

A MOUNTAIN
CALLED
NUN KUN

BY BERNARD PIERRE

Translated by Nea Morin and Janet Adam Smith

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PREFACE

By BRIGADIER SIR JOHN HUNT, C.B.E., D.S.O.

I WELL remember July 6, 1935. In that year I had had my first climbing season in the Himalaya; our party was on its way back from the Karakoram, which lies beyond the north-western extremity of that great range. We were walking up the Suru Valley, a tributary of the Indus, its flanks bright with wild roses, pink and saffron. Ahead of us rose twin snow peaks, separated by a col, the one obviously easy, the other more formidable. I turned to my companion James Waller with a question on my lips; he had climbed in this area the year before. "Those are Nun and Kun," said James. "Nun has not been climbed. That's the peak Jack Harrison and I tried last year, but it was our first experience of the Himalaya and we made many mistakes."

I knew what he meant. We ourselves had just failed to climb a greater mountain still, Saltoro Kangri, 25,400 feet, driven back by bad weather on the summit ridge when within 900 feet from the top. I had been responsible for the climbing plans, and I, too, had made many mistakes. Saltoro Kangri is still unclimbed.

And Nun itself remained inviolate for a further nineteen years. Little could I foresee on that far-off day, as I admired it from the warm, flower-scented valley, that its eventual conquerors would be a French party, led by a man who was to become my firm friend. I met Bernard Pierre in 1950, when I was stationed at Fontainebleau and serving with the Allied Headquarters there. He was already well known in Alpine mountaineering circles, although he had only started to climb a few years earlier. In fact, his magnificent exploits with Gaston Rébuffat on the Via Cassin of the Badile, which he had completed in a severe storm, followed closely by the West Face of the Aiguille Noire de Peuterey, made a remarkable mountaineering début and placed him, in the short space of two years, high among the ranks of mountaineers.

During our stay in France, Bernard and other friends stayed

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many weekends with my family at Fontaine-le-Port, and we spent much time on the forest rocks, our allegiance happily divided between the rival schools of the Cuvier and the Dame Jeanne. In 1950 we met in the Oisans at the Promontoire Hut, to celebrate July 14 by a traverse of the Meije. But the weather decided otherwise and we had to content ourselves with the traverse, a day or two later, of the Aiguille Dibona by the Voie Boell. I look forward to the next occasion when we shall climb together. Bernard has very many other climbing companions in Britain, and is a member of the Alpine Club and the Climbers' Club. There is no doubt that he has done much to strengthen the close bonds of sympathy and admiration which link mountaineers in both our countries.

The ascent of Nun by Bernard Pierre's party, with no previous experience of the Himalaya, was a remarkable *tour de force*. Conditions in those great mountains differ profoundly from those normally met with in the Alps or even the Andes, and few parties have succeeded in their first attempt to climb a high and difficult Himalayan peak. Yet Bernard and his companions are outstanding mountaineers. Moreover, they had graduated from the Alps via the Andes, and they had prepared their expedition with meticulous care and attention to detail. But even more than this, they brought to their adventure an enthusiasm, an *élan* characteristic of their countrymen, an unconquerable spirit which was so perfectly exemplified in the epic of Annapurna. This spirit more than made up for lack of experience of the tremendous problems of the Himalayan mountains; like Maurice Herzog's party, they swept aside the difficulties and drove on to victory. And it is this infectious enthusiasm which is typical of the author of this book.

It was indeed a happy circumstance that both he and I, "Bleausards" both, should each have led successful expeditions at either end of the Himalaya in 1953.

This book conveys much more than the bare facts of this success. Not least among its merits is the fact that it describes so vividly many of the minor events in the life of an expedition and the surroundings through which it passes. Some of these may be insignificant in themselves, but they are fascinating to the reader who lacks any comparable experience and any know-

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ledge of these strange and beautiful lands; equally, they awake nostalgic memories in others who, like myself, once knew Kashmir. Even more than this, Bernard Pierre has provided us with an intensely human story: of his relations with his companions, in particular with the Sherpas: his Gallic humour and his delightfully Gallic unabashedness in revealing to us the emotions of a man in great moments of trial and triumph.

CHAPTER I

THE PROMISED LAND OF THE HIMALAYA

FASTEN your belts! No more smoking!

Our aeroplane droned above a city of a thousand lights; in a quarter of an hour we should be landing at New Delhi. India was to me a magic word which had enchanted my childhood, and my passion for mountains had since endowed it with the crowning fascination of the Himalaya. I stubbed out my cigarette, fastened my safety belt, and sat back in my seat. Then I closed my eyes and dreamed the dream that had come true.

* * * * *

For every mountaineer dreams that one day he will visit his promised land—the formidable backbone of Asia, which throws up fourteen summits of over 8,000 metres (26,000 feet) and innumerable unnamed summits of 7,000, 6,000, and 5,000 metres. It is an inexhaustible treasure-house, to which devotees of mountaineering have come, for the last fifty years, to satisfy their craving for fresh peaks. And the Himalaya will retain their attraction for many generations to come, for up to the present only five¹ 8,000-metre peaks have fallen to the mountaineer—Annapurna in 1950, Everest and Nanga Parbat in 1953, K2 and Cho Oyu in 1954. Nun, which we climbed in August 1953, is 7,135 metres—23,410 feet. Coming after Annapurna and Chaukhamba, it was the third virgin Himalayan peak to be climbed by a French expedition.

Organising expeditions like these is a formidable business, and one might well suppose the climb itself to be the easiest part. First the team has to be chosen, and although our expedition had the support of the *Fédération Française de la Montagne*, the *Club Alpin Français*, and the *Comité Lyonnais de l'Himalaya* (who all helped us a lot), it was not a “national expedition”, and this made it harder to organise. I had to try to find people who

¹ Kanchenjunga and Makalu were both climbed in the summer of 1953. (*Translators.*)

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could be away from their jobs for two or three months, and who could share the expenses. Very fortunately the manufacturers of equipment and foodstuffs, and the transport companies, gave us substantial help.

All the members of the expedition had, of course, to be experienced mountaineers, but it was essential that they should have equable dispositions, for tempers are easily tried at high altitude. One well-known Himalayan climber has confessed to a strong desire at 22,000 feet to do his companions in—no doubt with his ice-axe.

Somehow or other, in spite of hesitations and defections, I succeeded in collecting a very sound team. More than once we thought that everything would fall through, but we had plenty of patience and plenty of perseverance, and finally the expedition took shape. There were seven of us: four French, two Indian, and one Swiss. The French were Mme Claude Kogan, thirty-four, one of the most remarkable mountaineers of to-day; Jean Guillemin, forty, the Medical Officer; Michel Desorbay, twenty-seven, and myself, thirty-three. All four of us had climbed a lot in the Alps, and had then turned our attention towards more distant and still virgin summits. Claude and Jean had taken part in the Franco-Belgian expedition to the Cordillera Blanca of the Andes in 1951, when Alpamayo (20,013 feet) was climbed, as well as other peaks. Claude Kogan and Nicole Leininger had together made the ascent of Quitaraju, 19,685 feet—the world altitude record for a manless party. Claude and Jean had been members of the first Franco-American expedition to the Peruvian Andes, which I had organised in 1952. With four of our American friends, Claude and I made the ascent of Salcantay (20,669 feet). The same year Michel Desorbay—though very young—had led an expedition to the mountains of Spitzbergen. As for myself, after I had made a number of fine expeditions in the Alps with the celebrated guide Gaston Rébuffat—who is my friend as well as master—I had taken part in 1951 in an expedition to the Hoggar. Our Swiss member came to us out of the blue—he was a Protestant pastor! I had heard from his friend, Marcel Kurz—as knowledgeable about the Himalaya as he is about the Alps—that a keen mountaineer, who had climbed a number of Swiss

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“four-thousanders”, had been living for the past three years at Leh (10,826 feet) in Ladak, near the Tibetan frontier. He was perfectly acclimatised, for his pastoral journeys frequently obliged him to cross passes of 16,000 feet, and his passion for mountaineering often took him up 20,000-foot peaks. So I asked Pierre Vittoz to join us. He was delighted; he hastily furbished up his climbing equipment, and hung a notice on the door of his house saying: “The Pastor has gone to the presence of the Most High.”

Our two Indian friends were also accustomed to high altitudes. One was the Air Force Lieutenant Nalni D. Jayal, who, a few days after Everest had been climbed, had flown over it and brought back some magnificent photographs and a film. He had been recommended by my great friend John Hunt, and, at twenty-six, had already taken part in two Indian expeditions to the Himalaya: Trisul in 1951 and Kamet in 1952. It was also in 1952 that our other officer, K. C. Johorey, twenty-seven, a Captain in the Engineers, made his Himalayan debut—a brilliant one, for he went to 23,000 feet.

It was an odd party: two officers, a parson, a silk merchant, a commercial agent, a doctor, and a designer of swim-suits. Three nationalities, of widely different education and religions, were to be united by their common love of mountains in order to conquer a virgin “seven thousander”.

Yes, but which seven thousander? Most of us could only be away from our jobs during July, August, and September. At this time of year the monsoon crosses the Himalayan chain and snow falls in Sikkim, Nepal, and Garhwal, hence expeditions to these regions generally take place between April and June. But the farther north-west one goes the less violent the monsoon becomes, particularly by the time it reaches Kashmir and the Karakoram. So, as it was out of the question for us to go to Nepal, and since there was no time to get permission to go to the Karakoram, we were forced to find a seven-thousander in Kashmir. I pored over maps and collected quantities of information. One day as I was turning over the pages of *The Mountain World* I came upon the following passage by Marcel Kurz, “Is it not remarkable that the only seven-thousand metre peak in the 400 miles between Garhwal and Nanga Parbat—a peak moreover which is only 60 miles from Srinagar, the capital

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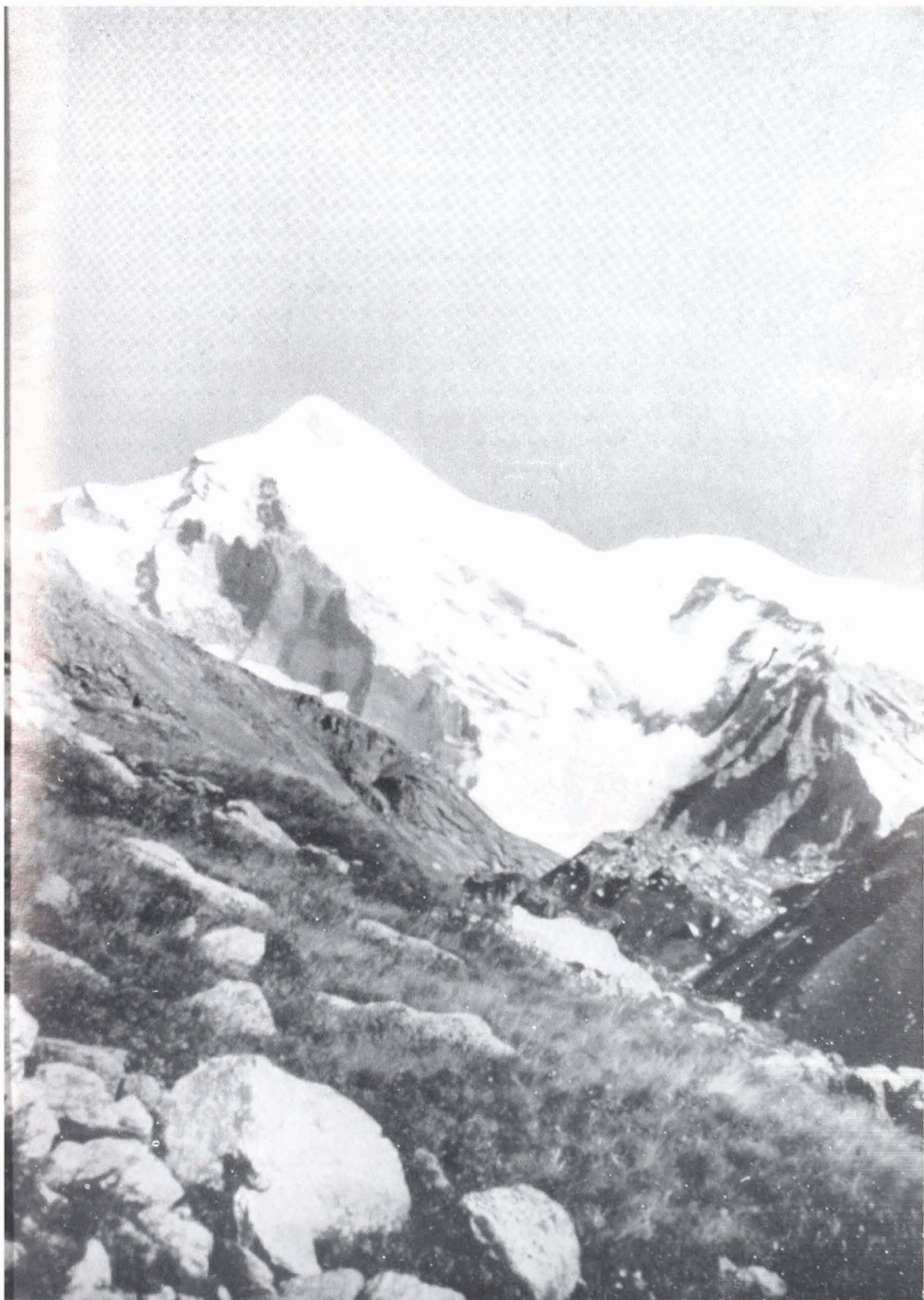
of Kashmir—should still be virgin?” My heart leapt. I had found our seven-thousander.

It was Nun, 7,135 metres, 23,410 feet, the highest peak of the Nun Kun massif and the second highest summit in Kashmir after Nanga Parbat. The neighbouring summit Kun, 23,246 feet, was climbed in 1913, in the middle of August—this seemed most encouraging—by an Italian expedition. As for Nun, it had remained inviolate in spite of two British expeditions, in 1934 and 1946, which had reached a height of about 21,325 feet on the east ridge. “It is a marvellous pyramid of snow and ice, a perfect cone rising from a mass of satellite peaks”, wrote Nalni Jayal, who had often flown over it.

When we looked into the accounts of these previous attempts, it became evident that the east ridge by no means offered the best chances of success. Moreover, I was intrigued by the remarks of James Waller, one of the members of the 1934 expedition; remarks which he made, during a later reconnaissance in 1937, of the west ridge, which appeared to him more favourable. I wrote to Pierre Vittoz, who had also been almost to the foot of the west ridge, and he confirmed my impression that it was the route to the summit.

But it was not enough just to discover our seven-thousander—from conception to realisation is a long step, and there are plenty of obstacles. Edison says that in every invention there is ten per cent inspiration and ninety per cent perspiration. And in this respect the organisation of our expedition ran true to form. The difficulties of collecting the party had been overcome, but there were many other jobs to be done. Jean, the M.O., would collect the medical supplies, Claude Kogan would be in charge of the commissariat, and Michel Desorbay of equipment. I had to supervise generally, keep the weight of our material down, co-ordinate the planning, and organise our meetings. As Claude lived in Nice, Jean and myself in Paris, and Michel in Lyons, it was in Lyons that we used to meet.

I pestered Nalni Jayal with impatient letters, for I had asked him to deal with all questions of transport in India as well as with relations with the military authorities. I pestered Henri Dumont, too, secretary at the French Embassy, and an old college friend of mine, who was to have joined us. He would look



“Solid and imposing, Nun stood outlined against the blue sky.”



In Kashmir: a canal in Srinagar.

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after all diplomatic problems, and they were not the least of our troubles.

There was one other major problem: the Sherpas. No expedition is possible without the co-operation of those admirable men who are blessed with a fine intuitive intelligence, an astonishing resistance, and an endearing devotion, and who have all the climber's love of mountains. So I wrote to the Himalayan Club at Darjeeling; the answer came that Ang Tharkay, the Sirdar or chief Sherpa of the French expedition to Annapurna, was willing to accept our offer and to recruit seven other Sherpas. I met him some five months later—in Paris, where he had come for the showing of the Annapurna film—and he then confirmed his willingness to join us. This was a trump card indeed, for along with Tensing, Ang Tharkay is considered to be the finest Sirdar going.

Our great problem was to obtain the necessary authorisation to visit the district. The Himalaya are near enough to the Tibetan frontier, whether on the Chinese or Russian side, to make the Indian authorities think long before they agree to grant a safe-conduct; and there is, too, all the political unrest in Kashmir. We had many ups and downs during the negotiations, and I suffered from alternate fits of optimism and depression. I used rather to dread opening letters and cables from Henri Dumont and Nalni Jayal, who both did so much to obtain this precious authorisation. Finally, thanks to the efforts of Count Stanislas Ostrorog, the French Ambassador, and to the understanding of Pandit Nehru—he has a keen interest in mountaineering and on our return from Kashmir did us the honour of receiving us at lunch—the authorisation arrived just a month before our departure. We had held firm during this trial of nerves and our preparations had continued as if nothing was amiss, but we had begun to be very anxious.

I am not likely to forget the day when a secretary from the Indian Embassy telephoned: "The visas are ready for you." As I drove to fetch them I was fairly jumping with excitement, and of course I went slap across a red light. A whistle blew; I stopped; and when a policeman came to ask for my papers, I told him the story. Did my plan to climb a high peak in Kashmir give me the right to ignore the traffic regulations on the

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Chaillot hill? I wasn't too sure, but the representative of the law seemed all in favour of this view: "If you are going to the Himalaya, that's quite a different matter." We chatted a few moments and then he became confidential: "The wife and myself and our two kids are interested in explorers. We even go to lectures. We'll watch out for you. Good luck!"

Good luck indeed!

These reminiscences were cut short by the jolt of landing. Here we were at Palam Airport! Claude, Jean, and I just looked at each other, we couldn't speak for excitement. As the cabin door opened we were stifled by the damp, stuffy heat of the monsoon. Slowly, and still half-dazed, we climbed down from the plane. There were our friends, in tropical kit: Michel Desorbay, who had arrived from Colombo two days before (he had come by sea, in charge of the expedition's baggage); Henri and Françoise Dumont, Nalni Jayal (in trousers, white dress shirt, and bow tie), Serge de Gunzbourg, of the France-Pressé agency.

We wondered what the army of newspaper-men and photographers were there for, until we suddenly realised they were waiting for us. Questions rattled out. Where exactly was Nun Kun? Had it already been attempted? And so on. I answered them all and ended up by saying: "We are very happy to be realising this long-cherished plan, and to be making up a team with two Indian Himalayan climbers and a Swiss mountaineer. Mountaineering knows no frontiers, and if we reach the summit of Nun we will raise the flag of the United Nations." After these lofty sentiments the reporters took flight like a flock of sparrows. "Since the conquest of Everest India has gone mad about mountaineering," Nalni Jayal explained with a smile.

While the customs officials were hard at work, Henri Dumont gave me the latest news. "Pierre Vittoz nearly couldn't make it. He was told he couldn't leave Ladak, but by good luck he had made the acquaintance at Leh of the Minister of National Defence, and *he* brought the matter to the notice of Pandit Nehru, and it's all been arranged." We breathed again. An expedition is horribly like a steeplechase. Until you have cleared the last fence . . .

"Vittoz is still at Leh," Henri continued. "We must tell him

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to meet us at Doda, which will be the starting point of the approach march."

"Fine. We'll send him a wire. And what about the Sherpas?"

"They left Darjeeling yesterday, and are on their way. I had begun to be anxious, for we had not been able to get in touch with them since their return from Dhaulagiri." ¹

"And Johorey?"

"He'll be here to-morrow."

"Good show! And what about yourself, Henri?"

"I can't leave the Embassy."

I suppose things had been going too well to last, but it was very sad to hear that this friend to whom we owed so much would not be able to come along with us.

* * * * *

Our departure from New Delhi had been fixed for July 11, so we had only three days in which to complete the final formalities, make our last purchases, and attend receptions. It was all a bit of a rush, but we did manage to spare a little time to visit New Delhi and to admire some of the beauties of the old city.

New Delhi is a fine town, large, airy, and laid out geometrically with straight main roads, wide avenues with grass verges, roundabouts which all look exactly alike, and roads bordered with bungalows. It is cold and classically Anglo-Saxon, and it reminded me of Washington. Moreover, New Delhi, like Washington, is an administrative town. It is the seat of the government of the young Republic of India, whose area is equal to Europe (without Russia) and whose population exceeds that of the entire American continent.

The heart of the capital is the former palace of the Viceroy, an impressive government building. On either side, two buildings that were formerly occupied by the viceregal secretariat now house the administrative offices. A fourth building, circular and surrounded by columns, is reserved for the legislative assembly. The ensemble, of red sandstone and white marble, is a majestic compromise between eastern and western architecture. The other main centre of the town is Connaught Circus,

¹ Ang Tharkay, Kami, Ang Phuter, and Gyaldzen had been on the Swiss expedition to Dhaulagiri, 26,810 feet.

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where the shops are to be found and the banks have their head offices.

New Delhi is not India. It reminds one rather of those elderly English ladies who have lived a long while in India. In contrast Old Delhi teems with life—smelly, jabbering, noisy, endless crowds. It is the embodiment of the East—its history, its traditions, its pomp and glory, its conquests and rebellions, its religious wars and massacres, the rise and fall of its empires.

Nothing could be more enchanting than the Chandni Chowk, the “silver street”, the main thoroughfare of Old Delhi. It is a strange mixture of old and new: the most up-to-date cars, horse-drawn tongas, cycles, tramcars with clusters of people clinging on, slow-moving bullock-carts, men, women, and children crossing the road, threading their way along the sidewalk, yelling, singing, praying, begging. And the sacred cows, so leisurely and unconcerned, philosophically surveying the kaleidoscopic scene. The Indian, it appears, does not care to look like his fellow-men, so one finds every variety of costume—turbans, pyjamas, long tunics, shirts with tails hanging outside the trousers, saris, European dress, the fez or shaven heads, shoes from the West, sandals from the East, bracelets on ankle or wrist, veiled faces, nose-rings, and different colour spots on the foreheads denoting the various religions.

Leading off the Chandni Chowk, and no longer laid out geometrically, is a maze of winding lanes edged with rows of stalls displaying merchandise of every kind and colour: fruit, jewels, embroidery, paintings, ivories, pottery, copper vases, flowers, materials, incense, and goodness knows what else. And the crowds disgorged by the narrow “Street” pour down these alleys in a rushing torrent of humanity which carries all before it.

It was the Great Mogul, Shah Jehan, who carved the Chandni Chowk through the old town. The Hindus have a great admiration for this Mahommedan, and aver that the blood of their own race ran in his veins. To him Old Delhi owes its great Mosque; at once majestic and delicate with its marble domes and minarets, it dominates the town. Every day at prayer-time thousands of the faithful gather together in its great interior courtyard to prostrate themselves towards Mecca.

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It was he, too, who built the Red Fort, encircled by a rampart of red sandstone walls which every evening are set aglow by the light of the setting sun. The Red Fort recalls the stories of the Thousand and One Nights: white marble rooms, walls set with precious stones, carved fountains and pools, towers of elegant tracery. The public auditorium reminds one of the wealth and magnificence of ancient times, and the private audience chamber is built of such fine white marble that it looks almost transparent. The Mongols used to sing its praises: "If there is such a thing as an earthly paradise, here it is, here it is."

No, certainly Old Delhi and New Delhi have little in common, save a damp, depressing heat. At night one sees knots of people sleeping in the open—then Delhi looks like some strange gigantic hospital.

On July 11—the day set for our departure—we breakfasted at the Cecil Hotel, the rendezvous of Himalayan climbers. The proprietor is Robert Holtz, himself the secretary of the Delhi section of the Himalayan Club, whose enthusiasm is equalled only by his kindness.

The dining-room was like an oven, and the wretched fans dispiritedly beat the damp, heavy air. We were still half asleep, for we had been up very late at the reception given for us the evening before by M. de Marolles, the *chargé d'affaires*, in the absence of the French Ambassador. There we had met General Williams, commanding the Indian Engineers, who did so much to help our expedition, and also our future companion K. C. Johorey. I wrote of him in my note-book: "A lanky fellow. Very pleasant. Talks like a machine gun. Full of go. Things must hum when he's around." Johorey immediately became Big Jo to us.

We drank our tea philosophically, for we had already been in India three days, and we thought of the three months during which it would take the place of the good wine of France. We couldn't help being a bit nervous, for the Sherpas had not yet arrived! We should have to postpone the start. . . . At this moment an Indian servant brought a message that I was wanted on the telephone.

"Hullo, Bernard, Henri speaking. They're here."

An hour later our Sherpas arrived. We gazed at them

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blissfully, like children to whom Father Christmas has promised: "If you are good, one day you shall go to the Himalaya and I will give you some Sherpas." Our future companions looked very weary, for they had been travelling four days and four nights; the journey from Darjeeling is quite an expedition in itself. They had to go as far down as Calcutta, and from there travel almost right across India, which was sweltering in the heat of the monsoon.

"All right, Ang Tharkay?"

"All right," he replied, nodding his head and smiling. It was grand to find him just as simple and unassuming as ever. His triumphant visit to Paris had not in the least altered his modest bearing—proof of great strength of character. The rest of the party were delighted with his open face, keen eyes, and quick intelligence. He introduced his Sherpas: Pemba Norbu, Sir John Hunt's personal Sherpa on Everest, with his plaited hair hanging down his back over an outsize pair of white shorts, or rather shorts that had been white on leaving Darjeeling; Pa Norbu, quiet, with narrow, slanting eyes, a true Tibetan type, who had been with the Lyons expedition to Nanda Devi in 1951; the cheerful Ang Phuter, Ang Tharkay's brother; Gyaldzen, with sparkling mischievous eyes; and finally Kami, aged twenty-one, the Benjamin of the party.

"And now go and rest: you need it. This evening at six o'clock we leave for the station. *Atcha?*"¹

"*Atcha!*"

We still had some shopping to do and letters to write; then in the evening we left the Cecil Hotel for the station in torrential rain. We had heard of the monsoon; now we knew what it was like. The station was as crowded as St. Lazare in the evening rush hour. But the suburban travellers here would not have passed unnoticed on the train for Bois Colombes. The sacred cows withstood the rush stolidly, never budging an inch and holding up passengers and taxis. Nalni Jayal discreetly explained to a policeman who we were, and he stopped the traffic to let our two tons of stuff, divided up into a dozen containers and six cases—not counting our personal luggage—through to the platform. Johorey had commandeered porters, and he kept

¹ Hindustani for "agreed".

