was very high indeed. With the help of the theodolite it was estimated to have been at about 28,400 feet. Although there might easily have been some error in this calculation, it did seem that the record of the English had been beaten.

This could be verified only at the Base Camp. Two men climbed to the ridge of Pumori and got up high enough to see the two points—where Norton halted in 1924, and where Tenzing and Lambert had to give up this year. There could be no doubt about it, the Swiss and their friend Tenzing had beaten the Everest record.

That evening, when the Sherpas heard of this, an exuberant spirit pervaded the Base Camp. They would have liked to weave garlands of flowers, and for want of anything better, they went out to meet the returning sirdar with chaplets of sausages!

Cheered by this gay welcome, Tenzing, who had been getting ready to leave Camp I, accepted his decoration laughingly. But another group of Sherpas stayed in the background with more sausages, not quite daring to approach Lambert. Might one joke this way a sahib? Wouldn't he get angry?

Tenzing, no less uneasy, looked questioningly at his comrade. But Lambert understood, turned to the Sherpas, and, with one hand melodramatically placed on his breast, he extended the other hand towards the sausages. And now, shouting with enthusiasm, the Sherpas decorated him in turn, and as they sang, bellowed, and shouted, the procession wound along

among the blocks of ice, slid along the moraine, and sank into the snow. At the Base Camp, their supper awaited them.

The triumphal march continued as far as Namche Bazar where the caravan arrived on June 9th. Tenzing's old mother would hear how her son, together with a sahib friend, had reached a point on Chomolungma higher than any ever yet reached by man.

The Return of Friend Lambert

This attempt in the spring provided a great deal of useful information. In the first place, the Swiss had begun to understand that the Sherpa infantry were the essential troops for the assault of Everest. Instead of fourteen carriers, thirty might well have been hired. The extra number could be held in reserve during the occupation of the Western Cwm, and would then be in good condition when the moment came to tackle the South Col. A telegram was sent to Tenzing telling him that he should bring a team twice the size to Katmandu.

The Swiss had received the authorization to travel through Nepal throughout the year 1952, and it was obvious that the return to Everest would have to be made this year, since the English were counting on trying the ascent in 1953. Many mountain climbers among the Everesters knew that a period of comparatively good weather separated the monsoon from the all too severe Himalayan winter. It was at that time that Tilman and Shipton had first found out about the south approach to the mountain. Accordingly, the Swiss decided to use this interval as best they could.

The oxygen tanks with closed circuit had proved disappointing, and so they took with them some open-circuit cylinders which would give them five full hours of oxygen supply for a weight of twenty-eight pounds.

The majority of the members of the first expedition were obliged to be in their home countries during the autumn. Consequently, Dr. Chevalley took the place of Dr. Wyss-Dunant as the leader of the expedition. Lambert succeeded Dittert as technical director, and Norman Dyrenfurth was to leave California to join them at Katmandu, so that he could complete the remainder of the film begun in the spring by André Roche. Several other members of the second expedition were professional mountaineers like Lambert and Tenzing: Gustave Gross, a guide from Salvan; Arthur Spöhel, a guide from Bern, Jean Buzio from Geneva, and Ernest Reiss from Davos.

All of them prepared most enthusiastically for their departure while, at Darjeeling, Tenzing was having the greatest difficulties. The Sherpas who had been on the West Cwm in the spring maintained that the icefall would probably be impassable for carriers and surely extremely dangerous. They were also afraid of the effect of the monsoon snows on the hanging glacier, and foresaw that the cold would attack their limbs. Tenzing could rally only a few of the faithful from the first team, and was compelled to recruit young men of twenty to twenty-two to make up for the deserters and add to his team.

On September 20th, the caravan left Katmandu with 251 carriers. It followed practically the same route as in the spring. The monsoon was still blowing and the tracks, filled as they were with water, made progress difficult. The leeches had never been so virulent. Where the caravan had camped on meadows in the spring, it was now forced to bivouac in pools of mud. At Rigmo, it was learned that a bridge thrown across the Dudh Kosi had been carried away by the monsoon floods. It was necessary to strike out on another track which forced them to cross several passes too high for the coolies of Katmandu, who were ill-clad and generally undernourished. Two

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of them died at an altitude of 14,000 feet, exhausted by the cold and the altitude. Panic-stricken, their comrades were afraid to go any further. It was necessary to pay off everybody, and to send messengers ahead to Namche Bazar to recruit men from Sola Khumbu, who were better equipped and more inured to hardship. On September 27th, all of a sudden the monsoon ceased, without returning, that is, as abruptly as it usually comes at the beginning of summer. On the 29th, the expedition arrived at Namche Bazar.

In the spring, in order to maintain the ferry over the icefall, Dr. Wyss-Dunant had sent out into the villages near Thyangboche for tree trunks to construct bridges across the crevasses, which increased in number and size from day to day. This time, about twenty additional men were hired at Melingo to carry trunks, about thirteen to eighteen feet long, from there on up. Just as during the first expedition, the inhabitants of the last settlements which the caravan passed followed them up to the Base Camp with bundles of juniper brush.

At the beginning of October the expedition established its camp on the right shore of the Khumbu glacier. On the very next day, a first group under the leadership of Lambert left with part of the carriers to install Camp I at the same place as in the spring, and to deposit the various loads intended for Camps I, II, and III. On October 8th, it was decided to abandon the Base Camp, and to transport everything to Camp I, which became the actual base of operations.

On the 9th, Lambert, Buzio, and several Sherpas began the assault of the icefall. The operation met with success, and six days later the icefall had been climbed, the track marked off and supplied with bridges from the base up to Camp III.

As soon as this had been done, the Sherpas began to carry up their loads. On October 16th, Lambert, Buzio, and three

Sherpas put up their tents on the same spot which had been occupied in the spring by Camp IV.

Up to this point, everything had gone well. The track over the icefall lay equidistant from the two rock walls. In this way avalanches from the hanging glacier were less threatening, and the Sherpas could continue to shuttle back and forth with their loads between the camps. The tree trunks brought from Melingo had permitted the construction of bridges easy for the men, from Nepal to cross. It was, therefore, easier and quicker to bring provisions to this Camp III than it had been in the spring.

But the monsoon had ravaged the Western Cwm. The majestic staircase with its huge steps of ice, which had led to Camp V, had been displaced. The top of the Cwm showed a picture of destruction like that of Judgment Day. Swollen with snow, the Lhotse Face puffed out above them even more threateningly than it had done in April and June.

Tenzing and Lambert accordingly decided to establish Camp V some 660 feet below the spot where it had been in the spring. They would thus escape the danger of avalanches, and the men would be able to breathe more easily before going on to the ascent of the South Col. In the spring, the distance between Camp V and the summit of the Geneva Spur, 3,700 feet, had made that stage of the journey too long and tiring. The 660 feet more of altitude which would have to be scaled ought not to be added to this. Tenzing, Lambert, and Gross agreed on the plan of establishing two intermediary camps between Camp V and the South Col. The greater part of the material would be stored at the new Camp VI. From there whatever was necessary would be transported to Camp VII, established at the former location at about 24,750 feet, and would be taken from there to Camp VIII, the camp at the South Col. Exposed to the danger of avalanches, as they

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were, Camps VI and VII would be occupied only during the actual ascents.

Though the transportation of the material, at the very beginning, had been accomplished with great speed, it slowed down towards the middle of October. Icy tempests followed at intervals of but one or two days, confining everybody to the tents. They were not like the storms of spring. The wind did not lift the hardened snow, and even with not a cloud in the sky, the wind's violence was stupefying. The speed with which the blasts of air blew across the Cwm was incredible; whoever risked going out of the tent was thrown down flat on the snow and had to crawl on all fours to get back to shelter. Though it was invisible, this strange wind produced hellish noises which soon affected the nervous balance of the Swiss, however well trained and inured to hardship they might be.

Instead of making a crossing on the Lhotse glacier, it seemed preferable to cut into the ice directly under the Spur and there to fix permanent ropes. In two days, Lambert, Gross, Buzio, Tenzing, and three Sherpas constructed a ramp which rose to a height of 24,000 feet. Next day they remained at rest, while Chevalley, Spöhel, Ningma Dorje, Pasang Phutar, and Ang Dawa set out to relieve them. Their share in the job was limited to lengthening the ramp over about 500 feet of uneven ground, and then to finding once more the permanent ropes that had been installed in the spring. Accordingly, the expedition had at its disposal a sort of elevator for loads up towards the South Col.

Up to his point, all precautions had been taken to avoid an accident. In the spring, both Sherpas and mountain climbers had been subjected to many more risks, but all had gone well. The ramp constructed by Tenzing, Lambert, and Gross was not exposed to danger from avalanches for more than about thirty feet. And yet it was there, in weather when ice and snow

are much more solidified than in the spring, that the catastrophe occurred.

Tenzing was using his telescope to follow the progress of the Chevalley-Spöhel team when he suddenly saw blocks of ice break off and fall, bounding in the direction of his comrades. The ice soon brought the snow into movement, and the avalanche broke loose.

Chomolungma spared the sahibs, but the three Sherpas who had been roped together lay there on the snow like disjointed puppets.

Everybody began moving: Spöhel and Chevalley rushed down at the same moment towards the scene of the accident. Two of the Sherpas were suffering only from shock, but Ningma Dorje, terribly disfigured, could not get up from the ground. It was believed that he had fractured his skull. In no time at all, everybody had climbed down to the Cwm, and Dr. Chevalley was examining the wounded man.

His face was badly hurt, but his skull had not been injured. Unfortunately, a broken rib had torn the lung on one side. Oxygen inhalations kept Ningma Dorje alive for twenty-four hours, but in the end he succumbed. He was the sixteenth victim that Everest claimed. The majority of the Sherpas were young and this avalanche demoralized them. To reassure them, it was necessary to change the route and to construct a new staircase which was, however, almost as dangerous.

In the meantime, November had arrived. The frightful wind from the west blew with its full force on Lhotse and the South Col. Its infernal uproar spoiled the possibility of any sleep for the caravan. Not until very late in the day did the sun reach the bottom of the Cym. As the Sherpas looked anxiously at the enormous plume of snow which twisted and writhed about the summit of Chomolungma, they seemed to see in it the mane of some ferocious beast.

The Young Tigers

On November 17th, Lambert, Tenzing, and Reiss installed themselves at Camp VII, with seven young Sherpas, to make the ascent up to the South Col the next day. The twenty-year-old Sherpas, whom the death of their comrade had saddened for two or three days at the beginning of the month, now behaved like veterans: nevertheless, they did not have the physical resistance of the Tigers, habituated as these were to Everest or to the other peaks of the Himalayas. They arrived on the South Col at about four in the afternoon, and collapsed, exhausted. The most valiant among them struggled against the wind with the sahibs, putting up the tents. They had to continue battling it for two hours, while the guy ropes were pulled out of their gloved hands. The tents kept flying off, dragging the men, who would slide along the ice. At last, when the camp had been set up, everybody shut themselves in, at a temperature of 4° below zero. The gusts repeatedly put out the alcohol stoves as soon as they were lit, and it was only with the greatest difficulty that it was possible to melt some snow and prepare a warm drink.

On the 20th of November, two Sherpas were left under the tent. The other five took their loads and departed in the storm together with the sahibs to establish a Camp IX, as high as possible on the ridge. They had good hopes of reaching the platform where Lambert and Tenzing had spent the night before the final assault of the earlier spring expedition. But this time they put up a good double tent, left an air-mattress for two and sleeping-bags, together with eight oxygen tanks, to assure two men of a supply of air that they could breathe for about twelve hours.

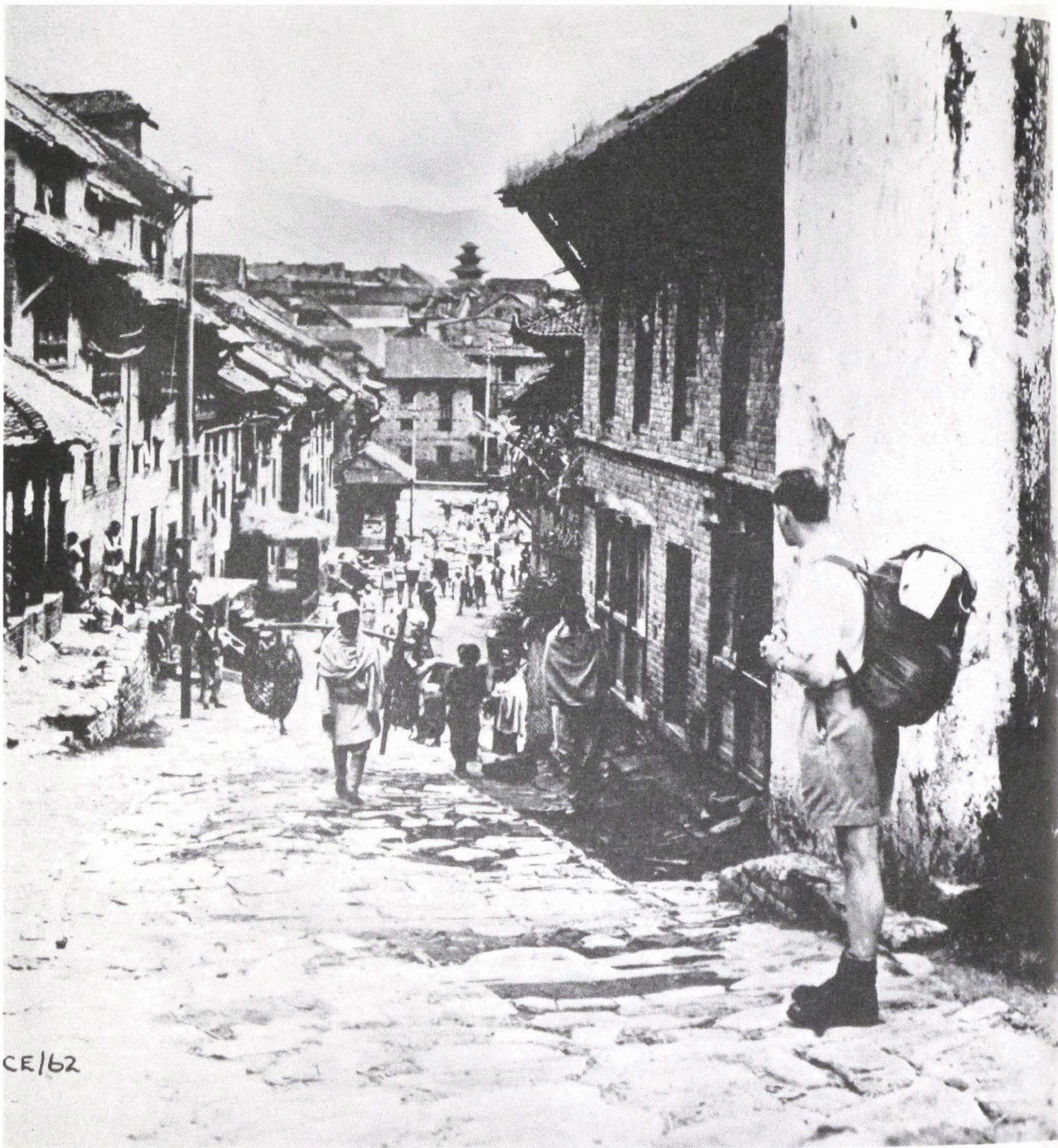
Bending under their loads of twenty-two pounds each,



Above. Tenzing after the conquest.
United Press Photo



Left. Tenzing in gear of Nepalese guide
before the successful assault on Everest.
United Press Photo



CE/62

Main Street of Khatmandu, the point of departure for the victorious Everest expedition.
United Artists Corporation



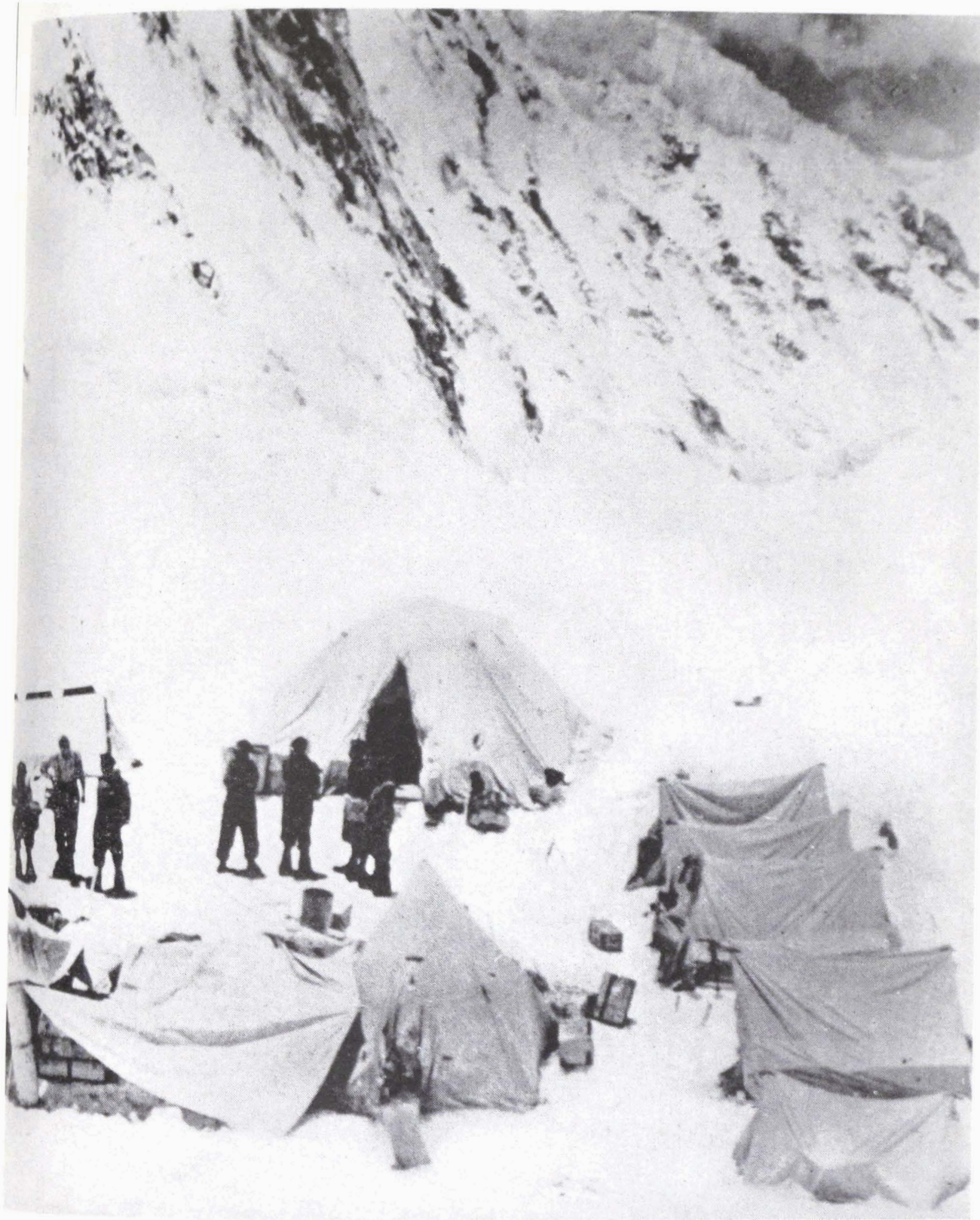
Above. Some of the 350 Sherpa porters needed to carry equipment. *United Artists Corporation*

Below. Tenzing discussing problems of equipment. *United Artists Corporation*





Maui River Bridge,
one of the obstacles
over which the huge
mass of equipment had
to be moved. United
States Artists Corporation

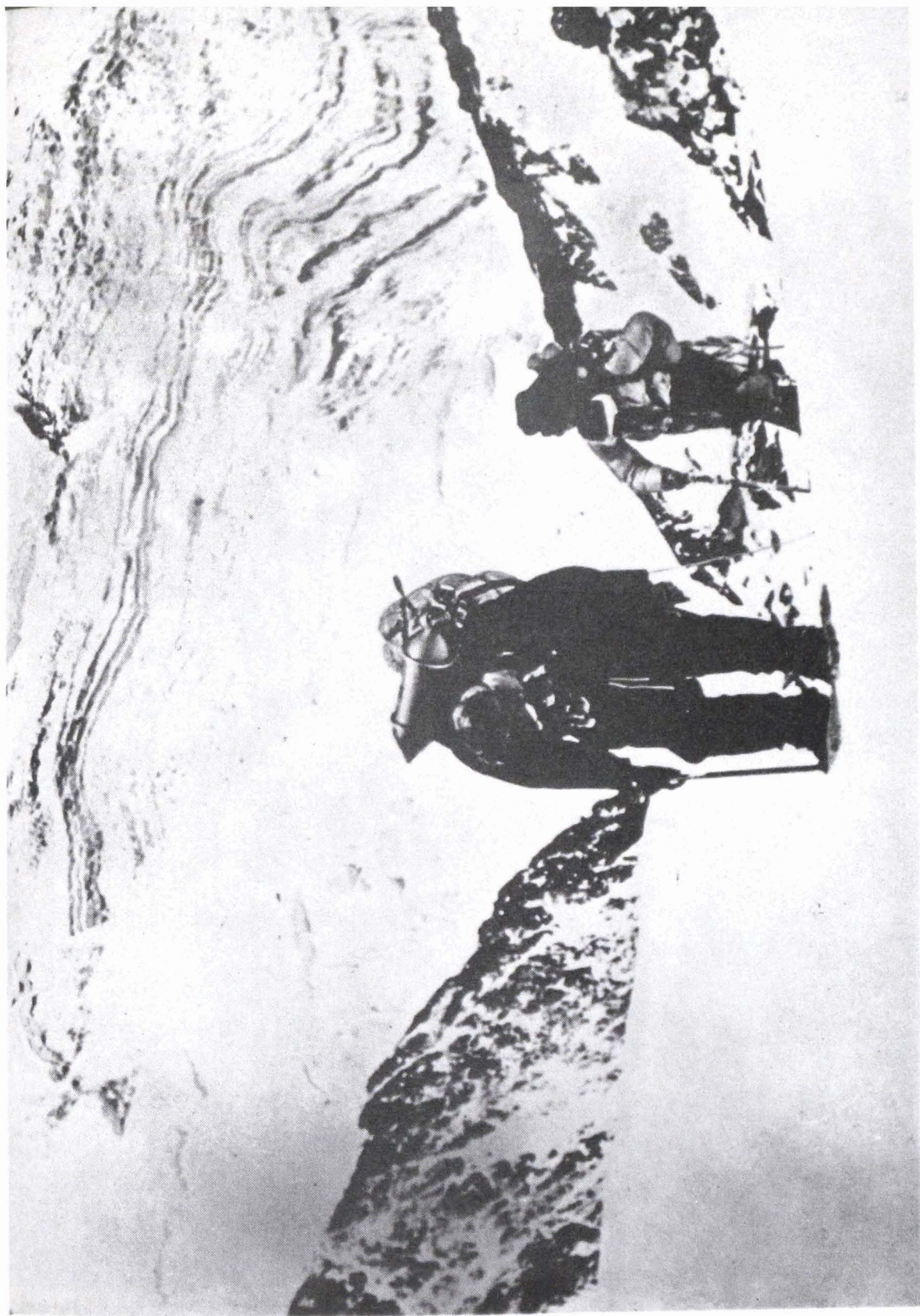


Camp 4 on Western Cwm. *United Artists Corporation*

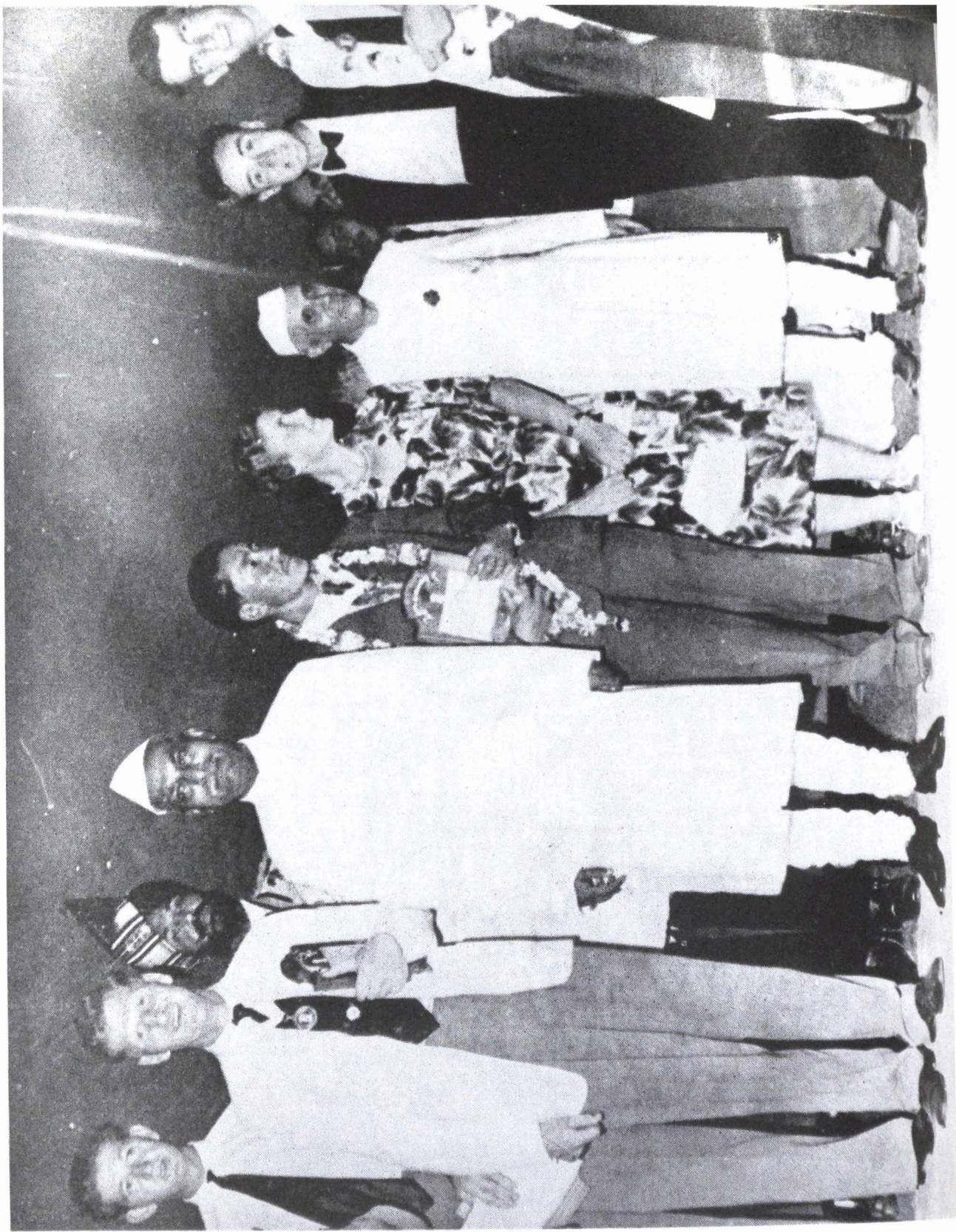


The telescopic bridge of duraluminum was an unsung hero of the expedition. In scene below the group of flags was used to mark alterations in the trail. *United Artists Corporation*





Hillary and Tenzing on
the southeast ridge the
day before the final as-
sault. United Artists
Corporation



At reception in the home of Dr. Rajendra Prasad, president of India. Second from left, Sir John Hunt, Dr. Prasad, Tenzing, Mrs. Hunt, Nehru, and, extreme right, Edmund P. Hillary. *Wide World Photos*

whipped by the wind* and still stiff from the cold of the night, the young Sherpas kept climbing persistently towards the rocks at the foot of the ridge. Tenzing supervised them with great care.

At an altitude of 26,700 feet at the foot of a snow couloir, Tenzing asked for a respite for these boys, who, even though this was their first ascent, boldly aspired to the title of Tiger. The eight cylinders of oxygen were set down right there, and the group returned once again to Camp VIII.

To spend a second night in the terrible wind of the Col meant running the danger of never getting down again. But the two sick young Sherpas did not dare get up. One of them, Guinding, was so stubborn about it, that it became necessary to lift his sleeping-bag from the bottom up, making the poor fellow fall backwards onto the mattress, where he was pulled about and thoroughly shaken until he was ready to get up and start off.

Dr. Chevalley had climbed up to Camp VII so as to be ready to help in case of broken bones, frozen arms or legs, or congestions of the lungs. They gathered around and took counsel.

Everything was coming along all right. There was plenty of food. Except for some twisted tent poles, there was no dearth of the necessary materials. There was no danger of a monsoon. And yet, no one could go any further. Even Tenzing and Lambert did not want to return once more to the South Col before they had had some rest at the Base Camp. This time, it was the cold and the wind that had gotten the better of human resistance and resolution.

Next morning, as they gazed at the Cwm from the height

* "The wind drives tiny needles of ice against us. So swiftly do these needles fly, that each one of them is able to pierce our windbreaker, the down-filled padded coat, two pullovers, two shirts, and our undershirts." Dr. Gabriel Chevalley, *Les Alpes* (Journal of the Swiss Alpine Club), March, 1953.

of their perch, halfway up the Geneva Spur, Tenzing and Lambert saw that it looked like an enormous witches' cauldron where the snow, blown and whirled about by the wind, rose as if it were boiling, and ran off in the direction of the South Col.

The retreat became a matter of course, and little was missing for it to turn into a rout.

Deafened by the noise, standing erect only by the power of their wills, the Swiss and the Sherpas alike welcomed the order to turn back. Everything that had been left above Camp V was abandoned. Furthermore, it was necessary to leave other things behind, in order not to be overburdened and slowed down in their evacuation of the Cwm. This explains how it came about that the English, in 1953, found so many Swiss provisions on the mountain.

From now on until the spring, the wind and only the wind was to be the master on Everest.

On November 22nd, at Camp IV, men appeared from the lower camps who had come by forced marches, under the leadership of Pasang Phutar, to carry the last loads. The Sherpas possess almost nothing at all, and they are usually ready to risk their very lives to preserve the precious material that they are able to salvage from the mountain. Quite logically, they counted on benefiting from this right of salvage, and the Swiss did not begrudge it to them.

The descent from Camp III to the Khumbu glacier struck terror into the hearts of all. Shipton's and Ang Tharkey's adventure at the top of their fine staircase, which was standing upright in the evening, and quite out of its place in the morning, was repeated a hundred times. While, in the Cwm, winter had plagued the men in body and spirits, a kind of spring had turned the séracs topsy-turvy. Nothing of the previous route was left; nature had completely altered the landscape. The

enormous glaciers, with their crevasses torn up, cut into pieces, pierced, eroded, and broken up, had so diminished in size that there were only small bits on the rock bed of the icefall, looking for all the world like mournful penguins.

The evacuation of the camp had been planned for the next morning. Seventy-five coolies arrived in the evening from Namche Bazar, to pick up their loads at dawn. They had neither tents nor other shelter, and piled up against the rocks to shelter themselves from the wind. They awoke all covered with snow. There were many women among them, and some of them had come with their nursing babies, whom they had pressed against their warm bodies all night to keep them from freezing.

The caravan arrived at Katmandu by the same route which they had followed when they left. The march was less difficult, the ground less muddy, and the leeches less virulent, but Tenzing was at the end of his strength.

Seven times he had been on the way up to Chomolungma, twice with the Swiss. He had believed that they were bound to succeed, and what had happened? Was he never to get to the top? Was he never to change what was almost a habit by now—always to fail? Thoughts of defeat and despair began to spring up in his mind, confused by the infernal uproar of almost two full months of wind. He marched along keeping step with his Swiss friends; he was even able to laugh with them and with the young Sherpas, who were returning to Darjeeling proud at having proved that they were as good as the more experienced men. But this was just outward show on his part. At night, when he lay down to sleep, he felt pain in his aching joints, and now and then he would shake and tremble like an old man.

The Swiss and the Sherpas were to separate at Katmandu.

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But the sahibs took Tenzing as far as Patna because he had been seized with an attack of fever. In a haze he saw his friends go off. "You will come back, you will come back," he muttered when he regained consciousness.

Every Evening the Shadow's Finger Points to the East

*"I had the choice between various expeditions
—American, French, Japanese, and Swiss.
But Mrs. Henderson, the secretary of the
Himalayan Club at Darjeeling which supplies
the Sherpas for most of the ascents in the
Himalayas, insisted that I join the British.
She did not hide from me that she
preferred to favor her countrymen."*

TENZING

*"For the final assault, the choice of
Tenzing was a matter of course."*

COL. JOHN HUNT

Toon Soong, the Hill of the Tigers

AT THE BEGINNING of January, 1953, a single passenger left the little shaking train that at a speed of seven miles per hour connects Darjeeling with the main line of Patna-Techpour. January is not the month for returning from Everest, a season when no one ventures into the mountains; Tenzing hoped that he could pass as unnoticed as he had in his bed Number 6, between Numbers 5 and 7, in the hospital at Patna. But if you are Tenzing, the sirdar, the man who has beaten a world record in climbing on his own two legs up to more than 28,000 feet, if you have been a former porter at the railroad station at Darjeeling, and are the hero of all the railroad coolies, it goes

without saying that you will be spotted just as soon as you leave the train.

One of them grabbed his knapsack, another took hold of his bag. All of them congratulated him on his fine appearance, but their glances did not fool Tenzing.

The Tiger's eager admirers would have been happy to have dragged him along to the public square to make him talk, and in that way to enrich their own conversation for many days with expressions dear to the world of the bars, such as "Did I tell you what Tenzing said to me . . ." But Tenzing was still very tired, weak and worn, and he was anxious to see Toon Soong with its narrow little streets climbing steeply between the villas and the huts. A brisk wind blew from the northwest, as if the Five Treasures of the Snows, way back there on the horizon, wanted to send him a reminder. The prayer flags fluttered above the rooftops, and their bouquets of fringed bamboo or torn and dried palms tossed wildly in the gusts of wind, the better to drive away the evil spirits.

When she saw him coming, Ang Lhamu could not trust her eyes. "This is a mountain spirit come to take your place, it is your phantom," she murmured, frightened by the leanness of the homecomer. But Tenzing smiled at her and reassured her. Then she, too, laughed, and made believe that she had only been joking in order not to cast sorrow on the return of the sick man.

The days passed with monotonous regularity. Tenzing recovered all too slowly to suit him. Often in the evenings he would be seized with a chill and would go to bed, shaking like an old man. As soon as he went out of his house, to take a few steps on the hillside, his joints would begin to ache. He asked himself if perhaps, because he had become so acclimatized to the high altitude, he was no longer able to stand the heavier air of

Darjeeling—and he thought of other ways to make a living. But what else could he do? He had no other trade. Should he return to the railroad station at Darjeeling to carry heavy trunks on his back? He had also worked as a lad for a trainer of race horses, but that was the time when the English sahibs made the riding schools at Darjeeling a prosperous enterprise. The only thing he really could do was climb. For want of anything better, he might have established himself as a small merchant, but he did not have any capital.

By such brooding on the future, he began to curse his lot. Here there were three mouths for him to feed, and no way to do it but by climbing. Those sahibs would come from the other end of the world, would take him along to the mountain, give him something to live on for several months, and say to him: "Go ahead, climb to the top." The poor devil had done the best he could, he had come back with his heart broken by his failure. He thought with anguish of the doctor's expression when the latter had warned him not to overstrain his heart.

A number of his friends came to visit him. Especially the journalist Mitra Babu. Tenzing talked little, but from time to time, some memory would become more distinct, and then he would describe prodigious sights he had seen: the wild gusts of the west wind scattering the boxes of provisions of the Swiss expedition over hundreds of feet—just before the end of autumn—or a sunset in all its magnificence on the Western Cwm. The long line of coolies crossing the hanging bridges of Nepal, and the cosmic upheaval that was the icefall.

As soon as Ang Tharkey's work gave him a moment's leisure, he would come over, with his perpetual smile, to cheer up his disciple, who had long ago outstripped him. When Ang Lhamu was not present, Tenzing would admit to his worries.

"You are just killing yourself in that trade of yours," replied

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the prudent Tharkey-Sancho. "Let the sahibs do the climbing and you just be satisfied with directing the transport of the material. Don't go beyond 20,000 feet."

As for himself, he did not want as much as 17,000 feet even to be mentioned. He was finished with all those affairs, with the throbbing of his temples, with his heart seeming to beat in his mouth, and with feet that felt as if they would turn to stone any minute. Since he had traveled much, seen much, and certainly retained a great deal in his mind, he for his part would found a travel agency. From now on he would manage the transportation of baggage for tourists who might want to travel in Sikkim, in Assam, and even in Nepal. But never too high up!

After several minutes of such talk, his love of adventure would get the upper hand, and Tharkey would marvel that he could even be thinking of going to Paris in the spring, just when the caravans would be setting out for the Himalayas.

And the two friends would recall the enthusiasm of the days before the war when they were young, when everything seemed a marvel to them—from Darjeeling up to Rongbuck while they passed by the monasteries in the limpid air of Tibet where even the farthest mountains seemed to be as close as your hand.

Besides his old friends, the Sherpas all took turns coming to the hut which had become the real headquarters of the Himalayan Club. Everyone avoided making any mention of what had happened last summer, when the old guard had, for the most part, refused to follow Tenzing to Everest after the monsoon.

Lhakpa Shering, the secretary of the Sherpas' Club, brought him two letters that had come from England and had been lying in the club awaiting Tenzing's return. Major Wylie was

asking persistently for a reply to his first letter, and insisting that this answer should be favorable.

There was a good deal of discussion of this proposal. As a general rule the Sherpas were rather unfriendly towards the English. Their departure was unfavorably affecting the economic conditions in Darjeeling, but instead of missing them, people blamed them for everything. Those to whom their presence had formerly been unpleasant were now the most voluble of all.

Waves of unrest were causing disturbances among the Sherpas, who, in their piety, had heretofore been isolated from the world. Insecurity was being felt among them as well as elsewhere in the world. In 1950, the Chinese troops in their flight had established themselves in the Chumbi valley which cuts into Sikkim. The Maharadja of Sikkim had had to abdicate under popular pressure in favor of the Foreign Minister of India. In 1951, civil war had raged in Nepal.

All these events were but the result of the strong pressure exerted by the Communists at the gates of India. Since the end of the war, strange emissaries had descended on Asia to sow the seeds of mysterious hopes there. Ever since then, the ancient misery of Asia seethed, and young men and women entertained strange notions, while strange talk was heard issuing from their lips.

Certain of Tenzing's friends advised him against going with the English, and recommended that he had better go with the Swiss to Dhaulagiri, or perhaps with the Americans who would be making another attempt at the ascent of K2. Or, why not with the French or the Japanese? But others kept repeating to him that the secretary of the Himalayan Club at Darjeeling, Mrs. Henderson, was urging that he come to see her.

The Keys to Everest

Finally, after having hesitated for several days, Tenzing decided that he would go and see Mrs. Henderson even though he felt it would be quite useless, because no one would want him as a sirdar any more.

Such was not the opinion of the British who were already busy preparing their expedition. They were eager to assure themselves of Tenzing's participation. This time they were firmly resolved to win the battle. They meant to stake all their aces on this game, and did not care what the expense might be. They intended to transport all the necessary material and food and deposit it in the Western Cwm and even on the South Col until Chomolungma should be theirs. They were ready to hire 300, 400, even 500 porters, as many as would be necessary.

As for the Sherpas, they would profit greatly by taking part in this expedition. First of all, they would be fitted out with equipment of superior quality, the like of which they had never yet seen. Second, Colonel Hunt had made his plans as follows: half of them would not have to share in the carrying until the whole party arrived at Camp IV, so that they would be in tiptop condition for the attack on the South Col. At least ten of them, accordingly, would be certain of acquiring the title of Tiger, if they did not already have it. It goes without saying that Major Wylie would give Tenzing full authority to hire his own team.

Listening to these conditions, deep regrets filled the mind of the sirdar. If only the sahibs had adopted these measures at a time when his heart was still strong, he would have been able to reach the top of Chomolungma. But now . . . January was already here, and the caravan would be leaving from Katmandu before the beginning of March. Tenzing still felt that he was not himself.

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"I am not well, I need several weeks more to recover. The Americans want me to accompany them to K2 and will not attempt the ascent until after the monsoon. That would mean that I would not have to go before May or June, and by that time, I hope to be myself again," was his answer.

This was Mrs. Henderson's reply: "He says several weeks, but aren't there still six weeks before the beginning of March? For a great seeker after adventures like him, the joy of going would be the very best cure, and if he was not entirely well when he arrived at the Base Camp, the sahibs would be only too happy just to have him there, so that they could profit from his valuable experience."

And, finally—"If the expedition should fail, it would surely return at the beginning of June, and there would still be time to join the Americans on K2. And if it succeeded—goodness, the sirdar wouldn't have to be running to the mountains any more. . . ."

On leaving Mrs. Henderson, he went, for the first time since his return, to the Sherpas' Club where Lhakpa Shering handed him a large envelope with a Swiss stamp. All it contained was a friendly note and several photographs of the recent expedition. Tenzing told them of his talk with Mrs. Henderson.

"Sure," they said, "they'll promise you anything you want so that you'll give them the keys to Everest. The first key they want from you is how to climb up the icefall and make a track over it so that the Sherpas won't be buried under an avalanche. The second key might be, how to cross the crevasses. The third, how to reach the South Col. And the fourth, where did the Swiss leave their stores and above all the eight oxygen tanks which they carried far beyond the South Col."

Tenzing nodded. Yes, all that was certainly true, and if he did go down there with them and let them have his advice, it would not be he who would do the climbing of Chomolungma.

What, then, would become of Mrs. Henderson's final promise that he would not have to be running to the mountains any more, if the expedition succeeded? The sirdar made no mention of this detail which suddenly appeared to him to be an absurdity every bit as ridiculous as the stories Uncle Sonam had told about that talisman, "world fame."

He returned to his home without having reached any decision, and lulled himself with memories while he looked at the photographs sent to him by his Swiss friends. Ang Lhamu, Nima and Pem Pem handed them around and all in turn looked at them.

From time to time his two daughters raised their eyes to their father, that marvelous man who went off to walk with the sahibs in that unbelievable world. Suddenly little Nima burst out: "Are these people still alive?"

The father looked at his daughter with affection and amusement, and answered: "Of course they are. Why should you think that they are dead?"

"Because there they are, all flat on the paper."

"What about your daddy? He is there on the paper, too. And he's alive."

"Yes, I know that," said Nima. "But still . . ."

After a moment she raised her head and began again: "It isn't at all the same thing for Daddy as for the others. He was alive before we saw him on that picture. But we never saw the others before."

Everyone laughed as the child spoke thus in her naïve way. But the father remembered that long ago, at the very beginning of his career, he, too, had been afraid of the cameras, and had feared that if he were to be laid flat that way on paper, some part of his soul might be immobilized.

The days of the bleak winter at Darjeeling passed by slowly, and still Tenzing kept turning over in his mind what he had been told. If he did succeed, he would not have to go to K2 nor to any other mountain—ever again! His wife often came upon him as he sat there wrapped in thought, his eyes fixed on the snowy peaks of the Kangchenjunga range.

The young fellows who had been his companions in the fall, and who a few days earlier had assumed the title of “Tigers of the Winter,” took turns almost every evening, coming to get possible news from him. They knew that Tenzing had had a talk with Mrs. Henderson, and kept asking themselves when the sirdar would decide to recall them to the colors.

Death on the Heights

Tenzing learned that one of them had already sold half his superb Swiss equipment to pay for the care of his sick brother. This drastic action worried him. The activities of a sirdar causes a stream of good feeling to flow into many a home in Toon Soong and that imposed certain duties upon him.

Less than eight days after his first conversation with Mrs. Henderson, the good news came to Tenzing: The British Everest Club had made a decision concerning the sirdar Tenzing. In consideration of his great value to them, he would be given triple pay if he would agree to participate in this year's expedition! Three hundred rupees a month! But that wasn't all! The Committee would double the amount of insurance indemnity that had been granted by the Swiss the preceding year. One really could not do any better than that! Just think: if he should die, there would be 2,000 rupees for his family—twenty times what would be paid in the case of an unmarried man.

Tenzing's attitude perplexed those who interviewed him.

Sometimes they said to themselves: "He lets matters drag along this way because he thinks he will get an advantage out of it. It's just the bargaining that every Oriental engages in!" At other times, they were confused by the apparent indifference of the sirdar whom they had always known to be full of vigor and energy. Finally, they made use of still another argument. This expedition was to end around the beginning of June. That is, just at the time when the Queen of England would be having her Coronation, and her subjects wanted to present her, as a Coronation gift, with the ascent of Everest. The same person, reinforcing the argument, held out to Tenzing a large block of bronze fashioned in the image of George V, with "Kaisar i Hind" engraved on it. "Look, this King of England ruled over India; he was your Emperor, *Kaisar i Hind*, the Emperor of all India. Then his son ruled, too, and he gave all of you your independence. The daughter of this good king is going to be crowned on the second of June, and the English climbers will do their very best, will give all their strength, their energy, their courage, and their money, to get to the top of Everest before Coronation Day."

Tenzing smiled; it seemed to him a really poetic idea—to offer a mountain to a queen as a gift. In former days it would have been enough to make him decide to go. But the face of the doctor in Patna, when he examined him and spoke about his heart—surely that faraway princess did not know about that!

Once more he put off his decision. During the days that followed, his uneasiness increased. There was no mistake about it, everybody was counting on him: the Queen of England no less than the young Sherpas of Toon Soong, as well as his faithful old friends. The petty cares of the household got on his nerves. He felt that he was guilty of drawing back from his duty when his household depended on his work for its support. He looked at his family and its mode of living with more

attention than he had done before, and he loved them more intensely. But he kept telling himself that a father's love is of little value if he does not do his duty by his family.

One evening he saw himself, as in a dream, high up at the very top of Chomolungma, stretched out in the snow like a disjointed puppet, like Ningma Dorje when the avalanche struck. He woke up, and began to think about that vision. Wasn't it perhaps a premonition? Wasn't it the fate of the career he had chosen, to have such an end? In this regard, the promises of the British fell on fertile soil: if he did succeed, why then he would no longer have to run up and down the mountains; if not—why then he would just simply remain up there! For a man who on the average earns a few thousand rupees all told, to support his family, two thousand rupees represents quite a sizable capital. He imagined that with a sum like that, Ang Lhamu might very well start a small business, and then she and the girls would never have to suffer want.

Such was the will of Chomolungma, perhaps. A goddess great as she was surely not an easy taskmistress. To submit to her wishes, it would be necessary to go to her, without any hope of returning.

Next morning he conferred with Ang Tharkey, who was most eagerly at work in his small travel enterprise and who was delighted with his role of Tharkey-Sancho.

“Go ahead, go on to Everest, since the sahibs want to hire you as their counselor for three hundred rupees a month. But don't try to amuse yourself by going in for climbing that icefall which one of these days will cast sahibs and Sherpas alike into a hell of ice, the way the painting shows on the wall of the monastery at Rongbuck.”

But what was the good of going off on an expedition if you did not have any hopes of climbing up to the inky black sky

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where the stars shine bright in the full light of day, up to the whirling snows of Chomolungma?

In his quandary, Tenzing went to consult his natural advisor, the President of the Sherpas' Club, who was both mountain climber and lama. He admitted his weariness and lassitude to him, and his fears about his health.

"You are a beautiful star," said Pasang Dawa, "but all stars must set when their hour has come," and then he soon turned the conversation into other channels. But when Tenzing was about to leave, the lama said: "Look at the shadow of that prayer flag. Just see how it grows longer."

Tenzing looked, but he failed to understand. This lengthening shadow reminded him of only one thing: climbing the night when he was higher and ever higher towards the top-most peak, that time when he and Lambert were at an altitude of 27,000 feet.

So Pasang took him by the shoulder and explained to him: "When the sun goes down, the shadows lengthen towards that point on the horizon from whence the sun will rise tomorrow."

Tenzing began to understand the parable of the sly old lama: Every evening the finger of the shadow points towards the east. The stars go down, only to rise again. Victory is sometimes born out of defeat. *Om mani padme om.*

The Little Blue Pencil

Next morning, Mrs. Henderson was very much surprised to see Tenzing arrive—a Tenzing altogether cheerful. His eyes had resumed their liveliness, he was smiling gaily as the sahibs had always seen him do. He announced at once his decision to go with the British sahibs to climb Chomolungma.

Then, for several days, without his family knowing anything about it, Tenzing was extremely busy. With the aid of his

assistant, Pasang Phutar, he recruited a team of twenty men, all carefully selected. Among them there were only ten Tigers so that there might be an opportunity for the ten others to win their titles. Tenzing counted on being able to arrange it so that Colonel Hunt would manage to make things easier for these ten novices at the start, so that later he would be able to send them to the South Col. Some of the men were afraid that he would blame them for their desertion in the fall, but he bore no grudges, and chose the very best from among those who presented themselves.

One fine day, his wife saw him taking stock of his equipment, and then he announced to her: "I am leaving tomorrow for Chomolungma, and this time, believe me, I will get to the top."

Every single year the father left them, and though it had always been like this, yet at every departure the mother and the two daughters feared for his safety. Yet they put a good face upon it, for they could not help seeing how changed he was. His good spirits had come back. They were eager not to spoil his last evening at home with the family.

And yet, at bedtime, Ang Lhamu could not hold back, and the same cry of despair escaped from her that she had uttered so many times before: "You will meet your end up there!"

"Everything that lives must die," Tenzing replied. "Would you prefer to have me finish my days here in your hut? Wouldn't you rather have me up there, in the snow palace of a great goddess?"

"But what is to become of us? What of the children? They are still so young."

Then Tenzing told his wife that in case of his death, the compensation would be 2,000 rupees in addition to whatever pay was still due him. With so much money, Ang Lhamu might very well start a little business.

Outraged at the utter calm with which he looked forward to

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his death, Ang Lhamu accused him of not loving his family. Aren't there any other trades that a man can follow?

Other trades? Which ones? This expedition would start in March and last until June—that is, four months; that would be 1,200 rupees, plus the bonus of the fine outfit. And then would come K2. Would he ever be able to earn that much in a tea plantation or in the shop of one of the city merchants?

Yes, that was so, but the girls were young, they needed their father; and the wife would like to keep her husband, too.

Then Tenzing confided to her the secret which the British had divulged to him: if he actually arrived at the peak of Chomolungma, he would never have to return there, not ever, any more. He laughed a bit to himself, in the shadow, as he said this, for he scarcely believed it himself.

And Ang Lhamu laughed, too. She remembered 1936 when he was courting her, and had told her that there was a famous talisman that the sahibs were hunting for on top of the whole world.

Meanwhile, little Nima in her bed could not fall asleep and had overheard part of the conversation. She was frightened. Would her father really have to die because he wanted those 2,000 rupees so badly? She knew that during the fall expedition three men perished. Do those who go to the mountain know when their turn is coming? But even if this were not true, the mere fact of thinking about it and foreseeing it was an evil omen. The cruel goddess might get angry about that. To appease her, Nima must make her an offering.

Next day, the little girl took stock of her treasures. She did not have very much. Tenzing could afford to have his family live in such a way that no one must suffer hunger, not even the little dog, Snowwhite; and they all had proper clothing (except Snowwhite, who did not need any!). But in the houses at Toon

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Soong, there were not many precious objects. Nima owned a few glass beads out of which to make a necklace when she collected enough of them; she had two ribbons for her braids, which she counted among her treasures because they were so beautiful. She had also a school girl's desk set: a copper inkstand with a chain for carrying it, a penholder and a pencil. But she also owned still another pencil which she did not use very often, her blue pencil. That was her most precious possession, and as such she chose it. Of course, there was also her doll, and the other doll, the little old one that she had had for a long while, but that would be too much to carry.

"Since you are surely going up very high this time, way up on Chomolungma, Daddy, you will give this to the goddess from me," she told her father.

Fearing that she might burst into tears, she did not dare to add: "You give her this offering from me so that she will spare you, and not keep you in her snow palace high up there above the clouds."

Tenzing accepted this gift for the goddess, and smiled happily. The child's idea seemed excellent to him: you must give everything to Chomolungma.

And now, even before the children had left for school, the Sherpas of the British Expedition to Everest in 1953 had come to gather at their sirdar's house. There were women among them. They would "carry" from Katmandu to Namche Bazar, and so would be able to meet with their families once again, and earn a few rupees in the bargain. The veterans in the crowd were wearing their mountain outfits. Ang Lhamu could not help but laugh to see them thus fitted out here on a hill in Toon Soong, for they remind her of the celebrated Sonam, the way he used to promenade in the hot sunshine dressed from head to foot as if he were about to face the most severe snowstorms on Everest.