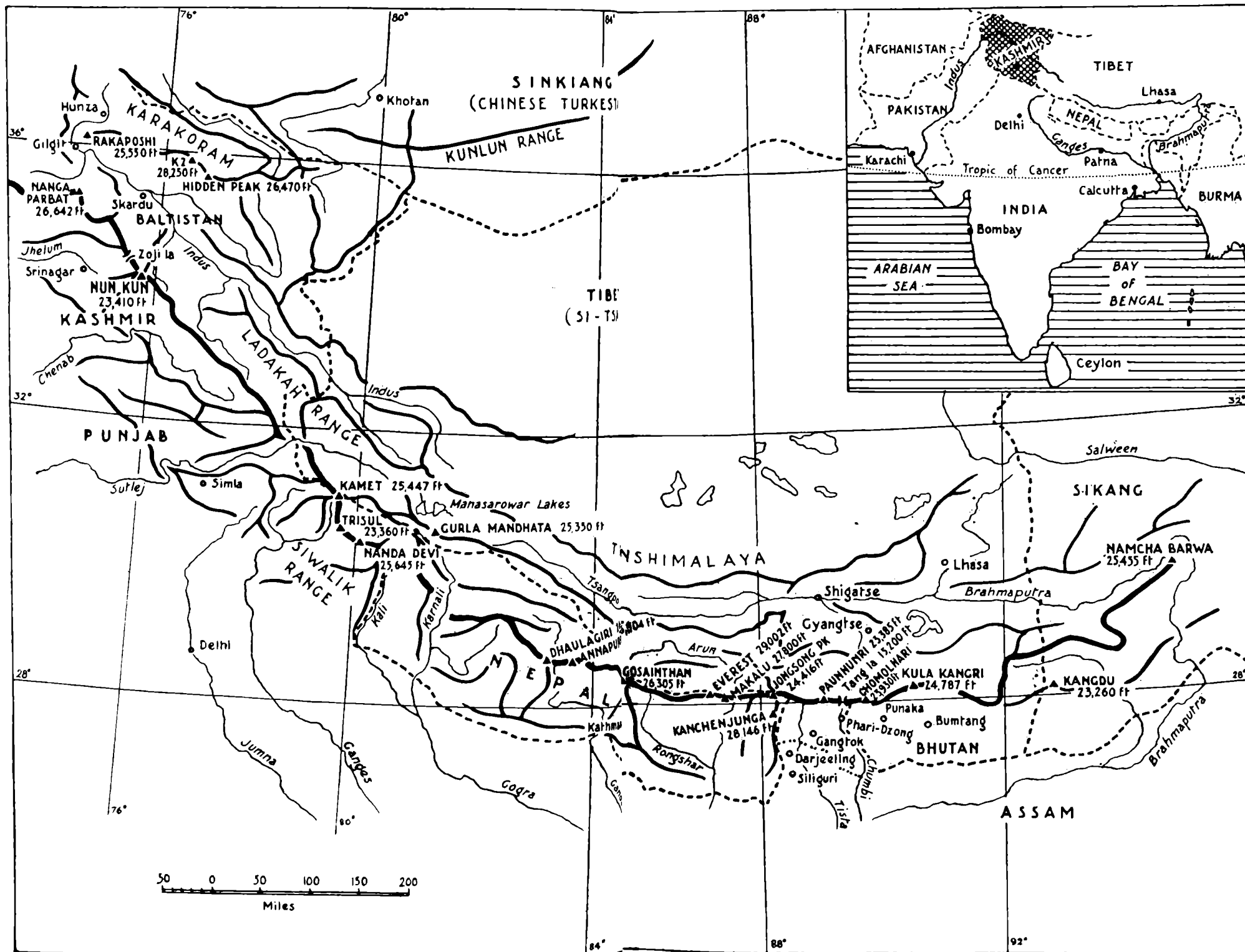
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them hard at it, issuing orders in a guttural voice. The Sherpas kept an eye on the procession. Ang Tharkay, to whom we had confided the eighty-pound case of rupees in coin, hugged our treasure close.

The heat was just as oppressive and humid as ever, and inside the station the smoke from the engines made the atmosphere even more difficult to breathe. The platforms were littered with people, some sleeping on the ground in clusters, others attending to their feet, eating, shouting to each other, singing, or yelling. Soldiers slowly moved along with their bundles, beggars with their wooden bowls, sellers of fruit, sweets and chewing-gum, newspaper men yelling the latest news, women with babies in arms and others frantically clutching their mothers' saris. Above the din could be heard the gasping of the engines and the ringing of bells.

At a quarter-past eight a whistle blew: the train for Pathankot and the Himalaya was about to leave. On the platform to wish us good luck were Henri and Françoise Dumont, Serge de Gunzbourg and General Williams—full of good wishes for Johorey and Nalni Jayal, whom he had taken to Kamet the year before.

The train started. Handkerchiefs waved, and continued to wave until they disappeared in a cloud of dust. Some words of H. W. Tilman's came to mind: "A man who is bent on getting to the Himalaya will find ways and means."



THE HIMALAYA, SHOWING THE PRINCIPAL PEAKS

CHAPTER II

IN THE HEART OF KASHMIR

IT was still raining torrentially when in the early hours of the following morning the train drew up at Pathankot, the terminus of the East Punjab Railway. Equipment, Sherpas, and sahibs were stowed away in two trucks and a station-wagon, and we started off for Udhampur and Jammu, in the north. Everything had been laid on for us by General Williams, and indeed all along our route we were taken care of by the Indian Engineers, who had been given orders to help us.

We made good time along the magnificent tarmacked Srinagar road. Srinagar is the Venice of India, for the River Jhelum flows through it, and all round are lakes which at sunset look like highly coloured magazine illustrations. This enchanting place, with its peaceful house-boats, is a summer refuge for wealthy Indians and visitors who want to escape the rigours of the monsoon.

An hour after leaving we were stopped by the customs, for we were about to enter the State of Jammu Kashmir. Kashmir proper, which lies farther to the north, is the home of Pandit Nehru; it has four million inhabitants in an area the size of Great Britain, and it has always been the haunt of philosophers, painters, and poets, who have hailed it as a new earthly paradise. This magnificent country of lakes, rivers, valleys, forests, glaciers, and mountains has often been compared to Switzerland; but it is a Switzerland of Himalayan, that is to say gigantic, proportions. In Kashmir lies one of the highest summits of the world—Nanga Parbat, 26,642 feet high. And of course, Nun Kun!

The famous valley of Kashmir, eighty miles long and twenty-five miles broad, is called "an emerald set in pearls", for it is always green, and for nine months of the year its mountains are snow covered. Naturally this valley has a legend. It is said that once upon a time it was inhabited by a devil who lived on human flesh. A wise man called Kashyapa was much affected

In the Heart of Kashmir

by this misfortune, and he prayed that it might be amended. His prayer was granted by the goddess Sharika, who disguised herself in order to take the devil unawares and heave a great stone at him. The stone was transformed into a hill, and the devil was buried under it. Then Kashyapa made a hole in the hill and drained the waters into a great lake, and thus the valley became habitable. Kashyapa had made an excellent job of it.

Since then the valley has known many vicissitudes. As far back as the third century B.C. the celebrated Asoka penetrated into Kashmir, which had first been colonised by the Indo-Aryans, introduced Buddhism, and founded the original city of Srinagar. For many centuries the Hindu and Buddhist faiths were practised side by side. But, under the influence of the philosophers, Kashmir again became the cradle of civilisation and of Indo-Brahman culture. In the eighth century Lalitaditya, one of the greatest sovereigns to govern the country, conquered the neighbouring territories of the Punjab and Central Asia, and Kashmir became part of a great Empire. At the end of the twelfth century the valley came under Islamic influence and, until the end of the sixteenth century, remained one of the most important centres of Indo-Persian civilisation. For the next two hundred years Kashmir was controlled by the Moguls, to whom we owe the archæological treasures in which the country is so rich. From the middle of the eighteenth to the beginning of the nineteenth century it remained under the yoke of the Kings of Kabul. Then, in 1819, the Sikhs took possession, but only for a short time, for in 1848 Kashmir was sold for a handful of gold to the Maharajah of Gulabsingh. Just a century later Kashmir became a democracy, and its present status causes a good many headaches to the United Nations, Pakistan, and India.

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The customs formalities were completed fairly quickly, thanks to a letter of recommendation from the Prime Minister of Kashmir. We continued on our way across a great plain where the colours had been revived by the monsoon, which every summer is hailed all over India as a deliverance. The torrential rain

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had turned to a fine drizzle, from which emerged, phantom-like, strangely-shaped trees and small peasants' houses with pointed roofs. Here and there a yoke of humped oxen could be seen drawing a plough with a barefooted ploughman bent over it, wearing a white loin-cloth and a linen tunic over his shoulders. Two hours later we halted again. But our letter of recommendation was no use this time: the road was cut by a great flood.

About a hundred military lorries and tourist charabancs were held up; with oriental impassivity the occupants waited for the situation to improve, and so did we. However, we had a pleasant surprise, for a big fellow driving a powerful Dodge came splashing through the water to present himself:

“As he didn't see you arrive, General Attal, who commands the base at Udampur, sent me to find you. First of all I will take you across the river, then go back and tow your station-wagon. Your two lorries will follow immediately.”

And so we crossed the river in safety, but we were most impressed by the fury of the flood waters. Then the Dodge went back to fetch the station-wagon. We were not very happy about this operation, and we kept our eyes glued to our equipment.

The crowds on either side of the river were delighted with the unexpected show we put on for them. Right in the middle of the river the Dodge stalled; the engine of the station-wagon was under water; slowly the car drifted, carried along by the force of the current. This was our first Himalayan set-back! The driver of the Dodge did not lose his head: he shortened and tightened the tow-rope of our little van, started up his engine again, got under way and reached the bank safe and sound. It was the same with our two lorries, whose engines were half choked with water. We heaved a sigh of relief.

General Attal had invited us to lunch; but in the event we only reached Udampur the following morning, in time for breakfast, after having spent the night with another general. Never in our lives had we been received by so many generals in so short a time. The congenial commandant was full of admiration for our “daring venture”, and he made us free of any information that might be of use. Jean chatted with the doctor attached to the base.

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“Look out for typhus,” he warned. “You will be passing through an area where it is very prevalent. Don’t sleep on the grass. Don’t stay in native houses. You must take very careful precautions: gloves, trousers tight round the ankles, neck well protected. Spray your clothes with this stuff.”

“Ask him,” I whispered to Jean, “if we ought to wear gas-masks as well.”

At the end of our interview I gave the bottles of germicide to a Sherpa who asked:

“Is it to drink, sahib?”

We said good-bye to General Attal and our caravan proceeded on its way. Soon after Udhampur, the country altered. Valleys succeeded the plains, and were in turn succeeded by hills which became progressively higher and steeper. The road now wound among foothills, and we came to Batote, a delightful small village perched 6,000 feet up among clumps of fir-trees. The air was fresh and a light breeze stirred the trees. Now we were at last quit of the Turkish-bath atmosphere of the plains, we came to life again.

I hurried to the village post office expecting to find a telegram from Pierre Vittoz, and sure enough there was word from him that the Leh-Srinagar plane had been held up by bad weather and that he would join us later. But I was not worried about him. For two years he had been trying for Nun; and this time I knew he would do his utmost to bag it, and would be catching up with us soon. I left two messages for him, one at the post office and the other with the pastor, with directions about our route and plans.

And now forward to Doda: the last stage by car. On the outskirts of the little village we left the main Srinagar road and changed direction from north to east.

Originally we had thought of making for the capital of Kashmir, and thence following the traditional route taken by expeditions to Nun Kun: the Zoji La, Dras, and Suru. But at the last moment permission was refused us for this route, which, since the partition of India, has taken on a “strategic” character. It lies near Pakistan (as, moreover, does Nun, and this constituted an added source of difficulty). So be it! As we could not approach the mountain from the north,

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we would do so from the south. We would carve out our own route.

From Batote to Doda we followed the Chenab for several hours—a powerful river whose turbid waters were swollen by the monsoon rains. We were tremendously impressed by the already Himalayan proportions of the country: everything—gorges, valleys, and mountains—is on such an entirely different scale from Europe. At nightfall the road came to an end: we had reached Doda.

It was from here, sixty miles south of the Nun Kun massif as the crow flies, that we should soon begin the long and round-about march—nearly 120 miles of it—which would eventually bring us to the foot of our mountain.

* * * * *

Doda is a small township typical of Jammu Kashmir. It is half Mahommedan, half Hindu. The Mahommedans have established themselves on the right bank of the river, the Hindus on the left. History explains this state of affairs, for the Arab invasion spread from the north-west. The Hindus wear small ear-rings and plait their hair into a short pigtail which hangs down at the back of their heads. They have clean-cut features and no hair on their faces. The Mahommedans are heavier featured, and though there are, naturally, many resemblances with the Arabs, they have certain peculiarities of their own—long noses, black eyes, and enormous protruding ears.

The population are artisans and cultivators (rice, wheat, and maize), and their livestock are cows, brown oxen, black *méhas* (humped oxen), sheep, and scraggy hens that wander about the streets. From the milk of their animals they make *ghee*, a sort of butter which is used in the preparation of rice and chick-peas called *dal*. It is also used in making their staple diet, *chapattis*, flat cakes made of wheat flour called *atta*.

There were no processions or dances to celebrate July 14 for us Frenchmen! We spent the day unpacking our two tons of gear and dividing it up into 130-pound loads for the mules, which could come half the way with us, thus saving us time and expense, for a mule carries twice as much as a coolie and makes much longer marches. We were watched by an inquisitive

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crowd of villagers who had left their fields and stalls to come and see the show. They squatted round us, elbows on knees, arms sticking out in front, often as though to receive alms. They looked longingly at unknown objects such as skis, ice-axes, rucksacks, and ropes. What was it all about? What had these sahibs come for?

While Claude Kogan, Jean Guillemin, and Michel Desorbay got the loads ready, K. C. Johorey went to change our eighty pounds of rupees in coin—we had thought the natives would not accept any other kind of payment—into notes. This operation took all day. We had to hire a mule and go right up the hill-side where the local Treasury was situated. Then Nalni Jayal and I negotiated for nearly three hours with the authorities over various problems. Mules? We could have about forty. Muleteers? We were to give them six rupees—about nine shillings—per day per beast. Postal services? These would be maintained by porters or else by forest guards, who would carry messages to the nearest post office. Food supplies? We could live off the land, and every facility would be given us for buying food for our future coolies. The deputy-commissioner was a charming and distinguished man, but the nature of our enterprise rather alarmed him, for this was the first time an expedition had been through the country. He dictated a detailed letter to his secretary incorporating all these points, and he ended his statement with the following words: “The men must be well paid, for the journey is fraught with a thousand difficulties and is terribly dangerous.” As he took leave of us he added a final recommendation:

“Look out for leopards, bears, and poisonous snakes.” What with typhus as well, we seemed to have a fair number of enemies!

Towards the end of the evening, while we were all in a shed coping with the loads, a big, fair-haired man with an enormous rucksack, a naval kit-bag under his right arm, and an ice-axe in his left hand, appeared in the doorway: our pastor, Pierre Vittoz! After brief introductions Vittoz explained how he had found us:

“First of all I took a military plane from Leh to Srinagar. This startled everybody, because the plane is the only link

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between the capitals of Ladak and Kashmir, and civilians aren't allowed on it except in very special circumstances. Then I hitched on lorries from Srinagar to Batote. Finally, I took a jeep from Batote to Doda. And here I am," he concluded in his slight Vaudois accent, which came in for a good deal of teasing from us French. It was clear that the pastor was a thoroughly good sort, and we were all delighted. The party was now complete.

Next day we left Doda and went on to Thatri about twenty miles away. For two-thirds of the way the road was fit for cars, and the deputy-commissioner very kindly offered us the use of his jeep. So we decided to be lazy and not leave until some time after the coolies and the Sherpas. It was not a good idea, for we were caught in the midday heat. At every stream we stopped to splash ourselves and fill our hats with water, which we put straight on our heads so as to wet ourselves all over, but the resulting coolness was only temporary and half an hour later our clothes were dry again. Ignorant Europeans that we were, we narrowly escaped sun-stroke, and we arrived at Thatri half dead with thirst and completely exhausted, for we had made a long and unnecessary detour into the bargain. It is at moments like this that one begins to wonder if one was really made for long marches, and whether the call of adventure heard one night as one sat by the fire in slippers, with a pipe, has not been a snare and a delusion.

There was a welcoming bungalow just alongside the river. At last we cooled off a bit as we drank pints of tea which the Sherpas, who had arrived long before us, had brewed up. Ang Tharkay and his friends, all smiles, ministered to our unquenchable thirst, and did all they could to make our halting-place comfortable. These little fellows are really wonderfully thoughtful and devoted. Nevertheless, we spent a restless night, a prey to the incessant onslaughts of mosquitoes. Apparently, too, so the others bitterly complained, I woke them up with my nightmares about serpents! Well, that was the fault of the deputy-commissioner.

Warned by experience, we left early, at 6 a.m, for Kishtwar, just over twenty miles away: it would be our longest march. For hours on end we made our way up the valley of the Chenab.



Members of the Expedition with the Sherpas. Back row: Michel Desorbay, Dr. Jean Guillemin, Pierre Vittoz. Middle row: Bernard Pierre and Claude Kogan with Ang Tharkay between them. Inset: Lieutenant N. D. Jayal and Captain K. C. Johorey.



Gyaldzen.



Pemba Norbu.



Kami.



Ang Phuter.



Ang Tharkay.



Pa Norbu.

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The rushing torrent swept all before it; when it came to an insurmountable obstacle it took avoiding action with a sudden bend almost at right-angles, and then resumed its dead straight course: a remarkable example of Himalayan force. Kashmir scenery is very fine—green pastures, multi-coloured orchards, plantations of green poplars, and yellow paddy fields.

As we went along, we chatted with Pierre Vittoz. His life at Leh, so near to Tibet and to Nun, interested us all greatly, we peppered him with questions:

“How long have you been there?”

“Three years.”

“Are you married?”

“Yes, and I have a son.”

“But your wife must get frightfully bored?”

“Far from it—we are tremendously busy. We have started a small weaving industry and we edit a paper. My wife also acts as nurse. In the evenings we often play chess and bridge. The Ladakis play very well. Time passes quickly for me. I am kept hard at it, for as an evangelist I must visit my flock. I get around on horseback as a rule—though there is a good deal of walking too.”

“What about food?”

“It is mainly based on various types of flour, and it’s a bit monotonous. I thought I was dreaming when I saw the stock of tinned foods you have brought. And I propose to do them justice.”

“Yes, we’d already noticed that! How do you dress as a rule?”

“Like a Tibetan: a long woollen robe down to the ankles with wide sleeves.”

“Is it cold at Leh?”

“Very cold, but one gets accustomed to it.”

“And you speak Tibetan, of course?”

“Fluently. In fact, I intend to compile a Tibetan-English grammar, as there isn’t one.”

“So you’ll be able to understand the Sherpas perfectly. It’s lucky for us to have an interpreter of your standard—it’ll make things much easier. By the way, can you give us an explanation of the Sherpas’ names?”

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“Yes. Ang Tharkay means the strength (*Ang*) that ensues from deliverance (*Tharkay*). Pemba Norbu is the jewel (*Norbu*) born on Saturday (*Pemba*). And Pa Norbu, the jewel born on Friday (*Pa* being an abbreviation of *Passang*). Gyaldzen means the symbol of victory. Ang Phuter means much the same as Ang Tharkay. About Kami I can't say; it is possibly not Tibetan but Mongol. Otherwise it would mean 'good fortune'.”

We then went on to ask Pierre the meaning of Nun Kun.

“The name may have several meanings: salt rock, the crystal willow—owing to the fact that Nun Kun resembles a pyramid of snow and ice. Or more likely it may mean the Lord of Suru, for, seen from Suru, it dominates the landscape.”

Pierre was a fascinating character. The Sherpas quickly took him to their hearts and called him “Nono”, little brother, and he soon became “Nono” to the rest of us too. Thanks to him we began to understand something about mysterious Tibet: and many a time on the approach march, at Base Camp, and at the high camps, he delighted us with his knowledge and his wit.

To-day, as we chatted with him, the miles flew by—we were already half-way. We stopped for a meal beneath the shade of some trees where there were masses of monkeys with black faces, grey silky bodies, and black curling tails half as long again as themselves. The largest and most serious sat on the stones, while the young gambolled about on invisible branches. We laughed at them, and they laughed at us. We made a gesture and they copied it. We were just like children at the Zoo, and in the end we weren't sure who were the monkeys—we or they. Pemba Norbu rocked with laughter and, all in the spirit of the game, was just going to pick up a stone to throw at his partners in fun. Luckily—for the monkeys far outnumbered the men—we were just in time to stop him.

Regretfully we left the monkey valley and entered a vast funnel—in the language of geographers, “a cone of dejection”—which was covered all the way up with square terraced rice fields. The sun was reflected in the water in which men, women, and children were working knee-deep. For over two hours we made our way through this green and yellow sea watched by astonished peasants, who wondered what all this army of mules, muleteers, Tibetans, and sahibs was up to. We asked them

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where Kishtwar was. They pointed to a big plateau, and told us we must follow the winding path for four miles. This lap seemed endless, and we were tired out when at last, at about four o'clock in the afternoon, we reached the gates of the town. Our arrival had been announced, and a bevy of children came out to meet us and gazed at us in utter astonishment.

The centre of the town was an impressive sight. The whole population were gathered in the streets, at the windows, or on the roof-tops. Proud as conquistadors, we passed by, acknowledging with dignified gestures the "*Salaam sahibs!*" of the inhabitants. There was no need to ask the way to the rest-house—the Grand Hotel of the place. These rest-houses were built by the British, at the end of each day's march: one has, of course, to take one's own food, but they are comfortable enough for the night. A crowd of men, women, old people, and children led us towards it, and once arrived the police would protect us from the natives, who wished to get a close-up of the explorers. No man is a prophet in his own land, and one has to go a long way to receive such touching homage.

After the first sensation aroused by our triumphal march had subsided, I questioned the local big-wigs. How far could we continue with our mules? Some declared we could go right to the foot of Nun, but they had never been there themselves! Others said that a few stages farther there would no longer be a mule-path and that we should have to engage porters. There was no knowing who was right. We had to come to a decision about flour for the porters, for after Kishtwar the country would be too poor for us to buy any quantity on the spot. In any case it was now too late in the day for business, and a rest day in the cool air of Kishtwar—the village stands at about 5,500 feet—would do us a lot of good and allow us to explore the situation at leisure. We couldn't afford any mistakes, for a false estimate might have extremely serious consequences.

Next day, after much calculation and hesitation, a policy of caution was adopted—"neither too much, nor too little". It was Gandhi who said, "My love of absolute truth has itself taught me the beauty of compromise." The amount required was fixed at eight hundredweight of wheat flour. One porter consumes just over two pounds of flour per day for his *chapattis*,

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but one had to have a good margin of safety over and above that. If necessary, we should certainly be able to supplement our store a bit from the village where we recruited the porters. The amount of *atta* needed depended on the number of miles remaining after the point at which we had to take on coolies for transport. Unfortunately we were unable to get any exact idea of the situation, for the local authorities all had different views. There were also other questions to settle: for instance, the reception at the Kishtwar post office of the messages sent by the expedition, and the settling of the muleteers' wages—they were fixed at six rupees per day per mule (the men from Doda now went back). The discussions went on endlessly with our two officers and Pierre Vittoz, who also spoke perfect English, taking part. In the evening we were all quite dazed after so much talking. Jean was even more tired than the rest of us, for the sick people of the town came to consult him—and there were plenty of them. One of them, an old chap of seventy-six, complained that he suffered from heart disease and chronic constipation. It was a bit late to start curing him!

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On July 18 we left Kishtwar with an extra seven mules to carry the eight hundredweight of flour, and an official of the Public Treasury whom the deputy-commissioner of Doda had delegated to go with us. This inspector had orders to help us in our dealings with the people and with the local authorities. The weather was magnificent but terribly hot. Would we be out of range of the monsoon? During my correspondence with Pierre Vittoz, he had written that the approach march would be made in rain, and the ascent in the sun. Well, as long as it was not going to be the other way round . . .

At the foot of the plateau on which Kishtwar is situated, we came to the Chenab once more. We crossed it and followed the banks of one of its tributaries, the Marau, which runs due north. An increasingly magnificent view unfolded before us during the march of seventeen miles which eventually brought us to Ikhale (5,741 feet).

The Marau had carved a deep bed like a trench for its foaming waters, and on either bank rose mighty walls dotted here and



On the approach the Marau valley.

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there with giant conifers. By its wildness the scene reminded one of a valley in the Grisons, but here everything was magnified three or four times. Nature is no longer on a human scale: Jean Guillemin said he felt like a Walt Disney character, lost in a giants' world.

The following day, between Ikhale and Lopara (6,069 feet), the country had completely changed. This fifteen-mile march lay through typical sub-Himalayan scenery. The flanks of the mountain at whose foot flowed the Marau were covered with luxuriant vegetation, and for hours we went through forests rich with every kind of tree—pines, maples, willows, sycamores, elms, larches, plane-trees, firs, oaks, cedars. It was pure delight to walk in this cool paradise, filled with the song of birds.

But next morning, before starting for Hanzale, the muleteers struck, thus momentarily putting an end to our enchantment. But what expedition has not had its strike? Alleging the undue length of the last two marches, the muleteers refused to continue unless they received double pay for them. They made a fine row, shouting at the tops of their voices and waving their arms. It was a pity we hadn't a tape-recorder! I knew perfectly well that we should have to make some concession, but, all the same, I wanted to limit the amount. The muleteers unloaded their animals. But that didn't worry us unduly, for we knew they would not leave us without first receiving their pay.

Then I gave it to be understood that we would send them back and take porters. (We should have been very worried if we had had to begin using our flour so soon!) An hour went by, with talking on both sides; watching out of the corner of our eyes, we tried to guess which way the wind was blowing in the ranks of the muleteers. There appeared to be a certain wavering, and I took advantage of it to propose that we should pay them double, six rupees, for the rest day at Kishtwar, a day that by rights should only have been paid at the rate of three rupees. In this way the sahibs would not lose face, as the increase would not concern the pay for the actual marches. After fresh palavers the muleteers accepted this offer, saddled the mules, and started loading up. However, they insisted that the last two days' pay should be given to them on the spot. Were they

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afraid that we should vanish into thin air with our two tons of baggage?

The strike had made us lose four hours, and it was not until late in the morning that we left for Hanzale (6,889 feet on the map) which, fortunately, was only ten miles distant. We had satisfactorily overcome the difficulty. Tilman was quite right when he said that the major problem of all Himalayan expeditions was transport.

The march began with a long walk through forest, which was lucky, for the heat was overpowering, and the sun's rays struck through the trees, which rose straight as rods. The route followed the Marau pretty well continuously, and we were cooled by the spray from its waters. The torrent hurled itself furiously over the dams caused by rock-falls, and soon became nothing but a series of boiling cascades.

The scenery grew progressively wilder as we approached Hanzale. In the distance we could see the snows of the Brama massif, where 6,000-metre peaks still wait to be conquered. And like the scenery, the inhabitants grew less civilised: a small boy busy digging an irrigation channel dropped his implements and fled yelling when he caught sight of us.

Yet in the village of Hanzale we were well received, in particular by the teacher, who took his classes in the open air. He was delighted when we asked him if we might film the scene, and played his part to perfection before the camera. He was in fact about to give his pupils a lesson in geography, with a map of the Himalaya. So he went on with his class and here, translated by Nalni Jayal, are his words: "The Himalaya is the longest range of mountains in the world. The highest summit is Everest. Next comes . . . Nun Kun! And it is these heroes you see before you who are going to attempt its conquest." The children all turned round admiringly to see what sort of a guy a hero was!

After the filming was over, the teacher asked the children to conduct us to the rest-house, at the far end of the village. As we went along Claude distributed some sweets which at first they regarded with mistrust, but ended by sucking with open relish. They even asked for more, encouraging all their little brothers and sisters to come and join in the distribution. And when we

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were settled in the rest-house all the teacher's authority was required to protect us from their enthusiasm. Before taking his leave the teacher saluted in Hindu fashion: he bowed while placing his hands on his chest, palms cupped, fingers together, in the image of a lotus flower.

At this moment the muleteers arrived all smiles, pleased by the short march. As we were in generous mood we distributed cigarettes. Relations with the transport syndicate had certainly improved since morning.