When Tenzing came out of his house, the young Tigers quarreled among themselves as to who should carry his knapsack, but there was no question of that at all. The Sherpa wanted to show his wife that he was entirely well, even though he had not yet regained his former weight. He was so very happy, such joy radiated in his smile and in his eyes, that Ang Lhamu was moved by it, and did her best to cut short the leavetaking.

En Route!

As he left with his twenty men, Tenzing felt that he was alive once more. The die was cast; this time he would come back victorious, or he would not come back at all.

But he did not enter into an undertaking like this without taking proper precautions. To drive away the bad influence of previous failures, to prevent any possible recurrence of fever, and to make the victory doubly sure, the sirdar had changed his name. It would be seen whether the evil spirits would be able to find Tenzing Bhotia under the new name of Tenzing Norkey.

This accomplished, he gave himself up to the joy of the road, the days of traveling on the railroad and in the trucks, then the long trek on the mountain paths at a time when the spring opened up the gorgeous rhododendron buds; when blades of grass pushed up everywhere through the earth where the yaks went with their triple bells, where in all the villages, the hearts of the men and women of the mountains beat more gaily than they had during the harsh winter season. And this journey would soon take him to the foot of the sacred mountain to which he had dedicated his humble life. Suddenly he found himself thinking of Duplat and Vignes, who never returned from up there. But what better death was there for those who loved the mountains?

And suddenly when the sirdar once more breathed the icy air of the heights, all his cares concerning the past and the future and the needs of his family disappeared. Everything had become perfectly simple once more: to reach the summit, that was now his only goal!

The little train from Darjeeling took them to the main line, then another got them to Raxaul. As there were now twenty of them, they practically owned the whole car, and literally established their camp there. There was always water boiling on the alcohol stove for tea. Whenever Tenzing wanted anything, he had only to make a sign, and it was brought to him, tea or something to eat.

The sirdar either sat alone with his thoughts, or talked in friendly fashion with one or the other of his men; his thoughts had taken quite a different turn since last month when he came back from Patna. Life had become wonderful for him once more.

At Raxaul they had to wait for the tiny train which stumbled along its narrow-gauge track across the jungle. The movements of the vehicle made the young Sherpas laugh, they exaggerated the violence of the pitching of the cars, pushed each other about, and had a good time like children. Next, trucks took the small caravan as far as Bhimpedi—and from there the journey continued on foot.

Tenzing did not always give up his knapsack to those who wanted to carry it for him. But occasionally drops of perspiration stood out on his forehead, and for the first time in his life, it was hard for him to climb up a mountain trail, to cross over a pass. He would have liked to listen to the beating of his heart with that doctor's little thingumabob, to find out whether there was a little hope still left in there.

At last the plain of Katmandu stretched out before them. The young Sherpas cried out triumphantly, and as they went

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down towards the capital, they discussed with one another whether that peak out there, very far off to the east, might not be Chomolungma.

“That’s it, isn’t it? You surely see it?” one of them asked Tenzing.

To which he replied: “I see it always in my heart and mind.”

The Approach

"The relations between the climbers and the Sherpas are much better during this expedition than during preceding ones."

COL. JOHN HUNT

"Such misunderstandings are, unfortunately, likely to occur between those of different countries, with different habits and different language."

TENZING

The Stable at Katmandu

ON THE 4TH OF MARCH, when the Sherpas arrived at the capital of Nepal, the greater part of the English expedition was already assembled at the British Embassy, where the men of Darjeeling had been told to meet them.

When the small troop arrived, Bourdillon and Evans, who were in the garden of the Embassy, welcomed them with exclamations of pleasure. Major Wylie, a former officer of the Gurkhas ran up to greet them; his role was to be transport officer in charge of relations with the Sherpas and the coolies. Soon other Englishmen arrived in the garden. They expressed their good wishes and were apparently delighted with the fine appearance of their aides. Their pleasant demeanor made the Sherpas, who always liked gaiety and signs of comradeship, laugh with joy.

Tenzing greeted them, shook the hands held out to him, presented the members of his team to Major Wylie and Colonel Hunt, and then went to confer with the sahibs.

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A disappointment awaited him. To be sure, Colonel Hunt was agreeable that Tenzing should be one of those on the rope for the final assault, but only in case there was no one else in better condition than he at the decisive moment.

Nothing more natural than this. These gentlemen had most certainly not come all the way from England, in such great array, for the purpose of inviting a recently recovered invalid to climb Chomolungma. But the contract signed at Darjeeling had stipulated that Tenzing was to be one of the party on the rope for the final assault, provided that he was in good condition. Moreover, this was not the only thing that troubled Tenzing at his first contact with the English sahibs. They were certainly agreeable and they smiled often, which was a good sign. But their smiles had something affected about them. They seemed to make grimaces to please the person they were talking to, rather than to express gladness in their hearts. Their rather stiff attitude reminded Tenzing of the worst days of Dehra Dun.

But one should not go by mere appearances. The Englishmen showed the best will in the world, and one should not be suspicious of one's neighbor's intentions.

Tenzing had still another disappointment in store after his interview with the English. Dr. Ward medically disqualified one of the Tigers, in fact one of the very best ones: Gyalsen, Tenzing's comrade on Nanda Devi and the Swiss expedition, a stout fellow and an entirely reliable one despite his mania for taking notes, as if he were keeping a diary of his adventures. However, Gyalsen refused to quit his comrades. Now, next question: Where was the night to be spent? Immediately came the reply from Major Wylie: "I'll show you your quarters," he said to Tenzing, who was acting as interpreter for his men. Each man proudly picked up his luggage, and all twenty of them followed their leader.

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They arrived in front of a kind of shed which had formerly been a stable, and which had been turned into a garage since several motor vehicles, carried on the backs of men across the steep mountain passes, had begun traveling about on the plain of Katmandu.

Some twenty Sherpas who had come from Namche Bazar the night before had already established themselves in these shabby quarters; most of them had brought their wives along with them, to earn a few rupees like the coolie women of Katmandu. These others already seemed to have made themselves at home, which was perhaps what irritated the men from Toon Soong most of all.

Taken by surprise, the Tigers put down their baggage and went into the place to make a reconnaissance of the premises. Several of them came out again while Tenzing was taking leave of Major Wylie; he could see at once by their expression how dissatisfied they were.

Tenzing was accustomed to hardship. A man who has passed a night at an altitude of 27,720 feet without either mattress or sleeping-bag is perfectly capable of bedding down in a stable, and even of sleeping well here. But this attitude towards him and his men was a shock to him.

During the night, the men from Darjeeling got their dander up. Perhaps Gyalsen's resentment had something to do with it. Naturally enough, he bore a grudge against this expedition in which he was not to take part. To crown his misfortunes, none of his comrades would buy, for a proper price, his fine Swiss outfit which wouldn't be worth anything to him from now on, because, according to the doctor, he had a bad heart and would never again be able to climb any high mountains.

The others merely fanned the fires of his chagrin. He had made the trip from Darjeeling, and surely deserved to be paid

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for the days of coming and going back. You don't put people to that much trouble for nothing. Surely the English might have made their medical inspections earlier, at Darjeeling where there were plenty of doctors.

Every single rumor circulating at Darjeeling against the former masters of India was recalled to mind, and the men kept getting angrier and angrier. There were no facilities whatsoever in the stable-garage. So they did not hesitate to mess up the road right in front of their sleeping quarters. The sahibs were greatly provoked by this manifestation and their protests were addressed to the sirdar. It was at this point that Tenzing's real difficulties began, which until the end of the expedition kept him between the devil and the deep sea: between the recalcitrant Sherpas and the haughty sahibs.

“We Proceed in Our Own Way”

They crossed the fantastic city of Katmandu, which many of them did not know. Here and there a temple in ruins might have led them to believe that in the course of the civil war, which had occurred two years before, the Nepalese had had heavy artillery or the means for aerial bombardments. But these palaces and temples with their huge blocks of stone scattered all about had been like this since the earthquake of 1934. This ancient Mongolian capital had temples shaped like pagodas with roofs superimposed one on top of the other, sloping sides, and enormous capitals of carved wood, similar to the Tibetan temples. However, the gods who guarded the temples at the steps and before the gates were the Hindu divinities of the Brahmins. Their posture was different from that of the images of Buddha. Some of the Sherpas from Sola Khumbu were astonished to see these grimacing divinities with their stylized slender bodies, and these goddesses with round, full breasts.

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None of them showed the serenity of the Buddha as they knew it, but they were not offended by these strange shapes, and if it came to that, they would have been quite ready to enter these temples to make their prayers, for Buddhism is a religion that teaches tolerance.

When they came out again on the plain, those of them who had taken part in the Swiss expeditions remembered with pleasure how, last year, at the airport, the distribution of material had been made on the very first day. Surely now they would be given all their equipment without any further delay, and then camp at the airport, as people should who were on their way to Everest. However, they received only their sleeping-bags, since the better part of the supplies would not arrive before the 8th of March.

To sleep under the stars is nothing unusual for the Sherpas. Often in the summer after the monsoon, at the foot of other mountains besides Everest, they slept outside the tents, even at an altitude of from 7,000 to 10,000 feet. When they went from Darjeeling to Sola Khumbu, it might happen that they would stretch out in some cave, or in a simple cavity of rock, or, perhaps, if they could find no better place, behind some barrier that would protect them from the wind.

But here was something new; it had been a good many years since the sahibs had acted in this way!

When the supplies finally arrived, the Sherpas began to divide the loads up equally among the coolies. This ceremony, the prelude to the grand start, always took place with a great show of good spirits. It was fine weather, the men were in their shirt-sleeves and shorts, and Tenzing presided over the weighing.

The Sherpas were always glad to handle the treasures of the camps because, as has been said, they themselves own very few things, and because they knew that the better equipped an

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expedition was, the greater would be the opportunity for them to bring back something which they themselves lacked. The greed they felt was like the natural excitement children feel when they stand in front of a show-window filled with toys.

They were sure that they would soon come upon those packages that Major Wylie meant for their own use. Had they not been told that this expedition would spare no expense to have the Sherpas arrive at the South Col in good shape? But evening came, and still there had been no distribution of any kind.

This time the Sherpas did not even complain, although they did look at Tenzing with an air of annoyance. It was all he could do to keep their morale up.

Finally, on the 9th of March, in the evening, several Sherpas began to talk of turning back. The start was set for the next day, and the sahibs had not furnished either tents for the journey, or shoes—nothing. Some of them did still have their good strong Swiss shoes, but these were no longer new. And what about the others? Could they make the march of 180 miles farther, with their shoes which were already worn out by the trip from Bhimpedi to Katmandu? And would they have to sleep out under the stars even up on the passes more than 10,000 feet, yes, more than 13,000 feet in altitude, between Bhadgaon and Everest? That, they certainly had not expected!

“You’ll be able to take back shoes that are still new, if you don’t use them on the way,” Tenzing told them. “And those who aren’t able to sleep out, on the ground, surely they won’t be able to stand the cold of Chomolungma.” But he himself was by no means convinced by his own words, and he went to Major Wylie to put in a word with him.

What he heard there stunned him. With the exception of the sleeping-bags, the Sherpas were not to receive anything until the march of approach was ended. Though the sirdar tried vainly to sway the English with the argument of the example

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given by the Swiss last year, they remained obdurate. There was nothing which could force them to imitate the Swiss, they would act according to their own lights. And as for getting them to change their minds—

The Sherpas gave in; they needed their pay. And, besides, the whole expedition, the long marches, the nearness of the mountains, the great adventure that recurs year after year—all that always puts them in good humor.

The Caravan

Since about forty-four pounds constitutes the load for one man, seven and a half tons of material required 350 carriers. The caravan would have been much too long, and so Colonel Hunt divided it into two parties of equal size, which left from Bhadgaon on the 10th and 11th of March, respectively.

At daybreak on the appointed day, the first caravan passed through the gates of Bhadgaon, in the direction of Banepa. These starts were always a festive occasion for the town's inhabitants.

The procession had nothing military about it, the carriers walked in groups just as they pleased, all the women together, the young people together with the rest of the young folks, and the old ones with each other. One hundred and seventy-five men loaded with heavy packs, off for the Abode of the Gods—that was a sight which attracted the children! Just as our own children follow along with a passing regiment, so the urchins of Bhadgaon followed the steps of the caravan and accompanied it with their thoughts up to the horizon, dreaming of the fabulous riches of the sahibs contained in the big, heavy packs.

First there was the plain: the wide valley of Nepal, in the middle of which lay the capital and the two large towns of Patan and Bhadgaon. All around it were the chains of moun-

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tains tinged with blue. Though it was warm, the temperature was not unbearable. The coolies had made themselves comfortable. All they wore was a shirt and a loin-cloth reduced to its simplest terms. When Tenzing saw them, it brought back to his mind the young porter of 1935, whose packbasket wore through his shirt that time at the Tibet frontier.

In the plain, spring had come to Nepal—a tropical spring. The candelabra of the cactus spread out their branches in all directions as if to fool the travelers by contrary injunctions to go this way, and that way. White magnolias, scarlet rhododendrons, and orchids of many colors grew at the side of the road, so luxurious in their growth that at times there were places that almost seemed like a jungle.

The climb towards Everest began at the Banepa Col. But Chomolungma could not yet be seen. Several days' march was necessary to reach it, marches across mountain passes and rushing torrents. On the heights, pines and spruce towered above the thickets of rhododendrons. All morning, the birds filled the air with their joyful song. The "wicked whistler of the Himalayas," obstinate and awkward musician that he was, kept ceaselessly repeating the same refrain, persisting in a triolet like a little girl playing her scales over and over and over again. With its long beak, the "bugra" hammered away at the trunks of trees, like our woodpecker, and interrupted his task from time to time to call out his name, politely, to the people in the procession. Now and then a mountain vulture flew high up in the sky, vanishing towards the north.

To avoid the hottest part of the day, everyone got up at five-thirty, and the troop was on the way by six, which would make it possible for the day's allotted stint to be completed by the beginning of afternoon. Then the campfires were lit. After having carried loads with the men, the women prepared the evening meal. Some of the Sherpas who acted as quartermasters

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divided up the provisions bought when they passed through the villages.

There were only two tents, a very large one for the Englishmen, and Tenzing's small Swiss one. The Sherpas did more and more griping. Not only had they not yet been given footwear, warm clothes or tents, but the sahibs ate at a separate table and were already being furnished some of the mountain rations, while the Tigers of Everest got only *tsampa* and rice, like the coolies.

That was a great disappointment, for among the attractions of the expedition were such luxuries and rare dishes as corned beef, pork and beans, canned peas and beans, and, above all, various kinds of canned fish, such as tuna, salmon and sardines in oil, which Tenzing called "heaven in a tin."

But there was another thing which made the men of Darjeeling mad. It was that they were considered braggarts. When they said to those from Namche Bazar, "That's not the way it used to be when we were with the Swiss last year," the others did not believe them, for they, for their part, had always been treated like coolies.

This division of the Sherpas into two groups really saved the caravan. The Bhotias did not dare turn around and go back, for then the sahibs would just simply hire twenty more Sherpas at Namche Bazar. And since they had as yet distributed nothing, this could all the more readily be done.

And so the caravan went on, despite a good deal of discontent. Besides, Sherpas were not the kind of men to bear a grudge. Provided the scene around them was varied, their nomadic instincts were satisfied, and, indeed, the landscape did change very quickly. After the plain and the low hills with their miniature jungles of flowers, small bare plateaus appeared with only meager clumps of bushes for vegetation. Far in the dis-

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tance, there were the huts of the men who raised cattle, which already looked like the huts of Sola Khumbu.

Every village through which they passed seemed to be a picturesque fairyland, as the peasants came down from the terraces to sell their vegetables and the sheep-herders who were also weavers displayed their clothes woven of the wool of yaks, mountain goats, and sheep. Everyone lived out in the open, for the hovels were too small and badly lit. Cooking was done out of doors, as well as spinning and weaving, from dawn to sunset. The single room served merely as a kind of umbrella for rainy days, and as a dormitory for the night.

The caravan continued on its way, now rising, now descending, but every pass became higher, every gorge deeper. The river Sun Kosi was crossed on one of those Nepalese bridges which had only been in existence the last few years. They consisted of two long parallel chains from one steep embankment to the other. At every link, there was a rod shaped like a U which held the boards constituting the path. The bridge itself was full of bends and curves; to get down to the middle of it, the coolies had to hold on tight to the chain, and then it was just as hard for them to get up again on the other side.

At the bottom of these gorges, leeches flourished in great numbers in the wet underbrush. They were tiny and managed to get into the mountain boots through the holes of the laces, even into those of the sahibs. Every night one could hear the men griping in their tents as they counted the bloody marks on their feet. Yet the bite of the leech is absolutely painless, and the so-called torture which they inflict is purely and simply a figment of the imagination. The Nepalese protect themselves against this nuisance by rubbing themselves with tobacco juice or with salt. The sahibs used some ointment which must have been a good deal less effective, because they could be seen

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making faces every time the caravan went down towards one of these streams.

The countryside continued to change. Plateau pastures, then cultivated terraces with houses built halfway up of dry stone. Then the caravan came upon great herds of yaks.

As they approached Sola Khumbu, the Sherpas regained their good spirits, and their grudges against the sahibs became the subject for a lot of joking. Though they still had no tents and had to eat their meager pittance at night crouching on the ground like the coolies, yet it *was* a camp, with its sweet-smelling pine smoke, its long drawn-out gossiping, its jokes and laughter, and at sundown, the joint prayers offered up in a loud voice.

Tenzing was enchanted; from his boyhood on, he had felt an intense pleasure in crossing any region where men lived. He felt that he was moving through their life. And life and nature are Buddha's glory. The approach to Everest filled him with joy. From now on, he did not mind carrying his pack. The long file of porters, too, made him happy, because they meant adventure. He knew that their life was hard, that by coming along on this expedition they would not earn even a hundred rupees, at most seventy or seventy-five. He saw their bare feet, their ragged garments, and their twisted features as they struggled up the steeper slopes. These men were much more poverty-stricken than the Sherpas, but perhaps they had escaped from man's most cruel and ruthless enemies: doubt and insecurity, those nightmarish monsters.

As sirdar it was his duty to oversee the purchase of food in the villages, and that, too, represented adventure for him, since he came into contact with strangers.

When the Sherpas repeated their complaints, he cheered them up: "Go on, we've already got a good part of the road behind us; before you know it, we'll be at Namche Bazar!"

The Storm at Risingo

After the houses of dry stone, the cultivated terraces, and the yaks, there came the chortens and the prayer-flags by the side of the road. The caravan had now left the realm of Brahma, to enter that of Buddha. A long climb in an oak and pine forest with spurge and rhododendron underbrush led them to the Buddhist temple of Risingo.

The sahibs' tent was set up on a meadow opposite the temple, and Tenzing placed his on a hillock a little above that. Hardly had the meal been finished when a storm broke. After a violent hailstorm, the rain fell in torrents and for more than three hours the ground was soaked by it.

This was too much for the Sherpas. It was the last straw. Next morning, Tenzing had the greatest trouble preventing a strike; what angered the men from Darjeeling most were the taunts of the Nepalese from Sola Khumbu: "What, now you are even afraid of the rain!"

Once the caravan had resumed its march, Tenzing's delight was renewed. Everything pleased him, even the English sahibs. He found them amusing with their affectations, these men who did not seem able to speak to a Sherpa without condescending and putting on an air of patriarchal kindness. And besides, their laughter was so childish when they joked with one another! It had none of the Sherpa frankness and spontaneity, something always seemed to hold them back, in spite of their childishness. Without a doubt, there must be demons hidden inside them. The sahibs had lost a good deal of their quality of divinity, now that he had become almost their equal.

The Sherpas amused him no less. At Darjeeling they were always boasting, on their return, about how they had to live under the worst possible conditions and put up with a thousand plagues.

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Perhaps they had come along in the caravan not to climb the mountains but to live high and bring back home a good supply of objects and tall tales which which to dazzle their neighbors.

But Tenzing was a little uneasy just the same. How was his aide, Pasang Phutar, getting along with the second team which was to follow this group of his after an interval of twenty-four hours? Was he succeeding in appeasing the anger of the Sherpas, or had a strike perhaps broken out among them? If that was the case, when should he know about it?

At every pass the mountains appeared more plainly on their left. Two days had passed since the great storm at Risingo, and now Gaurisankar and Melungtse appeared. The column was now in the massif of the Himalayas, whose ranges stretched far to the south where peaks were visible here and there, particularly Kariolung. The caravan came to a halt before these first ramparts of Everest.

As for the coolies, they showed a definite uneasiness about the road which the caravan was to take the next day. They could see it rising successively over three hills that stretched always higher and higher.

This day had been a very strenuous one: though it had taken them only to a height of 8,600 feet, it brought them near one mountain of 9,900 feet and close to the next one, which was 13,200 feet high.

But the sahibs and the Sherpas did not mind, for their eyes were ever turned towards Everest, now clearly recognizable, for it dominated clearly over the massif which surrounded it; those who were familiar with it could already distinguish the enormous plum of snow flying in the wind. It was still warm on this road of approach, especially in the gorges, but up there, in the Abode of the Gods of the Snows, the violent west wind must be whistling angrily.

In crossing the next two passes, the sahibs and several of the Sherpas tried out the oxygen tanks, and expressed themselves well satisfied with them.

Disappointment Follows Disappointment

At last, on March 22nd, the caravan descended to the Dudh Kosi, the river into which emptied the Bhote Kosi, the Chola Kola and the Imja Kola, and, most important of all, the waters of the Khumbu glacier. Now they were already on the threshold of Everest. The journey was to take them for three days through Sherpa country, along the banks of the Dudh Kosi. At every village the entire population came out to meet the procession, offered them tea, and held out to them the cylindrical wooden cups filled with *chang*.

Men of Darjeeling and of Namche Bazar had a chance to see parents, cousins, and friends, and a part of the population accompanied the caravan for some miles to hear all the news. Several went even farther, for from Thyangboche on, new carriers would be hired to replace those who had come up from Katmandu and who were unaccustomed to the high altitude.

On the 25th the caravan entered Namche Bazar, the capital of the Sherpa country with its houses separated in little walled-in enclosures and with its boulders that have prayers carved in relief on them.

The population of the town had tripled in a single day. First, there were the customary three hundred inhabitants and the two hundred men of the expedition; then there were, in addition, the mountain folk from all the neighboring settlements who had come down to see the passage of the Everestes: it was the great event, a regular festival for them.

But this festival was different from that of the previous year.

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The local Sherpas were delighted; they had a fine journey and had earned a goodly number of rupees. On the other hand, the men of Darjeeling looked sour; they tried to lose themselves in the crowd instead of strutting about in fine equipment from head to toe. For the villager who returns to his native village is disgruntled if he cannot satisfy his need to dazzle his fellow villagers. They whispered their grievances to each other; these were really not the same kind of sahibs at all. The people of Namche Bazar could see this very well for themselves, for the English did not take part in the celebration the way the Swiss did last year; they were gay, yes, but it was not the same gaiety.

During the sixteen days that they had been marching, a crevasse of ice, as it were, had opened up between the English and the Tibetans. It was not open warfare, for some of the English were on good terms with some of the Sherpas. The experiments with the oxygen equipment reminded all of them that they were going together towards a great adventure. But the English felt more or less consciously that they were living in a hostile atmosphere. This did not at all correspond to what was told them by the members of earlier expeditions, and it made them unfriendly and stiff. And that made the Sherpas fearful in turn. But, God knows, they were still curious about everything concerning these great caravans and their astonishing sahibs.

Stobart, the cameraman of the expedition, was the first victim of this atmosphere. As soon as he put down his tripod, everybody ran up and wanted to look right into the camera; but the sahib wanted none of this. He wanted to take realistic scenes, not groups of "gaping savages." He shouted to them in English not to look like that, and, to indicate to the Sherpas that he wanted them to scatter, he made gestures with his hands.

"That man is possessed by demons, let's get out of his way!"

said the mountain dwellers, and they turned their backs on him and went off sadly.

Tenzing's prestige among his men had not been lowered. But still there were mutterings. Did he take himself for a sahib with his Swiss tent, his impeccable get-up, and his airs of a foreign mountaineer?

It was true that Tenzing had somewhat the air of a king at Namche Bazar and that, without losing his head, he did show his joy somewhat too openly. Some men from Thami brought him news of his family. Everybody admired him. There was now a teacher at Namche Bazar, and Tenzing had a beautiful album for him, published in Switzerland last October. One of the pictures showed a schoolmaster in the courtyard of the school, with about a dozen young ones, some sly and some dreamy-looking, seated on the ground in front of him. For a moment Tenzing was wrapped in his dreams. If he, too, could only have learned to read and write! But he soon banished the thought; for if he had, he would now be like that fat Nullu who puffed like a locomotive when he climbed the hill at Toon Soong to sit writing letters all day long in the shop of one of the Hindu tea merchants. Nullu made his living no better than a Sherpa. Perhaps just because he could not read and write, Tenzing had now become the equal of a sahib. *Om mani padme om.*

The caravan struck camp on the hill above Namche Bazar among the carved boulders, and the coolies were glad. Tomorrow there would be a short march of only six miles and the climb was not steep, from 12,000 to 13,000 feet. That would be their last climb. Then they would go back to Katmandu with a great handful of rupees. The prospect of pay was their consolation for the long climbs with the packbaskets on their backs, for the burning sun and dizzying bridges. These helots

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of the Himalayas were gay and laughed lightheartedly with one another.

The march to Thyangboche was a mob scene, the curious from Namche Bazar acting as escort for the caravan. They pointed out Tenzing, and the child in him smiled. Had he not become like that great Indian merchant who was to arrive at Sola Khumbu at the head of a long caravan loaded down with fabulous goods and treasures? Chomolungma was ahead, almost within reach of his hand. The mountain appeared massive as ever, with its snowy pennant over a mile long stretching out towards the Kangshung glacier. It disappeared behind the great wall of Nuptse-Lhotse whose lowest peak was higher than 24,750 feet. Nearer, on the right, was Ama Dablam (22,730 feet), so steep that last year the Swiss pronounced it impracticable to climb. A long ridge joined it to Kangtenga (22,440 feet) with its fluted walls similar to those of the barrier Nuptse-Lhotse as seen from the bottom of the Cwm. On the left was Taweche (21,516 feet), which had two summits, one pointed, the other like a blade, but between them they seemed to embrace an immense corridor of avalanches. And, finally, on the left, nearest of all, there was Khumbila (19,411 feet), the mountain nearest to Thami, the one he had glimpsed first when he was an infant.

Next morning, the second caravan joined up with the first at Thyangboche. And now the Sherpas felt caught in a trap. It is true that they were getting an outfit, and one of good quality, at that. But the sahibs made note of every single article, with the name of each recipient, and kept on repeating: "Now take good care of all this, for you will have to return it when you come back from Everest." Now, that was really too much! Why had they promised so much, and now

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treated the men worse than in previous years? Ever since the first expedition in 1921, the Sherpas had been able to keep their personal equipment. It might not be anything special, yet it represented a treasure in the eyes of the Sherpas. And now the English outfit, which was no better than the Swiss, had to be returned! It was all right for sirdar Tenzing, he had his own.

What was the good of going on expeditions from now on? They would gladly have returned on the spot, if the people of Sola Khumbu were not right there, that minute, eager to take their places. There were even more than at Darjeeling, and the English could easily say: "Ten will go for each one who drops out."

Tenzing did not understand this either. How come? These English, who were to give their all to offer the mountain to their Queen, did they haggle about a detail which was not even mentioned in the contracts, since custom had by now made it into an unwritten law? They ought to know by this time that with the Sherpas the outfit counted for more than their pay, that it assured them a bonus at the end of the expedition, and that it put a small capital at their disposal that they could use in case of need. And how could anyone proudly boast of having gone to Everest, if he had no alpine costume to show as proof?

The sirdar's contacts with the English were not the same as those he had with the Swiss and the French these last two years, yet they were not bad, and above all, he wanted to avoid a calamity. He knew how sly the Sherpas were: these men probably wouldn't turn back, but if they were pushed too far, it was very likely that they would all be sick as soon as they entered the Western Cwm. Such things had already happened, for example, in the case of Shipton sahib, who had some of the very best Sherpas with him; all this at a time when Tenzing

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was still carrying loads of hay on the steep flanks of the mountains of Sola Khumbu.

Tenzing could not go to Colonel Hunt and tell him these things baldly, so he began tactfully to explain, smiling his customary smile: "My comrades cannot get used to the idea that they have to give up their personal outfits at the end of the expedition. No matter what I do or say, they will not give them up. Try to explain it to them yourself, bara-sahib, for of course you know that morale counts for a great deal in such an enterprise as this. If the Sherpas are dissatisfied, I fear that this year's expedition will end in failure, like the ones that went before. And yet, if we were to succeed . . ."

The colonel capitulated. The whole thing was nothing but a misunderstanding. The sahibs certainly had no intention of taking the equipment back with them when they went home, but they preferred presenting it officially to their aides after the return trip, as a form of reward.

However, when Tenzing brought this bit of news back with him to the Sherpas, it was too late. Pasang Phutar had already made his decision. During the sixteen days of the approach with the second group, he had been squeezed in a vise. The Sherpas kept complaining about the British, and he had no way of making the sahibs listen to reason.

"I tell you, I'm in a bad way. The men have been getting angrier and angrier. And I certainly don't want them to call me an English valet in Darjeeling. It's just too bad—but I'm going back. Besides, I can't understand either why we should be treated worse this year than we were before. After all the fine promises that were made to us. I don't have to march for miles and miles to eat rice and *tsampa*. I can get enough of that sort of food at home in Darjeeling."

Tenzing did his best to keep his aide from carrying out his decision. Everest was already so close by! But Pasang Phutar

had had more than he could put up with. Some of the other Sherpas wanted to return with him, but Pasang himself dissuaded them: "My going alone will be a lesson to them; it's only March, and you can still count on three months' pay. You had better stay—and may the gods protect you." Pasang shouldered his knapsack and went back to Namche Bazar that very evening together with the villagers returning home after a day of marvels. Seeing him go, his comrades asked themselves whether Tenzing was still their sirdar, or whether he had indeed become a European mountaineer.

To those who kept complaining, Tenzing replied: "Look, you went one hundred and eighty miles to get this outfit. Now it belongs to you. And there is Chomolungma. Look at it with its white feather. This year we'll get to the top, and then you may be sure the English won't refuse me anything."

For Tenzing was absolutely confident of his victory. And if he were not to win this year, it would not be for lack of trying.

Acclimatization

In London, when the English were preparing their trip to Everest, they carefully studied all the accounts of the two Swiss attempts, and found what perhaps had been the only reason for their failure, according to Tenzing himself.

When the caravans used to go by the northern route, they first climbed the passes of Sikkim up to about 16,500 feet. Then, in Tibet, they advanced in five weeks from 13,200 to 16,500 feet. Acclimatization was thus achieved automatically, and though it was not easy, it was effective.

The two Swiss expeditions had been pressed for time. The first had left Katmandu at the end of April, that is, at least two months later than the British timetable. The second Swiss

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expedition was hurried beyond the original plans because of the onset of the cruel Himalayan winter. In both cases, there had been no interruption between the march of approach, the assault of the Cwm, its occupation, and the attack on the South Col. There was an interval between the arrival on the Khumbu glacier and the retreat, but acclimatization had had to be accomplished during a period of great activity and at a very high altitude, that is, at about the point where deterioration progresses more swiftly than habituation.

In the spring, all the members of the Swiss expedition advanced to the South Col. Four of them got as high as 27,720 feet. In the fall, there were three men who climbed as high as 26,730 feet. But all of them were in comparatively poor physical condition, because for two months they had overexerted themselves, going up too suddenly to inhuman altitudes.

The English decided that they would avoid this mistake. That is why they started out early, with the intention of devoting fully three weeks to a progressive acclimatization at altitudes where the alpinist may harden himself without becoming weakened.

The monastery of Thyangboche is situated at about 13,200 feet. All around it are the ridges of the Himalayan chain, with mountains between 20,000 and 23,000 feet high. In following the European climbing technique, that is, climbing to the highest possible point in two days, and returning in a single day, the members of the Hunt expedition hoped to accustom themselves to the lack of oxygen in the air, to the cold, and to the wind, without too much difficulty.

As soon as the material had been distributed, intense activity prevailed throughout the camp, and this contributed to calming the Sherpas despite the departure of Pasang Phutar.

Each one of the Englishmen, a specialist with regard to some parts of the material, explained to his comrades and to a group

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of Sherpas how to use the mechanical tools of the expedition. These more intimate contacts than were possible on the march would aid the leaders of the various groups in choosing the Sherpas for their teams.

As the great adventure drew near, the English began to lose some of their stiffness. The Sherpas, who love whatever is grotesque, quite goodnatureedly had fun in seeing the barasahib himself with a little visor cap of oilcloth that had too narrow a brim; Hillary, with the striped head covering of the New Zealand beekeeper, which bears a strange resemblance to the headdress of the Egyptian desert—all this amused the Sherpas as much as it did the other sahibs. The youngest of the group, Band, who was just twenty-four, wore a straw hat like those worn by the vintners of the southwest of France when they go to spray sulphur on their grapevines.

By a lucky chance these three models of Everestian elegance were each in a different one of the three groups into which the party was divided.

The first group, led by Hillary, included Ward, the doctor of the caravan, a former member of Shipton's reconnaissance expedition of 1921; Noyce, who had fought his first battles of the Himalayas in Sikkim province and Garhwal; Wylie, a former officer of the Gurkhas and an accomplished athlete who had carried off the British Pentathlon in 1939. This group went up into the valley of the Chola Kola towards the pasturage of Chokpula where Tenzing had wanted to place the site of the Base Camp last year, at an altitude of 14,520 feet.

The second group consisted of Evans, also a doctor, who had completed his surgery course and at the same time had taken part every summer in alpine or Himalayan mountain climbing; Bourdillon, a specialist in rockets and jet motors, who, like Evans, had taken part in the British expedition to Cho Oyu in 1952 and, like Ward, had been on the reconnoiter-

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ing trip of the western approach of Everest in 1951; Westmacott, who had been president of the Oxford Mountaineering Club and was an accomplished climber; and Band, a geologist, who was finishing his studies at Cambridge University and was president of the Cambridge Mountaineering Club. This group was to enter a closed hollow situated between the western ridge of Ama Dablam and the northeastern ridge of Kantega, and there undertake a reconnaissance that was to last six days.

Finally, in the last group, there were Hunt, a professional soldier, who during the war had been head instructor of the alpine commandos, directed by the old Everester Smythe; Gregory, the manager of a travel bureau at Blackpool, whose experience was limited to the Alps and the English lake region; and Lowe, a teacher from New Zealand, who had acted as mountain guide during the summer months in his native country. All these went with Tenzing onto the Imja glacier to the south of Lhotse.

In each group there were from eight to ten Sherpas. They were all to meet at Thyangboche on the 6th of April to compare their experiences.

These trips into the Himalayas again served to knit more closely the contacts between sahibs and Sherpas; the latter referred to each group by the nickname given to the most eccentric headgear worn by a sahib of that particular group.

The sahibs were no longer looked upon as gods, least of all the English sahibs. Nevertheless, they did retain some prestige in the eyes of the Sherpas, because they knew and owned so many things! The Sherpas felt more comfortable in these small teams because it brought them nearer to their sahibs. Every morning they had the pleasure of awakening in a real camp composed of five or six tents, showing their prowess in clearing

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up, and eating the same food as the sahibs—something which seemed more friendly and cordial to them.

The good weather of the march of approach grew even better as the days wore on. Tenzing kept lifting his eyes towards Chomolungma, and with joy noticed that its plume was growing shorter, that the wind was getting less violent up there—that was a good omen.

On the 6th of April, when the three leaders of the groups returned, they all told the same story: frightened at first by oxygen apparatus masks, the Sherpas had taken a liking to them and kept exclaiming: "Why, to climb up with these masks on will be just as easy as climbing down." But their enthusiasm had driven them to childish excesses, and finally they had wanted to do what all mountain climbers dream about—run and jump at an altitude of 18,000 or 20,000 feet. These follies had worn them out, despite their masks, and they had collapsed on the ice, exhausted.

The week had by no means been wasted. Everybody had come back in excellent condition after having climbed up to heights of 21,000 feet, and the Sherpas had finished familiarizing themselves with the oxygen equipment that they were to use in scaling the South Col.

The caravan spent three days on the hill of Thyangboche. Again the sahibs stayed on one side, and the Sherpas on the other, but at least the atmosphere had become less tense. And how was it possible to dislike each other in such an idyllic environment where the birds and the small mountain animals calmly crossed the camp, without fear of the most dangerous animal on earth?

Like the monks of Rongbuck, those of Thyangboche invited sahibs and Sherpas alike to a religious ceremony, the blessing of Everest. The Sherpas always cherish the benedictions of their monks, and they pay slight heed to the wry faces of

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the sahibs forced to drink cups of Tibetan tea. Tenzing recalled the embarrassment of his Swiss friends in similar circumstances, and nostalgia overtook him as he thought of the tall Lambert who, to save the day, had swallowed down in one huge gulp all the tea flavored with salted butter that had been offered to his compatriots.

The caravan was waiting for a second convoy of oxygen which was to be brought up on the 16th of April by Major Roberts. While awaiting this, the party was once more divided into three groups; the first, consisting of Hillary, Lowe, Band, and Westmacott, returned to the Khumbu glacier to study the icefall.

Evans, Tenzing, Wylie, and Gregory returned to the Imja glacier with the Sherpas who had done best up to that time, so that they might perfect them in the use of the oxygen equipment. The third team, consisting of Hunt, Bourdillon, Ward, and Noyce first went about on the Imja glacier with the second group, and later joined the first group at the foot of the icefall. They were to experiment with the closed-circuit breathing apparatus, while the second group was using the open-circuit tanks.

All Ready for Chomolungma

It was also the second team's assignment to return at the end of a week to Thyangboche and transport the main camp from the meadows of the monastery to the Khumbu glacier. At this Tenzing remembered that in order to maintain communications over the icefall, the Swiss had brought with them about twenty large pieces of wood to make bridges over the numerous crevasses. As none had been taken along by this expedition, he mentioned it to Colonel Hunt, who reassured

him by showing him the collapsible duraluminum bridge that the Hillary team was to take with them the next day. This was unquestionably a fine piece of apparatus: this bridge would be perfect for the large crevasses which bar the approach to the Cwm. But it could obviously not be put up everywhere at one and the same time. Though Colonel Hunt continued to explain how easy it was to use and to carry, Tenzing persisted in trying to show him that at a given time there might be several teams of Sherpas carrying provisions between the camps, that they could not all be provided for with this single bridge, and that, besides, it would be senseless, even if there were a bridge for each team, to have to carry it from crevasse to crevasse. Colonel Hunt smiled, but he did not understand. Wylie had to be called in, for in his over-excitement Tenzing was laughing so hard that his English became inadequate. As Mongolians are wont to do, he laughed so much because the whole thing made him angry, and he welcomed Wylie as a savior.

Convinced by Tenzing's arguments, Wylie in his turn insisted that Sherpas should be hired at Namche Bazar and at Phalong Karpo to transport a good supply of logs. But the other Englishmen, consulted about this by Hunt, drew back at the idea of the added expense. Three men would be required to carry each one of these heavy pieces of wood, whose length varied between twelve, fifteen and eighteen feet. To hire sixty carriers for three days would add considerably to the budget of the expedition.

Finally Tenzing prevailed, and portage over the glacier was certainly shortened by several days.

With this out of the way, the team of Evans, Gregory, Tenzing, and Wylie left Thyangboche to go up the valley of Imja in the direction of Dinboche, following a trail bordered by rocks on which monks of Thyangboche tirelessly carved

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the praises of Buddha. They reached Dinboche that evening. During the night the snow fell thick and fast and in the morning, since they could not go on, the Sherpas who had stayed at Thyangboche during the first week were instructed in the art of using the oxygen tanks. The already initiated carriers were happy at the thought that their comrades would surely make fools of themselves when they put on the masks, and begged Tenzing not to give away the trick, for they welcomed every chance at amusement.

On the following day, March 11th, when the caravan entered the bowl of Imja, the novices quickened their steps to such a pace, so much did the oxygen equipment stimulate them, that they collapsed, one after the other, getting themselves well laughed at. Perhaps this mishap was the best possible way to teach them the proper use of the oxygen tanks.

The center of the Imja glacier, that is, its lowest point, extends over several square miles at an altitude of 18,810 feet. In the very middle of it there is a relatively low peak (19,800 feet), but this rise of a thousand feet has a dizzying effect, for the sides are extremely steep. The Evans team turned directly across the glacier towards this peak, and at its base found rocks covered with juniper bushes, making it possible to have fine fuel for the campfires. Next day, the ascent of the peak began and proved to be extremely slow and difficult. With the coming of evening, they called a halt about halfway up and laid out a platform to pitch the tents.

On April 13th, two ropes left for the summit, the first consisting of Tenzing, Da Namgyal, and Evans, and the second of Gregory, Wylie, and Ang Pemba. Tenzing guessed that the sahibs wanted to get an idea, not only of his physical condition but also of his mountaineering skill, for the Sherpas have the reputation among the sahibs of not knowing how to scale vertical walls. Constantly at the head of his group, it was

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Tenzing who cut the steps into the ice for the almost 500 feet of the climb, and towards noon they had gained the top. Tenzing thus demonstrated that he knew how to use the ice-axe and the crampons just as proficiently as any European climber. Modest as was this ascent of some 1,000 feet of the peak, Tenzing was happy as he climbed down. He had his good form back, and it seemed to him that he had never been in better condition since the beginning of his career.

On the 14th, the little caravan headed back to Thyangboche where Major Roberts and his seventy-seven carriers had brought the last loads of oxygen destined to serve in the actual ascent of the mountain.

Each team had taken with it only the bare minimum needed for a week, and the larger part of the food supplies had been left at Thyangboche with the bulk of the stores. An inventory of it had to be made once more; and the loads for the 300 carriers who were to go up the icefall had to be made ready.

Before leaving Thyangboche, Tenzing called Da Norbu aside, and dictated to him two letters which were to tell Ang Lhamu and Mitra Babu, his neighbor, that he was in the best of condition and was firmly resolved not to return a beaten man this time. This made it possible for him to send a last farewell to his family and to Darjeeling without alarming anyone, for he was firmly resolved to climb to the top of Chomolungma, even if it meant never to return. His experience of the previous spring proved to him that this path to death is always open.

The Reappearance of Uncle Sonam

The passage of a caravan of yaks on their way to Tibet usurped the attention of the Sherpas of Namche Bazar, and Tenzing was surprised not to see the vanguard of carriers

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appear when April 15th came round. Knowing that his countrymen are versatile in their enthusiasms, and fearing that something might have hurt them during the British expedition's crossing, he went down himself to Namche Bazar to make certain that he would have his three hundred carriers on D Day.

The first man he met there was none other than Uncle Sonam. He had aged considerably and wore his hair in a long white mane, but he had preserved his meticulous elegance, and Tenzing had never himself had more splendid Tibetan boots.

Sonam had heard of the exploits of his young comrade of earlier days, and he was happy about it. "I always foresaw that you would be the very best one among us." He still thought about Shipton sahib who had once taken him to Bombay. But he was no longer interested in mountain adventures: how could he be, at his age!

Sonam was accompanying the yak caravan which was going to Tibet by way of the pass of Nangpa La, and wanted Tenzing to go along with him. He was astonished when Tenzing refused, and a bit disappointed. Surely these Tigers of the Snows lacked any imagination: to be so worked up about the mountains made a man lose his taste for seeing the rest of the world. As for himself, Sonam, though he was old, he was still on his travels, he was about to go to Tibet, and would even go back to Lhasa some time.

The 300 carriers from Namche Bazar represented all the able-bodied population of the village and the neighboring settlements. Needless to say there were no tents for them, and when, on the evening of the 20th of April, a blizzard came upon them unexpectedly while they were on the Khumbu glacier, they had no other shelter except to pile up one alongside the other against the rocks of the moraine, as they had

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done the previous winter when they had climbed up to help evacuate the Swiss camp. This time, too, there were almost as many women as men, and when they awoke the next morning to good weather, the sun was soon so dazzling bright that in a quarter of an hour they were partly blinded by it. Some of them had dark glasses on cardboard mounts which had been given them by the Swiss last year; others knotted handkerchiefs over their brows, while still others simplified matters by putting their braids in front of their eyes. But for more than half of them, such measures came too late. The blinded ones took the hands of the coughing ones, and the troop that Tenzing led to the foot of the icefall presented a sorry spectacle indeed.

For the whole morning these unhappy Sherpas of Sola Khumbu had been climbing the slope of the glacier, slipping on the ice-covered rocks, winding in and out among the ice-boulders, all this to earn their three rupees coming, and their one and a half rupees going back. But this small sum, about equivalent to ninety-four cents, for them represented practically a fortune!

Still another catastrophe awaited Tenzing at the Base Camp: the Sherpas had decided to go on strike.

The first to arrive, the Hillary group, had reconnoitered the icefall and had chosen the sites of Camp II (halfway up) and Camp III (at the base of the Cwm, but this time in front of the crevasses). The material brought by the two first teams was waiting at the foot of the icefall. The sahibs had asked the Sherpas to carry sixty-six pounds at each ascent and the latter had not wanted to carry more than forty-four pounds while they were scaling this glacial chaos where the angle of climb was about 45°.

However, the route had been well laid out. Since their arrival, the two New Zealanders, Hillary and Lowe, with the

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help of Band and Westmacott, had placed fixed ropes along the most difficult stretches and had made it possible to cross over the crevasses by using tree trunks and parts of the collapsible bridge.

Once more Tenzing intervened to smooth out this new dispute. He went from sahibs to Sherpas and from Sherpas to sahibs until at last a compromise was reached. The Sherpas agreed to carry fifty-five pounds and promised to do this as far as the foot of Lhotse, from which point they were to carry no more than a maximum of forty-four pounds. The English accepted this arrangement, but to regain their prestige, which appeared to them to have been compromised, they determined that they themselves would carry loads of sixty-six pounds until they were above the South Col.

Up to the end of the expedition, the Sherpas were annoyed because the arrangement they had made prevented them this time from yielding to the temptation of making bets on who would kill himself carrying the heaviest load.

The Siege of Everest

"... That mountain that is so high that only the spirits can live up there, and perhaps the yeti as well..."

TENZING

"One might almost say that the 'eight thousanders' (meters), these 'thrones of the gods,' are protected by a sort of mystical defense."

G.-O. DYRENFURTH

The Lunar Chaos

THE ROUTE TAKEN by Hillary and Lowe followed the right side of the icefall, as the Swiss expedition had done in the spring, that is, it skirted very close to the terrifying overhanging glacier. Tenzing had noted this detail when he climbed up on April 24th, in the company of Hunt and Evans, to rejoin Hillary at Camp III. Far from being afraid of it, he remembered that in the spring the Swiss had not had a single accident, and that in the fall they had even taken a great many more precautions, which, however, had not prevented Ningma Dorje from going to his predestined fate.

In clambering up the glacier, Tenzing found a number of the little pennants set out by the Swiss the year before. These landmarks showed to what an extent the lunar chaos of the *séracs* had changed since he had been there. Even worse, the crevasses across which the first expedition had thrown bridges had grown wider and it was necessary at times to remove the tree trunks in order to change the trail.

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Camp II, set up by Ward and Noyce with the New Zealanders, consisted of two tents perched on a glacial platform even more hazardous than the enormous ice plateau which had spread out at almost the same altitude in 1952. The rope consisting of Evans, Hunt, and Tenzing did not delay, but began at once to follow the track toward Camp III. Hillary occupied it for several days with his fellow countryman.

It was he who had been most opposed to transporting the tree trunks when the subject had been discussed at Thyangboche. But to set up the route, they had had great need of them, and in brotherly fashion he had apologized politely to Tenzing as soon as he had seen him. The latter was pleased, and the good-will with which the tall New Zealander spoke made him seem very congenial.

It was too soon to reconnoiter the crevasses near which Camp III had been installed, and Colonel Hunt was afraid of finding an insurmountable obstacle there. At Camp III there were several sections of the aluminum bridge. Placed end to end, they were set up vertically, like a huge ladder, looking ridiculous at the foot of these high mountains, and by means of a system of ropes, this ladder could be let down gently to the other side of a crevasse.

Tenzing was fooled by the appearance of the Cwm, onto which he set out with the three sahibs. In the preceding spring, only the banks of the Cwm had been chaotic, between Camps III and IV. In the fall, the steps of the huge staircase at the foot of Lhotse had already been displaced, and all of the Cwm on its entire surface had taken on practically the same aspect as the ice pinnacles of the glacier. There were nothing but crevasses, huge vertical blocks of ice, or others worn round by the wind, like rocks polished by the force of a river. Under the hanging glacier, some of the blocks of ice had been cut

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up into pieces, and become pointed like the pinnacles at the foot of the icefall.

To try to make a trail in this chaos would surely be very difficult. Every step that they made towards the old Camp IV of the Swiss proved this to Tenzing, and he began to be fearful. Here was precisely where he would have to direct the constant shuttle of the porters to the foot of the glacier. After a job like that, how would he be in shape to be one of the final rope for the assault? However, despite a whole day that he had spent in annoying negotiations at Base Camp to iron out the differences between the sahibs and the Sherpas, he still felt magnificently full of confidence. If only no accident, no recurrence of his illness intervened to prevent the realization of his great project! He resolved to spare himself as much as his duties would permit.

The weather was fine this particular evening, and the ice was all gleaming white. Then it began to get greenish on the walls between which the Lhotse glacier runs. A moment later, the shadow of Pumori appeared at the top of the glacier, and swiftly spread over the landscape. A golden sun still shone on the top of the walls of the Geneva Spur and of Lhotse.

Soon the shadow gnawed at the foot of the glacier, and gently climbed up over the face of Lhotse. The Cwm was plunged into darkness, but the South Peak, an enormous massif, took on the colors of golden moonlight. Tenzing stood still, awed by this splendor of the setting sun which reminded him of the advice of the lama of Pasang Dawa. He was one of the vanquished, who had decided to turn back once more to the scene of his defeat, and perhaps he would rise once again victorious at the end of the expedition. For that there was no place to which he could go other than Chomolungma. *Om mani padme om.*

Colonel Hunt's Sacrifice

At Camp III where they spent the night, Colonel Hunt explained his plan. He intended to install his Camp IV at the same spot as the Swiss, and to make of it an advance base for the reconnaissance of the Lhotse Face and the conquest of the South Peak.

The Colonel had a map of the Cwm drawn up by the Swiss, and had inquired of them as to the exact location of this camp. Besides, he knew his predecessors had abandoned a goodly supply of provisions and oxygen there. The Swiss had even indicated to him the type of oxygen tanks that they had used, so that he could have valves made that would permit the use of English masks with English or German tanks, as the case might be.

Having the advantage of Swiss provisions would make it possible to cut down considerably on the amount of carrying that would be necessary between Base Camp and Camp IV.

For the ascent of the South Col, the colonel proposed to adopt a plan somewhere intermediate between Dittert's and Lambert's. The technical director of the Swiss spring expedition had set up, between the lowest part of the Cwm (Camp V) and the South Peak, merely a simple depot of loads which would serve as a relay point for the ascent. The technical director of the fall expedition had installed one camp at the foot of Lhotse and another midway between this new Camp VI and the Col which was to become Camp VIII.

Colonel Hunt planned to establish a Camp VI midway, but to provide it with tents and all the necessary food and materiel so that it would serve not only as a depot but also as a way station. But the plan which he favored most was to supply the South Col very generously, so that they might be able to carry a final camp as high up as possible on the ridge, between

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the South Col and the summit. He hoped to establish this last base even higher than the spot where Lambert and Tenzing had passed their terrible night of watching and waiting before climbing up to 28,400 feet. All the earlier experiences on the southern as well as on the northern route indicated that the final rope would have to spend its last night as high up as possible, and in the best possible condition throughout, in order to be able to make the ascent and the descent within a single day. The colonel calculated all the chances of victory that he would be giving his expedition if one last team of porters were to install this camp at 28,000 feet, or, if fortune favored them, at the furthest spot reached in the previous year by Lambert and Tenzing at 28,400 feet.