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On July 21 we reached Napachi (7,217 feet). It was just a week since we left Doda, and we had covered over ninety miles. The day's march had been very short, but rather trying—always on account of the heat. Once again the scenery had changed completely. After having spent two days making our way up a deep valley carved by the Marau, to our surprise we came to a great plain which very much resembled the plain across which the Isère flows near Voiron. The Marau now spread out and meandered lazily along. Napachi seems to be a fairly rich agricultural district—rice, maize, and barley are cultivated, apple and walnut trees grow in the orchards, and the cattle graze on fine pastures—yet the inhabitants appeared to be poor, backward, and deficient. They had never seen a doctor. They live in wooden huts something like cheese-makers' chalets in the high Alps, where the cattle are kept on the ground floor and the family, often very numerous, live above. The natives are very timid and go in terror of bears; when they learned that we had no firearms they showed their disappointment. To protect their crops against these marauders who come down from the mountains after nightfall, these good people have no other resource but to make a noise, and they let out short, melancholy screeches. Nights at Napachi were lugubrious and noisy.

Our first concern was to find out about the way to Nun Kun. (The Napachi officials spoke Urdu, whereas at Doda they had spoken Hindustani.) Their answer was quite definite: the way was too steep and too narrow for mules. So we should have to part with our muleteers, which caused us no heartache.

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Settling-up brought fresh difficulties, for our men insisted upon a tip. But now we had the whip hand, and we replied that, on the contrary, we would give only half-pay for this last march, which had been ridiculously short. Hearing this, the muleteers did not insist further, but bad-temperedly started to unload the mules anywhere—though still near to the rest-house. They purposely let the loads fall anyhow, and pushed the beasts about roughly, bawling away all the time. It seemed to be infectious, and the mules started up too, so there was a fine hullabaloo. Ang Tharkay restored order to all this confusion; he carefully checked the baggage and wrote in his note-book each man's name with the loads which his mule or mules were carrying.

Ang Tharkay was indeed a treasure. He is a first-class cook—there is no one to equal him in preparing rice and making curried chicken—and he is a Sirdar whom his Sherpas regard with the utmost respect; he could cope with any situation, and his knowledge seemed inexhaustible. There is nothing he does not know about expeditions. Tilman has described him as “a sort of Jeeves, Admirable Crichton, and Napoleon rolled into one, but taking himself less seriously than any of these redoubtable men”.

At last the muleteers were paid off, and it was with a sigh of relief that we saw them go. We could now work out a plan of action in peace and quiet.

The first question to settle was the porters. We needed about a hundred coolies; the official assigned to us by the deputy-commissioner would see about recruiting them. This tax-collector, whose honesty we had no reason to doubt, turned out later to be a downright rascal; our coolies told us that he deducted a high commission from their wages, threatening that he would not engage them if they refused to give him *baksheesh*.

This fellow now consulted the local authorities to find out how long it would take to muster a hundred porters. They told him four days, for there were not enough men at Napachi, and they would have to be looked for in the neighbourhood. This was bad news. We certainly needed two days in which to repack the loads—from 130 pounds they would have to be cut down to a coolie's load of between fifty and sixty pounds. But four days was too much. So to save time I decided to split the party into

two groups. Pierre Vittoz, Claude Kogan, and Nalni Jayal would leave in two days' time with two Sherpas, Pemba Norbu and Gyaldzen, and the porters recruited from Napachi itself. The object of this small vanguard would be to reconnoitre the route and choose a site for our future Base Camp. The main contingent would follow two days later, when all the details of the second and final phase of the approach march had been settled.

Another outstanding question was the coolies' food. We were told it was about fifty-five miles from Napachi to the foot of Nun, and Nalni Jayal and K. C. Johorey checked the distance on the Survey of India maps. Fifty-five miles meant a five days' march. One hundred porters equalled 220 pounds of wheat-flour per day. We should therefore need nine hundredweight and we had only seven.

So the tax-collector was instructed to recruit a hundred porters, ten to leave on July 23, the rest on the 25th, and to procure two hundredweight of *atta*. Off he went to his official headquarters, where the authorities were awaiting him, saying that he would let us know next day the result of his "negotiations". "What about rates of pay?" I asked him. "I will talk to you about that to-morrow also," he replied, prudently refusing to commit himself. So more talks loomed before us.

Sure enough, late next morning I received the following message from him: "The village head-men propose seven rupees per man-day. This seems a lot to me, but they insist that the porters will be running great danger, that they have much work to do, and that if they leave their fields the bears will come and eat the crops. I said this was blackmail. After hours of discussion I have succeeded in obtaining the following conditions: five rupees per day; half to be paid in advance. I imagine you will agree. I await you here, where the bearer of this message will guide you; I cannot leave, I have too much work."

I was very angry when I read this message, and so were the others. There was a chorus of protest, and Claude, who was treasurer of the expedition and who is a very economical creature, was scandalised:

"They're just trying to cheat us. You're not going to accept, I hope."

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“Of course not.”

There was really no reason why we should accept. No expedition, save in quite exceptional circumstances, had ever paid more than three rupees per day, including food. The deputy-commissioner of Doda had confirmed this figure and advised us not to let ourselves be cheated into paying more.

We left the others to get on with preparations for the advance party, and to repack the loads for the main party, and seizing our raincoats—for it had been pelting since the night before—Nalni Jayal, Johorey, and I rushed off to find the tax-collector and his acolytes.

The rest-house was quite a distance from the village, and the tax-office was right at the far end; it took us nearly three-quarters of an hour to get there, and as we paddled through the wet my temper had time to cool. At last we reached the chalet, and were taken up some very steep stairs and ushered into a large, ill-lit room.

The whole tribunal was assembled round a table; the tax-collector presided, like a judge with his assessors. They saluted us with respect—after all, we were the sahibs—and chairs were brought for us. We sat down slowly and deliberately, just to show we were in no hurry. Time, remember, is not of much account in India.

After a moment's silence the tax-collector began:

“These gentlemen,” he said, indicating the assembly, “cannot accept anything less than five rupees per day.”

I did not reply, but nonchalantly put down a fat packet of notes on the table and then looked at the delegates from the villages. They were fascinated by the money, and their eyes betrayed them. To a district like this, which had seen no tourist for many a long day, the arrival of an expedition was a source of wealth that must not be missed. Another silence. With studied calm I said to the tax-officer, who translated:

“We cannot pay more than three rupees a day. And we certainly shan't pay half that sum in advance, but a quarter to-day, another quarter the day we leave, and the rest on arrival at Base Camp. It must be clearly understood that we supply food for the journey out only, and not for the return.”

I shall spare you all the arguments advanced by one side and

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the other, as the talks dragged out for over two hours. Nalni used subtlety, K. C. was forceful (he spoke of calling in the Army from Srinagar!); they were both extremely helpful. Several times we made as if to go, and of course picked up the bundle of rupees—an action which each time provoked a gasp of apprehension.

When the moment was ripe I played my trump-card. I showed a letter from the Prime Minister of Kashmir. Most politely I threatened the village head-men and the Mayor of Napachi with the Government's displeasure; I would make a report to Srinagar upon our return. At the moment we had got them down to four rupees. Translated by the tax-collector, the letter produced a great effect: they now came down to three rupees. By way of compensation we gave in on one point: we would pay a third of the sum immediately, instead of a quarter. For the return journey the coolies were to be responsible for their own food. Finally, if all went well, we would give good *baksheesh* and cigarettes.

Two other questions were settled at the same time. When the expedition returned there would naturally be fewer loads, and seventy porters would be enough. They must be at the Base Camp on August 28; the wages would be the same. Secondly, we would employ two messengers, who would be paid one rupee per day during the whole time they were employed. Messages would be carried rapidly to Kishtwar by the forest guards, who would relay them from village to village.

When we took leave of these dignitaries we were the best of friends, and they could not be polite enough to us. The day was won. Upon our return to the rest-house in triumph, we were congratulated by Jean Guillemin, not usually give to praising, but neither did he like spending money unnecessarily.

In the meantime the poor fellow was snowed under with work. The whole neighbourhood of Napachi had learned that a doctor had arrived, and there was a tremendous crowd waiting to consult him. It looked like the *Cours des Miracles* of medieval Paris: the maimed, the goitrous, women who wanted children, women who didn't want them, children with rickets or with enormous cysts, asthmatics, rheumatics, and so on. A father brought his son in his arms. The boy's foot was full of pus

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and so swollen that it was nearly double the normal size. The M.O. disinfected the wound, which had been covered with a plaster of cow dung, put on a thick dressing, gave him sulphonamides and directions for the treatment to be followed. When Jean saw his patient again a month and a half later, he was walking like the rest of us. The effect of such treatment upon people who know nothing of medicine is incredible.

So, while for hours on end the doctor patiently performed his duties, Claude, Pierre, Michel, Ang Tharkay, and the Sherpas finished their preparations for departure. By the end of the evening all was ready, and the loads for the main party were also completed. We should now be able to rest for two days before the bulk of the porters arrived. For Jean and myself it was the first rest since we had left Paris, and for this the rest-house, which stood among fir-trees, was ideal. That evening, in the moonlight, we saw some magnificent silver peaks over 13,000 feet high. Out of the dark came mournful cries, the howling of the peasants to frighten the bears. We had better barricade ourselves in, or else the bears might be after us!

On July 23 Claude, Pierre, Nalni, Pemba Norbu, and Gyaldzen said good-bye, in the rain. Though we were looking forward to our two rest days, at heart we envied them. "*A bientôt!* See you at Base Camp!"

We were not far from our goal. Fifty-five miles—five days' march—and 8,000 feet to make in height; then, at last, we should be at the foot of Nun.



Crossing the Zaz Nal. Inset: Mahommed Sheik, who supervised the construction of the bridge.



Coolies resting on the way to Base Camp: Nun in the background.

Fording the Mandik Sar.



CHAPTER III

NUN KUN

AT six-thirty on July 25, almost before the sun was up, our ninety porters arrived gesticulating, jabbering, prying round the rest-house in search of empty boxes or tins, sizing up the loads and trying to guess which were the lightest. They were jolly creatures, child-like and always smiling—except when they were on strike. And when one asked, “*Chabash?*”¹ they invariably replied, “*Chabash!*”

The Napachi authorities, with the tax-collector at their head, very properly took part in the preparations for our departure. They made the coolies file past one by one and gave them the advance on their pay, as arranged. By way of receipt and signature each man affixed his thumb-print on a large sheet of parchment, and the ninety right-hand thumb-prints made a curious work of art.

Next, each coolie, counting and re-counting his rupees, was directed towards the “departure centre”, where Ang Tharkay was in charge, taking each man’s name, allotting him a load, and noting the details of the contents. The coolies fixed the loads on their backs with ropes which they had brought themselves, and then in small groups left the rest-house and were lost to view over the countryside. We wondered if we’d ever see our loads and porters again, but Ang Tharkay was very reassuring:

“It is always like this, sahibs,” he told us with his broad grin. “I’ve been doing this for years, and I’ve never lost a thing.” And with this we had to be content.

These coolies looked quite different from the muleteers. The latter wore very light clothes—white cotton trousers and shirts with the tails hanging outside—whereas the porters were dressed more warmly; strong linen or woollen trousers, big closely woven woollen coats coming half-way down their thighs, and a turban or cap. The long, wide flannel belt which they wind round their waists and then throw over their shoulders serves many uses: to

¹ All right.

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carry small loads, as a blanket for bivouacs, and so on. Their calves were tightly bound with woollen puttees, which protected them against the cold and, so they said, against varicose veins. On their feet they wore ingeniously woven straw sandals, and no porter failed to carry a small stock of them, for they wear out quickly. All these coolies—some of them in rags—with all this gear, made one think of Napoleon's soldiers leaving for the campaign in Italy.

These men are mountain folk and fairly strongly built, though there are some weakly specimens, and on an average they are about five feet six inches tall. They have typically Kashmiri faces—long with dark eyes, black hair, prominent noses, and protruding ears. They have magnificent teeth, though they never use tooth-brush or paste, but only a little wooden stick with which they rub vigorously—a practice also employed by the Indians in Peru. Their personal baggage consists of the clothing they wear plus a large flat copper plate on which they make their *chapattis*, a large cup, also of copper, for their drink, and a sack containing their supplies of *atta*.

They are certainly experts in what might be called the Tilman system of travelling light. (One of my British friends who was on one of his expeditions confided to me that Tilman would allow only the absolute essentials, and that this quota was cut down by half on the day of departure. I don't know what Tilman could have done to reduce these coolies' belongings!)

All the porters had now left except one who was trying to fix an enormous sack full of tinned food on to his back. Michel took pity on him and held out a rubber mat which would protect his back from painful contact with the tins. The man looked closely at this object, turned it this way and that, smiled—he had never seen anything like it before—and then folded the mat, put it on top of his load, and went tearing off! It was eight o'clock when we finally left, and the weather was magnificent. The whole population of Napachi had taken up positions on either side of the path, reminding us of the crowds watching the *Tour de France*. On leaving the village we came to the Marau, which makes a wide bend to the east. We crossed it by a rustic swing bridge, which swayed so much that we felt seasick, and

began to make our way up the side of one of its tributaries, the Rin Nal, which flowed down from the north.

Another small village, Yurod, consisting of wooden chalets very like those you find in Savoy, had grown up at the junction of the two rivers. Here, too, everyone had turned out on to their doorsteps and watched us go by with unconcealed interest. There was even a little triumphal archway erected in the centre of the village, and we wondered whether it was in our honour. But the children looked very scared; the small ones hid in their mothers' skirts, and some of the older ones jumped into the ditch like frightened goats. We were interviewed by the village schoolmaster, who was also the correspondent of a Kashmiri newspaper. He didn't quite understand all the names, and later we read, instead of Michel Desorbay, Maréchal Desorbay: enough to make Captain Johorey and Lieutenant Jayal green with envy.

For many hours we followed the Rin Nal valley, admiring the magnificent forests and their entrancing glades. My travelling companion was none other than the tax-collector. No doubt on the principle that travel was good for the young—and I wouldn't be the one to deny this—he had decided to accompany us as far as the last rest-house. He thought he might be of use to us in dealing with the inhabitants. But I think in reality he was not sorry to visit this district, which he helped to administer by relieving it, on behalf of the Government, of those good jingling rupees. This official was an intelligent fellow, who spoke and wrote English very well. It was a real pleasure to talk to him, and I took the opportunity of asking him all sorts of questions about local affairs.

* * * * *

The administrative set-up is relatively simple. Each district is divided into *tahsils* (for example Kishtwar). Each *tahsil* is made up of several villages (Yurod, Napachi, which we had just been through). At the head of each district there is a deputy-commissioner. And at the head of each *tahsil* a *tahsildar*. At the head of each village, a mayor or *lambardar*. Several villages are grouped together under the authority of a *patwari*, and several *patwaris* under a *girdawar*.

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All these officials are appointed by the Government, except the village mayors, who are elected by the inhabitants (this last is a recent measure, one of the new democratic procedures lately introduced into Kashmir). The *lambadar* is not assisted by a municipal council, as in France, although at Kishtwar there was a body rather like it, and his function bears only the slightest resemblance to that of a French mayor. He certainly attends to all questions affecting the life of his village, but apparently his main job is to help the administration assess the taxes and collect them. For this he receives a commission of five per cent (which encourages him to do his job thoroughly). I asked how the tax was fixed, and he explained that the basic rate had been fixed forty years ago, but the actual tax—which ranges from one to eight annas for a twentieth of a hectare ¹—varies according to the fertility of the ground and the nature of the crop.

The *tahsildar* is responsible for the administration of his *tahsil*. He acts as chief magistrate in all criminal affairs (a judge deals with civil cases); and he also has to collect the taxes of the *tahsil*. The parts played by the *patwaris* and the *girdawars* do not appear to be very well defined, although I gathered that they supervised the redistribution of land. The coming of democracy was followed by a radical reform, still quite recent (1950), which broke up the big estates of the *zamindars*, or landed proprietors. Now the land belongs to those who cultivate it, and no-one has the right to own more than 182 kanals.² The duties of the *patwaris* and the *girdawars* seem to include supervising work in the fields, as well as checking the harvest yield and suggesting improvements in agricultural technique.

Finally, there are the *chaukidars*, minor officials rather like our forest guards, who report all criminal offences to the *tahsildar*. But murder and theft are extremely rare. In this particular *tahsil* there had been only one crime in four years, and that was due to jealousy—a man had killed his wife. And that can happen anywhere in the world. Theft of crops is practically unknown. It is also the *chaukidars* who keep the register of births,

¹ This would equal about 600 square yards; there are sixteen annas in one rupee, which is worth one shilling and sixpence.

² One kanal is about 600 square yards. The total amount would be about twenty acres.

marriages, and deaths. The boys cannot marry until they are eighteen, and the girls until they are fourteen.

The main crops are maize, barley, wheat, and rice, and of these rice is the staple food. The harvests are not always big enough, and to prevent famine the Government has to send help. Vegetables are also cultivated: potatoes and chick-peas, for example. There are quite a number of orchards, growing apples, walnuts, etc. The livestock is mostly horned cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and mules.

These are rather meagre resources, and the Government are doing their best to improve the situation. They are trying to introduce the use of artificial fertilisers, to supply selected animals to improve the herds, and to lend tractors. The forests are the property of the State, but the timber rights are put up for auction to private companies, with safeguards against deforestation.

The *tahsil* exports spices to India—saffron in particular—as well as a medicinal plant, *kuth*, and above all, cocoons: the breeding of silk-worms is highly developed. Those Kashmiri silks aroused the silk merchant in me (that is my job in civilian life). To these exports must be added wood. The country imports salt, tea, clothing, and sugar.

“But in fact,” the tax-collector admitted, “within the *tahsil* nearly everything is done by barter: grain is exchanged for wool, and clothes are often made by the villagers themselves.”

So the economic situation is not particularly brilliant, and in some ways it is decidedly archaic. The agricultural resources do not increase in proportion to the population (each family has four or five children); and this presents the serious problem which preoccupied Malthus a century ago.

I asked another question:

“The land seems to be very fertile. Can’t the output be improved by irrigation?”

“Yes, a big canal is to be built near Kishtwar. Then it will be possible to increase the acreage of rice at the expense of barley and maize. It will also make water-power possible.” I had indeed been struck by the potential wealth represented by the great rivers and rushing torrents of Kashmir.

“But,” I went on, “if cultivation is increased at Kishtwar, and

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even if an industry is started—for instance, wood or medicinal herbs—how will you manage to export your goods since there is no road?”

“Just now the Government is constructing one. The first stage, Doda to Thatri, will be completed in a year. But the second stage from Thatri to Kishtwar will take many years to finish. As for the canal, it is not yet started. It is only a project, to realise it needs a great deal of money. And the Government is not exactly rich.”

The inspector went on to tell me about the population of the *tahsil*. In an area extending a hundred miles from north to south and sixty east and west there were only about 65,000 inhabitants. To this permanent population must be added the nomad tribes. These arrive in the spring, coming from Jammu and surrounding districts, with flocks which they fatten on the high pastures above the 10,000-foot level; they leave again in the autumn. Although these pastures are common property, the nomads pay a tax.

The expectation of life is about forty years, yet the infantile mortality rate does not exceed ten per cent. But health arrangements are bad. The only resident doctor in the *tahsil* is at Kishtwar (from Kishtwar to Napachi is sixty miles) and the nearest hospital is at Srinagar—four days' march and then half a day's drive. So the sick leave things to nature. Confinements are handled in each village by a midwife who has become a specialist through practice.

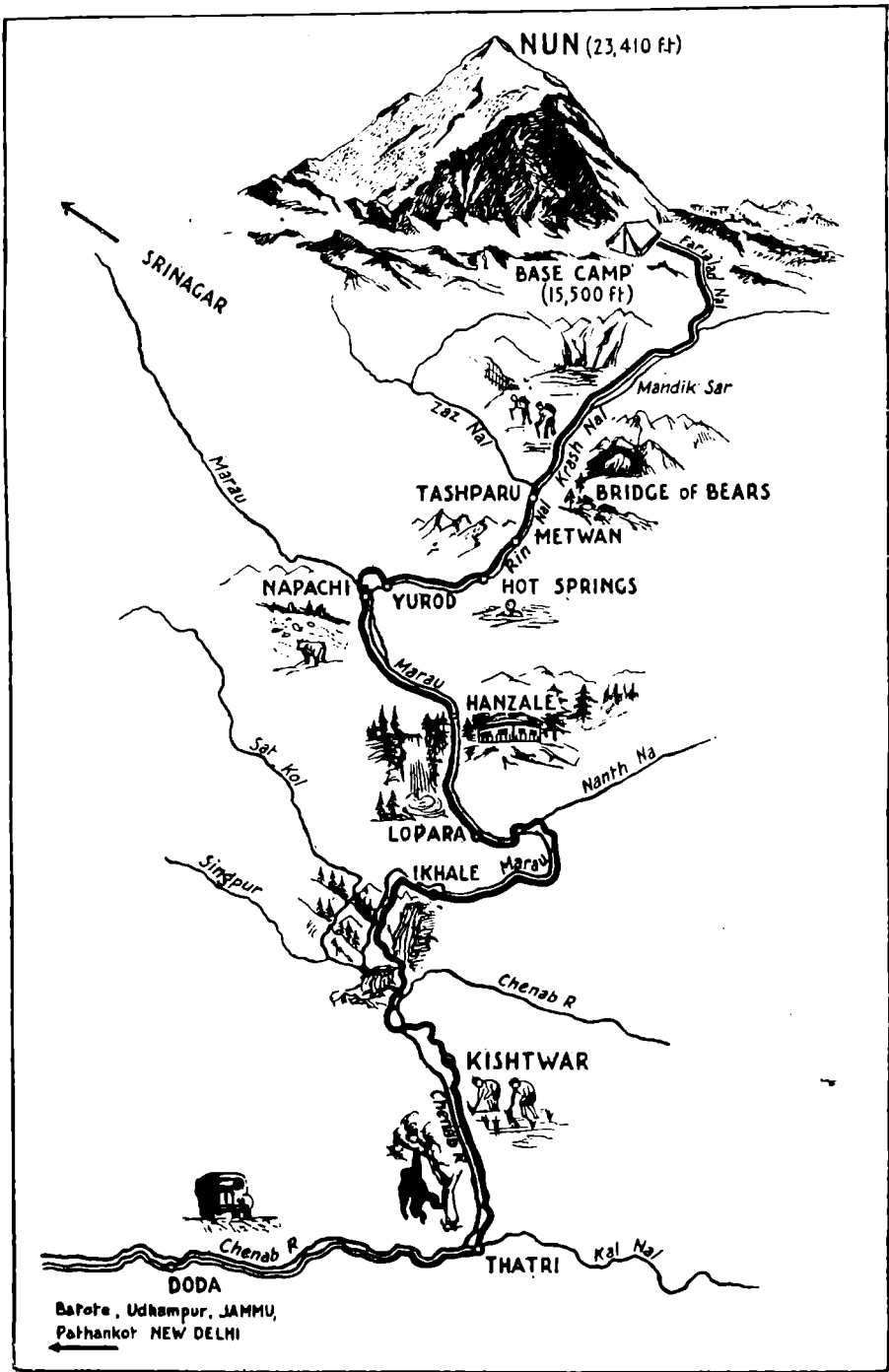
At Napachi the population is mainly Mahomedan: there is a mosque, and the children are taught the Koran. But in other places, Doda for example, some of the inhabitants are Mahomedan, others Hindu. The two religions live on good terms with one another, and each observes its own feasts.

“What about the schools?”

“There are two. They were opened fifteen years ago.”

“Are they free?”

“Yes, what we call primary education is free. But many parents prefer to employ the children in the fields. Some of the intelligent ones are sent to Jammu to continue their studies. They are assisted by the village, which is proud to have produced such prodigies.”



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“Here’s a last question: Do the people in the parts we’ve been through take an interest in politics?”

“As the schools opened only fifteen years ago, most of the men in the villages are still illiterate. Barely a third of the population of Napachi know how to read and write Urdu. The villagers pay little attention to politics, and understand nothing about them, and we don’t get newspapers here. The people are too taken up with their everyday worries—life’s hard and money’s scarce and they just keep going, and that’s the main thing. Sometimes political workers, people who make politics their profession, come to visit them. But these propagandists don’t make much headway. All the same, people reckon that things are better since the departure of the Maharajah. There is more liberty, for there used to be no appeal against arbitrary despotism. Generally speaking, the villagers accept all political changes, even important ones, provided their interests are not interfered with or their way of life affected.”

Kashmir peasants are certainly not the only ones to feel like this!

* * * * *

We now came to Hot Springs, 7,900 feet, after a march of twelve miles—the maximum stage for porters. Our rest-house was hidden among fir trees on a terrace overhanging the thundering Rin Nal. This amazingly wild and savage gorge is set between steep walls to which cling giant trees of every species. In front of us immense rock walls, contorted by Himalayan upheavals, rose up in a single sweep. And on the horizon delicate snow crests were outlined against the blue-mauve sunset sky. No massive mountains, just towers and spires and ridges of light-coloured rock, capped with snow or ice and touched by the last rays of the sun.

Close to the rest-house could be heard the murmur of the springs, from which the village takes its name. Although it was late, we bathed, knowing that a pleasure like this would not come our way again for a long time. We had such a wonderful feeling of well-being in the water that we could scarcely drag ourselves away. Dinner, prepared by the Sherpas, was awaiting us on the terrace—an exquisite meal, consisting almost entirely

of fresh food: vegetable soup, curried chicken, milk in various forms, and fruit. We appreciated this all the more for the knowledge that very soon we should be reduced to the detestable regime of tinned foods.

Night fell suddenly. The Southern Cross and the Great Bear dazzled in the firmament. The coolies were grouped round a wood fire singing tunes that reminded me strangely of some I had heard the Touareg sing. Ang Tharkay and his Sherpas recited their prayers. And, gazing into the distance, we dreamt of our great adventure that was coming nearer every day; we thought of the high camps, clinging to the flanks of "our" mountain. We should suffer from the cold and be battered by storms: and then, we should remember the Capuan luxuries of Hot Springs.

Next day we reached Tashparu, nine miles' march and another thousand feet up, where we had been told we should find the last rest-house. After that it was unknown territory. No more villages, no more hamlets, no more natives. We might meet with some nomads and their flocks, but nothing else.

When we came to the ruined and disused rest-house we were greatly surprised to find Claude, Pierre, Nalni Jayal, Gyalzen, Pemba Norbu, and their coolies!

"What on earth's happened?" we asked in astonishment, and rather crossly.

"It is quite simple," they answered placidly. "We have to cross the river which you can hear thundering along; it is the Zaz Nal, a tributary of the Rin Nal. But there is no bridge. It has been carried away by the monsoon floods."

"Well, that's a bit of a fix. But I suppose you're doing something about it?"

"Of course. We're building another bridge."

"Congratulations. But who are 'we'? God Almighty?"

"No," said Pierre. "The men of Metwan, the last village you came through. When we passed through two days ago the villagers told us that the bridge had been destroyed. At the time we didn't believe a word of what they said. You remember all the stories of that kind which were told us at Kishtwar. When we came to the spot we had to admit we were wrong. There was no sign of a bridge. So then Claude and I followed the river

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upstream for three hours in the hope of finding a ford or a foot-bridge. But there was nothing. We sent Nalni Jayal to Metwan to engage workers. The village head-man, Mahommed Sheik—he's a grand chap, with any amount of go—recruited a team immediately without so much as asking if he'd get paid anything, and they are at work now. Come and see, it's only five minutes from here."

On the opposite bank of the Zaz Nal, Mahommed Sheik yelled orders which almost drowned the noise of the torrent. Nalni explained the way things were being done. The first abutment, which had been half destroyed, had now been reinforced with stones. Then a tree had been thrown across the torrent to the second abutment, which, fortunately, was still in good condition. Mahommed Sheik had reached the far bank by straddling across; this needed pluck: it was a delicate and dangerous manœuvre, during which it was better not to look down. A second tree-trunk was pushed over to him. Logs of fir-wood split in half were placed across this improvised span, and the cross-pieces were fixed to the two large trunks and bound to each other by interlacing branches.

The bridge was now nearly finished. In a guttural voice and with much flashing of his black eyes, Mahommed Sheik gave orders for some big stones to be put on the spans to reduce the swaying. After the last stone was in position the chief contractor left the opposite bank and crossed the bridge majestically towards us. He stopped for an instant in the middle and proudly pointed to his work with the air of one saying: "Well, that's a fine job well and quickly done." And indeed the construction of this bridge with nothing but makeshift material and without any mechanical aids was a remarkable feat. We thanked Mahommed Sheik warmly, for he had got us out of an awkward hole. He was profuse in his thanks when the *bara sahib* presented him with fifty rupees and a certificate of praise written on the expedition's headed note-paper.

This bridge, which we christened the Bridge of Bears, because we had caught a glimpse of two large specimens a little while back, had cost us the modest sum of £3 10s. It would have been hard to improve on this.

Back at the rest-house, Pierre said: "It was a mighty good idea

of yours to send us on ahead. Otherwise we should have lost two days and four hundredweight of *atta*. I don't know how we should have fed the porters as far as Base Camp."

"You flatter me, Pastor! But that's not the whole of it: you must set out first thing to-morrow, for your assignment hasn't changed: to reconnoitre the route and settle on a site for our Base Camp."

"Of course. But Claude's in trouble with blisters."

"Never mind. Michel will take her place."

And Michel was delighted with this piece of luck.

So Pierre, Michel, Nalni Jayal, the two Sherpas, and ten porters went off next morning at six. We left the rest-house an hour later. Crossing the bridge was a lengthy affair, for in spite of the weight of the stones, it still swayed considerably. The heavily laden porters could only cross one at a time. They were rather scared, and with good reason, for a fall into the river would have been quite disastrous. Immediately afterwards we climbed up a little path by the side of an enormous rock spur overhanging the gorge. It was a tough ascent, and all the more disagreeable because our muscles were not yet warmed up. The coolies rested frequently; they had a curious habit of whistling as they emptied their lungs, and they leaned their loads on a large stick shaped like an ice-axe, which also served to help them keep their balance in difficult places, and when descending. Thanks to this ingenious method of support, they were able to take short rests without having to set down their loads.

This steep ascent lasted more than an hour and a half, and we arrived sweating and panting at the top of the spur. We glanced back: in the depths of the gorge the rest-house looked minute among the trees. We saw that the Rin Nal took a sharp turn to the right just where a tributary, marked on the map as the Krash Nal, flowed into it. And it was this latter river which we now had to follow. The path led us down to it at an easy gradient. Evidently there was no other way than to climb the spur, but it was vexatious to have to lose the benefit of our too-early morning effort.

At this height, just on 10,000 feet, the vegetation had already changed completely. The forest had disappeared almost entirely and given place to alps—if one may apply such a term to

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the Himalaya—dotted here and there with gnarled trees and criss-crossed with little streams. At last we could drink the water without fear, whereas up till now, since the beginning of our approach march, we had been obliged to disinfect the water with tablets.

The path ran down through tall grass that grew waist-high, sometimes even shoulder-high. Just the place to pick up typhus. But if we'd taken all the precautions prescribed—gloves, trousers tight round the ankles, and neckerchiefs—we should have died of heat long ago. Here, however, the regulation costume would certainly have been more bearable, for, in spite of a dazzling sun, there was a delicious cool breeze which gave us a foretaste of the heights and set the brilliantly coloured flowers rippling and swaying.

We set up our camp in this bower of greenery in mid-afternoon. The tents were pitched, and it came as quite a surprise to behold our canvas dwellings, with no tables or chairs, so accustomed had we become to find a comfortable rest-house every evening at the end of a hot day's march.

We had scarcely settled down when, to our astonishment, there appeared a group of nomads: it turned out that their camp was quite near ours. There were about thirty of them—men, women, children, and old folk, and a splendid old chief, with a hennaed beard. These were the people we'd been told of who came up for the summer grazing.

They weren't at all the same type as our coolies, but more like gipsies, magnificently healthy creatures—no doubt because they live half the year in the pure air of 10,000 feet, and enjoy a healthy and abundant diet. They were very good-looking, with regular features, and when they smiled their black eyes sparkled and their teeth gleamed. They were dressed with care and had an air of substance about them. In fact, most of the men wore wrist-watches, and the women and girls were plentifully adorned with jewellery, even to their noses. Summer grazing seemed to be a profitable business!

No-one could say how these nomads had heard of our arrival. I had already had experience of desert wireless, and now I was to see how the Himalayan variety operated. The new arrivals knew that we had a doctor with us, and immediately every one

of them, from the oldest to the youngest, discovered he had something the matter with him. Jean was swamped, and called us in to help, meanwhile explaining to the nomads that we, too, were skilled in doctoring and that they might have every confidence in us. So Claude and I transformed ourselves on the spot into physicians, with Johorey as interpreter while the patients filed past one by one. Claude attended to the female department. Some complained that they had no children: they were given an aspirin tablet. Others didn't want any children: an aspirin tablet. In the men's department I proceeded along the same lines, since my resources weren't any more extensive than hers. One patient announced that he was constipated: aspirin. Another that he suffered from diarrhoea: aspirin. The head tribesman rolled his sleeve up to the elbow and showed a callosity: three sleeping-tablets.

Jean was far more conscientious, although pretty chary of using his stock of medicines, which was understandable enough. We had already run through a considerable quantity on our way up, and though we'd foreseen this, we were now beginning to run short. It was time to put a stop to this free distribution.

The patients, more or less cured, went off very pleased. We were keen to photograph them, and they consented most graciously. The crowd milled round Claude, K. C., and myself, and the coolies also came up, to rescue us; they were all highly diverted to see faces and groups reflected in our camera sights. But what really impressed them was the flash. This sudden illumination struck them as nothing short of a miracle, and they quarrelled over possession of the used magnesium bulbs.

The patriarch stayed a moment longer to ask us a few questions. He knew that the sahibs were going to Nun Kun, but what were we going to do there?

"To attempt the conquest of Nun, upon which no man has yet set foot," answered K. C. Johorey.

The man with the hennaed beard was dumbfounded:

"You must be mad." And he went on to warn us that the peak was haunted by a diabolical fakir who sent out columns of smoke into which we would disappear.

K. C. smiled and replied: "But the sahibs are lion-hearted!"

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This handsome rejoinder did not appear to impress the patriarch, who went away repeating to himself, "It's impossible to reach the top of Nun. Even a bird couldn't get there."

* * * * *

But we hadn't yet got as far as this problem, since we hadn't even reached the foot of Nun. However, things now started moving quickly. On the morning of July 28 we got up at five o'clock so as to leave very early, for it was to be a long march. The day before we had covered twelve miles, which is a lot for porters, but now we were going to try to push them a bit farther, for, to our dismay, the stocks of flour were dwindling fast. If by bad luck we were delayed a day or two, we might well find ourselves in an extremely awkward situation. So, at six-thirty we struck camp and continued along the path beside the Krash Nal. The country grew steadily wilder.

The gorge, up which we marched for two hours, narrowed as we gained height. The torrent swirled and thundered below, and was eventually so constricted by the rocks that it could contain itself no longer and poured down in cascades which gave off a yellowish mist as the first rays of the sun shone upon them.

The Himalaya always have a surprise in reserve. This gorge was in fact the outlet of an immense fjord-like lake. The wild and dashing torrent of a few moments ago was transformed into a great peaceful stretch of water, and the reaches round the many sand-banks were scarcely rippled. The roar of the Krash Nal had given place to an impressive silence, broken only by the shrill cries of the marmots—just like the whistling of Paris policemen. The marmots looked at us, pointed their noses, and then fled down their holes. However, we found them to be much less timid than their Alpine brothers, and we were able to get quite close up and even to photograph them.

For an hour we followed the left bank of the lake, the Mandik Sar, in the tracks of our advance guard. Here there were no more paths: it was unknown ground. We were brought up short by a cliff. Should we climb it or turn it on the right by wading into the lake? Claude, who believes in trusting to intuition, found a note from Michel on a rock: "Take your boots off, it's the only way. Skirt along the foot of the cliff until you find the

tracks again three hundred yards farther on the left." We did as we were told, and hopped from one sand-bank to the next. With our trousers rolled up and carrying our boots we looked comically like Sunday trippers timidly paddling their toes on the beaches of Normandy. Then the cliff ran down gently to a grassy flat, and obviously this was where we had to rejoin the bank. We had only to cross a rather wider reach than the others, thirty yards or so, but it appeared to be rather deep, if the force of the current was anything to judge by. I started across first, as befitted the leader of an expedition. The water came up to my calves, to my knees, and then to my thighs. Heavens, it was icy! For a moment it didn't get any deeper. Three yards from the bank I thought I was safe, when all at once I went splosh into a hole, and the water came up to my waist. I just had time to clutch a tuft of grass and pull myself on to the bank. Warned by my experience, the others managed to do better. No doubt there was no risk of being drowned, but this enforced bath obliged me to go around in my underpants the rest of the day while my trousers dried on top of my rucksack. The Sherpas, who love any sort of joke, roared with laughter at my mishap.

It looked as if we should see some fun when it came to the porters' turn, and I aimed my camera in the hope of being able to film some incident. Along came our chaps followed by the rest of the Sherpas, including Ang Tharkay sheltering under an umbrella: he had lugged it all the way from Doda! But the coolies were cleverer than I. They found a shallow passage a bit lower down which they negotiated most successfully, going in pairs and helping to keep each other's balance. I was well paid out. Another rock cliff followed, which this time we had to climb, then a descent which brought us back to the banks of the lake, and another ford to cross; at last we set foot on the sand of an estuary covered with a quantity of—edelweiss. We could not believe our eyes. Never had we seen such quantities. We decided to stop for a rest and food—a well-earned halt, for we had been going for five hours.

Farther on the fjord narrowed where a torrent called the Fariabad Nal flowed in from a deep-cut gorge. We made our way up, following its zig-zags closely, to where another surprise awaited us. The river made a sudden bend and the gorge

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widened to reveal the sight that we had waited for so long: the peaks of the Himalaya, the massif of Nun Kun!

We were on the threshold of a new world. Unnamed peaks, 20,000 feet and over, sprang up on every side: miracles of snow, rock, and ice—domes, towers, spires, defended by huge glaciers. It was incredibly beautiful. We found enormous pleasure in christening these mountains, but we seemed rather lacking in imagination. "There's Mont Blanc", we would say, or "There's Fitz Roy".¹ The peak guarding the entrance to the massif we called the Sentinel. But I think in our heart of hearts we were a little disappointed: there was no sign of Nun.

We had done enough for one day. There had been lots of excitement, and the fifteen-mile march had been quite enough for our porters. We decided to camp where we were, on the banks of the Fariabad Nal, on a little plateau covered with heath and in view of our special mountains. We were about 11,500 feet up—in the Alps we would have been at the top of something. The coolies went off in search of scrub, for firewood was becoming increasingly rare. But the heedless porters hadn't given it a thought, and soon the shortage of wood became a serious problem.

On July 27 we struck camp briskly, for we were now longing to penetrate into the heart of the massif. The approach march seemed to be drawing to an end and Base Camp could not be far distant. Beside the winding torrent we followed the fresh tracks of the advance party. Most unexpectedly we encountered a horde of wild horses, no doubt belonging to the nomads, who looked at us in astonishment. "Most extraordinary," they must have been saying to themselves, "the number of people about in the Himalaya this year!" After two hours we came abruptly upon a tent at a bend in the path: there was Nalni Jayal, alone with Pemba Norbu and the coolies. I hurried up and asked him where the others were.

"Pierre Vittoz, Michel Desorbay, and Gyaldzen have gone to reconnoitre. The river splits into two branches, and we don't know which one leads to Nun."

¹ Fitz Roy is a splendid mountain nearly 11,000 feet high, in Patagonia. It is exceedingly difficult, and was climbed in 1952 by Lionel Terray and Guido Magnone.

Nun Kun

I looked at the map.

"That's no good now," said Nalni.

Quite true, for this massif had never been included in the Indian Survey, and the details given were purely imaginary. The only sahibs who had ever come this way were Bullock Workman and his wife, who in 1906 made a tour of the Nun Kun massif. They had drawn a little sketch map which we examined, but it didn't make things much clearer. We learned that we were at Fariabad, 12,795 feet up, and that was about all.

"I think we ought to take the left-hand branch," announced Claude.

"That's what I think, too. The nomads said 'always keep left for Nun'."

We discussed it for a while, and then agreed that by waiting for the return of the reconnaissance party we should lose time. So the tent was struck and we started up the left-hand branch.

A long rise enabled us to avoid the difficult going in the gorge, and an hour and a half later we reached a small plateau. Here we rested a while—since morning we had marched without stopping and at a good pace—and we even dropped off to sleep. We were awoken by Jean calling us. "Gyaldzen, there's Gyaldzen!" Gyaldzen, who was descending on the far side, saw us and managed to cross the river on a flimsy snow bridge to join us.

He gave me a note from Pierre, together with a drawing: "Dear Bernard, it's a piece of cake. Yesterday, from a hillock to the south of Nun, on the other side of Fariabad Nal, we spotted a site for Base Camp and to-day we were going there to see if it is O.K. The way up to the West Col looks child's play." (I had asked Pierre and Michel to pick out a route leading from the Base Camp to the West Col, whence the West ridge of Nun could be attacked.) "Follow the torrent until you come to the tent from which we set out this morning. Join us as quickly as you can. If by any chance you don't arrive to-morrow" (Pierre had thought we should arrive only *this* evening at the camp where we had found Nalni) "send up a porter with some grub."

I translated the message to Nalni Jayal and to K. C.

"You see, it's just as well we took the left-hand branch without waiting. We shall save half a day."

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Both of them wagged their heads and replied "*Atcha!*" Hindustani for "all right", but also implying a lot of other things. I turned next to Gyaldzen, who spoke a few words of English.

"Well, Gyaldzen, and what about Nun?" I said, for we found it difficult to hide our impatience. "When shall we see it?"

"But it's there, quite close, just beyond that bend!"

We rushed off like lunatics. But the height—we were at 13,000 feet—very quickly brought us to our senses. Hardly had we got our breath again when we were once more gasping, this time at the apparition of . . . Nun! We didn't move another step, but sat down on a rock devouring with our eyes the seven-thousander of our dreams. Solid and imposing, Nun stood outlined against the blue sky, its summit, 10,000 feet above us, a perfect cone. On either side of the South face which bristled with black towers that plunged down to the Fariabad Nal, two ridges climbed skyward. On the right the East Ridge, the route chosen by the British parties. We followed it with our eyes. Above the immense crevassed glacier was the White Needle, whose south face had to be traversed in order to reach the small col from which a hummocky ridge, half rock, half snow, led upwards for several hundred feet. It was this obstacle which stopped the 1934 and 1946 expeditions. The ridge then continued in a series of cornices on the point of collapsing, and finally ran up to the summit. There were no regrets about giving up any idea of climbing Nun by that route.

On the left our West Ridge appeared steeper, but less dangerous, because it was not corniced. Seen in profile from where we stood, it looked easy enough. Would we have to revise our opinions?

Gaily we ran down from the plateau to the torrent. Soon after, a cheery yodel rang out and Pierre and Michel came to meet us.

"Well done! We didn't expect you so soon. Base Camp is quite close, just three hours away."

"We're not there yet," I told Pierre anxiously.

"What's the matter?"

"Some difficulty with the porters! We have just left Ang Tharkay where you pitched your second tent. The coolies want to strike. It's the last straw. Ang Tharkay is trying to persuade

them to carry on. I back him entirely—he knows how to handle them. But one can't tell. Oh, well, let's go on all the same. We'll see all in good time."

We went on to the foot of the moraine over which we should make our way up to Base Camp next day, and picked a level stretch of ground beside the river for our night's camp, at 13,500 feet. Nalni Jayal, who was something of a poet, called it the Pastoral Camp after Beethoven's symphony, which reminded him of running water.

Soon the porters appeared. And the strike, which is the bugbear of all expeditions, broke out in earnest. It was frightful. These coolies are good chaps, but a few ringleaders are enough to work them up. We had at all costs to make them come back on their decision; but now they were definitely pushing off. Ang Tharkay ran after them, passing them and halting them. He talked for some time and succeeded in getting them back to the camp. With K. C. and Nalni as interpreters I opened negotiations. Ang Tharkay, a first-class diplomat, helped me in the palaver. "We've no more wood," the porters declared. "Don't let that worry you. You can cook your *chapattis* on our stoves. And there are some packing-cases which we can break up for fuel."

Then their spokesman came out with a demand for immediate payment. I would not hear of it. If we paid them then and there, they would have been off in a jiffy. I proposed to give them their money the following day, still keeping one more trump up my sleeve: a bonus to their pay. The discussions lasted from three o'clock to seven, without any definite results, but with various alternatives. First it was yes, then it was no, and so on. We handed out a generous ration of flour and cigarettes. Nothing had any effect. Both sides went to bed without giving way. We were horribly worried.

On July 30 at 6 a.m. the discussions started up again. Finally, at nine o'clock we reached a settlement: the coolies would be paid at once, but on condition that they carried the loads as far as Base Camp. I decided, with Ang Tharkay's approval, to split them up into groups of ten, each under the control of a sahib and a Sherpa. The ringleaders would be under the eye of Claude, Ang Tharkay, and myself.

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Things did not go exactly smoothly, but at last, at ten o'clock, camp was struck. After ascending a far too long moraine—if I had been in the Almighty's place, I would never have created any moraines—we reached our Base Camp site at twelve-thirty.

We were now 15,500 feet up—almost the height of Mont Blanc. Now that we were relieved of a major worry we were all smiles. Ang Tharkay, who deserved great praise, immediately distributed one rupee *baksheesh* and some flour, and all the porters, except two whom we kept as mail-runners, flew off like a flock of sparrows, quit at last of this mountain, of which they were so terrified. During the night one of them had even turned a bit crazy, declaring that Nun Kun was going to collapse on top of them. I wondered whether, after all, it was not simply fear of the mountain that had provoked the strike.

* * * * *

Here all was silence: at last we were alone with Nun, our own particular mountain. The tents were to be pitched at the foot of the South face, from whose colossal towers the avalanches streamed down: a big tent for the Sherpas, two others for the sahibs, and finally one other called the Barnum where we stacked all the provisions, and which would also serve as a living-room. We had to get busy with spades and ice-axes to level the ground and remove the stones. We were not yet fully acclimatised and felt the height; our hearts pounded fit to burst, and we felt giddy.

It was now July 30, and Base Camp had been established precisely according to plan. That evening when we were all assembled in the mess tent we opened a bottle of champagne brought from Paris and toasted each other gaily. Michel disappeared for a second and came back with an enormous candle which he held out to me. Everyone was surprised, myself most of all.

“Bernard,” he said, “your memory is very short. Didn't you say to me one day when you were battling with a host of difficulties: ‘The day we reach Base Camp, I'll light a candle?’”

CHAPTER IV

THE COL OF GOOD HOPE

BARELY two days had passed since our arrival at Base Camp, and already we were going into action. The weather was magnificent, and there wasn't a day to be lost.

The plan of operations was as follows: Pierre, Nalni Jayal, and myself, accompanied by Ang Tharkay and four Sherpas, would establish Camp I. Claude, Michel, Jean, and K. C. Johorey, who were not feeling entirely fit, would remain at Base Camp to get everything straight and rest a bit. The following day this second party of four would go up to Camp I to take over while we reconnoitred a route up to Camp II. If the weather allowed, they would then establish Camp II. After that we would see.

Acclimatisation is what one has to bear in mind the whole time. It is of the utmost importance, and it can only be achieved progressively. Experienced Himalayan climbers, Sir John Hunt in particular, had warned me on this point. Moreover, my experience on Salcantay in the Andes, where we had acclimatised gradually, was still fresh in my mind. We had planned a methodical upward progression, with a lot of going to and fro between Base Camp at 14,500 feet and our two high camps at 16,000 feet and 17,750 feet, and by never staying more than one day at either of them, we had succeeded after two weeks in getting absolutely fit. None of us felt any the worse—not even the slightest sickness or headache, and above all no loss of appetite, and at high altitudes lack of appetite is the greatest menace. Six out of seven of us had reached the summit at 20,669 feet, which was good going. So now I was set on similar tactics for the same length of time, and my companions entirely agreed. There was no question of hurling ourselves at Nun. No doubt Pierre, who had lived quietly at Leh for three years at an altitude of 10,000 feet, would have been all right, and so, of course, would the Sherpas. But it would be a different matter for us poor city-dwellers, who were breathing town air barely a month

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ago and were still suffering from the effects of the crushing heat of the Indian plains. The only valuable conditioning we'd had was on the long approach march, when the open-air life had to some extent refreshed us and limbered us up. But we were far from being fit enough for an immediate attack. Tackling a seven thousander is no small matter: in half a century of Himalayan climbing only twenty-nine summits over this figure have been climbed.

* * * * *

I could not resist the desire to leave Base Camp a little ahead of the rest of the party. For some time I made my way up the moraine, which was marked by small cairns, then I came to a big glacier which evidently led up to the foot of a rock shoulder, on whose crest we should probably establish Camp I. Judging from the sketch map made by the Bullock Workmans, it seemed that once there, one would be able to reach the west ridge. This rock shoulder, lying between the west ridge on the right and a snow summit on the left, looked as if it might be a col. Long before seeing it I had christened it the Col of Good Hope, because it seemed to me that once we reached it we should be almost certain of success.

The glacier, which was strewn with big boulders and glacier tables, lay at a gentle angle. Taking it easy, I climbed slowly up, looking all around me. The mountain quiet was broken only from time to time by an avalanche or stone-fall down the south face, and by the intermittent rumbling of the torrents that forced their way beneath the surface of the glacier.

I was incredibly happy, and I wished to enjoy my happiness to the full. Somehow I guessed that I might never again on the expedition recapture it quite so perfectly. The sensation was made up of several impressions: knowing I was the first to set foot here; being alone as though in a great cathedral and walking almost on tiptoe so as not to disturb the silence of the stones. Everything contributed to my happiness; the weather was magnificent—never a cloud. I climbed easily and effortlessly, for the glacier was straightforward. I felt absolutely fit, and one's physical well-being immediately reacts on one's morale. I had no worries: all the period of preparing and fussing, of trouble

The Col of Good Hope

and uncertainty, was over. I was now enjoying my reward. How wonderful life was!

“Hullo!” . . . I turned round to see Pierre, who'd nearly caught me up. What a steam-engine! I stopped and watched him. Swinging two ski sticks, he walked along at a very decent pace in spite of the heavy sack he was carrying. I envied his speed. Of course Pierre was acclimatised, but over and above that he was a naturally tough chap. I reflected how wise I'd been to ask him to join the expedition, he was clearly a great asset.

He caught up with me, and he, too—it must have been something to do with the place and the occasion—expatiated lyrically on the beauty of nature, the charm of this peerless morning, and his sense of physical and moral well-being. We walked up together, slanting across to the left, in order to keep at a distance from the south face. Several stone shoots ran out here, and fresh tracks made by large boulders rolling down warned us to be cautious. After an hour we stopped to wait for Nalni Jayal and the Sherpas. I looked at my altimeter, which registered 16,900 feet. So in 2½ hours we had climbed almost 1,500 feet—not bad going.

We sat down on two large flat stones and admired the landscape. Beneath us, just at the top of the moraine up which we had come a few days ago, we could see the Base Camp. The grey and yellow patches made by the tents contrasted with the brown and bluish-coloured stones and with the black and green rocks of the wall surrounding the camp. We had christened the glacier on which we were now sitting the Glacier of the First August in honour of Pierre Vittoz—for it was the Swiss National Holiday. On the right it ran gently down, and then with a change in the angle of the ground it suddenly turned into an ice-fall which plunged down to the Fariabad Nal. Facing it on the far side was an immense ice-wall with several summits in the neighbourhood of 18,000 feet. Pierre and Michel had climbed up on this side to a height of about 14,700 feet in order to choose a site for our Base Camp and pick out the route which we were following to-day. The Zaskar mountains formed the backcloth to the scene—a wonderful forest of peaks, and so far quite unexplored.

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Then, as the rest of the party were so long arriving, we lay back with our hats over our eyes to protect ourselves from the fierce rays of the sun, and talked at length about the history of the Nun Kun massif.

"Tell me Bernard, since you've gone into the question, how long has Nun Kun been known?"

"Since the end of the nineteenth century. General Bruce—later of Everest—was the first to visit the massif in 1898. He was followed by two Britons in 1902, Dr. Arthur Neve, and the Rev. C. E. Barton; then in 1903 by a Dutchman, P. Sillem, and his wife. And in 1904 Neve and Barton continued the exploration. Finally, Neve returned alone in 1910. All these explorers only made preliminary reconnaissances, mainly on the Shafat Glacier, to the east of the massif, but they also explored the west side of Nun Kun."

"What about the Bullock Workmans?"

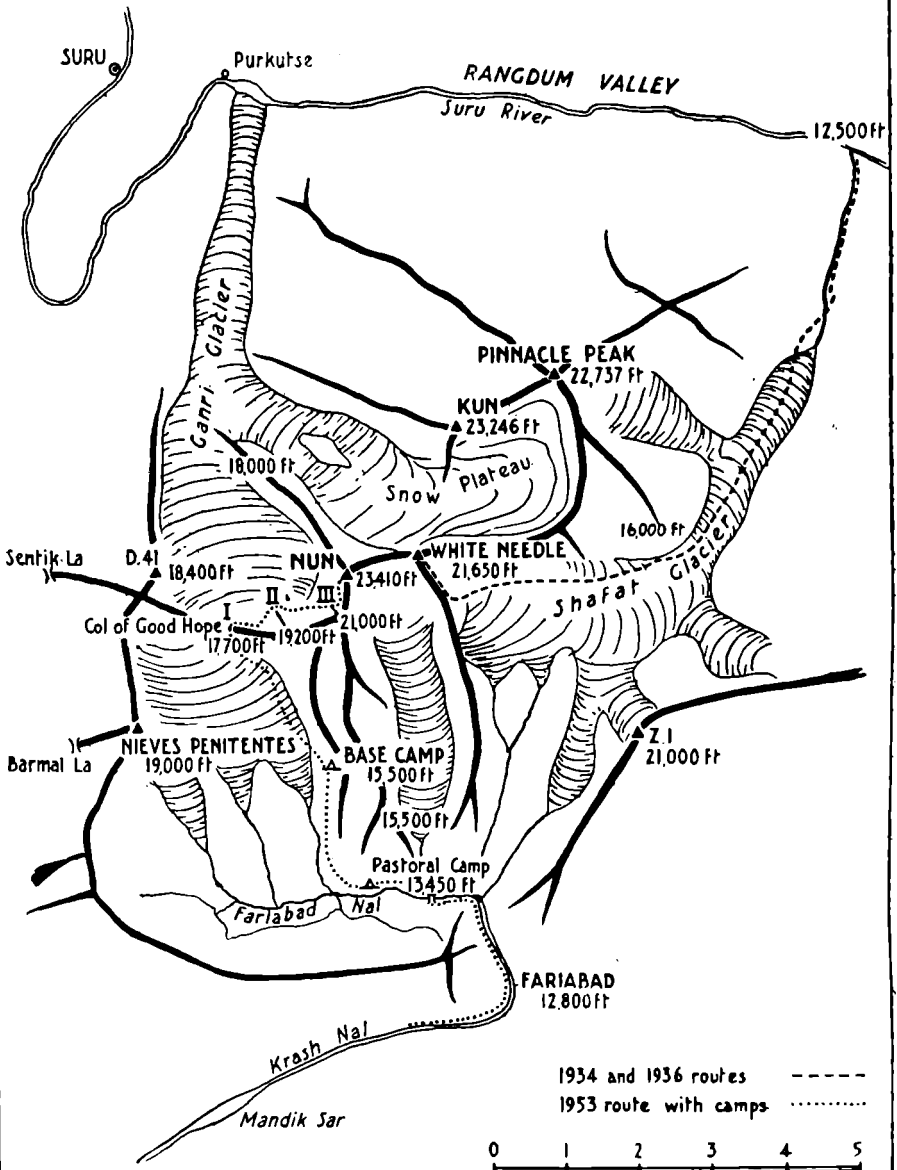
"They studied the district much more thoroughly and made a complete tour of the mountain in 1906. Coming from Suru in the north, they went down the Rangdum Valley, crossed the Suru river to the east, and went up the Shafat Glacier in a south-westerly direction. They then penetrated into the heart of the massif and were the first to come near to Nun, which was on their left, and Kun, which rose a mile or two away, straight in front of them. They made three fine ascents: the Nieves Penitentes (*c.* 19,000 feet);¹ peak D41, so marked on the Indian Survey map—a summit of over 18,000 feet—and another which they named Pinnacle Peak, rising to a height of over 22,600 feet. Mrs. Bullock Workman alone reached the summit of Pinnacle Peak with the guide, Cyprien Savoye, and a porter. At the time it was the highest point ever reached."