Evans, Hillary, and Tenzing nodded agreement, delighted by these fine prospects, but perhaps a little doubt was already entering the minds of each one of them. The ones who would be making possible this last carry would surely not be the ones to reach the summit. . . . And already, among these men who had penetrated into the realm bewitched by demons, the first seed of dissension was sown.

The British surely recalled what Shipton had continually written and said with reference to large expeditions made up of six, eight, or ten alpinists: they would start out good comrades and be secret enemies at the end, because each one, without admitting it, was jealous of the other who by his fitness and good condition would hold title to a victory won in common by all.

Tenzing entrusted himself to God. He had decided to husband his strength, certainly, but he would not refuse his help. And yet—if he made this last carry, if he were to remain at the last camp—he would, if need be, go alone on the following morning, to find rest to the end of time on the summit of Chomolungma.

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Colonel Hunt also thought of the glory that would be his if, as leader of the expedition, he himself were to reach the summit. But he guessed what was going on in the minds of those to whom he was speaking, and the dissensions which would immediately be unleashed in the caravan as soon as everyone knew his plans. It is difficult to ask men to make an almost superhuman effort which is, at the same time, a renunciation. Hunt felt that the fate of his expedition was at stake at that very moment, and his sense of duty sustained him.

Accordingly, he then added that if he kept in good shape to the very end, and if he felt capable of going well beyond the South Col, he would be proud to carry his own load with those who could follow him, to assure the victory of the last rope. So saying, he turned his head aside for fear of seeing a glimmer of relief appear in the eyes of his companions.

Next morning, Hillary and Tenzing left in search of the famous Camp IV with Evans and Hunt. Later they were to find traces of all the other Swiss camps from the fall expedition at the foot and the face of Lhotse, on the Col. They even discovered the remains of the famous light tent occupied by Lambert and Tenzing in the spring. But this was because tents had remained there, shrouds of which had persisted, and because the wind had not allowed the snow to pile up on them. But Camp IV had been located low enough so that the material which was so very precious could be removed more easily, and the snow had piled up there in the interval between fall and spring, burying everything.

The colonel had his map, and Tenzing had his memories. First of all they went in the same direction; then, trusting to the look of the two walls, Hunt found the north-south line for which he was looking, quite near, but landmarks were still lacking to reach the exact location and to find the spot near the Nuptse-Lhotse wall, along which, guided by his memories,

Tenzing was to lead Hillary still nearer to the hanging glacier. He laughed, recalling what had been said to him at the Sherpas' Club: "The English will pay you for handing the keys of Everest over to them." That was true, but, after all, what was the role of a mountain guide? After that, no one could ever again say that the title of guide had not become the Sherpas' by right.

The whole face of the glacier had changed. Blocks of ice had become detached from the hanging glacier, turning over in their passage and breaking into bits, and Tenzing had nothing to go by except his memory. He recalled that from Camp IV he had seen a certain part of the Geneva Spur, the summit of which escaped his field of vision.

Finally he stood still, and said to Hillary: "This is the spot. I am certain of it." With his ice-axe, he began to scrape the snow. Before Colonel Hunt reached them, Tenzing had already exposed to the light of day a large pile of oxygen tanks and a case of provisions.

In his joy, he opened the case, and found in it the powder which had been used last year to make lemon juice. One of the men had a paraffin stove with him. He melted the snow, and the four companions had a drink of lemon juice to celebrate this discovery.

The Swiss had given Colonel Hunt an approximate inventory of what had been left behind at this spot. All that was necessary was to climb up again with shovels to uncover all of it. The first objective in Colonel Hunt's plan was accomplished.

The Shuttle

Of the twenty Sherpas who had come from Darjeeling, only nineteen remained, since Gyalsen had dropped out; Major Wylie had hired thirteen more from among the people of

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Namche Bazar who had gone to Katmandu. Four teams were set up, with eight Sherpas and two sahibs in each. During the first stage, three teams did the shuttling between the Base Camp and Camp III, touching at Camp II, while the fourth transported the loads from Camp III to Camp IV. Later on, when the supply of provisions which were in the Cwm was judged to be sufficient, one of the first three teams went to join the fourth, then a second did likewise, so that at the end, everyone was carrying from Camp III to Camp IV.

Roped together all day long with Hillary, Tenzing shuttled without stopping between the foot of the glacier and Camp IV, that is, they were climbing in the neighborhood of 3,700 feet each day. In his capacity of a sirdar, it was his task to see that the porters were carrying out their tasks properly, that the track should be passable all the time despite the movements of the ice, and that the shuttles would stop when the sunshine on the hanging glacier might endanger the lives of the porters. Each day he had to estimate the quantity of loads that had arrived halfway, in order to dispatch the teams at the proper times from the glacier to Cwm. In short, it was the Hillary-Tenzing rope which guaranteed the security of the rear-guard of the expedition simultaneously with its revictualing, a role which had been reserved for Dr. Wyss-Dunant, leader of the Swiss expedition, in the spring. Unimportant as it may seem, this kind of supervision is basic, especially in an expedition as heavily equipped as Colonel Hunt's, which, leaving six weeks ahead of the Swiss timetable, counted on staying until final victory, or until the monsoon drove them from the Cwm.

Without previous acclimatization, Tenzing and Hillary would have succumbed in a few days to this extremely strenuous ferrying. But they were in such good form that this hardened rather than weakened them. Each evening they would sleep at an altitude of about 18,000 feet, and were able to rest better

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there than they would have done at a higher camp. Besides, circulating in this way, they were experimenting with the open-circuit oxygen equipment, while the closed-circuit type served the reconnaissances on Lhotse.

Once more they deluded themselves as to the value of the closed-circuit equipment which had caused the failure of the spring expedition last year. Those of the Hunt expedition were more perfected than those of the Swiss. Bordillon had put them to every imaginable test. They assured much longer effectiveness for much less weight. But as always in the past, they failed those who made use of them, especially beyond 26,000 feet.

Tenzing was delighted to see that Hillary's strength held out the way his own did. Born of that seemingly unfortunate discussion at Thyangboche on the matter of the wooden bridges, their friendship grew closer each day from living almost continuously roped together, and Tenzing liked his comrade all the more because it occurred to him to ask himself how the adventure would end for his friend if they should be the ones to depart together for the summit of Chomolungma, for the nearer that decisive moment approached, the more Tenzing was determined to push to the limit of his strength. Too bad if he did not have the time to climb down the mountain again on the same day! So much the worse for him... but for Hillary, too, without a doubt.

So, while sticking gaily to his tasks, in good spirits, Tenzing kept returning to this subject again and again. Now and then an idea somewhat too subtle crept into his brain: "If I offer everything, my very life, to Chomolungma—she will preserve me." Soon, however, he began to be afraid and reproached himself for bargaining with his goddess. To live happily to the very end and to succeed if God wills it, he would have to forget his own future entirely.

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At night when they lay down to sleep, Tenzing and Hillary would joke with each other. This sahib said he did not come from England at all, but from another far-off island, very far away to the southeast of Everest.

“When it is noon in England, it is midnight in my home, and when it is winter in England, in my home it is summer.” Tenzing was amused at this and sometimes Hillary would add, laughing, too: “That is why we so rarely agree with the English; our clocks don’t show the same time as theirs do.” This was said without any malice whatsoever, with a good deal of humor barely touched with irony.

One evening the New Zealander asked Tenzing: “And what will you do if you reach the summit of Everest?”

Tenzing was taken by surprise, for he had forbidden himself the same question. He knitted his brows, trying to find an evasive answer and could not find one which would not put him in a compromising position with regard to the gods. With a charming childlikeness he exclaimed: “That would be so wonderful that I cannot even let myself think of it.”

A moment later he asked: “And you, what will you do?”

“I will get married.” And Hillary explained that he was planning to marry a young lady from his own country. She lived on another island, even larger than New Zealand.

“But if you do not climb Chomolungma, then you cannot marry her?”

“Why, surely I can. But this would be much better.” And, laughing, Hillary added: “If I were the conqueror of Everest, she would be prouder to marry me.”

Tenzing was touched by Hillary’s plan. He recalled the winter of 1935-36 when, as a young Sherpa returning from his first expedition, he dreamed of capturing the talisman so that he might win Ang Lhamu. That was seventeen years ago! And now children had been born of that dream. Perhaps Hillary

would be even happier. Then Tenzing began to entertain a wild notion—by some means or other, he would see to it that his companion was made to follow him, if fate were to find them roped together for the final attempt.

Hillary's Rescue

The carrying went on, slowed up by the snow which kept falling so thick and fast at times that the Sherpas could not keep to the trail; then they had to lay out a new trail so that they should not sink down into it as they kept trudging along. But the snow slides occurred only in the afternoons at the hour when even in good weather it would have been dangerous to pass under the hanging glacier. Nevertheless, the teams, which under Colonel Hunt sought some outlet towards the South Col, would have gladly dispensed with this snow.

On a day on which Tenzing and Hillary had begun their daily labor at an early hour, the snow surprised them about the middle of the afternoon while they were descending from Camp IV to Camp III. This time the wind joined the snow and drove the sleet sharply into their faces. Before long a blizzard was raging in all its fury. They could no longer see anything at all, and kept bending over forward to be less exposed to the wind. The snow raised up by the wind at the entrance of the Cwm rose in dizzy whirls towards Nuptse, and fell on them like a charge of great white phantoms. Then, the whirlwind over, they could see nothing any longer. It became a matter of trudging along as quickly as possible in order to reach Camp III before the snow had wholly wiped out the track.

Tenzing, who was in the lead, was surprised that they had not yet reached the top of the glacial platform where a fixed rope had been set up to facilitate some fifteen to eighteen feet of the route, and went on, bent over by the buffeting wind,

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his eyes on the ground, to make sure that he really was following the right track and would not suddenly topple over at the edge of the platform. The taller man, Hillary, was bent forward even more, and from time to time he groaned under the strong beating of the west wind.

At last the two men found the fixed rope and descended backwards toward Camp III, which they reached some minutes later.

Thanks to the work of the shuttles, each camp contained more tents than were needed, with air mattresses and sleeping-bags in case some team might have to spend the night there.

Tenzing and Hillary were now under shelter to await the end of the storm, even if it were to last all night. Five Sherpas occupied this camp with old Dawa Thondup who, climbing up from the Base Camp, had arrived there at the beginning of the storm. To pass the time, Tenzing melted some snow on a little stove and prepared some sweetened lemon juice. Relieved of their oxygen masks, the two rope companions took up again their long conversation which had gone on for days with periods of interruption and silence. Sometimes they spent an entire day without saying a word to each other. Tenzing thought in his mother tongue which was that of the Sherpas of Sola Khumbu. He spoke Hindustani fluently, but in English he could express himself only in short phrases, crisp, almost at the rate of a hop, skip and jump, and he used a minimum of words. At this altitude, it was even more difficult to translate into a strange language what he wanted to say. That is why the two friends, though understanding each other so well, yet spoke so little with each other.

For some time now, Tenzing had foreseen that he would remain on the rope with Hillary up to the very end, and he became more and more curious about his companion. Was he, too, a professional mountaineer, like Lambert? Then all the

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guides in the world could be puffed up with pride at their success . . . if God willed it.

In reply to a question, Hillary indicated that he was a *beekeeper*. Tenzing understood *bookkeeper*, and this idea was very amusing to him, because in his mind, accountants were large and powerful men, like Nullu. But Hillary explained: "The beekeeper cares for the tiny insects which go 'zum-zum-zum,' fly in a straight line, and stick their noses into flowers all day long to make honey. It is this honey that the beekeepers take from them, and sell."

Tenzing was delighted. Hillary's profession constituted a new link between him and the sahib, for the Sherpas of Sola Khumbu were beekeepers of Tibet, and he entered upon a long explanation in order to make clear this strange coincidence to Hillary, who attached little importance to it but nodded his head and smiled because it was evident that this conversation pleased the Sherpa.

The west wind had ended by driving away the snow clouds which rose from the south every afternoon at a low altitude, and the weather became good. There was still daylight, and nothing hindered the two companions from regaining the Base Camp where they were to spend the night. Besides, Colonel Hunt had advised them to spend all their nights there so as not to lose their conditioning.

They reattached the rope to their belts, and once more put on their masks to make the descent as rapidly as possible. This time Hillary took the lead. The snow had almost wiped out the trail, and they had to follow the route by trusting to habit to find the markings again. Prudence was called for because the slightest gust of wind and heavy snow slides like those of the afternoon set the ice in motion on the glacier, and arriving at Camp III, they had believed that, in the hubbub

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and uproar of the wind, they heard an explosion which seemed to be coming from the glacier of Khumbu.

Two less careful mountaineers than they might have allowed themselves to be distracted while they trudged this way over a familiar trail, but Tenzing knew that accidents always occur when they are least expected, and since he was second man on the rope, he played his part in all circumstances in accordance with the principles that the sahibs had taught him, that is, that he should be ready to hold his companion on the rope in case of a fall. And on this particular evening, as was his custom, he held onto the rope and kept marching forward at a regular pace in step with Hillary.

The route descended due right to the bottom of the icefall, then it turned to the left to become a crossing in the middle of a fairly large glacial platform; that very morning Hillary had pointed out to Tenzing a crevasse in the middle of it.

Suddenly Hillary spun around, seemed to shrink, struck his ice-axe into the ice on the left—and disappeared. The instant Tenzing had seen his companion make a violent movement, he had kept a tight grip on the rope. With a violent pull, it became taut, and Tenzing had to support himself by pressing his ice-axe savagely into the ice. And now the rope slackened, just as if it had been cut in two by Hillary's fall. Tenzing concluded that Hillary must have reached the bottom of the crevasse.

The accident had occurred so fast that Tenzing had the impression that he had seen Hillary pivot around his own axis in order to fasten himself into the ground like a screw, and he realized only a fraction of a second later what had occurred. The crevasse that they had noted in the morning must have grown bigger. Feeling himself falling down towards his right, Hillary had thrown his ice-axe into the ice on his left, in order to maintain his balance, but since the force of the fall had

pulled him down, his gloved hands had slipped on the handle of his ice-axe.

Since the cord was loose, the crevasse could not have been a very deep one, surely not more than twenty-five feet. But a vertical drop of twenty-five feet! Tenzing was fearful that his friend, the beekeeper, might be dead.

All these thoughts concerning the accident were as instantaneous as a flash of lightning. The Sherpa, accustomed as he was to getting about on ice, séracs, and glaciers, took in the whole situation at once. Hillary was calling for help; hearing him gave reassurance to Tenzing, who hauled on his rope in order to test out the depth of the crevasse. Half of it could be pulled up before it became taut again, and from that moment Tenzing felt jerks on the rope as if his companion were struggling while he called to him.

Since these struggles of Hillary's did not pull the rope too far out, he must have been stopped in his fall, and Tenzing plunged his ice-axe into the ground, making two twists of the rope around the handle so as to be able to let out the entire length of the rope that he had attached to him. He turned the rope around the handle once more, and succeeded in driving the ice-axe in securely. In this way, even if the jerks on the rope were to make him lose his balance, Hillary would not go too far. Tenzing followed the rope to the edge of the crevasse, letting the other end of the rope run out between his hands to secure himself. He leaned over the open space, and was amazed at the movement that had occurred in the ice since morning. Cracks often appeared and became larger in the short space of a few days, or even in several hours, but this time the ice platform had been cut in two because one part of it had come to hang over open space. This portion, the lower one, had see-sawed, and was now about twelve feet below the first one. But the worst of it was that in falling this way, it had inclined

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at an angle of 60°. Accordingly, Hillary, bereft of his ice-axe, was on a slope where he had to hold on by only one single crampon, for the other one had been lost in his fall. Crouched on the ice, leaning forward, he had at first struggled to climb up this terribly steep slope, then he stayed where he was, and kept calling: "Tenzing! Tenzing!" Even had he been able to clamber up the slope, he would have found himself before a sheer wall over twelve feet high, without an ice-axe, and with but a single crampon.

It became necessary, then, for Tenzing to hoist him up like a bundle, for Hillary was not actually able to help him, and the more he moved, the more difficult he made the job of rescue.

"Yes, sahib, I'm coming to your rescue—just don't budge," replied Tenzing as he turned towards his ice-axe.

The Sherpa undid the rope from his ice-axe, passed it over his shoulder, and pulled on it as he stepped away from the abyss. At first Hillary climbed the slope until he came up against the wall. Held fast by the rope, he succeeded in holding himself erect. Up to this point, the effort was not too great for Tenzing's physical strength.

But when the tall sahib stood up vertically along the wall, his entire weight bore on the Sherpa who crouched down, then he lifted up, leaning forward, and carefully removed his right foot that was cramponed in the ice. Planting his crampons a little further back, he put his weight on this foot, and bent forward once more in order to haul in the rope; then he made the same movement with the other foot.

Except for the trail, the ice was covered with a fall of snow now some ten inches deep, which would have put a brake on any normal progress, but at the same time it reassured Tenzing that he would not be risking skidding, a thing which could

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have dragged him after his comrade into the crevasse, then—to the very end of the slope.

It was necessary for Tenzing to go in this way, step by step, for some twelve feet, in order to bring Hillary back to the edge of the crevasse. Then he found himself in front of a block of ice which he could have scaled easily enough without this load, with Hillary hanging from his shoulder, there could be no question of this.

Now Tenzing, still crouching on the ice, turned completely around. He had pulled up some twelve feet of rope, and already Hillary's hands must be near the edge of the crevasse. But what sort of a hold would be able to find there?

Tenzing was standing with his back to the block of ice and was angry at having been stopped so near his goal. He tried to haul in the rope. But the ridge of ice and the length of the rope over the snow acted as a brake and added to Hillary's weight. Taking advantage of this brake, Tenzing stretched out one leg, planted his crampons in the ice, stretched out his other leg and braced it the same way, then eased himself to a sitting position on the ground. Then he got up, pulling himself along the rope which remained stationary. In this way he gained a good three feet in his grip on the rope. Then he threw himself back to sitting position, bringing Hillary up by three feet. He pulled himself up again, and from the feel of the cord, judged that Hillary was now definitely at the top of the crevasse. Once more he threw himself back, putting all his weight on his crampons, and Hillary, who had his two hands over the edge of the crevasse, found himself thrown forward head over heels, like a tuna fish that a fisherman pulls in. But what a fish!

Exhausted by so much effort, Tenzing stretched out on his back breathing heavily through his mask while Hillary leaned over him. Hoisted up over the edge of the crevasse, the rescued

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man was less breathless than the one who had performed the rescue.

The big New Zealander knelt beside his companion. Perhaps Tenzing was hurt? But the Sherpa got up. Smiling under his mask and patting Hillary on the shoulder, he said: "It's all right, sahib."

Although still out of breath, he was terribly happy, and never had he liked the sahib Hillary better than at this very moment.

Before reaching Camp II, Tenzing stopped and stood still, overwhelmed by a burst of laughter which completely astounded his comrade.

"I saved your life, sahib, I saved your life!" he kept repeating. Life seemed to him to be more wildly funny even than during the approach to the mountain. Here was this sahib whom he had just saved, and whose life he would perhaps be putting in mortal danger just a few days later. For years he had been admiring the sahibs because these men did not hesitate to risk their lives to save a Sherpa, and he had sworn to do as much, to deserve to attain the goal of his own life. Now he had done it, and all of it no longer had any importance whatsoever. . . .

And yet, was this not perhaps an omen? Chomolungma should not, according to his earlier calculations, have permitted anyone but a man of courage to save the life of another man. And yet from time to time Tenzing had unconsciously wished for an accident which would have permitted him to play the role of rescuer, to win the good graces of the goddess. The occasion had been presented to him and he saw in it a sign given to him by fate.

That very evening, as he was going to sleep in his sleeping-bag, he felt once again the sharp bite of the rope on his shoulder, and this pain made him smile with quiet happiness, as if it were a portent sent by the gods.

The May 15th Reunion

After ten days of ferrying, more than three tons of materials were stored in the camps of the Cwm; especially at Camp IV which had indeed become, in accordance with the colonel's plans, the actual Base Camp where he had established his headquarters. Camp I, the first base for the assault, had been transformed into a Rest Camp, and after they had participated in reconnaissances of the Lhotse glacier, sahibs and Sherpas took turns going down there. They slept there, and in the morning would descend the Khumbu glacier to find once again a little green grass on the pasture lands of Lobuje. In the evening they would return to the camp, to learn the news from the radio and to hear what operations were taking place on the Cwm.

By chance, on the evening when Tenzing and Hillary arrived at Camp I, after the rescue of the New Zealander by the Sherpa, there were no sahibs there any more. All the climbers had gone up once more to Camp IV, and the sahib leader of the camp had gone up with them.

The greater part of the carrying having been finished, several Sherpas participated in the reconnaissances on the Lhotse glacier in the direction of the South Col; one small team stayed at Camp IV with the majority of the sahibs, but the far greater number of high-altitude porters were divided among the three camps on the glacier.

It was not Tenzing who had designated, on his own, the Sherpas who were supposed to rest. The expedition doctors watched very carefully over the health of the aids so that they might choose those who responded best to the heaviest labor, that is, the carrying up to the South Col, and beyond.

During this respite, the task of supervision to which Hillary and Tenzing devoted themselves was no longer anything very

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overwhelming. They continued their shuttling in order to keep in good physical form, and especially to get accustomed to the oxygen equipment. In principle, one sahib was to return each evening to the Base Camp, and he would communicate by radio with his comrades on the Cwm, and the next morning they would leave with a team which would carry, let us say, stoves to Camp III, paraffin to Camp IV, or sleeping-bags to Camp V.

Sometimes Hillary and Tenzing would grow restless at being away from the most interesting operation, namely, the search for a road of access to the South Col. But they kept reassuring themselves every day, noting how well they stayed in condition, while their comrades were having a hard time up there above Camp IV.

Since the previous year, the problem had not changed basically. It always remained a question of finding a route leading to the South Col which would be protected from avalanches. In a way, the mountaineers shut up in the Cwm were struggling like insects who have fallen into a bowl, and who are looking for a way out by climbing up the rim.

As soon as the provisioning of Camp IV made it possible, that is, by the 1st of May, Evans, Bourdillon, Wylie, and Ward had pitched their tent on the site of the old Camp V of the Swiss autumn expedition, around 22,300 feet, a little lower than the spring camp. The appearance of the glacier had been completely transformed. There, as well as in the Cwm, the ice had moved, had been broken into bits, had been displaced, and the ice blocks, piled one on top of the other, had lost their stability. The snow which covered them was no more inviting than the ice blocks.

On May 3rd, Evans and Bourdillon climbed up to about 23,700 feet where they found the fixed ropes that had been installed by the Swiss expedition in the fall. They examined

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them carefully, and concluded that safety demanded that they be replaced if the portages of the English expedition were to follow the same route.

In the afternoon the snow slides held up these reconnaissances, and they progressed but slowly. Colonel Hunt was not unduly alarmed, for all these ascents provided an opportunity for everyone to become accustomed to the oxygen equipment. These problems of training and acclimatization occupied him more than did the actual progress of the climb.

In about ten days, the old Camps VI and VII of the fall expedition had been found once more and put into shape, which led the colonel to modify his previous plans somewhat, and to give the number VIII to the camp which he expected to establish on the South Col. Then, in order to reach Camp VII, the Britishers marked out and made secure a trail across and over the glacier, that is, one trail started from the left bank and went in the direction of the Geneva Spur on the right bank. As soon as the decision about this trail was made, on the 10th of May, the New Zealander Lowe and the very young Sherpa Ang Nima spent three days on the Lhotse Face, cutting steps in the ice and setting up fixed ropes. On the 15th, a day of bright sunlight, Colonel Hunt reassembled his party at Camp IV.

During all this time, the doctors had been examining the team, making certain of the state of their hearts, worrying about their morale. Then they consulted with Tenzing on the matter of what Sherpas should be chosen who would be able to climb up to the South Col.

Now Colonel Hunt divulged his plan.

To be sure, the South Col had not yet been reached, but thanks to the work of Lowe and Ang Nima, the matter no longer presented any great problems. One team would sacrifice itself in order to maintain the track over the crossing of the

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glacier, and after a short rest period, the Col could be occupied in force so that Camp VIII might be set up with all possible comforts for four sahibs and eight Sherpas. Then the ropes, for the ascent and for the supporting party, would climb in the following order: the first assault rope party, the first supporting team, then the second supporting rope, and only at the very end, the second assault rope. The second supporting rope would leave ahead in order to carry a tent, mattresses, sleeping-bags, a stove, paraffin, and provisions with the greatest number of Sherpas, just as high as possible. The distance for the second assault rope would thus be reduced to a minimum.

The first attempt at the ascent would have to be done with closed-circuit equipment; the second with open-circuit equipment. The first, given a much longer period of comfortable breathing, would be in a position to climb in a single stage from the South Col to the summit, whereas for the second team with the open-circuit equipment, it would be necessary to leave from much higher up, in order not to be without oxygen during the descent.

But the Britishers were inclined to have their doubts about the closed-circuit apparatus. Despite all the improvements that had been made in this type of equipment, it was not giving the marvelous results that at each departure from Europe the alpinists had hoped to receive from it. Accordingly, Colonel Hunt indicated that the first rope to depart would have to try at least to reach the South Peak (28,882 feet), in order to check on the possibilities of climbing up to the very summit.

From the base of the ridge, the outlook is upward towards the South Peak, but further on, this first peak cuts off the view, and so no one can tell just exactly what obstacles he might encounter during the last 425 feet of the ascent.

The colonel added that if the first rope, after having arrived

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at the South Peak, should feel itself to be in good form, and have the time to climb down again before nightfall, it might take its chances to reach the highest peak in all the world. In that case, if the meteorological conditions permitted, the second ascent rope could go on up, so that four members of the expedition would be able to bring back the victory.

At the end of the conference, the colonel designated Bourdillon and Evans as the first rope; Hillary and Tenzing as the second.

Colonel Hunt's plans made allowance for a rest period for all those who were to be carrying up to the South Col, and at least half of the caravan wended its way cheerfully towards the glacier camps to take the air, as one might say, on the green fields of Lobuje.

Tenzing and Hillary climbed down towards Camp I, well satisfied with their lot. To be the first to reach the summit of Everest mattered little to them, provided they reached it before the expedition turned back.