"For a lady mountaineer in skirts, it was a very fine performance."

"Mrs. Bullock Workman was certainly full of the spirit of competition. She had sworn to beat the record established by her fellow countrywoman, the journalist Annie S. Peck, on Huascarán in the Peruvian Andes, with Swiss guides."

¹ So called because its glacier formation resembles that of the Andes, where *Nieves Penitentes* are masses of ice shaped by the wind so that their bases are thinner than their tops.

THE NUN KUN MASSIF



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“Women will go to all lengths to score off each other!”

“After these exploits—and they really were exploits; don’t forget that I’m talking about the beginning of the twentieth century when Himalayan climbing had only just begun—the Bullock Workman expedition continued in a southerly direction to complete the tour of the massif. The couple were seen at Fariabad, which we passed too. Then they followed up the Fariabad Nal, as we did, and continued to ascend until they reached a col to the north of the massif which they named the Barmal La. Then a second col was crossed, the Sentik La, and finally they reached Suru again. The trip had lasted two months. It must be regarded as the only thorough exploration of the massif. And the Bullock Workmans were also the first to do any real climbing in this district, for they made these three ascents, and their Pinnacle Peak is the third highest point of the massif.”

“What about Kun?” continued Pierre, “Wasn’t it climbed quite soon after?”

“Yes. Kun, which is 23,246 feet, was climbed in 1913 by an Italian expedition led by Count Calciati. Mario Piacenza, Lorenzo Borelli, Joseph Gaspard (a guide from Valtournanche), and the native porter Ali Rahin got to the top, on the 3rd of August—so there’s hope that we, too, will stand a good chance, in spite of the monsoon.”

Then Pierre wanted to know how it was that for over twenty years no one had attempted the twin summit, Nun.

“At the time there was no Pakistan and no independent India. Mountaineers were far more interested in 8,000- and 7,000-metre peaks in the Karakoram, which were easily accessible, than in Nun Kun.”

“I suppose that’s it. But what about Harrison and Waller in 1934, and Berry, Stobart,¹ and James in 1946—didn’t they all try to climb Nun?”

“Well, the massif is comparatively close to Srinagar: a little over sixty miles to the east as the crow flies. People who, for one reason or another, hadn’t much time to spare were bound to cast covetous eyes on an unclimbed peak of this height.”

“I wonder why the 1946 expedition again chose the east ridge.

¹ Tom Stobart, member of the 1953 Everest Expedition.

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Waller, who came back in 1937 to reconnoitre the west ridge, thought this route more hopeful than the east ridge."

"Yes, it does seem odd. I only discovered Waller's report in the *Himalayan Journal* after I had read the accounts of the 1934 and 1946 expeditions, and I was much impressed by it. And what's more the photographs which he brought back seemed to me so convincing that I wrote to you suggesting we should give up the east ridge in favour of the west, where chances seemed much better. And you wrote back agreeing. But tell me, Pierre, we've never really talked about your trip in 1952. How did it go?"

And Pierre, with his charming Vaudois accent, described the reconnaissance:

"You can imagine how interested I was by Nun. It's the only seven-thousander in my parish, and I've been fascinated by it ever since I arrived at Leh. Often and often I had admired it from a distance, and one day I made up my mind to have a go at it, after having trained myself on a few peaks of 20,000 feet or so in the district.

"I had made friends with a New Zealander, a major, who lived at Srinagar. He hadn't much alpine experience, but as he had spent the whole of one summer wandering about between 10,000 and 16,000 feet I decided that he must be pretty tough and enterprising. So we arranged to meet at Kargil, at the foot of the massif. This was in August 1952. We hadn't any Sherpas, which was a drawback, but it was too lengthy and expensive to get them to come from Darjeeling. I had to make do with some Ladakis who had no experience or equipment. Nor had we very much equipment ourselves; but I had brought a certain amount with me from Switzerland, including three tents, which might be enough. My intention was to attack Nun from the east as the British had done. I knew nothing of Waller's reconnaissance, and had no idea that there was a route on the west. Although our chances of success were small, it was still worth making an attempt. You know that in my profession, more than in any other, you're forbidden to despair. So I left Leh, happy to be on my way to the mountains again. But alas, I had only just reached Kargil when I learned that Major Brown had been refused permission to join me. I didn't allow myself to be

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discouraged, so I went off all the same to take advantage of this opportunity to admire Nun from close at hand. Instead of following the route taken by the British parties, I decided to reconnoitre the approach to the west ridge. I climbed up to a view-point almost at the foot of it, accompanied by a Ladaki who had an extraordinary sense of balance, in spite of sandals with smooth soles tied on with thongs. He declared that he had never had any experience of this sort of terrain. I wondered what he would have been like if he'd had my training and boots! From our view-point—which I expect we shall shortly see from the Col of Good Hope—I was able to examine Nun at leisure. I was amazed when I discovered the west ridge. Undoubtedly it was steeper and more direct than the east ridge, but at least it was free from those nasty-looking humps and formidable cornices which stopped the British party 2,000 feet from the summit. I had succeeded in satisfying myself that I had found the way up Nun. And when you wrote to me, I was delighted to be able to confirm your opinion by telling you of my own findings. That is the story of my first encounter with this mountain. Now we'll have a go at it together."

We had talked long enough to allow Nalni Jayal, Ang Tharkay, and the Sherpas to catch up with us. We could see the porters doubled under enormous loads, which included everything necessary for a high camp: tents, air-mattresses, sleeping-bags, nylon ropes, cooking-stoves, pots and pans, and provisions of all kinds. These men are terrific! Although they were carrying more than fifty pounds they climbed steadily, possibly slightly slower than we did, but they were barely out of breath. They pressed their foreheads against a broad band which was passed round the loads holding them close to their backs. To preserve their balance, they moved along with their heads well forward; with one hand they stuck in their ice-axes, which they used to steady themselves, the other rested on one of the bands.

We started off again, going ahead of the Sherpas, and made tracks in the snow, which had begun to melt in the hot midday sun. It balled up under the soles of our boots, it was an effort to lift our feet, and the going became really stiff. Beads of sweat stood out on our foreheads, and our breath came in gasps.

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“One or two more experiences like this and you’ll be the first to advise early starts,” Pierre flung at me. “I’m a great believer in them. The snow’s so much better then because it’s harder. I’ve had reason to appreciate this more than once since I started climbing in the Himalaya.”

“That’s rather an old story, isn’t it?”

“Not altogether. Believe me, conditions here change far more quickly than in the Alps.”

“I’m sure you’re right.”

An hour later we were at the foot of the great rock shoulder on the crest of which lay our precious Col of Good Hope. There were a few patches of snow and *névé* here and there on the slopes, which appeared far steeper from near at hand.

Now we had to decide a technical question: should we turn the shoulder on the left, or go straight up? Either method had its advantages and disadvantages. A detour to the left might be long, but without difficulty. The direct route was shorter, but the rock was rotten, and there would be danger from falling stones. There was a division of opinion. Nalni was for turning the shoulder on the left. Pierre and I preferred the direct route, and as it was two to one, our view prevailed.

For an hour and a half we made our way over horrible scree running with water and melting snow. We floundered about in this mush, making prodigious efforts to keep our balance on boulders that rolled away from under our feet. The face up which we were climbing was sheltered from the wind, and it was absolutely stifling. Baked in the pitiless rays of the sun, many a time we stopped to moisten our lips in the deliciously cool waters of a little rivulet that ran down beside a rock slab.

At last the slope eased, and at one-thirty we came out on to the Col of Good Hope at 17,700 feet. Our first look was for the west ridge, and for a few moments we just stood there gazing stupidly. Pierre broke the silence:

“Well, if this is what you call the Col of Good Hope, you might as well un-christen it at once. Just look at that!”

Straight in front of us rose an enormous tower of snow, rock, and ice, at least 2,000 feet high, barring the approach to the west ridge. It was formidable indeed, and it frightened us. Climbing it would have been difficult enough in the Alps. But

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there the summit would have been at about 13,000 feet, whereas here it was between 19,000 and 20,000 feet.

"I say, Pierre, it's horribly steep. Can you see with your glasses whether at least it connects with the ridge?"

"Yes, I think so, but I'm not sure. And if it does, we'll have to go beyond the junction to establish Camp II—I think I can see a little plateau."

All this was not very heartening. Even admitting that we could make it, there were the Sherpas, with their heavy loads—supposing the ground proved too difficult for them?

Next we transferred our attention to the left of the tower, where there appeared to be an ice-fall. From our present position we couldn't see clearly, for the tower blocked the view. Pierre handed me the glasses and I scanned this other defence of Nun at length.

"Well, what do you see?"

"I can see a slope, much less steep than the tower. On the other hand, it looks to me as though those seracs are on the point of collapsing. Not very safe."

Disappointed, indeed pretty well discouraged, I passed the glasses to Nalni, who cautiously reserved his opinion. Then I said to Pierre:

"There's not much option. To-morrow we'll make a reconnaissance of the tower and the ice-fall. To get a general idea we'll go down to that big glacier than runs along beside the shoulder and the north-west face of Nun." ¹

"I quite agree," said Pierre.

Then we lay down on the stones, our eyes fixed on Nun. Its summit, so near and yet so far, looked scarcely real, and we were fascinated by the snow cone standing out against the blue sky. But the sun and the altitude between them had made us drowsy, and very soon we fell fast asleep.

When we woke the Sherpas had already got to work on the scree and built platforms. Three tents were soon pitched, the air-mattresses blown up, and the sleeping-bags put ready. A small cave was hollowed out of the ice for provisions, and the equipment was carefully stowed in one of the tents. In no time the lonely col was made quite habitable. We congratulated

¹ Named the Ganri glacier by the Bullock Workmans.

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Ang Tharkay and his Sherpas. Our Sirdar, with the everlasting smile which lights up his face, replied in a few words of Tibetan, which Pierre translated: "Ang Tharkay quotes from a Tibetan proverb: He who knows how, can live comfortably, even in hell."

Four o'clock already: it was high time to send Kami, Ang Phuter, and Pa Norbu back to Base Camp, to come up again next day with the second group. I gave them a message: "Camp I established at 17,700 feet. Go up the glacier as far as the rock shoulder which you can see from Base Camp. Keep away from the south face (stone-falls). We climbed up direct, over loose scree. You'll find another way, longer but safer, by contouring round the shoulder on the left. We thought it would be possible to reach the west ridge at once. In fact, the way is barred by a great tower that does not look at all attractive. We're not even sure if we can climb it. Left of the tower there is a big ice-fall which we can't see well from here, but which doesn't look very safe. All rather perplexing. To-morrow we'll reconnoitre. Start *very early*: the heat's infernal."

In fact, we were literally roasting. It was ghastly. I don't remember ever being so uncomfortable, even in the mountains of the Hoggar in the middle of the Sahara. If we stayed outside we risked sunstroke. But inside the tents we practically fainted from lack of air. We stripped our clothes off one by one till we were almost naked; but it was no use. "What a cauldron!" sighed Pierre. "Heavens, we'll evaporate!" Neither Nalni nor I had the strength to say anything. Until the sun at last disappeared, we just had to put up with the dreadful ordeal.

* * * * *

August 2 was a glorious morning. After the experience of the day before, Pierre, Ang Tharkay, and I started off very early. Nalni was suffering from mountain sickness and stayed in camp. We went down the Ganri glacier, which flowed gently northward, hemmed in between Nun on the right and Peak D41 on the left. This was the great glacier which James Waller had ascended in 1937 in order to examine the possibilities of climbing the west ridge, and which Pierre Vittoz had seen from his view-point in 1952. An hour after leaving camp we reached the foot of the ice-fall, but the sight of this immense frozen cataract,

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with its tottering seracs, and all ploughed up by rock falls and avalanches, was scarcely encouraging. The angle of the ice-fall was not at all formidable—it would have been an easy matter to go up it to the site of the future Camp II. But it would have meant running tremendous risks.

“H’m. Looks pretty unhealthy,” remarked Pierre.

I could only agree. What would Ang Tharkay’s opinion be? His views carried great weight, for he was an old hand and had probably seen more ice-falls than we were ever likely to do in all our mountaineering. And then the Sherpas had absolute faith in him and would follow him wherever he went.

Ang Tharkay studied the fall at length. He was not very enthusiastic either.

“No good, Sahib,” he announced. “Dangerous.”

What about the tower? Seen from our present position, it was even more impressive than from Camp I. True, we were very close up, almost right up against it, and this made it seem even steeper.

“Pierre, will you go with Ang Tharkay and reconnoitre the base of the tower? I’d rather stay here and not do much. I don’t feel very fit yet, I suppose it’s the height.”

“Right you are.”

Off they went. I put my sack down on the snow, sat on it, and got out the glasses. They attacked the first snow bridge. Pierre was leading, and he set a pace that again filled me with admiration. Nature had certainly blessed him with a sound constitution. Legs, wind, and stomach—Pierre had a digestion like an ostrich—are a *sine quâ non* for a Himalayan climber.

The easy but dangerous ice-fall; or the tower—difficult, but not apparently dangerous. Which should it be? I was a bit gloomy.

Hullo, the party had already gained height! They appeared to be making rapid progress without difficulty. Was the angle of the tower not as steep as we had supposed? For two hours Pierre and Ang Tharkay climbed without stopping. Suddenly they halted. Again I was a prey to doubt. Pierre made a sign, and I understood it to mean that they would both go back to Camp I direct, for to return to where I was would entail a detour. Anxious and pensive, I made my way back alone to-

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ward the tents, turning round continually to glance first at the tower, then at the ice-fall. I weighed up the pros and cons. Pierre, Ang Tharkay, and I reached the camp almost together. Pierre was very cheerful and Ang Tharkay one big grin.

"Bernard, don't make that face. Nun's in the bag! The angle of the tower is much less steep than we thought. Of course the top section and the junction between the tower and the plateau are difficult. But I am certain we can make it. Listen: I'm *certain!*"

"But you turned back?"

"That was because we had no crampons."

"Oh, I see. That's a relief."

Pierre gave me a great thump on the back, repeating: "Nun's in the bag. It's all right, it's a cert!"

"Yes, maybe. I hope to heaven you're right. But it'll take a fortnight at least, if not longer."

"I'm with you there."

"What does Ang Tharkay think?"

"He entirely agrees that we should take the tower route."

"Good. In that case the Sherpas can go ahead. That's one problem settled; it's a weight off my mind."

"And now to work!" cried Pierre, attacking a tin of sardines, which he swallowed in less time than it takes to tell.

As we ate we talked things over and laid down the foundations for our future plan of action.

On the following day a reconnaissance would be started at once by Pierre, Ang Tharkay, and two Sherpas. The difficult sections would be prepared, large steps cut—real buckets—and fixed ropes placed in position, fastened to ice pitons; they are a great help to the Sherpas when they are carrying loads: they use them to keep their balance and, if necessary, to pull themselves up. They also contribute to their sense of security. Finally, the reconnaissance party would dump loads as high up as possible, with all the equipment necessary to establish Camp II plus some provisions. In order to save food Nalni and I would return to Base Camp. The others—those who would be coming up—would spend the night and the following day at Camp I to become acclimatised. Depending on the results of the reconnaissance, another team, made up of the fittest members, would

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then establish Camp II. After that, we should see. The programme was, never to forget the question of acclimatisation, and to proceed upward in successive stages.

Pemba announced that the sahibs were coming up, and were nearly at the camp. Twenty minutes later, they arrived, dead tired, and terribly thirsty, and flopped down on the stones.

"I don't know what you were thinking of to suggest our turning the shoulder on the left," said Jean with the air of a martyr.

"There was no end to it," declared Michel. "It was just like Mont Blanc after the Grands Mulets: one slope after another."

K. C. Johorey agreed, smiling:

"We followed your orders, chief. But we very nearly had to give up."

Faced with this concerted recrimination, Pierre and I concluded philosophically:

"Was it too long? Good, that's just what we wanted to know!"

In future, we'd stick to our original route. But we'd need to be very careful of falling stones.

"Where's Claude?"

"Her blisters are still too painful. She stayed at the camp," said Michel. "She told me to tell you that she has prepared a real feast."

Comfortably seated on packing-cases, with a table in front and the food depot close at hand, we should be able to have a first-class meal—a very cheering thought.

So off we went to Base Camp, as quickly as possible: Nalni still not feeling well, K. C., who had had quite enough coming up in the morning and did not wish to diminish the slender food-stocks unnecessarily, myself, and three Sherpas. The latter would go up again the following day with fresh loads of equipment and provisions for the high camps. We disappeared down the crumbling face of the buttress. The way was now well marked, for the precariously balanced boulders had been pushed over by the Sherpas, who, with their usual flair, had improved the track by judicious detours. As a result the route no longer presented more than a slight danger, for there was now practically no risk of falling stones. Once down on the glacier we let ourselves go down the slope with great strides, almost running.

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Two hours later we arrived at Base Camp, to be welcomed on our arrival by a few mountain choughs, who quickly flew off. Claude had seen us from afar and had prepared tea, which we swallowed in bowls. She was insatiable for information, and pestered me with questions. Sitting in our "living-room" I told her the sequence of operations, ending with: "I really got quite worked up."

"I realised that, all right, when I read your message. But I also thought that the sun must have been very hot just then."

"Yes, I expect so. But now there is every reason to be optimistic. Camp I is established, and the route settled. To-morrow Pierre, Ang Tharkay, and two Sherpas will make every effort to mark out and equip a route up the Tower. Camp II should be established before long. We can be quite satisfied with the way things are going."

Towards evening we had visitors. Two coolies arrived with ninety pounds of rice, which we had ordered at Kishtwar. They also brought the mail, which we devoured eagerly—letters from our parents, who anxiously followed the doings of their mad children. We had also asked the porters to buy us some fresh meat in the shape of a goat. They explained that in the last village they had found one all right, but it only had one eye. For this reason they didn't bring it. Apparently the eye is a much prized delicacy in these parts.

The day ended with an extraordinary sunset. The Col of Good Hope stood out against a violet sky, while the glacier of the First of August and the immense wall of the south face gradually darkened. The seracs crowning this face turned, in the space of a few seconds, all the colours of the rainbow—gold, rose, purple. And then, suddenly, the mountain was swallowed up by night.

* * * * *

The following day there was a change of scene: about eight inches of snow!

"Rather depressing," said Nalni, when we had all collected on the main square at Base Camp.

With our hands in our pockets, bundled up in our bulky down jackets and looking like advertisements for Michelin tyres, we

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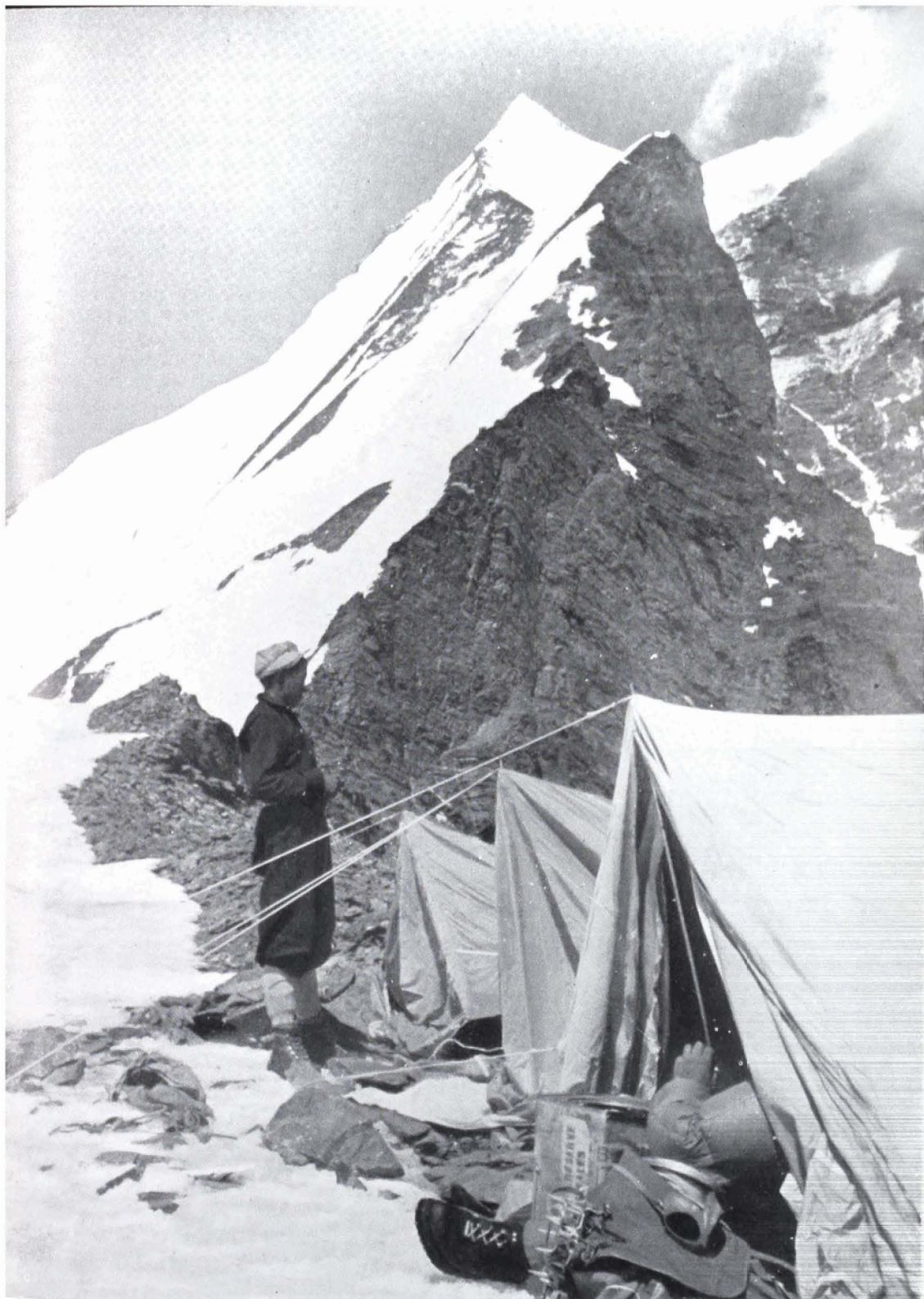
gazed around. Visibility was almost nil: Zaskar and its forest of peaks had disappeared, and the Col of Good Hope was lost in mist. Here and there parts of the south face were visible through a break in the clouds. The wall of schistose rocks near the camp oozed water; it had stopped snowing. We shivered in the keen icy breeze.

Sadly we made our way to the mess tent, where breakfast was awaiting us; it was as good a way as any other to pass the time.

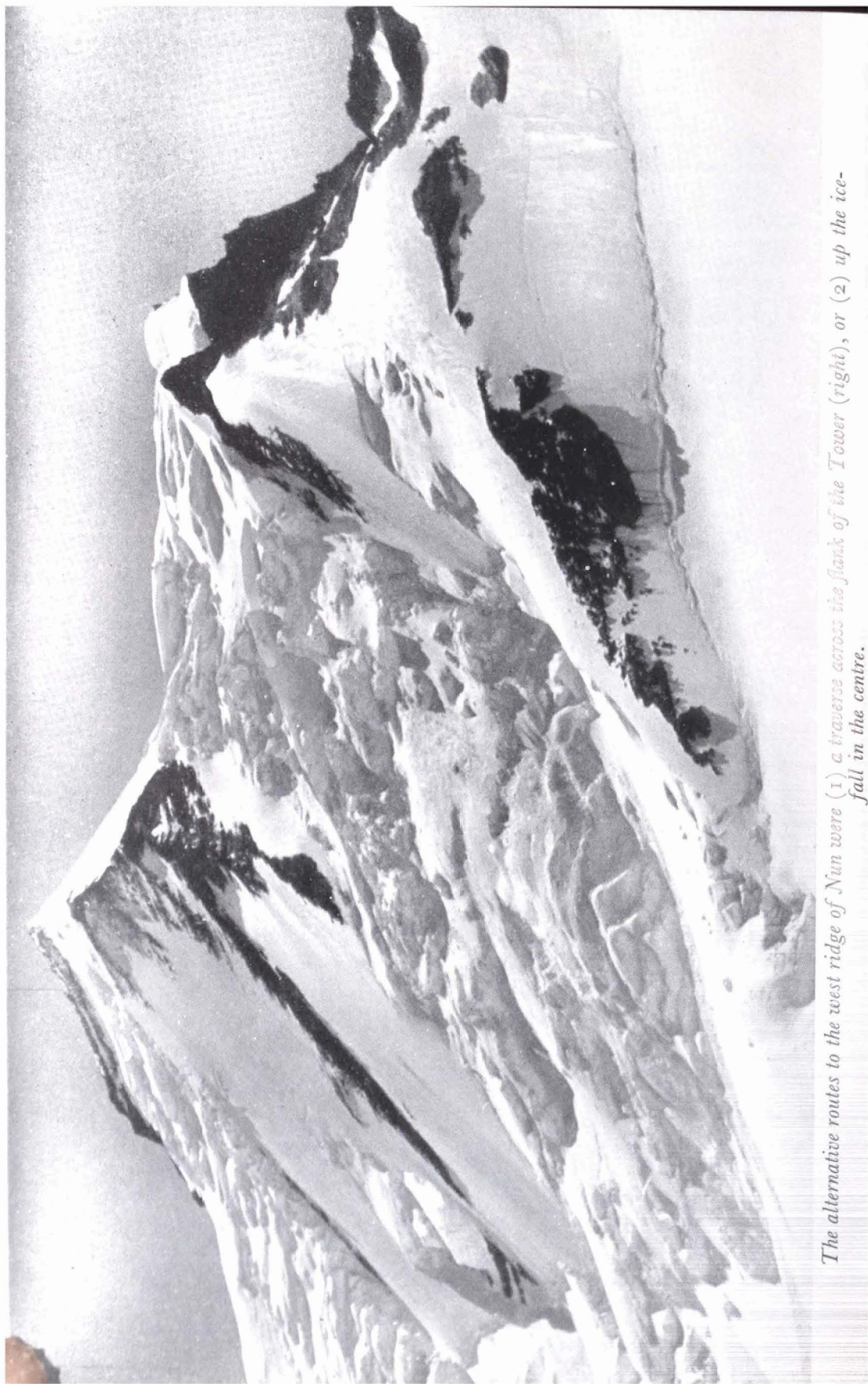
"There must be quite a packet of snow up at Camp I," I said to Claude. "They will certainly not have gone on a reconnaissance."

"Yes, it'll mean beginning all over again, worse luck."

About midday the higher party arrived looking disconsolate. At any rate Camp I was established, which was something to be thankful for. But we couldn't conceal the fact that Nun had won the second round.



Camp I (17,700 feet) and the Tower, with the summit of Nun behind, to the left.



The alternative routes to the west ridge of Nun were (1) a traverse across the flank of the Tower (right), or (2) up the ice-fall in the centre.

CHAPTER V

THE KEY TO NUN

“THERE’S no reason to be downhearted,” said Pierre. “Pass me the hors d’œuvres.” And he went to the attack—not of the Tower but of tunny fish and sardines! Everybody, as usual, protested.

“Well, I see that living in Tibet is good for the appetite,” observed Michel.

“He’s an eating-machine, that man,” declared Jean. Nalni was afraid he’d exhaust the food supplies.

I made a quick calculation of what the “eating-machine” consumed in a day—over three pounds. In sixty days that made just on 200 pounds: nearly four porters’ loads. Delighted with the result of my mental arithmetic, I informed Pierre that four per cent of the coolies had been employed just to carry his food, and its weight was about equal to his own. His enormous appetite laid him open to a good deal of teasing. He took it all very well; except for occasional outbursts, he was a remarkably good-tempered man. As a companion he was no less dynamic and enthusiastic than as a climber; always in splendid form, always offering to do whatever job was going. The Sherpas adored him, and as well as the nickname “Nono”, little brother, they gave him the very flattering appellation of “Coucho”, incarnation.

He wasn’t the only one to be made fun of. We all teased each other, and even the M.O., who was the eldest of us, came in for his share. The year before, on Salcantay, we had called him “Nyaka” because whenever any problem arose he had a habit of saying *il n’y a qu’à faire ceci ou cela*. Not that he didn’t enter wholeheartedly into the discussions when something really important was at stake. This year, on Nun, we decided to give him the nickname “*C’est normal*”. The reason for it was that Jean was only interested in serious medical cases; and later on did miracles in this line. But he couldn’t be bothered with trivial ailments such as colds, loss of voice, slight constipation, or diarrhœa, and whenever any of us complained of these, he

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invariably replied, "*C'est normal.*" So, whenever anyone told him "I've got a cough" or "I've got a tummy-ache", we'd then all reply in chorus, "*C'est normal.*" But we had absolute confidence in him, and we knew just how good a member of a party he could be. The year before, on Salcantay, he had given up all his own chances and stayed at Camp II as a reserve, so that we could reach the summit. We were really fond of him, even though he hadn't the most angelic of tempers. He was a first-class climber, and under his apparent indifference there burned an ardent love of the mountains.

To continue our candid character-sketches. Michel Desorbay was the baby of the party. He was always particular about his appearance, even above 16,000 feet, but most of all down in the plains wherever there were any pretty girls around. There was seldom a hair out of place, and the side-whiskers which he had grown were trimmed every day with infinite care. Nevertheless, this dandy knew how to cope with hardship. He had proved this in 1952 when he led a successful expedition to Spitzbergen, where they endured appalling weather conditions. The Sherpas called him "the quiet man". He had just that degree of easy indolence which is rather attractive. He was always good-tempered, and without appearing to hurry he got through a considerable amount of work. He was absolutely reliable, and before we started he collected all our equipment without fuss, and with great attention to detail. He was very strong and would undoubtedly pass the high-altitude test easily. A confirmed camper, he had tips for every awkward situation. Thus he was the champion of the "Elastoplast method", and he counted on overcoming every difficulty with the 200 yards of the stuff which he had brought with him. To add to his accomplishments he wrote in a very pleasing style.

Now for Claude—a real wonder! At the end of an expedition all the men have lost weight, but Claude gains. It's quite uncanny. Her appetite is second only to Pierre's. On a mountain this extraordinary scrap of a woman—barely five feet high, and seven and a half stone—is as good as a man. She keeps up a good pace, has a superb technique, and a flair for route-finding. And to crown everything, a will of iron. She is, in short, a very great mountaineer. She was quite hardened to male conversa-

tion, and never raised an eyebrow at our broader stories—the padre was a great one for them. But although Claude is any man's equal on the mountains, she is also extremely feminine: she didn't forget her nail-file, nor her jars of cream, nor her looking-glass. We all agreed that a woman is an invaluable asset to an expedition—even if it were only for the odd job of repairing and for thinking up menus!

Our two Indians were both charming; but how different from each other! Nalni, who came of a high-caste family, was a complete thoroughbred—and the Sherpas nicknamed him “Son of the Emperor of China”, on account of his elegant manners. He, too, always looked spick and span, and the sight of water was to him an invitation to wash. Neither he nor K. C. ever stirred without a battery of tooth-brushes. The rest of us had only one each, and I suspect Nalni thought us Europeans a disgusting lot. He was also by way of being a poet—which may already have been apparent—as well as a man of culture. He brought with him two of Pandit Nehru's books, and he wrote with considerable talent himself. And of course he loved mountains—otherwise he wouldn't have been there.

K. C., too, loved mountains, but in his own fashion. Nalni would have come to terms with them, whereas K. C. would rather conquer by force. That was Big Jo's nature; he was like a tank forging straight ahead. He was a most reliable chap, and always ready to lend a hand. He had great resilience, as his first trip to the Himalaya proved, when he went to over 23,000 feet on Kamet. He was a thoroughly good chap.

Nor did the Bara Sahib escape the general scrutiny. One day he had the misfortune to say to the others: “I'm doing the thinking for you,” whilst watching them at work. After that he was called “the brain with the idle hands”. Michel wrote of him “the indispensable instigator, and walking Himalayan encyclopedia”. I won't say more out of regard for his modesty.

As for our friends the Sherpas, I shall be speaking of them later.

* * * * *

When we left the mess-tent to go back to the warmth of our sleeping-bags, the weather had not much improved. In the

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middle of the afternoon the sun made a timid attempt to pierce the clouds, but soon the mist descended again upon the camp. Snow-flakes fluttered down. To-morrow, for a certainty, we'd still be at Base Camp.

When we woke it was snowing: a fine snow which fell gently and slowly, but persistently as a November drizzle. We might indeed have expected this—it had been too fine on the way out. We consoled ourselves with the thought that snow and rain during the approach march would have been a fearful handicap. Perhaps the porters would have refused to go on—perhaps Pierre and Michel would not have been able to pick out and reconnoitre a site for our Base Camp, for the simple reason that Nun would not have been visible.

It snowed all day on August 4, and during the following night. When we awoke on August 5 we no longer heard the dull sound of snow-flakes on the tent, and sprang to look outside: it was not snowing, but there was plenty of mist. The barely-glimpsed towers of the south face seemed to be out of this world, and more mysterious than ever. In the afternoon the sun made a rather feeble appearance, and immediately our morale improved. Already plans began to take shape, although the rumbling of avalanches down the south face underlined the realities of the situation. Gradually a few gaps appeared in the curtain. The sun gained strength. The banks of mist slowly dispersed, and the last part of the day was fine. No further encouragement was needed to arouse a desire for action, immediate action. We decided to attack the Tower.

“Claude and Pierre, you'll leave to-morrow for Camp I,” I said abruptly. Claude's eyes lit up: she was longing to pit herself against the mountain. Pierre, too, was aglow with pleasure—there was no need for either of them to reply! Ang Tharkay and two porters would go with them. There was no point in wasting a day's provisions; two Sahibs and three Sherpas were quite enough for a reconnaissance of the Tower. The assignment was still the same: to go as high as possible, to prepare the difficult passages, dump the loads of equipment and food necessary to establish Camp II, and then descend to Camp I.

The rest of us—Michel, Jean, Nalni, and I and the Sherpas—would then join them, take over, and establish Camp II and

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perhaps prospect the following day for the future Camp III. K. C. would unfortunately no longer be with us, for his leave had expired and he was due to go back.

Very early in the morning there was a general upheaval at Base Camp, for by the time the decision had been taken the evening before it had been too late to prepare for the party's departure. With renewed enthusiasm, everyone set to work, Sherpas and sahibs—even, indeed, the "brain with idle hands".

Equipment, food, and medical supplies were rapidly assembled, thanks to lists prepared in advance, and stowed straight into our sacks. The equipment included, among other things: sleeping-units (air-mattresses and sleeping-bags), high-altitude tents from the Annapurna and Nanda Devi expeditions, nylon ropes, karabiners, pitons, line, a *cacolet*¹ in case we had to carry an injured man, two oxygen cylinders, snow shovels, spare crampons. Next came the food: tubes of condensed milk, nougat, jam, tea, sugar, oatmeal, corn-flakes, fruit-juice, tinned fruit in syrup, dried fruit, sweets, chocolate, *pain d'épices*, tins of vegetables, fish and meat, rice, potato powder, ham, *saucisson*, cheese, pemmican, and even whisky. There were also candles, flasks, Thermoses, cooking-apparatus, stoves, and of course the invaluable Calor gas containers. The M.O. had selected a whole range of medical supplies, among them a great variety of sleeping-tablets, and pills and potions for throat infections—sleeplessness, ulcerated throats, and coughs are the most persistent enemies of the Himalayan climber. Nor did Jean forget to take supplies for dealing with frost-bite—heaven forbid we should need them!

In addition to all this we each took our own personal equipment: eiderdown jacket, glasses, spare socks and gloves, outer clothing of nylon, *piéd d'éléphant*,² and so on. It was a scene of feverish activity, with Claude and Pierre champing to be off. The Sherpas were fooling about and playing tricks on each other. Those of us who were staying behind were so excited that to calm ourselves down a bit we decided to accompany the

¹ A carrying-frame made of canvas and straps worn like a rucksack, in which an injured climber can sit.

² A watertight nylon bag used for bivouacs in the Alps. It pulls on up to the thighs.

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reconnaissance party as far as the foot of the rock spur. At eleven-thirty the whole party moved off. Claude at once went ahead and set an infernal pace in order to make up for her forced inactivity—and also, I was sure, to show the Sherpas what she was made of. They must have been asking themselves what on earth this poor little woman was doing in such company! I took it easy, stopping to take photographs, and to film the avalanches on the south face, and arrived at the foot of the spur three-quarters of an hour behind the others, just in time to wish good luck to our two friends and their Sherpas Ang Tharkay, Gyaldzen, Pa Norbu, and Ang Phuter.

We stopped for a bit on the glacier of the First of August and watched the others climbing up (it is always an exquisite pleasure to watch other people sweating away), then made our way back to Base Camp. On the way I confided to Michel:

“I am very anxious. There’s no doubt the Tower is the key to Nun. This reconnaissance will decide our fate one way or the other.”

“Don’t worry, I am certain it will be all right. You were quite right to send Claude and Pierre. I’m sure they’ll make it.”

“I think so too.”

I smiled into my beard, now quite a respectable length; I was pleased with our plan for outwitting Nun.

The afternoon was much more peaceful, now the tension had relaxed, and we quietly got ready all we would need to take with us next day. We were brimming over with optimism and built many castles in the air: reconnaissance of the Tower, Camp II, reconnaissance, Camp III, then the summit. Just as though we were masters of the sky! At Base Camp one sees everything through rose-coloured spectacles. But as soon as one goes high, one’s will-power seems to evaporate, one’s senses are deadened, physical energy diminishes, and all at once the outlook becomes quite different.

Just then a message from the party above confirmed all this only too clearly. It was a note from Claude brought by a Sherpa returning from Camp I, and it acted as a douche of cold water.

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“The tents are full of water and half collapsed. It’s impossible to give the inventory of food supplies that Bernard asked for. Everything is under the snow. In any case bring up sugar and high-altitude tinned food. Equipment: as well as what we decided, bring up two air-mattresses and two down sleeping-bags. Also mending things, including some nylon to repair the tents that have been torn by the wind. The Tower looks foul. We’ll see to-morrow. We’re in good shape.—Claude.

“P.S. The Sherpas are shocked that I’m sharing a tent with the Padre. What will they think when they see me change my tent-mate two or three times a week!”

The M.O. frowned. He was pessimistic on principle. And we teased him about it—also on principle. Next day appeared to prove him right, for it rained. The Col of Good Hope was invisible, lost in the clouds.

“I don’t think it is worth going up,” I said. “Pierre and Claude will have stayed where they are. However, if the weather clears it would be advisable to send up a couple of Sherpas with loads. We’ll be that much to the good, whatever happens.”

At 11 a.m. the weather improved slightly, so Kami and Ang Phuter set off. Soon the mist cleared, and we could see them go up, then the sky brightened, and at about twelve o’clock the Col of Good Hope came in sight.

I grabbed the glasses. Little black specks were moving about. The reconnaissance party looked as if they were ready to leave, and in any case there was no point in us going up. There would not be enough time for our friends to complete their reconnaissance, and next day they would have to return to the job. But the evening was so fine that I bitterly regretted having put off our departure, and I felt I’d really been guilty of an error of judgment. I swore, rather late in the day, that I would never be caught again by false alarms of bad weather. I was learning the lesson of the Himalaya.

On August 8 the weather was magnificent. Only Nalni remained in camp, for he had not completely recovered from his upset, and still had some stomach trouble. At eight-thirty,

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accompanied by Kami, Ang Phuter, and Pemba Norbu, Michel, Jean, and I said good-bye to him. K. C. was also leaving, but in the opposite direction. The poor fellow had tears in his eyes—"I am sure you will get to the top," he said, by way of farewell.

On the glacier of the First of August progress was easy and rapid—proof that acclimatisation was beginning to take effect. I kept on telling Michel—"You see, my dear fellow, that acclimatisation is the key to success. Acclimatisation. . . ."

Michel leaped ahead of me and shouted:

"I'll show you!"

We reached Camp I two and a half hours after leaving Base Camp. The first time we had taken nearly four hours. We were in perfect condition and had hardly sweated at all, but of course we were not yet getting the full force of the sun. We found Claude, Pierre, and the Sherpas beaming with pleasure.

"We've made it, we've climbed the Tower!" they shouted before we'd even spoken a word. "But what a time it gave us!"

"Good show! Tell us all about it!"

"Well," began Pierre, "we left very late yesterday morning. As you know, the weather was uncertain. Instead of tackling the Tower at its base, as I did on August 2 with Ang Tharkay, we began the ascent very much higher—almost on a level with the camp. That saved time. The first slopes looked steep, but by taking advantage of the lie of the ground we arrived half-way up comparatively quickly. There we met with difficulties, for the upper half is far steeper, and quite tricky. Actually there were steep bands of loose rock. There were also pitches of blue ice covered with a layer of snow. We worked out a route on rock, building cairns so that we should be able to find the way in the event of bad weather. The ice-pitches we carefully equipped with fixed ropes, and cut big steps. We pushed on to the top of the Tower in order to see what came next. It doesn't look bad at all. We saw the junction of the Tower with the west ridge. Just beyond there is a small, flat space, where, as we'd supposed, Camp II could be set up."

"Why didn't you go on and do it?" I interrupted.

"The junction is difficult to reach—it's very steep. There will be a long bout of step-cutting, and the place will have to be

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equipped with fixed ropes. We were surprised to find it was so late. It was dark when we got back."

"Well done. You've opened the way to the summit. It's a pity there's no more champagne."

"I say, Claude," inquired Michel, "are the Sherpas satisfied, now?"

It was Pierre who answered:

"I should say they are! Do you know what Ang Tharkay said to me on the summit of the Tower? *Mem sahib good, good!*"

"Now," I declared, "we must have a plan of action. What a pity we didn't come up yesterday! I thought that as you started so late you wouldn't have time to finish what you had to do, and I didn't want unnecessary mouths to feed at Camp I. If we'd joined you here sooner, Camp II would have been established to-day. It's my fault. Now we must try to make up for lost time. Claude and Pierre, you must return to Base Camp to rest. We will keep the Sherpas. Ang Tharkay will show us the way, and to-morrow we will establish Camp II. From there I hope we shall be able to make a reconnaissance in the direction of Camp III. You two will then take over from us at Camp II and establish and consolidate Camp III."

For the moment we were scoring points against Nun. Technically, the situation was well in hand. Our lines of communication between Camp I and the future Camp II were well equipped, and it would be a fairly straightforward trip for the Sherpas with their loads of food and equipment. We held the key to Nun.

Physically, we were all in good form, and our morale was very high. There was one factor, however, which we couldn't control: the weather. Our elation was tempered by the memory of the disappointments we had experienced the year before on Salcantay: a siege lasting twenty-three days, three ill-fated attempts, and only a few days of fine weather during which we had to snatch D-day.

The afternoon was fine and hot, and we got our sacks ready. The late evening was exceptionally hot—a bad sign—indeed we were able to eat our dinner outside. There was a flaming sunset, which boded no good. On the horizon great black streaks floated in the sky, clearly brewing mischief. It smelt like snow

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Alas, so it was. Next morning, on August 9, we were awakened by a familiar sound.

"It's snowing, Michel."

"All right. So what?"

"Well, we shan't be leaving for the moment. We'll wait a bit. Perhaps it'll lift."

"Yes, perhaps. Let's wait."

How pleasant was the warmth of our sleeping-bags! We fell into a doze.

At eight o'clock a Sherpa opened a flap of the tent and handed us in tea and porridge. We gave a quick look round: snowflakes were fluttering in a murky mist. We swallowed our breakfast without much appetite. Drops of moisture, formed by condensation, fell on to our sleeping-bags. Insidiously, the humidity of the atmosphere penetrated our bodies. Things weren't very cheerful. It all goes to show how strong our love of mountains must be, that we should be willing to put up with this sort of thing. However, as it was our own free choice, we just had to endure the misery and hang on. In the Himalaya, even more than elsewhere, tenacity is everything.

"Hope is not essential to endeavour, any more than success is essential to perseverance," I quoted priggishly from the Prince of Orange.

At nine o'clock it was hailing. The wind rose and started to blow violently on the tents, and hailstones beat on the canvas, which flapped like a sail. We bemoaned our wretched lot. In such circumstances one invariably starts dreaming of the Côte d'Azur. How many times have I not heard climbers swear that next year they will go to the sea-side?

"Just think of all the lovely girls at this moment walking about the beaches in Bikinis!" sighed Michel.

At eleven o'clock conditions had barely improved, and there was no longer any question of establishing Camp II that day. Claude and Pierre had been waiting for a lull before leaving, but as there was no immediate prospect of one, they decided to go down to Base Camp in the storm. We felt no call to envy them.

* * * * *

All day long it alternated snow and hail, and then there was the

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wind—the Himalayan wind, piercing, disheartening, devilish, ceaselessly roaring, drowning the noise of the avalanches that poured down the south face. Jean, who was the heaviest sleeper of the party, slept through everything. Michel and I endeavoured to kill time by chatting.

“I say, Michel, don’t you get demoralised?”

“Not in the least. I’ve seen far worse. Do you know that in Spitzbergen last year we were held up for eight days running by blizzards. The wind was so strong that inside the tent one had to yell to make oneself heard. It was enough to drive one crazy.”

Thank Heaven it wasn’t as bad as that. Towards the end of the evening there was actually a lull, which calmed our nerves a bit. Hope returned. When night fell a few stars appeared. At six o’clock in the morning on August 10 the weather was still sullen, but it was not snowing.

“Well?” inquired Michel anxiously.

“It’s not too good. But I haven’t given up hope. I don’t want a repetition of our unfortunate experience of August 8. Let’s wait a bit. After all, it’s very early, and if the sun chooses to come out it may improve matters. What’s more, it’s cold, which is a good sign. Doesn’t feel to me as though it’s going to snow. We’d better prepare, anyway. I think maybe it’ll clear. We must hang on!”

“Pemba!”

“Yes, sahib?”

“*Cha*,¹ please.”

“All right, sahib.”

Generally speaking, we had to wait upon the weather, but to-day the roles seemed to be reversed; obediently the sky seemed to give in to our wishes. Around seven-thirty a small patch of blue appeared. I was determined to see spring in this one swallow, and went over to the tent that Jean shared with Ang Tharkay.

“Jean, it’s very fine now.”

“Really?” he replied sceptically, making a move to go out and see.

“No, don’t go out, Jean,” I said, coming in, “you’ll catch cold.”

¹ Sherpa for tea. It was one of the few words we knew.

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So much solicitude seemed suspect. He answered, with a grin, "If I understand rightly, you want to start?"

"Yes."

I turned towards Ang Tharkay, but the rascal had guessed.

"Camp II, sahib?"

"*Atcha.*"

Immediately he gave his orders. At eight-thirty the three sahibs and the six Sherpas, with Ang Tharkay in the lead, left Camp I. A glance towards the Tower showed it to be half clear of its sheath of cloud. We were firmly resolved to take our chance. It would always be possible to retreat if the weather got worse. But I felt pretty sure that, by evening, Camp II would be a reality.

CHAPTER VI
THE APPARITION

So this was the Tower which had so terrified us! Now that we knew it had been climbed it had lost a great deal of its prestige and power to alarm. With easy minds, we confidently attacked the first snow slope with Ang Tharkay, who knew the route, in the lead.

It was hard work breaking trail in the thick layer of new snow, which balled under our feet so quickly that every ten yards or so we had to give our boots a sharp tap with the point of the ice-axe to detach the extra sole of compacted snow. All the same, we made good time, and after an hour we had gained a good deal of height. It was then my turn to relieve Ang Tharkay. At first the route was easy to pick out. It was just a question of ascending the broad snow gully which runs up towards the Ganri Glacier. The slope was fairly steep, and I had to go up in zig-zags, sinking deep into the snow, which had to be stamped down at every step. At one hairpin bend I glanced back at the procession behind me: Sahibs and Sherpas, climbing up in complete silence but for their heavy breathing, heads well forward, bodies bent under the weight of their rucksacks or loads.

At the top of the couloir a large, flat space with protruding boulders seemed a good halting-place, and we did not resist the temptation. In any case it was a well-earned rest—it was tenthirty and we had been climbing for two hours. We sat down on the rocks and nibbled our provisions—nougat, sugar, and chocolate. We were half-way up the Tower. Secretly, we were rather disappointed. The obstacle was undoubtedly imposing, but it had lost the massive quality that had so impressed us. In fact, the Tower was really only a succession of black-and-white turrets—the beautiful countenance we had admired from afar turned out to be lined and ravaged.

The crumbling rock made a crenellated outline like a fort or the Great Wall of China, and dropped away in great steps to

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end at the Col of Good Hope, where our tents were now no more than specks: how impossibly frail and ridiculous they looked, these signs of a temporary occupation! Just about as frail as ourselves, for with one blow Nun could have swept us off. A monstrous convulsion, a cry of terror, and then once more silence. The inanimate world would continue its existence as though nothing had happened. As Edward Wyss Dunant puts it, "In the Himalaya man finds his own measure in face of the eternal."

Straight ahead of us, the Ganri glacier was a dazzling white with D41 farther away. It was odd that from our present position it looked completely squat, for this twin-topped bastion had appeared most impressive from below. Between it and the Col of Good Hope a beautiful little white needle rose up from a convex mass of black-and-grey rock. We had spotted it as soon as we'd arrived at Camp I, and had christened it Bamomo, a Ladaki word which, according to the padre, meant "triumphant one". Behind this foreground—attractive enough, but a bit pretty-pretty for our liking—the scale and majesty of the Himalaya reasserted themselves. The great Bat Kol glacier described its magnificent curves through a maze of unknown mountains. On the horizon we could dimly make out enormous white shapes, shrouded in cloud. Perhaps the eight-thousanders of the Karakoram? On our right, quite close at hand, stretched the Suru valley. I pictured it as even greener and more welcoming than it must have been in reality, no doubt because of the contrast with the desolate world in which we now were. We'd been resting for half an hour, and it was high time to be getting on again. Ang Tharkay took over the lead again, for the route became more complicated, zig-zagging through a rocky chaos. One by one we found the cairns left by the others on August 8—the pebbles of a Himalayan Tom Thumb. We were faced by three rock steps, which we avoided by sometimes taking to a névé and sometimes to a stony couloir. This brought us to the foot of a terrifically steep slope, undoubtedly the passage about which Claude and Pierre had spoken. The fixed rope which had been placed the whole length of it was now nowhere to be seen: it had disappeared beneath a thick layer of wind-crusting snow.

Ang Tharkay motioned to us to stop—it was now twelve-

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thirty—while he anxiously cast round about for a few minutes, then finally he decided to go up twenty yards or so, and started digging in the snow. Suddenly he gave a triumphant yell:

“Sahibs, the rope!”

Down he came again, and I asked him impatiently:

“Where do we traverse?”

With his axe, he pointed out a line. To begin with, an ascent of about 300 feet straight up—the length of the fixed rope. Then, on the left, a wide shelf edged with ice-glazed rock—that was the traverse. It must have been 150 yards long, and it followed the contour of the snow dome immediately beneath the summit of the Tower—circling it and disappearing behind. It was there, undoubtedly, that we should find the junction with the plateau where we planned to establish Camp II. Would this section be hard? We were really too far off and too directly underneath to estimate.

The minute Ang Tharkay lowered his ice-axe, I jumped into his tracks. Somehow, I just leapt forward, and Michel, to whom I was roped, complained loudly:

“You’re crazy, we’ll weary ourselves out.”

“I don’t want Ang Tharkay to take the lead again. We must show, as Claude and Pierre have done, that we sahibs are up to scratch. I’m damn well doing this to satisfy my own self-respect. To-day when we’re able to make the effort, for heaven’s sake let’s do so; our self-respect mayn’t be up to it another time.”

We had reached a large ice-piton, which marked the beginning of the fixed rope. I grabbed it and began to climb up, but very soon my pace slackened. I had to re-cut the snow-filled steps, and also chip the rope free of the snow and ice; gruelling work which set my heart thumping fit to burst.

Half-way up the slope, I turned round to see whether the others were following. All was well. Behind us Jean, Kami, and Pa Norbu enlarged the bucket-like steps to make them more comfortable, while Ang Tharkay brought up the rear, followed by Gyaldzen and Ang Phuter, who heaved up his load—the heaviest of all—with a great deal of groaning.

We made many halts to regain our breath, and it was already one-thirty when we reached the end of the hand-rail.

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For two hours we had been so absorbed by our labours—eyes glued to rock or snow, heads bent over the tracks like a ploughman's over his furrows—that we had never looked at the sky. Now we had an unpleasant surprise: clouds had blotted out the Tower and we were enveloped in mist. We had to get on with the traverse as quickly as possible. While Michel was bringing me up a length of line to use as another fixed rope, I got out my hammer, some ice-pitons and karabiners which I stuffed into my anorak pocket. I kept one piton out to insert at once; after clearing away the snow which overlay the ice, I banged in the ice-piton for all I was worth, until it was right in up to the hilt. I tested it, and it held perfectly, so I fixed a karabiner to the ring in the head of the piton and fastened the line to it, taking the precaution of tying several knots. I uncoiled about twenty yards, which I would let out as I went ahead, and set off.