The Base Camp once more assumed almost the same importance it had had at the beginning of the expedition. It was installed, this time, on the left bank of the glacier, that is, at the foot of Nuptse. The Sherpas had built a low wall of flat dry stones to protect the kitchen, where the cook worked under the shelter of a linoleum awning. They still had the huge tent of the radio station which made it possible for the members of the expedition to keep in touch with the outside world. Behind the low wall were piled all the loads that it had not been necessary to take further up, since the expedition had inherited a part of the Swiss provisions.

From here the resting Sherpas and sahibs descended the Khumbu glacier almost every morning, to take it easy on the pasture lands, some three and a half miles below. Sometimes, on the other hand, Tenzing and Hillary would climb up to

supervise the work on the ice of the glacier. It had been necessary to change the route where Hillary had fallen into the crevasse, but since then the icefall seemed to have quieted down. These rest periods lasted only five days for some, and only four for others. Then all the high-altitude men would climb up once more to Camp IV, and the others would take their places at the Base Camp.

For the Sirdar, Or for the Queen?

Only a month had rolled by since the last incident between sahibs and Sherpas, when those in the best physical condition came together at Camps IV and V on the 20th of May. All the differences that had arisen between them were forgotten. The fraternity of the mountain had reasserted itself, and Colonel Hunt had succeeded in preventing the senseless quarrels which occur at great altitudes and which are provoked among the sahibs by their very close proximity. Everybody was united in enthusiasm for the great enterprise.

This particular evening, Noyce together with six Sherpas went to spend the night at Camp VI, hoping to reach the South Col the following day. By daybreak, everyone was standing at Camps IV and V to watch the progress of this first group. The sahibs had their binoculars, and the Sherpas shaded their eyes with their hands. From time to time some would run the risk of taking off their dark glasses for a single instant. Tenzing kept close to Hillary, and he felt himself imbued with that exaltation that he experienced every year in the mountains. Colonel Hunt was seated before his telescope on a cask of heavy pasteboard, and everyone was awaiting the moment when Noyce and his Sherpas would appear on the Lhotse Face.

But Camp VI was concealed in the ice pinnacles, and Noyce, if he had started, remained invisible in the chaos of the glacier.

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At last a Sherpa uttered a cry, and pointed with his finger to a spot below the Geneva Spur. All eyes turned in this direction, and many a shoulder drooped. Instead of the seven figures that they had been awaiting, only two were to be seen. They were climbing on the sharp rock above the Spur that the men from Geneva, the Swiss, perhaps derisively, or else moved by an almost Buddhist spirit, had named the Point of Mercy.

An instant later, the two small black specks disappeared, only to reappear a short while later on a snowy saddle of the Col.

Only two loads on the South Col! That was a bad beginning. What had happened to the five other Sherpas? Tenzing could stay quiet no longer, he wanted to climb up to Camp VI, to find out whether some difference had perhaps arisen at the last moment between the Sherpas and their sahibs.

That same evening, John Hunt decided to speed matters up by sending a column of twelve Sherpas to the South Col on the following day. But what rope of sahibs should accompany them? Bourdillon and Evans had to be spared for their ascent. Lowe and Ward were at Camp VII to see that the Lhotse route was in good repair while the majority of their comrades were resting. Band and Westmacott had barely recovered from throat infection and general weakness. Noyce was en route. Colonel Hunt had intended to leave at the same time as Bourdillon and Evans, to carry loads up to Camp IX. There was no one left but Gregory. But he was at the Base Camp with the scientific members of the expedition. Wylie was already climbing up to Camp V with a goodly team of Sherpas, to occupy Camp VII. So there was only a single rope at his disposal: Tenzing and Hillary.

To have to climb up as far as the South Col at this particular time verged on the tragic for Tenzing and Hillary. They would

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arrive too soon to be able to stay there until the time of their projected ascent, and too late to be certain of resting there long enough after having climbed down again. But the discipline of the expedition prevailed, and half an hour before midday they left to join Wylie on the side of the Lhotse.

En route, they passed Noyce who was on his way down with the Sherpa Ang Noulou. Five of the porters had declared themselves sick that morning, at the very moment of departure, and Noulou alone had been able to continue. Sick? The ascent of the South Col is no small matter. One has to be in very good shape indeed to undertake it. But morale counts for a great deal where the physical condition of the Sherpas is concerned! Perhaps without meaning to, perhaps without even being aware of it, the sahib had made his men lose their taste for making great efforts.

Tenzing and Hillary, along their way, were able to rally all the high-altitude Sherpas that they found at Camps V and VI, and Camp VII that very evening grew larger by several tents.

Tenzing's suspicions had been correct. Five of the six Sherpas of the Noyce team were really sick, but . . .

Night was falling when Tenzing went over to sit among the Sherpas. Some of them turned their eyes away or looked at him with a troubled air. And yet, what a fine team they made!

There was Ang Nima, at least a twenty years' veteran of Everest. This was his third expedition. He had a round face, was sturdy as a yak, and smiled all the time with an almost girlish bashfulness. His face inspired Tenzing with confidence, for among Buddhists, a smile denotes peace in a man's heart.

There was Arjiba, the strong man of the Swiss spring expedition. Bigger than his companions, with thick lips and dark complexion, he often assumed an air of defiance, but never to the point where he fooled his sirdar as to his real intentions.

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With his Swiss fur cap's earmuffs tied back, giving him the look of nothing so much as a staid old rabbit, Dawa Thondup, one of the Sherpas who had been on Annapurna and who had exhibited the most bustle and stir the previous spring, kept smiling as he sat between the two younger men. He was the dean of the expedition—fifty years old. At that age, most of the Tigers have long since given up the mountains.

On the other side of Thondup, little Gomba sat with lowered head. At seventeen, he was coming to Everest for the first time. When they had left, he was all eagerness, and saw himself practically in the final assault party, roped together with his sirdar—and no sahib could do any more than that. But since he had entered upon the Western Cwm, the thought of home kept coming to him, and he asked himself if it was possible ever to return to the real world, after one has experienced a nightmare such as this.

There were quite a number of others, old comrades or novices, now and then given to complaining during the march of approach, or during the expedition itself, but always ready, so long as they had the physical strength, to carry their loads and to climb up as high as possible—always higher and higher.

Tenzing, without saying a word, kept looking over in Dawa Thondup's direction so as not to cast his eyes at the five "invalids." The fourteen Sherpas waited. . . .

Finally, a voice spoke up in a rather surly tone: "I've got no desire to kill myself for the Queen of England."

Tenzing turned to the man who had spoken, and several Sherpas broke out laughing.

"Yes, indeed," the recalcitrant explained, "the sahib told us too many times already that we should have to get to the very summit of Chomolungma, to make a present of it to the Queen. The Queen of England doesn't rule over India any more, and Chomolungma is our goddess."

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Tenzing fully understood this point of view, for at another time perhaps, he, too, had imagined that the English wanted to capture the Goddess Mother of the Winds in order to take her to London where she would have to do homage to the British Queen, or God knows what sort of a similar fantastic notion.

But he had learned a great deal since he was young. He knew that Chomolungma undoubtedly does exist, but that even in climbing high up to the summit, no one could impose his will on her; men would have climbed in vain by the tens of thousands, and they would still never be the masters of the summit, where the Mother of the Winds, invisible and powerful, reigns eternally over the snows, with her magnificent head of hair enveloped in a white plume.

He knew, too, the reasons that made the sahibs wear themselves out as they do to climb such mountain peaks. Some go to seek a nonexistent talisman, others for the love of glory, still others to conquer their own fears, or to show off their strength; and, finally, some to render homage to God by admiring what He has created.

“And what if the Queen were to offer this mountain to us, the Sherpas of Darjeeling and of Sola Khumbu?” he asked. He told them that according to Colonel Hunt’s plans, he, their sirdar, was destined to climb to the very summit. When the Queen of England had her Coronation, the entire world would know that the highest mountain in the world had been climbed by a Sherpa! And Tenzing revealed to them a secret which made an enormous impression on them: he was carrying with him not only the flags of the sahibs but also those of Nepal and of India, the standards that belong to the Sherpas of Sola Khumbu and of Darjeeling!

Night was falling. Tenzing looked towards the bottom of the Cwm, where the shadow of Pumori went creeping toward

Lhotse. Then the line separating the white and the green ice disappeared under the glacier. Night fell gently over it, and all of a sudden, the camp was plunged into darkness.

The eyes of the Sherpas shone. They, the porters, to whom had been denied the title of guides; the Tigers of the Snows who carried great loads like those beasts of burden the yaks; the coolies of Darjeeling, the peasants of Sola Khumbu—they would be known throughout the entire world for their stamina, their strength, their fidelity, and their valor, if this sirdar of theirs was to climb to the very summit of Chomolungma. Their sirdar had begun by carrying loads just the way they did, and had risen step by step until he had become the equal of the sahibs by doing the very same work that they were doing. And finally their sirdar assured them of the pay which they earned every single year, and which made it possible for them to experience the joy that is to be found in adventure.

“All right, we’ll keep going, we’ll keep carrying, the way we always do,” spoke up old Thondup. And the two young men sitting beside him were overcome with awe and wonder when they thought of all the glory that would come to their sirdar. Some day perhaps, they, too—and in his enthusiasm, young Gomba gave himself a resounding blow on the thigh.

The Inferno of the South Col

Tenzing’s mission now consisted solely of keeping high the morale of the Sherpas in order to insure the supplying of the South Col with provisions, and Colonel Hunt had advised him not to go beyond Camp VII, so long as all went well.

Next morning, at half past six, with his eye on the telescope, Colonel Hunt could see two figures appearing at the foot of the first fixed rope. And when these two had begun the ascent others followed. All Camp IV was in a state of great excite-

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ment, and they all kept counting the figures to be seen. Sixteen men had left in the direction of the South Col when the sun was still behind Lhotse and had not yet warmed up the route. In agreement with Hillary, Tenzing had estimated that no one would get sick en route if he was the example for his men. He was mistaken, but only a very little. A single Sherpa did drop out, at an altitude of 25,000 feet. Selected at the last moment for the missions on the South Col, he had not had the time to become accustomed to the oxygen equipment, and unable to keep up with the pace of his comrades, he lost confidence, and in his discouragement, returned to Camp VII.

The beginning of the ascent was frightfully cold. The west wind beat against the Lhotse Face like a battering ram, and whirled furiously over the snow. Tenzing kept asking himself if he was not completely ruining all his chances, for at one time it seemed to him that one of his feet was growing stiff as it had done at Nanda Devi, while he was with Dubost. A foot which has once been frozen will freeze again, that he knew.

The sun shone graciously upon them on the Point of Mercy, which for once at least, was worthy of its name.

The enormous saddle of snow, realm of a wind perpetually unleashed, was spread out before their eyes. The point of the Spur is over 26,400 feet, Annapurna tops it by only 158 feet. From there, one has to climb down to about 26,000 feet, to reach the Col from which rises the ridge of Everest.

In coming down once more, Tenzing noticed some shrouds in the snow, to which were attached some slashed scraps of a tent. He recalled the "each man for himself" rout of the autumn when, with Lambert and Reiss, he had had literally to tear young Guinding from his bunk, and he thought with a little bitterness how last year, five young Sherpas had followed him with Lambert and Reiss up to the ridge of Everest, with a wind raging which made even him stumble at times like

a weak old man, to such an extent that to prevent these lads from going beyond the limit of their strength, he had been compelled to give the signal to turn back. With the Swiss sahibs he would not have had to work to keep up the morale of the Sherpas as he had had to do last night.

Thus Tenzing, for the third time in his life, arrived at the South Col, which showed no change. Always the same desolation, the same wasteland of snow where the tents flapped noisily, where one's ears hummed, where you had to make an almost superhuman effort to keep an idea straight in your head, and not to lie down where you were, to dig yourself a trough in the snow to escape the bitter gusts of wind—or else die from them. He saw before him the long ridge rising abruptly towards the summit of Chomolungma, and lower down, the enormous abrupt fall of rock which bars the access to it with a stream of snow on its side, some 2,000 feet long.

Noyce and Ang Noulou had left their loads on the nearer bank of the Cwm, below the Spur. This was the direction that the caravan took. The shadow of the Col extended on the Cwm up to Camp IV, but the two walls which confined the icefall were lit up from top to bottom, and their fluted sides shone with a fantastic light. Beyond, he could see Pumori, and still further off, Gyachung Kang, then the Cho Oyu of which Hunt had often spoken to him, for the latter had gone there last year, while Tenzing was with the Swiss.

When Tenzing and Hillary climbed down again with their thirteen Sherpas, Wylie, who was remaining with Pasang to occupy Camp VIII, congratulated them all in their language. He was delighted at their exploit which would make it possible for him to render homage to the Queen. . . . Though they were exhausted and almost dying of thirst, the Sherpas could not keep from laughing as they continued their downward climb.

Towards three in the afternoon, one could see the last one

among them disappear into the *sérac* which concealed Camp VII, and that same evening, the whole little band arrived at Camp V to spend the night there. But that is where the unexpected awaited them.

The First Assault

Seeing the men arrive at the South Col, Colonel Hunt had decided not to lose a single moment. A camp had been made ready up there. The first rope would be able to spend one night in it so that they could start out toward the summit early the following morning, that is, on the 24th. To wait would be to expose themselves to a possible storm which might last right up to the monsoon, or "deteriorate" the whole group.

But the lack of men, which had made itself felt since it had been necessary to use Hillary and Tenzing at a job which had worn them out, obliged the colonel to change his plans. He himself would go to the support of Bourdillon and Evans, and besides he would carry the materials necessary to establish Camp IX on the narrow ridge. And if an available rope was to be found, it would accompany Hillary and Tenzing, unless the colonel had to stay with Wylie on the South Col to support his second rope.

Accordingly, Bourdillon, Evans, and Colonel Hunt left, together with Da Namgyal and Ang Tensing (not to be confused with the sirdar Tenzing, nor yet with Uncle Sonam). They arrived at Camp V some few minutes before the caravan which was descending from the South Col. But the inventory of the loads which remained in the camp disclosed to the colonel the fact that the Col was not yet sufficiently supplied with all the materials essential for carrying out his plans. Six Sherpas were needed who would agree to climb up to the South Col.

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However, the evening before they had been told that a single ascent was all that would be required. They had accomplished the job assigned to them and the colonel kept asking himself how they would accept this new request of his. In this quandary he could do no better than turn to Tenzing.

When they had left in the morning, the Sherpas had drunk only some tea, and up to the time of their return to Camp V, they had consumed nothing at all, so that they were just about to fall to with a good appetite when Tenzing came over to speak to them.

“Let’s see if I have six friends among you,” he began. The Sherpas understood right away just what he meant. But it was a bitter pill for them to swallow.

As no one answered, Tenzing pointed to the two young ones who were asleep, worn out by such a day, and said: “I guess I’ll have to turn to them.”

Everyone protested, but no one would make up his mind to accept such a strenuous task. “We just can’t any more. To climb up to the South Col and to climb down again, that’s too much to take on two days in a row; even if we did start out, we wouldn’t make it there and back,” one of them grumbled. Old Dawa Thondup squirmed uncomfortably, embarrassed before his plate of food, and ended by whispering: “If the bara-sahib would give me a flask of whiskey, even a very little one, to put me in shape, I’d go to the ends of the earth.”

When he had left Katmandu, Dawa Thondup still had had a bottle full of rakshi, but the exertions and especially the disappointments of the march-in had obliged him to turn to it for comfort. A little had been left during his rest period, but he had finished it up one evening on his return from the grazing fields of Lobuje.

The Sherpas burst out laughing, and while they were thus engaged, Tenzing knew he could ask anything of them. Without

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any further insistence on having some whiskey, Dawa Thondup was the first to accept.

The night at Camp V was bitter. The west wind roared more ferociously than it had done since the expeditions had started, and the next day they had to postpone the ascent towards the South Col, for even the sahibs, fresh and in good form as they were, would not have been able to reach it, to say nothing of the six Sherpas after their strenuous exertions of the previous night.

However, towards eleven, the storm subsided and the colonel left with the first rope, his two Sherpas, and the six volunteers. Tenzing and Hillary climbed down once more towards the big Camp IV for a better night's rest, with the idea that they might even go on as far as Camp I if the weather permitted yet was too bad for them to have a good rest in the Cwm.

On the morning of the 24th, at eight-thirty, the eleven men of the Hunt party arrived at the foot of the fixed ropes. The ascent was slow because Da Namgyal and Ang Tensing did not have any oxygen masks. Evans and Bourdillon were using the closed-circuit equipment, but the colonel's oxygen supply failed him because the climb had lasted longer than they had expected. Accordingly, it was late in the evening when they arrived at Camp VIII which seemed to the colonel to be the most forbidding spot in all the world. All of them were so worn out that it was decided to wait twenty-four hours before attempting the first assault, even at the risk of having the storm become worse.

On the other hand, this decision also gave a twenty-four-hour respite to Tenzing and Hillary and helped them recover from their fatigue.

After studying the photographs taken by the members of the Swiss expedition, the colonel had believed that a passage existed between the Col and the southeast ridge. Along the

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way, he had asked Tenzing why Lambert and he had climbed up to the rocky ridge when they had to pass by a band of snow that seemed dangerous. Tenzing had replied that it had been impossible to do anything else, and had tried to explain that an enormous rock, at the lowest point of the ridge, forms an abrupt dip and makes a direct ascent impossible. The colonel did not understand him, and did not realize his mistake until they had arrived at the South Col.

The two nights at Camp VIII were bitter enough for the first assault rope and its supporting party. The wind kept up such a hubbub and shook the tents with such violence, that they had to have recourse to oxygen to sleep.

Evans and Bourdillon roped together were to leave at six in the morning at the latest for the southeast ridge which is exposed to direct sunshine from the moment the sun rises, thereby lessening the danger of frost bite. Unfortunately, Evans' breathing apparatus had been damaged by the frost, and he was not able to repair it. When he saw, some time after seven o'clock, that his stopped-up valve would cost him his chance at the ascent, he ended by suggesting to Bourdillon that he (the latter) should depart alone, while he himself would accompany the colonel and the two Sherpas as far up as possible on the ridge, carrying the material needed to establish Camp IX there.

But it was no longer merely a matter of establishing Camp IX. One of the colonel's two Sherpas was sick, and this time really sick, after having made the difficult ascent the night before without oxygen equipment. Da Namgyal and the colonel divided Ang Tensing's load between them, and this was perhaps the only time during the entire expedition that a Sherpa agreed to carry sixty-six pounds—but it was for his sirdar.

Finally, Evans succeeded in adjusting his defective valve, and the first rope started out for the summit.

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Hunt and Da Namgyal accompanied them for a short while, but the two in the first group soon outdistanced them because Hunt's apparatus, in its turn, failed to work properly. It was only much later that he understood what the trouble was: the steam from his breath kept freezing at the outlet of the mask, and stopped up the hole through which the carbon dioxide escapes.

The sahib and the Sherpa climbed up as high as they could to a little platform where there still remained some tattered remnants of the tent which had sheltered Lambert and Tenzing during that frightful night a year before at 27,700 feet. Having reached this point, the colonel was suffering as much from the danger of asphyxiation by carbon dioxide as from a lack of oxygen. He was barely able to collect some stones to build a cairn to indicate where the loads were.

Meanwhile Da Namgyal took off his mask and placed his carrying rack in the snow to remove the oxygen tanks. Hunt thought that the Sherpa's breathing apparatus was functioning badly, like his own, and that Da Namgyal was about to repair it in his own sweet way. He tapped him on his shoulder and with his finger gave him a negative sign. The Sherpa, smiling, gave him to understand that he was planning to leave his two cylinders with the others, and to climb down without any oxygen equipment. In astonishment, the colonel followed this example, and also gave up the oxygen on which he had been counting, until then, to assure the safety of his descent.

Once more the two men departed in the direction of the South Col, and plunged into the fog of clouds which completely enveloped Everest. The return trip was difficult, and several times they slid into a couloir of snow. They had to hold onto the walls with their ice-axes, which required them to let out the rope in order to avoid hitting each other on the head or even killing each other.

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Meanwhile, the evening before, Tenzing had left Camp IV with Hillary, and all the Sherpas had voluntarily suggested accompanying them to the South Col with the supplementary loads. Some of them wanted to provide an escort for Tenzing clear to the summit. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds. Tenzing chose only six of them, to the great disappointment of the rest. This fantastic team of Tigers would have ended in a terrible slaughter of men had he not chosen those who had shown the greatest resistance in the enormous tasks already performed. He eliminated at the start all those who had already made the ascent twice. Ang Nima was among the six chosen, but from the moment of departure, his overexcitement bothered the sirdar. In a state like that, the lad would most certainly not be able to go to the very end. Tenzing begged him to be calm, and made him promise to think of other things rather than what he was doing at that moment.

The last assault rope spent the night, together with its escort, at Camp VII, which they left too late to be able to make the climb before the sun shone on the Lhotse Face. The party arrived around one o'clock at the Point of Mercy and right then the clouds which surrounded Everest opened up. The Sherpas could see two tiny figures silhouetted against the South Peak. The fog which still hid the summit fooled them, and they imagined that the first rope was already on the actual summit.

Soon after his arrival at Camp VIII, Tenzing saw Hunt and Da Namgyal appear. He went out at once to meet them and to bring them the comfort of some hot soup and especially some tanks full of oxygen.

In a state of great excitement, the Sherpas kept insisting vehemently that they had seen Bourdillon and Evans on the summit of Everest. Hillary and Tenzing, for their part, were not so sure. The colonel asked them to confer with him in his

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tent, to which he had gone to rest from his hard ascent and in anticipation of his descent which would perhaps be even harder.

Tenzing and Hillary sat down outside the tent to observe the narrow ridge carefully. Clouds covered it as far as the top of the snow couloir. Finally, at half past three, Bourdillon and Evans did appear on the ridge. They appeared to be in as bad shape as the colonel had been some hours earlier. This time, again, Tenzing and Hillary hastened to meet their comrades and bring them some hot drinks.

The summit had not been reached. They had not gone beyond the South Peak more than a dozen steps. But their mission was accomplished, for Bourdillon and Evans were not to have continued up to the very summit, once they had reached the South Peak, unless the weather, the time, the performance of their breathing apparatus, their physical condition, and the route to follow had made it possible.

Tenzing was seething with impatience. He wanted to know if the difference in level between the South Peak and the summit presented insurmountable difficulties. What obstacles had the evil spirits assembled around the prison of Chomolungma?

It Can Be Done!

Exhausted by the climb, Dr. Evans slid into his sleeping-bag. Worn out also by a terrific day—the climb up to the South Col and two trips to and from the camp and the snow-covered couloir—Tenzing stretched himself out near the doctor.

“Tell me everything, Dr. Evans, I beg of you. Is it possible? Can it be done?”

“I tell you, Tenzing, you won't have to come back to Everest

ever again—for this year you are going to succeed—if the weather is right,” was Dr. Evans’ reply.

He explained slowly and carefully in order to be thoroughly understood. Beyond the South Peak, Bourdillon and Evans had seen a rocky spur, exceedingly sharp and pointed with huge snow cornices, overhanging the Kangshung glacier.

“Be mighty careful, Tenzing, don’t trust this snow; it will give way under your feet, and that would mean a drop of 10,000 feet down to the Kangshung glacier. When you are in the lead, don’t set your foot on it, and when Hillary is in the lead, guard him well: hold yourself ready to fall over towards the left in order to balance his weight if the snow should crack.”

Dr. Evans also disclosed that midway between the two summits there was a rock, a veritable sentry. There, one would have to venture out on the cornice in order to get around the rock.

“But the ascent is possible, it can be done, Tenzing, provided you both are very careful. If you arrive at the top, I shall continue to pray to God to protect you during the descent. Above all, it is then that you must be wary and not let yourselves be carried away by your joy,” Dr. Evans added.

Tenzing asked nothing more. The ascent was possible. It could be done! When his turn came, he would climb up, and when he had reached the summit . . . ! Even in his conjectures, he did not want to go beyond that point.

That night, he fell asleep repeating over and over: “It is possible; it is possible; it can be done!”

At the time of their first attempt, weariness had obliged Hunt, Bourdillon, and Evans to put off their departure for twenty-four hours. The same delay had to be imposed on the Hillary-Tenzing rope because the unbearable west wind made any thought of an ascent impossible on the following day, May

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27th. To speak of resting on the South Col, especially on a stormy day, is for want of anything better, to make use of a word that simply does not apply. As soon as he awoke, Tenzing got up to get from the colonel what news there was. He fully realized and appreciated the effort that the latter had made, the evening before, to lighten his, the Sherpa's task. On leaving his tent, he thought he had gone back to the autumn of 1952 when the sleet and needles of ice had penetrated his windproof smock, his eiderdown-lined blouse, his pullover, and his shirts. The snow clawed at his face and took away his breath with such force that he fell back in a sitting position inside his tent. He put on his oxygen mask and went out once more, bending over forward in order to keep his balance.

All night long he had heard the flapping of the tent walls even while he was asleep, as if the sharp wind was absolutely determined to slash it into shreds, and he had dreamt that his dog, Snowwhite, was playing with the tatters.

When he looked at the camp from outside the tent, he was frightened. It seemed to him that from one moment to the next, all the tents would blow away towards the Kangshung glacier, and that the tents' occupants would suddenly find themselves without any shelter whatsoever, stretched out in their sleeping-bags which would carry them off together with the tents.

Practically everyone was at the end of his resistance. Hunt, Evans, and Bourdillon were almost completely exhausted by their exertions of the previous day, as were also Da Namgyal and five of the six Sherpas who had volunteered to carry the loads up to the South Col. There remained only one able-bodied person, the youngest, Ang Nima. The two Sherpas who were on the Col with Lowe and Gregory, Pamber and Ang Tembar, had just spent two nights on the South Col, and they were barely able to stand upright. Tenzing returned to his tent and in a melancholy mood got to thinking about the end

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of the various expeditions to Everest in which he had participated up to this time. The caravans had always consisted of ever greater numbers, but the more participants there were to start with, the more the caravan would shrink en route. Then, when at the threshold of the summit there did remain one or two men in good condition, there was no one left to support them. This present expedition comprised fourteen sahibs, thirty-five Sherpas and 350 porters, besides an additional seventy-seven who had carried supplementary oxygen supplies—in other words, a total of 476 men. And at the end of seven weeks, how many of these were left?

He would have gone to pay a visit to Hillary, too, who had declared he was all right, but he decided it was useless to undertake anything at all with breathing equipment that did not provide power enough for climbing up and down again.