The first step out on to the slope was most impressive and exposed. This time, though not for long, I blessed the mist which floated beneath us and hid the abyss. The slope was steep, and the Ganri glacier disappeared into cotton-wool 2,000 feet below. The start of the traverse went slowly, but the snow held well, for the ledge had been swept by the wind. One's feet broke easily through the crust on top, and progress was safe. About fifteen yards from the start of the traverse I stopped to put in another piton and make a stance—banging with the hammer and cutting with the axe. You can do all this in the Alps almost with a smile on your lips, but here it left one gasping. I had to pause and get my breath again.

“Is it going all right?” yelled Michel.

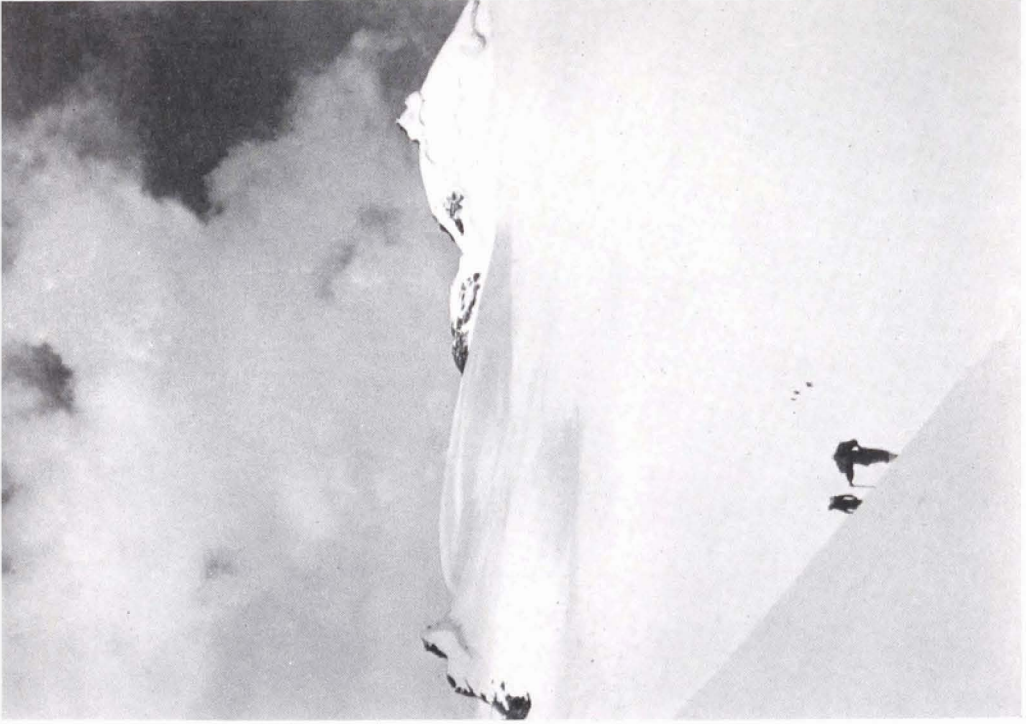
“Yes, you can come along to the second piton.”

“O.K. I'm coming.”

While I was belaying Michel, I gave a quick look round. The mist had thickened and the light was murky. A few snowflakes were eddying round, and the wind was rising. No luck! We were about to be caught in a storm on the trickiest bit of the route, and yet so close to our goal! Well, we'd have to take it. We couldn't let Nun beat us off with this last-minute attack, we just had to establish Camp II to-day. Michel came up to me and I carried on with the traverse. The snowflakes were now falling thick and fast, the squall lashed our faces, and the wind



The south face of Nun with the Tower in the foreground.



Traversing under the Tower.



On the way to Camp II.

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howled. Visibility decreased every minute. After twenty yards I stopped to put in a third piton. The same actions, the same breathlessness, the same manœuvres were gone through. I brought Michel along, and went on again. This time I could see nothing. The snow was sticking to my goggles, and when I tried to wipe them with my gloves, I only succeeded in plastering the snow all over them and everything became blurred. I pushed them up for a few seconds, but it was no good—the glare blinded me. Disconcerted, I stopped.

We were in a very awkward situation. Nevertheless, none of the sahibs was really put out, for, oddly enough, we were happy—happy to come to grips with Nun and make our presence felt on the mountain. Were we not making our mark on it by creating a route? But already the snow, like Penelope, was destroying our work, effacing our tracks; to-morrow, perhaps, they would have vanished. No matter—our dream was coming true, and our mountaineering passion could be given free scope. We were intoxicated, but it was a cool and reasoned intoxication, which, in the presence of danger, was translated calmly into our thoughts and actions.

I was sure that when, later, we relived in memory our adventures on Nun, we should keep a particular affection for this moment. For myself I know that it is the toughest expeditions—not necessarily the most difficult—which I have got most out of; a hard struggle with a mountain and against the forces of nature has always given me something more than a climb at the limit of my capabilities beneath a clear sky and fanned by a gentle breeze.

Now my impatience spurred me on for another ten yards, and my eyes strained to pierce the mystery of this muffled world. I succeeded in vaguely making out a steep step and, just behind and below it, a band of snow which appeared to be flat. But perhaps I was a victim of my own imagination? I shut my eyes a moment to rest them, and looked again. No, I was not dreaming. It really was the junction of the Tower with the plateau.

I yelled back the good news to Michel: "We've done it—we're there!"—and a grunt of satisfaction floated up through the mist. Then I saw that I was too high. We should have to go down, probably about ten yards. In any case, before doing anything

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else, I had to put in a piton. I picked out the longest and strongest, for it would have an important part to play. I intended to pass my own rope through the karabiner attached to the ring in the piton, as well as the line serving as a hand-rail. I explained what I was doing to Michel.

"Let the rope out gradually and I'll slide down."

"O.K."

"Hold tight, I'm starting."

"Right."

I began descending slowly and without jerking, so as not to put too much strain on the piton. Then I found myself brought up short: the rope would not run any more. I had not noticed that it had worked up right under my armpits and was constricting my ribs and making breathing difficult.

"Michel, give me some slack for heaven's sake."

"I can't, there's no more rope."

In the mist I had miscalculated, thinking there was only about ten yards to go down, whereas in reality there was about twice as much. I thought for a moment and then called to Michel:

"Whatever you do, don't move. I've only got the line to hang on to. I'll cut myself a bucket, and when I'm secure you can cross to the piton and give me some more rope."

"Right you are."

I set to work on the snow, then soon came to ice. Balancing on my crampons and holding the rope in my left hand, I cut fiercely to make a roomy stance. The ice-chips flew between my legs and disappeared into space, and quite soon I had made a large step. My crampons bit well into the ice and my ice-axe, driven in deep, gave me a further anchorage. I was well established, and I gave the word to Michel to come on.

But I was gasping. Working like a navvy in an awkward position and with the rope constricting my chest had left me utterly breathless. It reminded me of a route on the Saussois (a climbing school in the Yonne department) called "the steam-engine". It can only be climbed by sheer force, and one reaches the top puffing like an engine.

I got my breath back while I was belaying Michel, at whose whereabouts I could only guess, so thick was the mist.

"I've reached the piton," he called out.

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I didn't wait a moment longer. Thirty seconds later I stepped down gingerly on to a snow-bridge. Would it collapse under my weight? I prodded cautiously with my ice-axe. It was not too solid, but should hold all the same. I crossed the bridge, making myself as light as possible; then I threw technique to the winds and let myself slide down quickly on my backside, until at last I set foot on the plateau and heaved a sigh of relief.

In a trice I took off my sack, drove my axe well in, and twisted both line and climbing-rope around the shaft.

"I'm on the plateau. Come on. I've got you firm. Tell the others to follow."

"They're just behind me. Jean's getting impatient."

Michel moved down quickly, judging by the rope, which I had to take in as fast as I could. His remark on reaching me was, "What a beastly traverse! And what filthy weather."

"It'll be one of the happiest memories of Nun, you'll see. . . ."

The same manœuvre was repeated for each party. With their heavy loads the Sherpas moved slowly and hesitantly, as they had every reason to do. One by one we saw them emerge like ghosts, their faces plastered with snow. For once Ang Tharkay had lost his smile.

At last we were all together on a narrow tongue of snow which should by rights become progressively larger, as it was the beginning of the plateau. I got out my altimeter; it read 19,200, which meant that we had climbed up about 1,600 feet from Camp I. This was enough, and there was no need to go any higher. But where could we pitch camp? My eyes were tired. I would ask Ang Tharkay to find a site, and at my "Camp, please" off he went with Pemba Norbu. He stopped every two yards, blinded by the snow, which luckily was falling less heavily. The wind, too, appeared to have dropped slightly, and the squalls became less frequent. Perhaps we should have the benefit of a lull. The two Sherpas were still advancing, and from time to time Ang Tharkay pushed his glasses right up, ignoring the risk of snow-blindness. He pursued his way imperturbably, but it was almost like groping in the dark.

Soon they were lost to sight; we remained where we were, shivering, stamping our feet and clapping our hands to warm ourselves. The minutes dragged by. I glanced at my watch:

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three o'clock already. Well, we'd get ourselves out of this mess all right. No need to get in a flap. The M.O., who was an inveterate smoker, quietly pulled out a *gauloise* from a packet and lit it calmly. A last squall, more violent than the others, tore the mist apart. Then, as if by magic, the wind dropped and suddenly a hundred yards ahead of us Ang Tharkay and Pemba Norbu could be seen, as they yelled to us for all they were worth: "Sahibs! sahibs! Camp, here!"

We hurried up to join them. The Sherpas dropped their loads with a sigh of relief and took off their crampons. While Pemba Norbu brewed up tea, the other Sherpas set to work. The first thing was to make two large platforms for the tents, and with shovels and ice-axes they sent the snow flying. The sahibs made a pretence of helping the Sherpas—just for form's sake, and to keep up their self-respect. In fact, we were very tired; the nervous strain, the effort of climbing, the height, all these caused a reaction that left us pretty shaky. We were a bit dizzy, and our stomachs were crying out for something to eat. Actually we'd had practically nothing since about seven o'clock in the morning.

By 4 p.m. the two tents were pitched: Camp II was established. Victory! The altimeter registered about 19,300 feet.

The mist had not completely cleared, and we could not tell exactly where we were. On the right the camp backed on to a big rounded snow slope, streaked with black rocks: this was the summit of the Tower. On our left the ice-fall cascaded down, and we could scarcely even distinguish the enormous seracs. Farther on, straight ahead of us, we could only guess at the mysterious plateau beyond.

There was no time to be lost. We'd already arranged that Jean would go down again as well as the Sherpas, except for Ang Tharkay and Pemba Norbu, who would stay with us. So after a quick bite, they all set off, wishing us good luck as they went. Our hopes of establishing Camp III next day depended more on the weather than on ourselves—and what a capricious element it was! Barely two hours ago we had been shivering, now the sun was beating down. Outside the tents it was like an inferno, but inside it was even worse, for there was not a breath of air. Michel and I kept opening our mouths like fish out of

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water. It was as bad as it had been on the first of August on the Col of Good Hope.

The two tents were adjacent, with the openings facing each other. Putting our heads out in an attempt to get some air, we came face to face with Ang Tharkay.

"Hot, very hot, sahib."

"Too hot, it's a bad sign."

"No, sahib. Fine weather for the summit."

Ang Tharkay seemed to be an optimist all right! Not very long before he hadn't been able to see five yards ahead of him, and his glasses had been plastered with snow. He had forgotten all this, and was smiling once more. He went on, pointing up with his finger:

"To-morrow Camp III, sahib. And the day after, the summit. Yes, the summit!"

He was astounded when I answered wryly:

"No, I don't think so. Perhaps Camp III to-morrow. But afterwards we shall all have to go back to Base Camp because of the bad weather."

Ang Tharkay couldn't make this out. It was obvious that he was wondering whether I was joking. Michel added:

"Yes, the Bara Sahib is right."

Our Sirdar smiled and politely refrained from saying anything—perhaps he imagined that the height and the heat had affected the sahibs' brains. But there was nothing wrong with our brains—it was only that I didn't trust the weather, nor did Michel. These sudden changes didn't augur any good. Moreover, I was convinced that we were not yet sufficiently acclimatised, and still lacked this essential factor for success. To-day's experience proved this. We had all arrived up very tired, and in such conditions an attack on the summit might be premature. All the same, whatever happened, the second part of our programme—establishing Camp III—*had* to be completed the following day. A clear, luminous evening enabled us to sketch out our future route.

On August 7, from the summit of the Tower, Pierre and Claude had been able to get some idea of the lay-out. They told us that there were two possible courses. One was to make straight for the west ridge, but to do this one would have to

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cross the head of the ice-fall and force a way through the seracs, which might prove impassable. The other route, which seemed preferable, skirted the ice-fall on the right and then came back to a little col to the east. Sticking our heads out of the tents, we surveyed the scene of operations. The ground sloped up gradually for 1,500 feet or so to the head of the ice-fall. In the background the west ridge ran up to the summit. On the right we could see part of the great face of Nun, three-quarters screened by a huge snow dome. We should have to make a flanking traverse across the face in order to reach an area of couloirs, hummocks, and seracs. There we should have to climb up directly to the little col of which Claude and Pierre had spoken. The route would undoubtedly be complicated, and we should have to wind about, according to the lie of the ground. What lay after we could not tell.

At six-thirty the sun slowly sank behind the Bat Kol glacier, and the shadow of night crept up the west ridge of Nun. At six-forty-five the last rays lit up the summit cone of snow and ice and set fire to the red rocks ringing the top. Then suddenly darkness struck and this Himalayan monarch, too, was swallowed up by night.

* * * * *

On August 11 at 6 a.m. the alarm on my wrist-watch awoke us from the heavy slumbers induced by sleeping-pills, which we had taken the night before when we found we were too tired to sleep. Now we felt rather cheap, our tongues were furry, our heads heavy, and our pulses too rapid. Mind and limb were lethargic. The height was the cause of all these troubles, and it was proof again that we were still not properly acclimatised.

Regretfully I extricated myself from the soft warmth of my sleeping-bag and looked outside. An icy blast blew into the tent. The weather was magnificent—at least for the time being, for to the south the sky was streaked with long red monsoon trailers. Not a very good sign. All the same, we ought to set out. We could always turn back later.

“Pemba!”

“Yes, sahib.”

“Tea and porridge, please.”

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“All right, sahib”—and the stove started to sing. While we waited for breakfast, we got ready to leave, but to do so required a tremendous effort of will. Inside the tent everything was in a mess. Boots were stuffed at the bottom of our sleeping-bags to prevent the leather stiffening in the night frost—an old dodge of Himalayan climbers. Gaiters were in one corner, frozen and shrunk, anoraks in another. Cameras, films, cine-camera, re-fills were all over the place, but carefully wrapped in plastic bags. To find one’s own belongings one just had to fish around. And to move about inside a small high-altitude tent, with the roof sagging on to one’s head, is quite a hard gymnastic feat.

We dressed warmly: a long-sleeved woolly, then a woollen shirt, a thin pullover, plus a thicker, loosely-woven sweater. All these thicknesses form layers of air which give protection against the cold. Then pants, and trousers of that closely woven material, *drap de Bonneval*, and over the whole lot we put an outer layer—trousers and anorak—of nylon, which kept out wind and snow. On our hands we had first a pair of silk gloves, then a pair of angora wool, and finally waterproof nylon mittens. For our feet, the same plan: three pairs of woollen socks, one thin, the other two thicker. Our boots were very roomy, and allowed the free movement of all the toes. It is all-important that the feet should not be constricted, or the circulation would be stopped altogether. The possibility of frost-bite was always in our minds. Canvas gaiters, laced behind, completely covered our boots and kept the snow from coming in contact with the leather.

Our heads were protected by thick Balaclavas over which we fixed our goggles (we always had a spare pair), and faces were smeared with white sun cream, which made us look like clowns. We always had to put on our crampons outside the tents, for fear of tearing the ground sheets. The double walls of these isothermic tents make an air-cushion which is another protection against the cold. Unfortunately the difference between the outside and inside temperatures caused condensation, and the resulting drip on to our sleeping-bags was extremely unpleasant.

The tent-flap opened and Pemba handed in tea and two plates of porridge. Tilman says that to swallow porridge at 20,000

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feet shows a positive triumph of mind over matter. One must persuade oneself that this food has immense nutritive value—which, in fact, is true—and that a beefsteak and fried potatoes wouldn't compare with it—except for the taste! However true this may be, there's no doubt that it makes you feel very sick when you swallow the stuff, and you anxiously wonder whether your stomach will not take it all in bad part. The more so as the position you adopt for eating isn't the best imaginable: seated, and doubled up to avoid touching the roof of the tent with your head. In order to rest a bit you lie back a moment, and your stomach, no longer constricted, begins to take a brighter view of things. But meanwhile the porridge has treacherously taken advantage of the pause to get cold, and the situation is pretty desperate, for it then takes twice as much courage to absorb the rest. No doubt we shall be told, and rightly, that if we put up with all this it is because we have chosen to do so.

By seven-fifteen Operation Porridge was accomplished, and we came out of the tent. Heavens, it was cold! Our fingers were so numb and clumsy that fixing on our crampons and doing up the straps took a good ten minutes. What a horror these early starts are!

We put on our rucksacks containing spare gloves and socks, cameras, cine-cameras and spools, tinned food, climbing equipment, and first-aid kit. We also took some small marker flags with which to indicate the route—they would be invaluable in the event of mist. Pemba Norbu and Ang Tharkay were far more heavily loaded than we were. They carried a tent, food, and equipment, as well as a cylinder of oxygen for Camp III. Going by previous experience, I had decided to bring five cylinders of 150 litres each, or about one and a half hours' supply. There was to be one cylinder at each camp, to be used only in case of collapse or injury.

At seven-thirty we set out. We looked up at Nun: the mountain was not yet in the sun, and its sombre mass loomed up disturbingly. I went ahead to make tracks, followed by Michel: Ang Tharkay was roped to Pemba Norbu. From the very first steps, I found it hard going, for the freshly fallen snow had not had time to consolidate, and I broke through the thin crust and

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sank in up to my calves. At each step I had to make an effort to withdraw my foot.

Nevertheless, we progressed at a good pace, for barely an hour after leaving we had completed the traverse of the large dome. We were quite close to the ice-fall, at the foot of a spur which marked the beginning of the area of gullies and seracs over which we should have to make our way to the col. We halted a minute. The amazing and unforgettable sight that met our eyes brought a cry of admiration to our lips. Far to the north rose Nanga Parbat and the giants of the Karakoram. On the left, Nanga Parbat (26,642 feet), with its two great domes, looked like a large white cat, asleep; but make no mistake—it wakes to kill. The “Naked Mountain” (Nanga Parbat derives from the Sanskrit, *Nagna Parvata*) has claimed the lives of fourteen climbers and seventeen porters. In 1953 an Austrian, Herman Bühl, by a feat unequalled in the annals of Himalayan climbing, conquered this much-coveted summit alone. Thus, after seven attempts, the most murderous mountain in the world, on which so many parties had come to grief, fell without offering any resistance. To the right of Nanga Parbat, the pyramid of K2 pierced the sky. With its 28,250 feet it is the next highest peak in the world to Everest. This amazing cathedral of rock, snow, and ice possesses a barbaric name which has somehow prevailed over all others. The term “K2” is only an indication given by the Survey of India, signifying “Karakoram: summit listed as No. 2”. (It is quite by accident that this number happens to coincide with the position of the mountain in the list of eight-thousanders.) What was, in the beginning, nothing more than a topographical indication, has finally become a geographical name, which has even been integrated into the Tibetan language. But the Baltis—K2 is in Baltistan—also sometimes call it Chogori (Great Mountain).

This year the Americans were attempting it, for the third time, under the leadership of Houston, who was responsible for the brilliant attempt of 1938. Among the members of the expedition was my friend George I. Bell, who the year before had been in Peru with Claude Kogan, Jean Guillemin, and myself. My thoughts went out to him and his party: were they about to plant their ice-axes on the second highest summit of the world?

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Or were they, on the contrary, fighting against the unleashed fury of the elements in an attempt to escape their fate? ¹

From here K2 resembled the Matterhorn. But what a Matterhorn! A Matterhorn set by the Creator on a gigantic plinth. On its right rose three other giants: Hidden Peak (26,470), which was attempted in 1936 by a French expedition led by Henry de Ségogne, Broad Peak (26,400), and Gasherbrum II (26,360), all three still awaiting their conquerors. Winding in between these giants of the earth was the vast Baltoro glacier, twisting and turning through a galaxy of peaks over 23,000 feet high.

* * * * *

“You’re a fool . . . you’d have done better to stick to your place. Of course making tracks is exhausting, but at least you are able to go your own pace—Now, you’re breathless . . .”

This was my other self giving me a lecture, and with good reason. I was furious with myself, and with the mountain which was the cause of all this misery, and with Ang Tharkay for going too fast. That diabolical creature was forging ahead at such a pace that Michel and I had to go all out to keep up with him. We were puffing like grampuses. I found myself counting steps, with the idea of allowing ourselves a bonus from time to time in the shape of a few seconds’ rest. Ang Tharkay saw through the game, guessed that we were feeling the strain, slowed up, and smiled. We heaved a sigh of relief. That was a bit better! We began to live again, and our spirits rose. It is extraordinary how morale can oscillate in the Himalaya, chang-

¹ It was in fact during these very days—August 10 and 11—that a tragic drama was being played out on K2. A reconnaissance party reached a height of just over 27,000 feet—only 1,250 from the summit—to choose a site for the future Camp IX. When they returned to Camp VIII at 25,600 feet, the whole party was blockaded for eight days by storm. The expedition was obliged to give up the attempt, and one of the climbers, Arthur Gilkey, fell seriously ill. On the way down to Camp VII the expedition narrowly escaped disaster through a slip. Gilkey, on an improvised stretcher, was left firmly anchored to a snow slope for a short time while the tents were being put up at Camp VII. He was never seen again. When his friends returned they found he had been swept away by an avalanche. The retreat continued on the 11th, and on this day George Bell had two toes frost-bitten.

(K2 was subsequently climbed in 1954 by an Italian party under the leadership of Professor Desio.—*Translators’ Note.*)

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ing suddenly from optimism to despair or vice versa. If a big effort is needed, the world looks black. But as soon as the body is functioning well, then life begins to look rosy again. For the moment I felt all right. I was full of admiration for Ang Tharkay's route finding; he took every advantage of the ground and, by natural flair and long practice, picked out the best line, first going up a wide couloir, then zig-zagging between seracs and snow hummocks.

On the way up I took off one of my outer mittens for a few seconds in order to find my altimeter, which I had slipped in the pocket of my anorak: about 19,700 feet. Just about the critical limit, above which one really begins to feel the height. For the Sherpas it was nothing out of the way—Pemba Norbu was fresh from Everest and Ang Tharkay from Dhaulagiri. For Michel it was a record. I know how very wearing this introduction to high altitude can be, but Michel wouldn't admit it; he forced himself to answer with a smile when I asked him, rather meanly, if he was all right. As for myself, to say that I felt quite comfortable would have been far from the truth, but last year's experience in the Andes stood me in good stead. It is a very curious phenomenon that once one has gone high, one feels the benefit, even a long time afterwards.

Ang Tharkay stopped to change places with Pemba, and I took advantage of the halt to look at the sky. My God, what a change, and in less than an hour! The Zaskar peaks, which early in the morning had been just lightly touched by long black trailers, were now submerged beneath a mass of cloud, and these clouds were rising up to assail Nun Kun. To the north the horizon had closed in: Nanga Parbat and the eight-thousanders of the Korakoram had disappeared, swallowed up by the damnable monsoon which brought a trail of storms in its wake. Of course, it doesn't affect this part of the Himalaya as much as others; but, all the same, we did come in for some part of the disturbances. And we were not the only ones: the Americans on K2 must have been getting their share.

In an hour's time we should be completely in mist. I made a rapid calculation. We were at 19,850 feet; so in two hours we had climbed only 650 feet. Now there ought to be at least fifteen or sixteen hundred feet difference in height between Camps II

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and III. This meant that if we wished to put Camp III at a respectable height we should need roughly another three hours. It would not be possible, for the bad weather was rapidly gaining on us; we were the losers on this lap of our struggle with the mountain. But there was no reason to give up immediately; with the flags to mark the route we should always be able to find the way back to Camp II. The attempt would at least enable us to establish an intermediate camp where we could dump food and equipment.

The mist caught up with us just as we reached the little col which, the evening before, we had picked out as our first objective. Then it had seemed very near at hand. Once again we had badly misjudged the distance; we were still seeing things on an Alpine scale. We had told ourselves that when we reached the col we should see. Well, we could see very little, and no wonder.

The mist was not very thick, so that we could push on a bit until conditions should become too bad. Ang Tharkay and Pemba Norbu turned round questioningly, and we signed to them to continue. The two Sherpas carried on by guess-work, sniffing their way, and slanted up to the left. We had decided the night before that we should have to make over in this direction to find a site for Camp III.

The ground sloped gently, in fact it was slightly concave. We might have been in one of those combs where the wind never penetrates to blow away the powder snow. There was not even the vestige of a crust. We sank in up to our knees, and had to make tremendous efforts for an almost imperceptible gain.

We were advancing blindly, for the mist had gradually thickened, until everything had merged into one plane and all perspective had vanished. It was time to put an end to this game, or we would soon be turning round in circles on our own tracks. This has been known to happen—mountaineers going round and round like the horses on a roundabout. And what is more serious is that one may fall plop into a crevasse, without any warning—a risk that is really not worth running.

I looked at my altimeter: it read 20,200 feet, nearly 1,000 feet above Camp II. It was certainly not high enough, but to carry on in such conditions would have been idiotic.

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A decision had to be made. I called to Ang Tharkay: "Acho La,¹ we must give it up."

There was a moment's hesitation. Then, almost regretfully, as though he was being torn away, Ang Tharkay let out an "All right, Sahib," which hadn't much conviction in it.

When I came up with him, I pointed out what I thought would be an ideal site for an intermediate camp. A great wall of ice loomed out of the mist. With its back to this wall the tent would be well protected.

Ang Tharkay was not at all convinced; he protested, though very pleasantly. He thought the spot was not a good one, that farther on there would be a better, and that the weather might quite well improve. What an optimist! He was so insistent that I gave way. Very well—we'd go on a few hundred yards, but we would leave our sacks. In this way we should not be tempted to go far, and if we did fall into a hole we should be less encumbered. There was something to be said for our Sirdar's idea. If the wall of mist should happen to open, we'd then be able to see the route ahead and to fix our position exactly in relation to the summit.

So we started off again—after a fashion. We advanced twenty yards, then halted; then another twenty yards, and another halt. A ten-yard lap, and again we stopped. Our two Sherpas had disappeared behind a hummock. This intrigued us, and we carried on to join them. Michel and I began to laugh heartily, for it was indeed a comic sight that met our eyes. There was no longer any need to preach the advisability of stopping. Visibly disheartened, Ang Tharkay and Pemba had sunk down on their backsides, motionless, their axes planted between their legs, hands crossed on the blades, heads bent.

But our laughter was cut short: the Sherpas were, quite simply, murmuring prayers to Buddha. Ang Tharkay was reciting, and Pemba chimed in with a few words at regular intervals in *Acho La's* long chant. This strange incantation in monotone at twenty-thousand feet, filled the silence with a moving and doleful music. It was, no doubt, a fervent prayer that the sky should clear. Profoundly touched, we listened silent and

¹ *Acho La* means respected elder brother. It was the nickname deferentially given by the Sherpas to Ang Tharkay, which we often used.