That morning the Sherpa hung back for a long while. Had not the hour struck for him to realize his secret project? Since his equipment was such as to permit him to reach the pinnacle, why did he not leave, all by himself, without any qualms as to his return, as had been promised to him? But the wind was really raging too furiously, and to undertake an ascent such as this on a morning like this would have served no purpose whatever, for he could not be absolutely sure that he would get to the summit. He stretched out in his tent and tried to go to sleep. But how to find sleep, in a wind like this? Undoubtedly the Sherpas who had climbed up the day before full of enthusiasm had not slept either, and it was this which had bothered them. Only young Nima, precisely because of his youth, had been able to get a real rest.

Towards noon, the storm died down. Hunt, Evans, and Bourdillon climbed down once more with the men who were disabled, and the only ones left on the South Col were Lowe, Gregory, Ang Nima, Hillary, and Tenzing, who kept asking

himself how many of them would still be in condition the next day.

On to Camp IX (28,000 Feet)!

Next day, May the 29th, all of them were still in good shape, despite a night that had been even worse than the one before. However, two Sherpas were lacking and Tenzing reproached himself for having perhaps made an unfortunate choice two days before. Hillary and Tenzing then got rid of everything which was not absolutely indispensable for spending the night at Camp IX. Then they divided up their loads as well as possible, but Tenzing saw to it that Ang Nima did not carry more than about forty-four pounds. The others had about fifty-five pounds each, including the weight of the oxygen equipment to the iron rack of which they attached the rest of the load.

Lowe, Gregory, and Ang Nima started off a little before nine. Tenzing and Hillary followed in their footsteps an hour later. The weather was good and the long crossing of the South Col was nothing new for Tenzing who had already done it three times the day before. With the utmost care he climbed the couloir of snow at the top of which they found the steps that had been cut by Lowe. Around noon they arrived at 27,700 feet, on the small platform where there still remained some vestiges of the last Swiss camp from the spring. The vanguard was resting there waiting for them. From this spot, a superb panorama lay before them. Everest hid from them only Tibet, and the entire heart of the Himalaya as far as Kulka Kangri stretched out to left and right of them.

Beyond, far, far to the south, they could see low-hanging clouds floating by, forerunners of the monsoon. But frequently

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it takes weeks before the south wind reaches the height of the Himalayas.

After they had caught their breath and had admired the landscape for a long while, all five of them left in the direction of the little cairn built by Colonel Hunt. There they found the oxygen, the provisions, and a tent.

They divided up this extra load, but once again Hillary and Tenzing made a careful inventory of their supplies to eliminate every ounce of weight that they could, in order to carry as much oxygen as possible. This time again Ang Nima wanted to increase his load, but the sahibs opposed it, because despite all his stirring and bustle, this Sherpa was really very young to be carrying at such a height.

The ascent continued. When they left the platform, the ridge became very sharp and cornices of snow began to appear, like those Dr. Evans had described to Tenzing the day before. The five mountain climbers then had to be very careful indeed in cutting steps into the ice on the side of the ridge, that is, they had to climb a slope of 45° while they marched on a terrain which itself had an incline of about 60° . A little further on, some rocks, piled one on top of the other like tiles on a roof made it possible for them to proceed without having to cut steps in the ice. But the climb was very difficult and everybody was getting weaker. In order not to wear out their companions, Hillary and Tenzing decided to set up Camp IX as soon as they found a suitable spot. But there was none in sight.

Finally, Tenzing recalled that the year before when he was climbing with Lambert he had noticed a rocky platform, well protected, about sixty feet below the ridge but a little nearer to the summit. It was necessary then to continue to plod along under their loads until that platform appeared, and to reach it by a long traverse at the side of the ridge. It was now two

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o'clock. They estimated their altitude at about 28,050 feet, and later the theodolite registered 28,063 feet altitude.

The three men who were supporting the assault rope were not carrying anything for themselves. It was already rather late and the necessity for their return made speed essential in order that they might reach the South Col before nightfall.

The calculations which the sahibs had made as to the altitude at which they were now brought back Ang Nima's strength and vigor. Never had any other Sherpa except the sirdar Tenzing climbed so high, anywhere, on any mountain. And he was only twenty years old! He was enormously proud of this, but his joy was perhaps made even greater by the fact that his exploit made the work of his sirdar that much lighter.

In watching him go off, Tenzing recalled how at one time the thought had come to him of adopting some young Sherpa worthy of his calling. But there was no longer any question of such a project, since the future would be determined tomorrow. And, besides, Ang Nima did not have need of anyone.

Soon afterwards, the two champions of the British expedition saw their comrades disappear behind the rocky masses of the crest; then they set about the work at hand.

Victory

*At Mont Rose:
"Before this awe-inspiring spectacle
of grandiose magnificence, we all felt
ourselves in the presence of a most
imposing—and for us, new—manifestation
of the omnipotence and majesty of God."*

ACHILLE RATTI
(afterwards Pope Pius XI)

*"Below us, all the peaks rose majestically
and as serenely as Buddha. I could not
but admire the grandeur of divine creation
and the harmony of all the world."*

TENZING

Two Men Alone on the Roof of the World

TENZING AND HILLARY SWEEPED AWAY the snow, erected their tent, laid out their sleeping-bags, and consumed almost the whole of their provisions. Then, having nothing better to do, they stretched out in their sleeping-bags. The weather was good, the wind did not blow with too much force, but they were unable to sleep and lay thinking for a long time. When the temptation to look forward to their victory became too strong, Tenzing kept thinking of Ang Lhamu being successful in a little business of her own thanks to the 2,000 rupees' insurance money. Then his thoughts led him back to the past, to all the expeditions of other days, and of their failure which for some time had appeared almost fated to him! Every single time, some anticlimax had occurred, the last camp was not

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high enough, or not sufficiently well provisioned. However, this evening, for once, everything had not gone absolutely wrong, particularly since Hillary had even promised a little oxygen for sleeping. And Tenzing asked for one thing only, that on the morrow he should have the strength to go to the very top.

Evening fell, and like last year, Tenzing saw the shadow climb up on the side of the narrow ridge, devour Lingtren and the summit of Pumori, then crawl toward the summit. He got up and signaled to Hillary to look at the reddish light on the snow, while all over the rest of the universe, night had already fallen.

Just as the young Sherpa had prostrated himself before the mountain of his dreams on the route from Tibet sixteen years ago, so Tenzing this evening once again addressed a heartfelt prayer to his goddess, Chomolungma.

By evening, the west wind had grown colder. From time to time it lashed out furiously on the slope, and Hillary had to lean with all his might against the tent shroud on the less protected side, to keep it from blowing away.

Impossible to sleep! Tenzing half sat up and melted some snow for preparing lemon juice. He drank a good deal, and offered it to Hillary to counteract the dehydration of high altitudes which contributes so much to making sleep impossible. Towards nine o'clock, Hillary in his turn got up and regulated the oxygen equipment so that it would yield a little less than two quarts per minute. Then the two men lay down once more in a sort of half-sleep which was as refreshing as real sleep. For this, Hillary used the tanks that had been tapped by Da Namgyal and Colonel Hunt, and in which there were only two hours' supply of oxygen left. Towards eleven, it seemed to them that the wind was getting more and more

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furious, and its noise more nervewracking, but it was simply because by this time the oxygen tanks were empty.

For two hours more they remained stretched out, resting but not sleeping, their nerves as it were in their finger tips, and their heads by turns empty or full of strange fantasies. Tenzing kept asking himself how he could possibly separate from his companion in case the latter should give up. For a long time now he was no longer carrying a *koukri*, but he did have a fine Swiss knife in his pocket. It would be an easy matter for him to cut the rope clean at the belt. But, then, what would Hillary think of the prospect of climbing down without being supported by his companion? Unquestionably he would feel that Tenzing had gone mad, and he would want to seize and hold him again.

Then the sirdar had a grotesque fantasy: Hillary was pursuing him on the spur of the mountain. They were running, they were jumping from rock to rock, like children playing tag. With nothing to hold them back, they kept jumping up to dizzy heights and falling down again gently with the slowness of snowflakes, to bound up once more. At one moment it was a game; at another, they were pursuing each other with ferocious bitterness, and thoughts of murder revolved in their minds. Then Hillary turned into a *yeti*, or else it was Tenzing—and they no longer knew who it was who was pursuing whom.

Next Hillary disappeared and Tenzing was climbing easily on the ridge, on all fours, repeating to himself: "Watch out for the snow cornices so you won't fall into the Kangshung glacier." To do that, he climbed very far down on the side of the ridge, and climbed up again, slowly but steadily, with an almost compulsive obstinacy. He achieved the climb, and found himself at the summit, exhausted, and without any oxygen. Then, to make things easier, he plunged head first into the Kangshung

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glacier, only to wake up inside his sleeping-bag with a tight feeling in his stomach, bathed in sweat.

Or else, upon the summit, he met Uncle Sonam wearing Tibetan boots more richly embroidered even than those he had actually worn the month before. Sonam handed him the talisman "world fame" in the shape of a billfold encrusted with glistening semi-precious stones. Tenzing opened it and found inside, written in English, the following words which he was able to read without any difficulty: "To attain one's end . . . is there any worse disappointment in all the world?"

A sahib had once explained to him this sentence of Tilman's. . . . Or, hadn't it rather been Mallory, the one who had remained forever up on Chomolungma, when Tenzing was only ten years old? Perhaps the next day he would find that tall blond sahib, seated on the reddish snow in the light of the setting sun, with his eyes looking longingly towards England where there would soon be the Coronation of the Queen, daughter of the last Emperor of India. . . .

"Tenzing, if you succeed this time, you will never again have to go to K2 or any other mountain for that matter."

"You won't have to return next year, because you're going to succeed this time. . . ."

And Uncle Sonam kept laughing like a fiend, and plunged headfirst into the Kangshung glacier. But instead of falling, he was flying, moving his arms as if they were wings, and his white hair floated behind him, like the white plume of Chomolungma. He turned, then flew off on his way to Tibet, crying as he went: "Come with me: I'm going as far as Lhasa. Believe me, there will be marvelous sights for you to see in Tibet—perfectly fascinating. Plunge right in—and you'll be flying the way I am. The Dalai Lama is waiting for us, and we will go to live in Potala with Chinese officers waiting on us."

Or again he dreamt he was in Tibet—Professor Tucci—eight

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months at Lhasa—to the monastery of Samye, a Sherpa is walking silently in a corridor and knocks at a door. A lama opens it for him and bids him sit down in front of him. “My son, you tell me that the skies grow black when one attains the highest peaks and that the stars shine forth in full daylight because the sun is so near. I have searched in all the books, and I know the secrets of the hereafter. The sun is a black star and cold, and the sky is a glacial abyss. In order for the rays of the sun to be heated up once more, it is necessary that they should touch the earth or the air which surrounds us, and that is why it is so cold up there where you go to glorify God, because there is no longer any air up there to heat up the rays of the old sun.

“To live and breathe even way up there where there is no longer any air, my son . . .”

At that moment Hillary groaned in his sleep. Tenzing thought of the fact that his companion was planning to get married. Once again his thoughts wandered: then Hillary would get married, and he would have two daughters, Pem Pem and Nima. When he died on Chomolungma, his wife would open a little business on an island where it would be night when it was day, and day when it was night, and where the summers are cold, and the winters hot. That is why you can't always have a complete understanding with the English sahibs. It is hard to have such an understanding with them. And yet, the bara-sahib Colonel Hunt had been carrying his load just like a Sherpa, for the sirdar, Tenzing, and the bee-keeper, Hillary. Noyce, the man who writes books when he's at home, spent three nights on the South Col, and climbed up again to spend a fourth one there, to relieve Gregory. The Queen of England was offering a mountain to Tenzing.

“Let's give ourselves a little more oxygen, my head aches,” Hillary was saying.

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Towards three o'clock in the morning, they had to stop breathing in the oxygen—and set off again for the land of phantoms, the kingdom of evil spirits.

At Thyangboche and at Rongbuck, the lamas live in contemplation of Chomolungma, but they never climb towards its summit. However, they know. "To live and breathe even way up there where there is no longer any air, my son . . ." But the lamas stay below in their monasteries, and at night the *yetis* prowl around all about them.

Tenzing saw in his mind's eye the footsteps of the *yeti* on the Darjeeling route, and then all over, high up on the mountain, the strange footprints of mysterious stealthy beings that no one had ever seen. Then, in the fog, that horde that they came across in the spring last year, of beings who fled and left *yeti* footprints.

This year no one had seen any of the footprints because the *yetis* were wearing Swiss boots just like the folks from Namche Bazar. And how could you distinguish the *yeti* footprints if he wore boots, how could you distinguish the *yeti* himself if he was wearing clothes. From now on, the *yeti* could insinuate himself everywhere without being any the less bent on murder. Might not a *yeti* even have slipped right in among the members of the expedition?

Hillary had turned off the cock of the oxygen tanks. He was a *yeti* in disguise. That's why he couldn't explain where he came from. Had anyone ever heard, I ask you, of an island where day is night and where it is hot in the winter?

It was going to be cold up there, cold as the very ends of the earth—up there on the summit of Chomolungma. And it would be cold under the tent, terribly cold, the way it always was when a *yeti* was near. A little oxygen, just a little more oxygen, I'm choking. It's the *yeti* who is choking me.

Well, come on then! Day is about to break, and we must

go to see the palace of Chomolungma shining in all its brilliance in the immense darkness of night.

Step by Step Onward Towards the Summit

The two comrades opened up their tent about four o'clock in the morning, and stuck their heads out to gaze upon their vast domain. The ridge hid the east, and the top of the mountain hid the north from their sight. But towards the west, they saw shining the highest peaks of the Himalayas, unbelievably far away. Then Tenzing seized hold of Hillary's arm and pointed out to him, with delight, the monastery of Thyangboche barely visible on its wooded slope. The sirdar prepared their breakfast of lemon juice, always plenty of lemon juice. The two mountaineers used up their provisions. Then they drank some coffee, and finally Tenzing got ready a supply of lemonade which he put, still boiling hot, into a little metal flask encased in felt.

The Sherpa got up and went outside the tent. The ridge was not lit up by the sun in the spot where they were, but when they got on a level with the cornices of snow, the sun would surely be a comfort to them. Hillary looked at his little thermometer that showed the minimum temperature reached within a given period, and noted that during the night it had fallen to 17° below zero inside their tent.

In trying to put his shoes on, Hillary found that they were frozen stiff. Then he looked over at Tenzing's feet which were encased in Swiss boots. The Sherpa was sitting on his mattress. "Let me tell you, beyond Camp V, you mustn't take off your shoes above 20,000 feet. Your feet may not be as comfortable that way while you are resting, but they will hurt you less the next day," the Sherpa said.

Tenzing slid back once more into his sleeping-bag, lit the

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stove and held the boots near to the flame—near enough to thaw out the leather, yet far enough away not to run the risk of burning them.

Meanwhile Hillary went to lie down again, too, and pulled the oxygen tanks over to him. He checked their contents once again, and their functioning, played around with the valves, and then asked Tenzing to hand him his boots. But these were much more frozen than Hillary thought, and it took all of an hour for Tenzing to get them into shape so that they could be worn. Stretched out on his mattress, Hillary meditated in a melancholy mood.

When Tenzing returned his boots to him, they were still hard on his feet, and they hurt. When the two men had put on their three pairs of gloves, one of silk, one of wool, and the other nylon, and their smocks over their quilted coats, they put the racks of their oxygen equipment on their backs—representing a further weight of thirty pounds to be carried to a height of 29,300 feet. Because walking was hard for him, Hillary asked Tenzing to take the lead, and it was the Sherpa who led his companion up to the ridge, which they reached after a long trasverse on the side, very near the spot where Lambert and Tenzing had had to give up the year before.

From this place, the ridge became so narrow that there was scarcely a knife-edge of rock, and the side was not rough enough anywhere to provide a foothold. Some 300 feet had to be negotiated in a position similar to that of a tightrope walker on his rope, with a precipice of a depth of 10,000 feet on the right and a drop almost as steep on the left. Then Tenzing was able to descend gently on the side where the rock was covered with a thick layer of ice into which he cut steps for them.

Hillary's boots had finally thawed out, and the two companions relayed each other in cutting steps in the ice. The ridge

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had become much broader, and it was now possible for them to proceed on it, but Tenzing kept watching the rope most carefully, for the cornices would probably have given way if Hillary had made a single false step. As it broadened, the ridge became steeper.

The assault rope had now reached the foot of the South Peak. They climbed it by nine in the morning, two and a half hours after having left their tent. They then stopped for a moment to catch their breath and to look at the landscape. Tenzing gazed especially at the monastery of Thyangboche which appeared tiny 16,500 feet below. They had now reached 28,565 feet; there was left for them no more than 576 feet to climb of the total distance of about 1,000 feet.

The way before them was not very reassuring.

The ridge was completely covered with snow. Impossible, therefore, to distinguish the snow which was hanging over space from that which was resting firmly on the rocks. For about 265 feet, the side of the ridge was very smooth, with a few spurs here and there between which the way would be frightfully difficult. Beyond these 265 feet there rose a sentry of rocks forty feet high, which it would be absolutely necessary to circle on the right over one of the snow cornices. Beyond that, the way seemed relatively easy, but perhaps that was merely an illusion due to the distance.

When the first oxygen tank was empty, they got rid of it, which reduced their load to about nineteen pounds, and by consuming only about three quarts per minute, they had enough oxygen to last them some four and a half hours.

Tenzing was about to go on ahead on the ridge, but Hillary stopped him and himself took the lead. It seemed to them that the new oxygen tank was giving them a new burst of strength, doubtless because their first one had been used up before they reached the South Peak.

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Hillary had accordingly taken the lead on that part which seemed to them to be the more difficult, and there was no question of relieving each other on a space where the two men were not able to go side by side. Therefore, for some 265 feet, Hillary cut steps in the ice and Tenzing checked him. Then they found themselves before the obstacle some forty feet high. It was again impossible for Tenzing to go up in front. When he saw his comrade launched on the cornice, he looked back to make certain that he would be able to balance Hillary's weight by letting himself slide along the side of the ridge, in case the cornice gave way. Hillary was advancing, almost crawling along. Scarcely had his feet disappeared before he found a hole in the rock, a chimney on which he could set his crampons, first backwards, then properly placed, and so he hoisted himself into that narrow chimney. Being forty feet high, at an altitude such as this, it demanded efforts which Hillary had not looked forward to when he left for Everest. He asked himself if he were going to remain cornered in this narrow passageway, but by using his shoulders, his knees, and his back muscles, he succeeded in reaching a rocky platform onto which he stretched out at full length. When he had caught his breath, he called to Tenzing, who started out in his turn. This climb was less arduous for the Sherpa, since his comrade was able to help him to a certain degree, by drawing him along on the rope, just as Tenzing had hauled him up out of the crevasse on the icefall. Finally, Tenzing stretched out in his turn, and they took a moment of rest while considering the climb that they still had before them. Most decidedly they had not made any great progress, and the summit was still very far above them.

The ideal weather was a great help. The wind was not so strong as when they had gotten up, and it scarcely bothered them at all. When they set out again, the two men took turns

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leading on the rope. As they had foreseen when they were on the South Peak, the left flank of the ridge was sufficiently broken up so that they could follow a path on it by going from spurs to rocks by way of flat slabs covered with heavy ice. Each one in turn cut steps into the ice. Finally, the one in the lead at the particular moment suddenly realized that he was no longer climbing, but rather descending abruptly. Then he noticed the monastery of Rongbuck at the foot of its glacier.

At that instant, the two men found themselves at equal distance from the crest. All they had to do was to give several blows of their ice-axes to cut steps into the ice, and in this way raise themselves a few yards.

Given the situation just indicated, it is perfectly possible that the Sherpa and the New Zealander might have arrived on the very summit of Everest at exactly the same time.

Not long after the ascent, a futile controversy arose on this subject, and we shall give a summary of it below, by setting forth just exactly what the causes of the controversy were. They have already appeared clearly enough in the story that has preceded. We note also that a sworn agreement has been signed between Tenzing and Hillary, to the effect that neither one will ever reveal just exactly what did take place at the final moment of the ascent.

Later, Hillary published a story in which he let it be understood that he had arrived first. As for Tenzing, he held fast to their pledge without giving in.

However, if one takes into account the character of Tenzing, his frankness and his capacity for loyalty, to which all those will attest who have ever known him, one is inclined to believe that if he had been the second to reach the top, he would not have hesitated to admit it, and furthermore, without thereby losing any of his prestige.

One thing is certain, and that is that no human being, no

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matter how robust he might be, would have been able to stay in the lead and to cut steps in the ice over a period of five hours (in addition to which the ascent would have taken much longer), and that the success of the rope was due equally to Hillary and to Tenzing, without forgetting all those others who helped them, just as the sirdar himself said.

It was half past eleven when two puny human beings set foot on the highest peak in all the world. At this moment they no longer thought of anything at all, and felt merely some slight satisfaction at being able to lie down to rest for a short moment, after five and a half hours of an ascent that was as steep and grueling as this one.

Then the two conquerors shook hands. For an Anglo-Saxon this was going pretty far indeed, but for that fine fellow, the Sherpa, who had a warmer nature, it was not enough. Tenzing embraced his comrade in hardship and glory.

At last they came to themselves, and took off their oxygen masks. Tenzing thought of the little blue pencil and of the dainty morsels that he had been saving since the beginning of the expedition. He took them out of his pocket to bury them in the snow. Hillary was touched by the simple faith of this pious Buddhist. Then these conquerors of the world cast another glance all around their empire and felt as if the whole world were lying stretched out before their eyes, so far-flung was the horizon. Tenzing looked at all the summits he had climbed and at all those whose ascension he had attempted. Then he turned towards the monastery of Rongbuck and that of Thyangboche. The caravan of Uncle Sonam would have arrived at Tibet long since, and the monks of Rongbuck doubtless would have learned that this year again the strangers were making the attempt at the ascent of Chomolungma. Perhaps they would have been able to see him on the summit, if they had had a telescope as powerful as Colonel Hunt's. While it

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would take the Grand Lama of Rongbuck several weeks to get from one to the other, Tenzing, small and unimportant as he was, from his present vantage point, had seen the monastery of Thyangboche that morning, and was now seeing the one at Rongbuck before noon.

Something still more to be marveled at was the fact that Tenzing could see Kangchenjunga as distinctly from here as he could from his own garden in Darjeeling. And at this particular moment, Ang Lhamu, Pem Pem, and Nima were perhaps looking up at this very mountain, and asking themselves how things were with him.

At that moment Hillary, who was taking pictures of the panorama all about them, reminded him of the flags which Tenzing now drew from his pocket and attached with strings to his ice-axe. Thus it was that Hillary took pictures of him brandishing four pennants: those of the United Nations, of Great Britain, of Nepal, and of India. But when the moment came to "plant his flags on the topmost pinnacle," Tenzing was fearful at the idea of abandoning his ice-axe and having to get along without it. So he fastened one end of the string to a rock which overhung the glacier of Kangshung, and buried the other end in the snow on the side of the crest.

There were still several minutes left in which they could admire the grandeur of the Himalayas in all its serene majesty, and Tenzing was overwhelmed with awe at the sight of such splendor. How well he had done to carry along a small gift for the gods who had created such a magnificent universe!

Several times Tenzing turned his head around abruptly, convinced that there was someone behind him, and the impression kept growing ever more definite that his friend Lambert was there. He could not see him, he could not hear him, and he did not even want to turn around for fear of causing this presence which was dear to him to disappear. Perhaps Lambert

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thought of him right now, and no matter how far away that friend might be, that thought had undoubtedly contributed to comfort him during the arduous climb. One deep regret gripped Tenzing's heart—and that was that Lambert could not participate in his victory. He loved Hillary as a friend for all time, but the relationship was not quite the same as with Lambert, and he congratulated himself at not having forgotten the brilliant red scarf that his Swiss friend had given him a year and a day before, at the moment when they had started out on their vain attempt at the ascent, worn out and chilled to the bone. In this way, something of Lambert had indeed arrived at the summit of Chomolungma.

But already the lack of oxygen was making itself plainly felt, and at eleven forty-five, after having rested a short quarter of an hour only at the summit, they began the downward climb.

As they had done on the way up, they took turns in leading and supporting each other alternately. One went on ahead from one safe spot to another, cutting steps into the ice, and pressing his crampons until he came upon another safe spot, while his comrade gently let out the rope. Thereupon the first man pulled the rope towards him, while the second man was engaged, in his turn, on the dangerous part of the road.

When they arrived at the rock sentry that they had climbed with so much difficulty, Hillary climbed down ahead, through the narrow passage, and Tenzing supported him. When his turn came, the sirdar entered it. But he was now no better secured than Hillary had been on the upward climb.

Once they reached the South Peak, they wanted to give themselves the comfort of a good drink of lemonade, but it had frozen inside its metal flask, so, without wasting any more time, they descended along the little glacier which runs from this peak along the flank of the ridge. In climbing down, they made a crossing which brought them a little too low down, and

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they continued to make their way almost horizontally, in order to reach the end of the dangerous cornices.

They began to feel frightfully tired, and silently both of them cautioned themselves to be extremely careful. An accident at this stage of the enterprise would have been the height of folly, and would have deprived all their comrades of victory, for no one would ever know that they really had reached the top. The wind had risen, and although it was not terribly strong, it did hinder them in their progress. They picked up the two oxygen tanks without which they would have been slowed up to such an extent that they would never have arrived below. They did not even dare to look at their watches before they got to Camp IX. Then it was two o'clock. The ascent had taken five and a half hours; the descent, two and a quarter.

But there was no question of spending the night at this camp. Already the wind had pretty well battered down the tent which was hanging pitiably by a single stake.

While Tenzing was preparing something hot for them to drink, Hillary connected their masks to the two tanks which had been left by Bourdillon and Evans near the South Peak. Although they had already been tapped, they still held a good deal of the life-giving oxygen which they were able to make use of. They folded up their mattresses and their sleeping-bags, attached them to the iron racks of their oxygen tanks, and turned in the direction of the South Col where several shapes were to be seen.

Their fatigue grew rapidly worse. They were very nearly at the end of their strength when they passed close by the location of the last Swiss camp of the spring expedition. Later on, they were not even able to recall whether they had seen any vestiges of it or not. The ice steps so painstakingly cut by Lowe on the previous morning, at the top of the couloir, had disappeared. They had to be cut anew, and the wind made the task

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so arduous for them that they had to relieve each other practically every sixty-five feet or so. Meanwhile, Noyce and Lowe had undertaken to climb up the couloir from their side, in order to carry oxygen to them as well as some hot soup and tea which, prepared on a paraffin-burning stove, smelled and tasted somewhat of gasoline, but to such annoying incidents they had become quite accustomed. Tenzing swallowed it down so as not to hurt the feelings of the British who had gone to the trouble of making it, and it recalled to his mind how Lambert had swallowed down in rapid succession ten cups of tea with salted butter in order to do honor, as it were, to the lamas of Thyangboche.

Finally, they stretched out, exhausted, to sleep under a tent in Camp VIII, and this time it was almost with delight that they listened to the wind making the tent creak and groan. The infernal South Col had become a veritable paradise in their sight. Lowe, the New Zealander like Hillary, could no longer contain himself, and despite the fact that he had lost his voice, kept croaking in a low but enthusiastic noise what sounded like "Hurrah!"

Epilogue

"In general, the Englishman does not fraternize with the Asiatic."

RUDYARD KIPLING

"All men who climb mountains are my brothers."

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Dizziness

WITH THEIR NERVES UNDER a great strain up to the moment of victory, the two conquerors of Everest did not really begin to feel their exhaustion until their return. . . . Tenzing had been engaged on this venture for three months. He had given himself to it with all that there was to give. Though he was in good shape physically, his head still felt giddy, and in descending from the South Col towards the Cwm, this man who had never been frightened of any precipice whatsoever was taken with a fit of dizziness.

That impression of a presence near him that he had experienced up at the summit took firm hold on him, and he was tempted to flee because he did not dare turn around to face it.

Then he grew calm once more, thinking of all those who had been his escorts: Dr. Kellas, Lhakpa, Norbu, Pasang, Pemba, Temba, Sange, Dorje, the seven Sherpas who had been killed by the avalanche in 1922; Shamsheer who had died of a cerebral hemorrhage, Manbahadur, the shoemaker with the frozen feet; Mallory and Irvine, Wilson, whose enigma had haunted the sirdar's youth, and also the two porters of Katmandu and young Ningma Dorje: a whole procession of phantoms in their icy shrouds, the sixteen victims of Everest, followed by the still

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longer line of those whom Chomolungma had not claimed for her own. And among these latter, he had had so many friends: first of all Lambert and Ang Tharkey, and also old Shipton sahib with his cold blue eyes and his Himalayan beard.

The presence of these phantoms became blurred, and Tenzing was alone, overwhelmed by the vastness of his adventure: he had climbed to the highest point, he had come back alive, and what was perhaps the most unbelievable aspect of the whole thing—he was exactly the same man as he had been before!

He had made a dream come true—a dream the beginnings of which were lost in the haze of his earliest childhood memories . . . the time when as a small urchin at Sola Khumbu he had not known whether he wished to conquer the world like the great Genghis Khan or to approach the gods by becoming a lama like Uncle Sonam, or to return to his native village one fine day at the head of a great, noisy, bustling caravan, a magnificent Indian merchant.

They say that a drowning man, just before he dies, sees his whole life unroll like a film before his eyes with the speed of a dream, and that morning Tenzing was drowning in the exhaustion and the exhilaration of success. He kept thinking of the famous talisman “world fame” which, after all the promises made by Mrs. Henderson and Dr. Evans, seemed about to confirm her statement that “you won’t ever have to return to the mountains again.”

He had not seen the goddess Chomolungma, perhaps he had not seen the talisman either—but just the same, he possessed it. Perhaps by establishing some contact with these phantoms who had made an attempt at what he had actually accomplished, he would be endowed with a miraculous prestige . . . ? This idea appeared so absolutely absurd to him that he burst out laughing and sat down for a moment on the ice. It would be

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about time, indeed, to bring a talisman to Ang Lhamu—after eighteen years of promises! But Ang Lhamu would not see it either. And after that . . . ?

Nevertheless, the fact remains that ever since 1921 the sahibs had been expending fabulous amounts of energy and of money so that two men might arrive at the top of Chomolungma. And to do what up there?

He, the Sherpa, at least had had the great good fortune to be able to deposit his offering to God on the topmost peak of the whole world, and also the offering of his little Nima. But Hillary had been satisfied with taking photographs of the mountains of which he would have gotten just as good pictures if he had flown over Everest.

Is it conceivable that these expeditions had been set up, and that so many men had grown so fanatic about them, merely to reach a result as futile as this?

This Tenzing simply could not believe, and so he concluded that a miracle was about to be performed, and that Chomolungma, before long, was going, in some way, to reveal herself.

The First Disappointment

Down below, in the Cwm, all those who were not on duty had assembled at Camp IV where the greatest perplexity prevailed. On the eve of the attempt on which Colonel Hunt had staked his greatest hopes, the weather had been mild. The men of the South Col, however, had not given the signal which had been agreed upon, namely, to lay out the sleeping-bags on the snow as a sign of victory. The cameraman of the expedition had climbed up again from Camp III with his heavy camera, and at the Base Camp a frightfully angry sahib had all but smashed the wireless equipment because the radio had announced the failure of the British expedition.

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Besides, for two days now, the English press had been preparing its readers for a disappointment.

At long last tiny figures appeared way high up. They were working their way towards Camp VII. The cameraman could not stay quiet any longer and started off in the direction of Camp V so that he would be in a position to take films of the arrival of the conquerors at the foot of Lhotse.

Tenzing and Hillary came forward towards him, imperturbable, and it was only when he had come quite close to them that they raised their thumbs as a sign of victory. Stobart wanted to wave his smock, for this was the signal that Colonel Hunt had asked him to give. But Tenzing and Hillary asked him not to. They wanted to revel in the happiness of their comrades. That was why Lowe and Noyce, the evening before, had not given the agreed-upon signal. Then Stobart in his turn asked them not to go ahead too fast so that he might take moving pictures of the tumultuous outburst.

Accordingly, the five men climbed down in leisurely fashion towards Camp IV, and it was only after that Stobart had put his camera into position that Hillary and Tenzing announced the tremendous news with a single gesture.

Then the Sherpa's throat tightened as he saw the sahibs, in their absolute frenzy, jump about, slap each other on the shoulder, behave like men possessed—yell, run all about, only to fall down exhausted. Together in a group by themselves, the Sherpas appeared to be dumbfounded.

The reaction of the Englishmen bespoke a happiness so heartfelt that Tenzing thought they must have been exorcised of the demons that had possessed them. Without a doubt they would lose their stiffness, and they might even become as human as the sahibs from other countries.

Then, in the hurly-burly and bustle of triumph, something

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occurred that spoiled everything. Everybody crowded around Hillary; he was congratulated, slapped on the back, his hand was shaken, people laughed in his face—and no one gave a thought to Tenzing who, roped together as usual with his companion, was following the triumphal group of the New Zealander at a distance of some twenty-five feet. Ah! This was certainly not the same brotherly feeling that had prevailed with the Swiss friends after an exploit of far less importance!

One moment later the Sherpas hesitantly approached him who had come back from the heavens above, apparently the very same man he had been the evening before, but unquestionably now endowed with divine powers. Some of them bowed down before him with their hands together in Hindu fashion, others scarcely dared to touch his fingers; several old mountaineers from Sola Khumbu, with their long locks hanging over their cheeks, leaned over until their foreheads touched the sirdar's hand, and the less civilized ones respectfully stuck out their tongues to him as far as they would go, for that is the Tibetan way of saluting the great and the powerful.

The next day, May 31st, was a day of rest. It is true that the sahibs kept on smiling. Nor did they hesitate to say some "kind words" to the victorious Sherpa, but they had regained the condescension that they had had at the beginning, as well as their high and mighty air of patriarchal superiority. In their joy, the Sherpas caroused, celebrated, and made merry. They would have been only too glad to feed their sirdar full to bursting. Yet despite all their enthusiasm, the gap grew wider between the sahibs and the Himalayan mountaineers.

"World Fame"

The evacuation of the Cwm began on the 1st of June. Already the great news was spreading from antenna to antenna, and the

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English learned of it during the night before the Coronation of their Queen, the daughter of the last Emperor of India.

In a little house in Toon Soong, a mother and her two daughters were asleep when they were awakened by some knocks at the door. It was probably the market gardener with his two baskets hanging from a bamboo yoke that he carried when he climbed a hill, or perhaps some other peddler. But he surely would not knock so loud nor would he be so impatient.

Mitra Babu came in, all excited. The radio had just brought the news of his neighbor's victory. How could that be? Two evenings before everybody at Darjeeling was saying that once again the expedition had failed. And was it really and truly Tenzing, her husband, their father, who climbed right up to the very top?

Before they could grasp what had happened, Ang Lhamu, Pem Pem, and Nima saw their house and their garden invaded by the entire neighborhood. Tied to the pole of the prayer flag, their little dog Kangkar was almost choking himself to death in his fury at such a crush and uproar, but he was barely heard, for everyone was talking, and all at the same time.

When Pem Pem and Nima spoke of going to school, there were bursts of laughter from the crowd. To school—today? Nobody at all was going to school. There wasn't going to be any school—for all the Nepalese of Darjeeling were celebrating Tenzing's victory.

Other old friends were scarcely able to work their way through the crowd to visit with the family of the hero, and to bring their congratulations. And here, all of a sudden, was a great personage, accompanied by a man in uniform! The crowd made way for them. The great personage came up to Ang Lhamu, who was all a-flutter with excitement. What did these people, so important, want of these folks in their little hut? After all, perhaps it was not permitted to go up to the home of

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the gods, the way her husband had done? Better be careful, then—and when the unknown man asked Ang Lhamu if she knew what was being said over the radio, the poor frightened woman answered very simply that she did not have a radio. Seeing her fright, the man in uniform told her: “Woman, rejoice and be happy: your husband Tenzing has climbed Chomolungma.” And these two very important people had come for the purpose of inviting the Tenzing family to a great reception at the Governor’s house.

For days and days, the mother was secretly nervous and worried. Would Tenzing have gotten down again, safe and sound? Perhaps the mountain would have its revenge on him for his audacity? At last there arrived the victory message dictated by the conqueror of Everest. “This message is from Tenzing. I have climbed to the top of Everest with one of the sahibs. Take good care of your health.” From then on, Ang Lhamu, Pem Pem, and Nima were precipitated into a dizzying whirl which would take them to the very ends of the earth, where everyone would ask them silly questions and shower them with gifts.

The Colonel Explodes

Hillary and Tenzing remained at Thyangboche while the rest of the expedition left on their way towards Katmandu. As was proper, the lamas feted the two heroes who had returned from the home of their goddess Chomolungma, and from all the villages of Sola Khumbu there came Sherpas to render homage to the child from Thami who had left eighteen years earlier on his fabulous adventure.

The people from Thami itself arrived, bringing with them Tenzing’s old mother, her head covered with a woolen shawl, wrapped in a heavy fur coat, and with Tibetan boots on her

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feet. Unquestionably mothers were themselves in the confidence of the gods, for she, too, kept saying: "Now that you have succeeded, you won't have to risk your life up there any more in the mountains."

At Thyangboche, the peace of the mountains reigns, but at Katmandu tempers grew hot, for the British continued to make one *faux pas* after another. Since the entire world was talking about the Nepalese, Tenzing, the inhabitants of the capital became interested in the news on the radio and in the newspapers, and found plenty to get angry about.

First of all, the three messages sent by the Queen of England, by her husband, the Duke of Edinburgh, and by her Prime Minister, were addressed to the British alone, and made not the slightest allusion to the Sherpas, not even to the sirdar. Then, on top of that, better informed perhaps, the Queen did deign to take an interest in Tenzing, but only to grant him a decoration, and at that a less important one than those for Colonel Hunt and for Hillary. And why? Will the native with the slanting eyes always remain the coolie, even when he accomplishes the most marvelous exploits? Even after the ascent of Chomolungma, will money always be more highly valued than sweat?

For the Nepalese, mountaineering was a matter of religion; for the British, it was a sport. Besides, there were some people at Katmandu for whom all pretexts were good enough when it was a question of arousing popular enthusiasm, of unleashing passions, and of injuring the Westerner, who in his foolish pride uses his ingenuity to lighten their task.

When the British caravan arrived at the Col of Banepa, a crowd of young Nepalese invaded the camp looking for Tenzing. What, the hero was not there? Why, what in the world had they done with him? The Sherpas of the expedition had heard talk also about the messages sent from London, and at

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the moment when the two groups met, the two disappointments came together.

The sahibs, for their part, were amazed at finding this hostility all around them. Everywhere they heard nothing but Tenzing spoken of. Then they got angry in their turn, and Colonel Hunt lost his head. There was no question about it, he was worn out and tired. His sentiments of justice and loyalty were shaken. It seemed to him that the Nepalese public were trying to defraud not only him and his fellow countrymen of their victory, but also all of those who had preceded him on Everest, Swiss as well as British. In October, 1952, when the Royal Geographic Society had entrusted him with the leadership of the expedition, he had declared: "It should be thoroughly understood that whoever reaches the summit of Everest will be standing, at the same time, on the summit of a pyramid of experiences dearly acquired; his triumph will have to be shared by all those who have contributed to build this pyramid."

And here the Nepalese Government was taking the liberty of answering back to the Government of Her Majesty, by awarding a more important decoration to Tenzing than to Hillary and to the leader of the expedition. Now, really, that was going too far!

It was in this state of mind that the colonel received the press representatives, and made the following disastrous declarations: "Tenzing was nothing at all, merely a simple aide. He did not possess any technical knowledge of mountaineering; during all of the final assault, Hillary had been in the lead, and had cut the steps in the ice above 28,000 feet, for five and a half hours without interruption!" And the colonel became even more precise: "Tenzing never acted as a guide to anyone. His role had always been that of a subordinate."

This was only one more blunder, but stupidity, even though

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accidental, was contagious, and the most fantastic rumors began to circulate in the capital. Certain people even went so far as to pretend that the English had arranged for the disappearance of Tenzing. For their part, the British continued to make bad matters worse. After Colonel Hunt's press conference, the special correspondents of the English papers sent out perfectly absurd telegrams: Tenzing was the coolie who had helped Hillary to get to the summit. Besides, he had not been at all well, and was scarcely able to stand up when they arrived at the Base Camp at the end of March. They made him into a comical boaster, a sort of Falstaff of the mountains.

The relations between the Nepalese and the British continued to get worse and worse. Before the end of the week, the latter scarcely dared risk going out on the street alone. And no one knows what might have happened if Hillary and Tenzing had not just at that point arrived at the Col of Banepa.

Glory to Tenzing, the Hero!

After having proceeded on their way for some two weeks like brothers, Hillary and Tenzing were hurled into the thick of a mob of excited people as soon as they arrived in sight of the great plain of Nepal. They were acclaimed, certainly. They had garlands hung about their necks, and if the enthusiasts were inclined to forget Hillary, Tenzing put them on the spot. But what a racket! And most of all, what a lot of questions! Tenzing had to reiterate every moment that he was a Nepalese. And that did not upset him nearly so much as when he was asked to deny India in favor of Nepal. There were also the Anglo-Saxon newspapermen who had come in groups in their jeeps. They kept asking who was to get more of the credit, with a lack of discretion almost inconceivable to a man as reserved as Tenzing.

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And in the midst of all this uproar, Hillary struck upon a phrase which touched Tenzing: "All things being equal, it was easier up there!"

The two conquerors took their places in the jeeps of the Nepalese Army, and went off in the direction of Bhadgaon, surrounded by a turbulent escort. How far away these celebrations were from those of the Buddhist villages where the lamas and the notables decked themselves out in enormous masks to perform dances in honor of the two heroes!

While the Nepalese and the British were abusing each other at Katmandu, any number of people arrived there from Darjeeling. First of all, Ang Lhamu and their two daughters, and Lhakpa Shering, the secretary of the Sherpas' Club, as well as a great many of the companions of long ago; and everybody pressed on to Bhadgaon to welcome and acclaim the greatest among them.

Pem Pem and Nima had prepared garlands of flowers for their father, but they felt lost in this enormous and noisy throng, and pressed close to their mother, who was perhaps even more frightened than they by all this yelling and commotion. This happy Tibetan woman from Toon Soong kept asking herself if all these cries were not the prelude for some tremendous barbaric sacrifice, and she wept when she thought that her husband might perhaps be punished for having had the audacity to climb up to the sky. But an eddy ran through the crowd, which began to yell even louder. There was Tenzing! He was still alive, all covered with flowers; everyone acclaimed him; everyone admired him. The husband found his wife, and the father, his children. He also found Colonel Hunt who had come to meet him.

Drawn by four horses, the royal coach of King Tribhuvana Bir Bikram, temporal and spiritual ruler of Nepal, had left the royal stables, preceded by pike bearers dressed in leather

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trimmed with copper nails. The coach had come to call for "Tenzing, the Glory of Nepal" who took his place in it together with his family, his companion on the rope, Hillary, Lhakpa Shering, and Colonel Hunt. A triumphal procession went along with them to the capital. Tenzing remained standing with his hands together, and saluted the crowd in a gesture of prayer. He was still wearing the red scarf that Lambert gave him, and it was in obedience to tradition that he willingly let his face be daubed with *koukoum*, a bright vermilion dye.

Everywhere in Bhadgaon, as in Katmandu, it was he who was acclaimed. Some young Nepalese on horseback rode in advance of the coach which passed under triumphal arches decorated with flowers, and above the streets there hung, from one wall to the other, huge streamers carrying in Urdu characters, or in English, the inscription: "Hail to Tenzing, the Hero of Nepal!"

That evening, the man for whom, at their departure, the British had found no better lodging than a stable, lay down to sleep in the palace of King Tribhuvana Bir Bikram.

A Triumph Spoiled

When at the end of this triumphal day Tenzing found himself alone at last in the bosom of his family, he asked himself if the goddess would not pursue him in her vengeance. What didn't he learn! The colonel's statement, the cables of the English newspapermen. What? He had difficulty walking on the glacier at Khumbu? The truth of the matter was that the man who said that would not have arrived at the end of the stage without the help of Tenzing. What? When Bourdillon and Evans had been chosen as the first rope for the assault, Tenzing was supposed to have shown "a very understandable jealousy"? Yet he had sacri-

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ficed his own chances of success to no purpose, to assure that of his comrades.

And the fraternity of the mountains, without which nothing at all was possible—what had become of that?

When, next day, King Tribhuvana Bir Bikram sent first to Tenzing the ribbon and the medal of the highest decoration of Nepal, and only later a less important medal to the colonel and to Hillary, the atmosphere was so tense that Tenzing was disconsolate. The ties of friendship, too loose perhaps, but nonetheless real, which united them up there high on the mountain—had they then really been broken?

And the devil of it all was that some strangers got hold of Tenzing, kept asking him questions, bothered and pestered him, and forced him to talk so much that he did not know just where he was. How the sahibs had deceived him! He was shown an article which finally made him lose his patience. Reporting his triumphal entry into Katmandu, one reporter described him as having the characteristics of a grotesque braggart, swollen with pride, and with a garish scarlet rag tied around his neck—Lambert's red scarf that he had carried from way high up on Chomolungma to the royal palace, so that he might associate his friend Lambert with his own triumph.

Then Tenzing decided to put the facts bluntly. Not only did he reach the summit, but what's more, the expedition would have failed without him, for this was his eighth attempt, and not a single one of the English sahibs had ever gone beyond the first crevasses of the Cwm. He was assuredly the most experienced Everester of the whole caravan.

And the public continued to grow more and more excited, to such an extent that one evening the police were obliged to take an English reporter into custody to prevent the crowd from doing him harm.

The sahibs sued for peace, and Tenzing was only too happy

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to negotiate, for he saw how very much things had gone astray: blunders had led to retaliations that were just so many more blunders!

Accordingly, Hillary and Tenzing signed a sworn statement in the office of the President of the Nepalese Council, a document which forbade them to divulge which one of them arrived at the summit first, which would surely make all the mountaineers in the world laugh because of its very absurdity.

As the Nepalese continued to acclaim him as their own, and the Indians did the same, Tenzing did not want to disappoint either one or the other. He was born in Nepal, and his sisters still lived there. He now lived in India, where he was a voting citizen. And so he declared: "I was born in the bosom of Nepal, and I was raised at the knee of India."

Peace having been re-established, he left for Calcutta, where the Bhotias of the city received him and his family in their temple. Then there he was in Delhi, among his English comrades, and the President of the Council, Jawaharlal Nehru, handed him a medal on which was engraved briefly the whole life history of Tenzing: "Adventure is glory." Perhaps that was the message of the goddess that Tenzing was still awaiting?

Throughout this journey, they continued to ask him questions. People seized every passing phrase of his and noted it down. Several consolidated their catch. It grew apace. It got interpreted, and without meaning to, he, in his turn, irritated the English. Once more he avoided an open break, and here he was now, ready to leave for London.

Tenzing's Real Triumph

Having departed, practically as a hostage, together with his family and the secretary of the Sherpas' Club, Tenzing completely won the heart of London. And seeing him always smil-

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ing, modest, and happy with his wife and daughters, the English began to understand that only one of two things could be true: Either he was not a coolie, or the coolies were mighty nice people. His comrades from the expedition had scattered throughout the country, and had left him all alone. He did not get lost in the crowd. More and more, the people he met in the street recognized him and acclaimed him.

Finally, the great day arrived. All the sahibs had returned to London and betaken themselves to Buckingham Palace. Tenzing went there with his family, accompanied by Major Wylie and his wife. The crowds near the palace were tremendous. They loudly acclaimed all the Everesters, but when Tenzing passed, in a long linen tunic, loose silken black and white trousers, Ang Lhamu with her Tibetan embroidered apron, and the two young girls with their hair decorated with little red ribbons, the acclaim was even warmer and more enthusiastic than for the others. Tenzing responded to it in silence by his customary salutation, and this time no one saw anything grotesque in it. Ang Lhamu had regained her customary smile. She kept wondering what her friends in Toon Soong would think if they could see her about to enter the Royal Palace, and she burst out laughing at the thought as she marched along. The two girls were a little stiff, and besides, they were fairly afraid that they might burst out laughing, too, for Nima, the more roguish of the two, kept repeating in a whisper a little English jingle that she had learned at school in Darjeeling:

“Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been?

I’ve been to London, to visit the queen.

Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you there?

I frightened a little mouse under her chair.”

Nothing could have touched the hearts of the English more than Tenzing’s demeanor. Proud of his family, dignified and

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modest in his triumph, this man who could neither read nor write showed himself to be as much of a grand seigneur as the most famous English gentleman.

But in his own mind he kept asking himself whether this acclaim was possibly the reply of the goddess?

Then there came the trip to Switzerland. As soon as he arrived in his room in Zurich, Tenzing went to the window to gaze out, for the too flat horizons of England had made him homesick. His Swiss friends took him to climb some of their mountain peaks. He visited some private homes in Europe and regained his confidence in the sahibs, which made it possible for him to answer reporters without getting annoyed, and to deny the silly statements that had been prepared for him just to make sensational news.

Sometimes, seeing how much delight his daughters took in being photographed, he would smilingly say to them: "Watch out! After all, it isn't so certain that Nima was mistaken. One or two photographs taken by friends don't do any harm. But these hordes of unknown photographers, perhaps they'll rob us a little of our souls."

Finally, he returned to Darjeeling where he saw Ang Tharky again, whom he had not seen since the latter was in Paris. And the two old friends from Everest exchanged their travel recollections. The lads from Sola Khumbu had gone farther than Genghis Khan himself.

It's many months now since Everest was climbed. Colonel Hunt has become General Sir John Hunt and directs a military school in his country. Before going off to risk his life on another Himalayan peak, Edmund Hillary married Louise Rose, the fiancée he thought about on Everest. On this occasion Tenzing sent his friend of the great adventure his warmest con-

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gratulations. He received no answer and still feels profoundly hurt.

Nevertheless, things follow their course. The Sherpas' Club of Darjeeling broke with the Himalayan Committee of that town. From now on foreign expeditions will have to go to the Club to get their Sherpas. The English will no longer handle these matters, and will no longer have the same priority they once had.

As for Tenzing, his future seems assured for the moment. It does not seem that he will ever have to go to the mountains again, sack on back and his family in anguish. The Government of Western Bengal has founded a mountain-climbing school at Darjeeling. Tenzing is the principal. Another thing: an Indian newspaper proposed a fund to build a house for the conqueror of Everest. The fund was subscribed in two days and the house was built. Tenzing moved into it with his family.

But this year the Sherpa saw this new house swept away and destroyed by a landslide. Was it the vengeance of Chomolungma following? Tenzing is convinced of it.

GLOSSARY

arête	A narrow ridge.
chang	A beer brewed from rice.
chimney	A narrow vertical gully in rock or ice.
chörten	A walled tower; a symbolic structure built to recall some special event or for the salvation of the builder; also a tomb.
col	A pass; a depression in a chain of mountains.
cornice	An overhanging mass of snow or ice along a ridge.
couloir	A gully in a mountainside.
crampon	A metal frame with spikes that fits the sole of the boot, for use on hard snow or ice.
crevasse	A fissure in a glacier.
cwm (pronounced coomb)	An enclosed valley on the side of a hill.
icefall	A frozen cascade of ice, often on an immense scale, caused when a glacier passes over a change of angle or direction in the slope of the ground below it.
koukri	A Sherpa dagger.
massif	The dominant central mass of a mountain ridge, defined by lengthwise or crosswise valleys.
monsoon	A wind in South Asia, blowing from the southwest in summer, bringing rains; and from the northeast in winter, the dry monsoon.
moraine	The accumulated stones and debris carried along and brought down by the glacier.
piton	A metal spike with a ring or hole in the head; can be driven into rock or ice and used in conjunction with a snap-link to secure the rope between two climbers.

GLOSSARY

rakshi	A spirit distilled from rice by the Nepalese.
rope	Secures members of a party for greater safety; the members of a party linked together.
sérac	Tower or pinnacle of ice.
Sherpas	Hillmen of Tibetan stock from Eastern Nepal.
sirdar	Prince, powerful one, policeman, leader.
spur	A rib of rock descending from a main ridge.
“Tiger”	Title given to high-climbing Sherpas by the Himalayan Club.
tsampa	Flour of roasted and ground barley; the staple food of Sherpas.
yeti	An unidentified creature believed to live in the Himalayas; nicknamed the “Abominable Snowman.”

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