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motionless, not even aware of the biting cold. Ten minutes went by. And then by an extraordinary coincidence, the veil parted. We found that we were on a large, gently sloping plateau. Ahead, straight in front of us, the foot of the great face was clear. And then the clearing began to extend rapidly up the slopes. A few moments later the summit of Nun was revealed—and a diabolical apparition it was. Three thousand feet in one majestic sweep! An immense white triangle edged by interminable ridges to which clung ghostly shreds of mist, and with the dream-like cone of ice and snow outlined against a pale sky.

We were stunned by this apparition, and our first feeling was of profound discouragement. We realised that ahead of us lay a problem of an entirely different order, and that there was another mountain to climb. All the rest—the climbing of the Tower, establishing Camp II—were but the simple tasks of the approach. We had thought that the hardest part was over and that we were going to gather in our Nun like a fine ripe plum. What naïveté! It was only now that the true stature of our adversary was disclosed. Our disillusionment turned to anger. Oh, the bastard!

* * * * *

There was no question of establishing a camp on this windy spot. In spite of this speedy answer to prayer, Ang Tharkay and Pemba Norbu kept their feet firmly on the ground. After quickly thanking Buddha, they returned to the ice-wall where we had left our sacks. It was the two sahibs who were bewitched by the apparition, and silently endeavoured to fathom the mystery of the summit. But the clouds returned as rapidly as they had cleared, and once more Nun was swathed in its cloak of mist. The curtain fell. Was this the end of the last act but one?

CHAPTER VII

INTERLUDE

IN the pallid light at 20,200 feet stood a small yellow tent—one of the Annapurna tents which the year before had also braved the storms of the Cordillera Blanca. Here it was, back in the Himalaya, very small and frail under the ice-wall. This was all our provisional Camp III. Equipment and provisions were quickly pushed into the tent, then Ang Tharkay pulled down the zip-fastener and carefully did up the press studs of the fly-sheet to stop the wind and snow getting inside.

We seized our ice-axes and departed rapidly. We were in a hurry to escape from such a silent and inhospitable region as this icy waste, and to return to Camp II, where the relief party would be waiting.

Returning along our upward tracks, we found, one by one, our little orange flags, like those that mark the course of a ski-race. During the descent, which was very quick—we had been absolutely frozen during our halt—I brooded over some disturbing questions, and I was sure that Michel was doing the same. I could clearly see, in my mind's eye, that apparition of Nun, that immense white triangle. How were we to tackle it? On the right? Straight up the face? By the left-hand ridge?

The west ridge was very tempting, even though to reach it we should have to cross the ice-fall—a dangerous business on account of the enormous tottering seracs. This would certainly be the most direct route. It would involve no detour, for the ridge began roughly at a height of 1,000 feet above Camp II. And it seemed so close! No doubt it would only be a matter of a couple of hours to reach the foot of it. Once we had gained the ridge it ought, though steep, to be comparatively easy to climb; it was mixed snow and rock, straightforward and without apparent danger. Possibly it was too steep for a camp: and even if we could establish one, our tents, standing on a bare crest, without shelter and exposed to every squall, would be highly vulnerable.

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Should we, then, be forced back on the first course, on which in fact we had already embarked? In this case Camp III would have to be established very high up, or else we might have to envisage a Camp IV. A *sine quá non* for D day was that the distance between the last camp and the summit should be such that the assault party, or parties, should be able to reach the top and return before nightfall. Except in case of necessity (an accident for instance), a bivouac was not to be thought of. The consequences would be too serious.

Our provisional Camp III was certainly not high enough: in under an hour and a half we were already back at Camp II, where we were welcomed by Claude, Pierre, Nalni, our M.O., and four Sherpas. Once again the whole expedition was together. Pa Norbu, Kami, Gyaldzen, and Ang Phuter had brought up heavy loads of equipment and food, the supply teams were working perfectly between Camp I and Camp II via the Tower, and our lines of communication were well organised.

All of us except Nalni had completely lost our voices. We were accustomed to see Jean in this condition, but it had taken Pierre and Claude by surprise. Apparently it was a result of climbing the Tower. They complained that they had caught cold and had taken vigorous steps to cure themselves at Base Camp. I intercepted a mischievous look between them, and realised in a flash that for their hot grogs these two must have got hold of the whisky, the precious whisky which I was keeping to toast the fall of Nun. As soon as I got back I rushed to hide the second bottle carefully. One couldn't be too careful with this rascal of a padre. However, it is an excellent thing for members of an expedition to lose their voices. Tilman holds that there is nothing like it for improving the general harmony.

The others commented on my worried look, and as we took off our crampons we began to explain the situation. We put the new problems before them and the possible solutions. Owing to the muted condition of the party we were able to complete our report without serious interruption. (How right Tilman was!)

We rapidly agreed on a plan of action. Claude, Pierre, Jean, and two Sherpas (Nalni was still not fit, and preferred to return with us) would make a reconnaissance of the west ridge. If this

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proved satisfactory, we would change our route; if not we would follow the line already begun and push Camp III up to between 21,000 and 21,500 feet. After this all of us, without exception, would return to Base Camp to recuperate before the final assault. By this time we should be completely acclimatised—our present condition left a good deal to be desired (though of course here Pierre had a great advantage over the rest of us); both in body and morale we should be on the top of our form. Finally, everything would be in position for the attack, the camps firmly established and provided with all we needed. We should then be able to proceed confidently to the final assault. In conclusion, I said to Pierre:

“Nono, you are in charge. Good luck. Your job is supremely important. We count on all three of you. *Atcha?*”

“*Atcha!* But . . .”

“What?”

“I would have liked to have Ang Tharkay and Pemba Norbu with me.”

“I’m quite agreeable, but I doubt whether they will go up again now. They’ve done a tremendous job carrying enormous loads. Just look at them, they’re played out.”

Our two Sherpas were sitting on their sacks, elbows on knees, holding their heads in their hands. Pierre made the suggestion to Ang Tharkay, but he shook his head, accompanying the gesture as usual with a broad smile which lit up his round face.

“No, *Kusho.*”¹

“Right. Never mind. We’ll say no more about it. I’ll take Gyaldzen and Ang Phuter.”

“Just as you like, Pierre. In that case Kami and Pa Norbu will return with us to Camp I, where they will spend the night; to-morrow they will bring up loads. The rest of us will be in clover at Base Camp, with good food and whisky—if you’ve left us any!”

We drank a last cup of tea, adjusted our crampons on our boots, put on our rucksacks, shook hands with our friends, and then plunged off at express speed down the Tower. Michel and I whistled and sang, as happy as schoolboys after the exams,

¹ Sherpa for Your Excellency.

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who see the freedom of the summer holidays stretching before them. But there would still be another test!

We reached Camp I by mid-afternoon, just as the snow started. We halted a while to eat and to prepare the contents of the loads which Kami and Pa Norbu would take up to Camp II next day. Ang Tharkay, who for once had lost his smile, sat sadly on a boulder watching the falling snowflakes; he looked like a defeated Chinese general. I reminded him that our prediction of the previous evening had proved correct.

"You're right, it's bad weather," he admitted.

Turning towards Michel, I said:

"We were right to stop where we did this morning. It must be snowing heavily up there now."

Ang Tharkay gave final instructions to Kami and Pa Norbu, and then we set off. We went down without hurrying, for now we had all the time in the world. Down below, on the glacier of the First of August we could walk side by side. We chatted cheerfully, drawing up the exact menu for dinner: chicken soup, sauer-kraut, salad with onions and lemon—a great speciality of our Sirdar—fruit in syrup, chocolate cream. As I have already remarked, Himalayan climbers are confirmed materialists.

We sauntered along lazily, the better to enjoy our return to earth. The air was soft. We were now down to 16,000 feet, and it was no longer snowing. We reached the moraine which hid our Base Camp, and 500 yards lower the sun shone fitfully through the clouds. All at once the colours came to life—brown, sienna, ochre, grey-green, blue-black. These delicate tone-symphonies were a delight to eyes accustomed only to white, more white, and nothing but white. We stopped here and there to pick flowers nestling behind the rocks. How good it was to chew stalks and grass and smell the earth again!

By the end of the afternoon's wanderings we were back at Base Camp, at 15,500 feet. A few hours before we had been at over 20,000 feet; a descent of more than 4,500 feet in the day, not counting the trip up in the morning!

A pair of choucás circled above us uttering raucous croaks. Our presence seemed to surprise them; no doubt they regarded us as intruders. We quickly took off our climbing-things to go and wash in the nearby stream, which sang merrily over the

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stones. We summoned up courage to look at ourselves in a glass. Heavens, what a change! It was no longer ourselves at all. Our bearded faces were lined with effort, our features were hollow; The skin on our noses, burned by the sun, peeled off in strips; our eyes were still inflamed. We looked ten years older. I had lost more of my hair in the fray, and there was very little left now. My mother had presented me with a case containing all sorts of lotions I hardly ever used—it was just as well she couldn't see me now!

Ang Tharkay had prepared a royal dinner, with all the dishes of our choice plus an unexpected addition: curried rice, which he does to perfection. After our meal we took a few drops of whisky; the remains of the bottle which those villains had taken to cure their pretended colds. But now the other bottle was safely hidden away; if I died I would take the secret with me to the grave. To crown all we had cigarettes in plenty. Though I preferred a pipe, I didn't take it high up, for it didn't draw well above 16,000 feet, and had to be constantly relit. I had quite enough to do already looking after myself.

Nalni and Michel were as happy as sand-boys. The former had recovered his regiment of tooth-brushes, and the latter had smartened himself up as if all the belles of the district were coming to admire him. I was content just to idle and to give up worrying for a time. All this was quite enough to make us see everything in a rosy light, and Michel and I began to hum the well-known song *La Vie en Rose*. Imagination ran riot. Nothing could hold us back: Camp III was established, Nun was conquered, the triumphal archways were put up along our return journey. It was time for us to take ourselves off to bed.

We woke fourteen hours later. Ang Tharkay brought us our porridge and tea in bed.

"Big Brother," I said, "you are a mother to us."

He burst out laughing. These Sherpas are really extraordinary: they read our thoughts. Barely five minutes before Michel and I had said to one another, "If only we could have breakfast in bed!" René Dittert has written of the Sherpas with great truth: "I don't think anyone could possibly be more obliging and less servile."

About eleven o'clock we put our noses outside. Our first look

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was at the sky—it was not too good. A pale sun and threatening clouds, and it was too warm. All this meant snow. What would the others be doing? We had not long to wait for the answer. Around midday Pemba Norbu let out a yodel, on spotting an almost invisible black speck above the moraine. Who was it? The speck grew bigger, and soon we were able to recognise the doctor by his clothes and his walk. Why was he returning alone? Had there been an accident? We went up to meet him. He reassured us at once: there had been no accident, but everyone was coming down. It had been impossible to carry out the assignment.

“Up there,” Jean told us, “we were right in the storm. Last night the tents were lifted up by the squalls, and we thought we should be blown away with them. It was ten o’clock before we were able to go outside. We had arranged with Claude and Pierre that they should try to reach the west ridge according to plan, forcing a route through the seracs of the ice-fall. If all went well I was to go up to the temporary Camp III with two Sherpas to bring on the tent and its contents. After an hour Claude and Pierre had gained about 300 feet in height and were then obliged to turn back: the weather was too appalling.

“The situation did not improve—very much the contrary. The wind blew stronger and it snowed hard. So we decided to retreat, since by remaining we should diminish the stocks of food. The others will be along this afternoon. It’s a rotten business, all this,” he concluded with a mournful shake of his head.

This time his habitual pessimism had reason strongly behind it. The news was indeed very bad, for it meant that our whole plan of attack had collapsed. A few hours later, just as Claude, Pierre, and the Sherpas reached Base Camp, the sun pierced the clouds as if in mockery.

“It’s sickening,” said Claude, turning to look towards Nun.

“We weren’t patient enough,” added Pierre.

We cheered them up by telling them that they had done quite right to come down. If we were in a bad period, that was because we had to pay for the exceptional weather during the approach march.

Conversation was brisk in the mess-tent as we drank mugs of tea, and discussed the situation up and down. Some were for

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the west ridge, others for the original route with Camp III higher up. . . . But the west ridge route was shorter. . . . No doubt, but only if a way could be found through the seracs. . . . Michel was at it hammer and tongs with Claude, who defended herself with some asperity, for she does not like being contradicted. She was positive:

“It’ll go all right.”

“How could you possibly see, since you were in the clouds?”

“I tell you, I did see.”

A note of bitterness was coming into the discussion, and Pierre turned to me:

“What does the Bara Sahib think?”

“Well, the Bara Sahib thinks that before beginning the assault we must make sure of having a well-established Camp III. Personally I am in favour of pushing Camp III up to between 21,000 and 21,500 feet. I am, therefore, in favour of pursuing the route begun yesterday. At least we know this route, and it seems sensible to go on with it. The west ridge is no doubt more direct. But we should lose a lot of time reconnoitring, and this at a moment when time will be very precious. And I must emphasise again that we are not sure of getting through—those seracs looked dangerous to me. Really, I think we’ll have to come back to the original plan.”

“I’m with you there,” said Pierre. “And now,” he thundered, “no more talk of Nun until further orders!”

Upon these words the meeting broke up. As we went to our tents light flakes of snow were swirling in the mist which began to cover the mountains. Bad weather was slowly setting in. How many days should we have to wait about doing nothing?

* * * * *

Here are some pages from my diary:

August 13: Nothing special to-day, just like any other day, doing nothing. Snow or rain. Mist on Nun. As we are short of Calor gas, four Sherpas have been sent off to fetch wood. They were delighted to go down the valley (perhaps they hoped to meet girls looking after the cattle). Ang Tharkay and Pemba Norbu have stayed with us. These two are quite inseparable. We have strong suspicions that Ang Tharkay wishes to keep

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Pemba for his eldest daughter (he has four to marry off). Our view is that he would make a perfect son-in-law as well as an excellent "housewife".

We've spent the day reading, but one gets quickly tired of it. Michel has been rather bitter: "If you count up the days on which we've done any real climbing, you realise that they are very few indeed." Tilman has often said: "If you really want to climb, don't go to the Himalaya!" The evening has been cold and damp. Went to bed early at 7 p.m.

August 14: No change. No longer snowing this morning. But banks of mist have rolled up one after the other to submerge the mountains.

We're bored to tears. It is a frightful humiliation for climbers to be condemned to inaction. It's terribly demoralising. To kill time we've played chess or read—Prévert (*Paroles et Histoires*), Nehru (*Autobiography* and *Glimpses of World History*), Maraini (*Secret Tibet*), Harrer (*Seven Years in Tibet*), the Fables of La Fontaine, and *India Before the Storm*, by Tibor Mende. But we soon get sick of reading, after two whole days of it, and after lunch we began playing cards—*belote*. The M.O. is a keen bridge player and won't stoop to such childishness. Claude and Michel play together and Pierre's my partner. Pierre's new to it, but it doesn't take him long to learn: he's just as fond of cards as of whisky, which is saying quite a lot! He's even a bit of a cheat, and with a far-away look on his face he takes a squint at his neighbour's cards—not that I object, as I'm playing with him. He's a bit of a card himself, our padre! Now he makes signs to me to play certain cards: and seeing what's going on, Claude and Michel begin cheating, too. So we're all square. The evening ends with a crushing victory for P. Vittoz and B. Pierre, which the beaten pair won't acknowledge to have been won by fair means. Indeed, they refuse to continue under such conditions! Meanwhile Nalni reads up and writes out his notes. Jean sleeps like a top and snores fit to start an avalanche.

August 15: Better weather this morning, though it's been snowing all night. Neither rain nor snow, only banks of mist. After breakfast the sun tries to come out, and part of Nun is visible. The south face is terribly plastered. Our hopes are short-lived: rain by midday and more snow in the evening.

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The two porters to be entrusted with telegrams for the nearest post office (Kishtwar, 125 miles away) arrive with letters from Europe and India, and Indian newspapers ordered by Nalni. We hear all sorts of news at once: the end of the war in Korea, Beria's arrest, the general strike in France. All this leaves us cold. What matters to us egotists is the conquest of Nun. And we're not getting any farther on with it. There's a letter among my mail from the *girdawar* of Yurod, confirming that in accordance with my request, seventy porters will arrive on August 28 at Base Camp for the return journey. We write at length to our parents and friends. I write a telegram for the France-Pressé agency in New Delhi, for the post runners are leaving to-morrow morning.

In the afternoon the Sherpas return with an enormous cargo of wood. Pierre asks Gyaldzen:

"What about the girls?"

"They made us very happy."

A day of visitors. Two nomads, who have heard there's a doctor in the neighbourhood, have marched for days to find us. Jean grumbles, but does his stuff. The two patients go off with their medicines: they feel half-cured already. And the doctor resumes his slumbers.

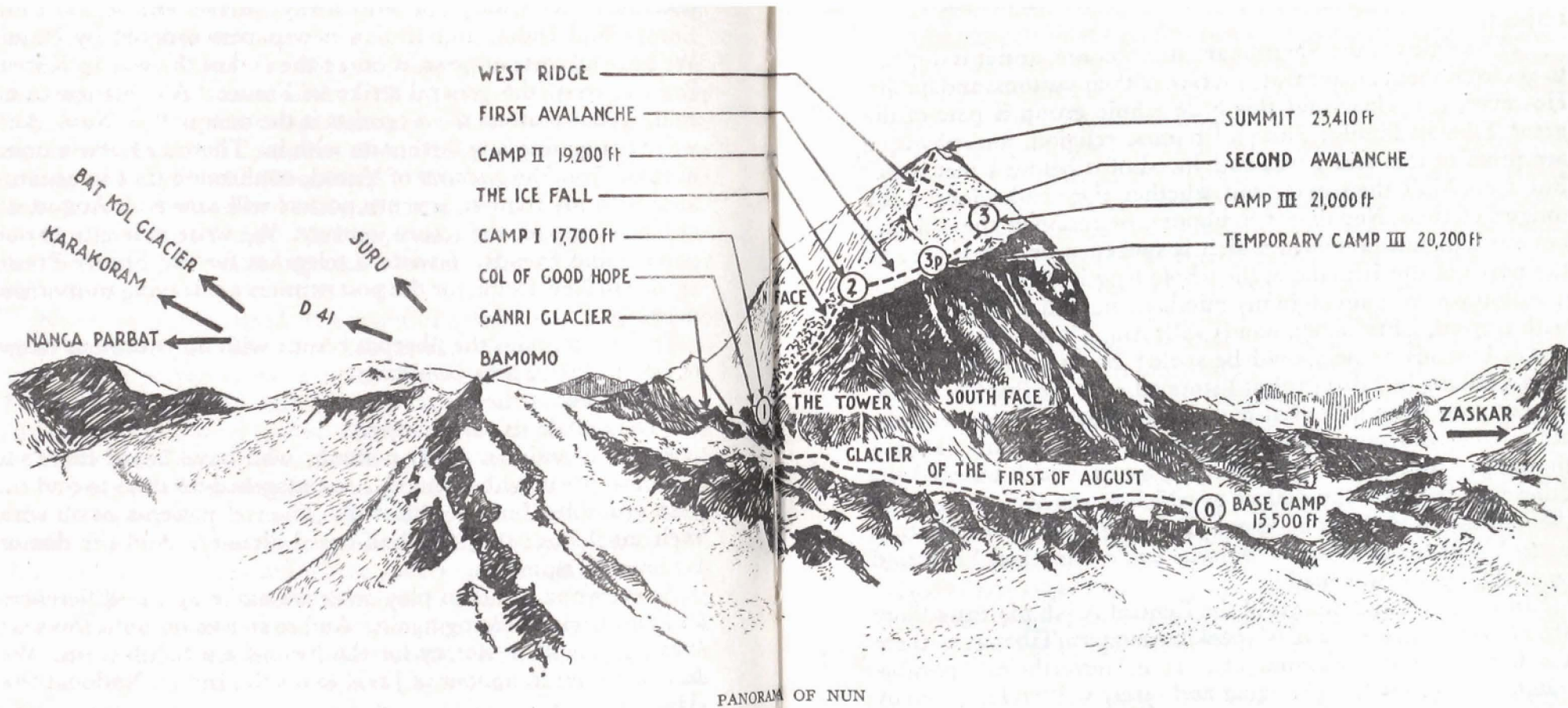
As everyone wants to play *belote* we make up our differences . . . and begin cheating again. And so it goes on until the next bust-up. Another victory for the Nono-Bara Sahib team. We have a dinner in honour of Jayal as it's the Indian National fête day.

August 16: Woken by the sound of hail: no improvement in the weather. We scarcely wait to finish breakfast before hurrying back to our sleeping-bags. What a rest-cure!

Now that we have all the Sherpas together it's time to interview them, with Pierre's help. Some time ago I prepared a questionnaire for the purpose. We're greatly interested by these men, and very much want to know more about them than what we can glean through everyday conversation.

* * * * *

"First of all," began Pierre, "I would like to tell you what is known of the Sherpas and their tongue."



Nun is the second highest peak in Kashmir and is the seventeenth in height on the list of Himalayan 7,000 m. (22,966 ft.) peaks that have been climbed.

Of the fourteen 8,000 m. (26,247 ft.) peaks, seven have now been climbed: in order of height:—Everest, K2, Kanchenjunga, Makalu, Cho Oyu, Nanga Parbat, Annapurna.

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Michel, Claude, and Jean put down their books. Whenever Pierre started on a topic like this we all listened with respect.

“The origins of the Sherpas are still obscure, and it is difficult to get from them an accurate picture of their customs and habits. However, it is clear that this little ethnic group is part of the great Tibetan family; Sherpas’ names, religion, and physique are proof of this and I was convinced of it before I met them. But I couldn’t then make out whether they had adopted the tongue of their Nepalese neighbours, or retained the old and famous Tibetan language which is spoken over a vast area to the north of the Himalaya, the whole length of the range. This question was very much in my mind when, with curiosity mixed with respect, I first shook hands with Ang T’arke—incidentally this is how his name should be spelt.¹ So as an experiment I began talking in Tibetan; but I stopped after the first few words, for the poor chap looked at me with such startled eyes and the air of one who says: ‘But, sir, I don’t talk French!’ Then I thought of speaking slowly, word by word, which lessened the difference between the dialect to which I was accustomed and the one which perhaps he knew. Pointing to various objects in turn, I said ‘wood’, ‘foot’. A large smile wreathed his round face. The point was made.

“In the oases and deserts of the Central Asian plateaux there are almost as many ways of speaking modern Tibetan as there are hamlets and encampments. It is, nevertheless, possible roughly to classify this changing and rarely written language by taking as a base the three principal districts of Tibet. In this way one can distinguish the central dialects of which the prototype is that of Lhasa; the western dialects proper to the regions round Ladak, and the eastern dialects, which are spoken in the relatively low-lying provinces of the Tibetan-Chinese frontier.

“At the present time only a few of the dialects of the first and second groups are known at all well to Europeans. But the eastern dialects do not appear to have been studied systematically at all, which is a great pity, for there is a tradition that the

¹ I personally disobey this edict and continue to write Ang Tharkay, for this is how he is known the world over, and it is how his name is written on his visiting-card.

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Sherpas emigrated from an eastern province (*Sherpa* coming from *shar*, which means *east*), and a thorough knowledge of the eastern dialects might enable one to prove or disprove the truth of this tradition. Further, by comparing the Sherpa language and various of the eastern dialects, one might be able to establish the region from which the Sherpas originally came.

“In the meantime I can only put forward the following conjectures. The Sherpa dialect belongs to the group of central Tibetan dialects; though it differs markedly as regards pronunciation and grammar from, for instance, the dialect of Lhasa. Certain intonations and the use of certain words lead one to the hypothesis that, in the distant past, the Sherpas spoke one of the eastern dialects. They have been greatly influenced by neighbouring languages so that the pure Tibetan words have been replaced by equivalent words in Nepalese or Hindustani.”

“It is a curious language,” interrupted Michel. “When you are talking with the Sherpas it sounds as if you’re using onomatopœia—you seem to be barking.”

“Yes, you’re right,” went on Pierre. “Their Tibetan dialect possesses a tonal quality whose strangeness it is difficult, if not impossible, to describe, and sounds which it is extremely awkward to reproduce in our alphabet. Thus *tokpo* means friend; *lakpa*, hand; *ming*, name; *luk*, sheep; *lak*, eagle; *balu*, bear; *sang*, saucepan; *tsong*, onion; *kangri*, glacier; *lungpa*, valley; *tse*, summit; *tangpo*, cold; *dang*, yesterday; *ngamo*, to-morrow morning, and so on.”

“But,” put in Michel, “all the same, one has to use conventional symbols to write down these words.”

“Yes, of course. Thus the vowels, which are generally very short, *e*, *u*, *ö*, *ü*, are pronounced *é*, *oo*, *eu*, *u*. *R* is rolled and short; *ch*, *j*, *sh*, *zh* correspond to the sounds which in French would be written *tch*, *dj*, *ch*, and *j* respectively. But these conventions, although very useful, are neither systematic nor sufficient; they are not even recognised by all writers.”

* * * * *

The Sherpas’ tent was not far from our own. We put on our boots, splashed through the slush of dirty snow and earth, and were there at once. We poked our heads through the opening

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of the tent. The Sherpas were sitting cross-legged round a mat playing dice.

"Hullo. The Bara Sahib wishes to ask you some questions," announced Pierre. "Are you willing?"

"Certainly," they replied, much intrigued.

We sat down.

"First of all," I said to Pierre, "I would like to know their ages, their family relations, and the principal expeditions in which they have taken part."

They put up very willingly with this interrogation. We began with Kami, the baby of the party. He was very conscientious and capable of carrying really heavy loads; twenty-three years old and unmarried. In 1951 he had been with Eric Shipton on the reconnaissance of the south face of Everest. Before coming with us he had climbed with the Swiss on Dhaulagiri (26,795 feet).

Pemba Norbu, our dear Pemba, was twenty-six. He had been with Shipton in 1951 on Everest, and in 1952 on Cho Oyu (26,904 feet). He had now come straight from Everest, where he had gone as high as Camp IV (21,200 feet). He was personal Sherpa to Sir John Hunt, who gave him this excellent chit: "A most attractive character. Has shown unequalled endurance. Went up and down the ice-fall several times carrying enormous loads over the ladders."

Pa Norbu, twenty-seven years old and unmarried. A very gifted and promising Sherpa, who had often led a rope. In 1950 he accompanied Tilman first to Annapurna Himal, then to the south face of Everest.¹ In 1951 he was one of the Sherpas on the third French Himalayan expedition, led by Roger Duplat from Lyon (who disappeared with Gilbert Vignes on Nanda Devi). The same year he took part in the reconnaissance of the south face of Everest. In 1952 he was on Cho Oyu—it was a fine list.

Gyaldzen, twenty-seven, married with one daughter, certainly had a magnificent career before him. He is extremely intelligent and is capable of taking initiative and of leadership. In our opinion he is of the stuff of which Sirdars are made. He

¹ Oscar Houston, the American, invited Tilman to join his expedition, the other members of which were his son, Dr. Charles Houston, A. S. G. Bakewell, and Mrs. Elizabeth Cowles.

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speaks English fairly well and has a strong sense of humour. Pierre tells the story that one day as Gyaldzen watched him rubbing Claude's back—she was shivering with cold—he asked: "Has the *chefitaine* got fleas?"

In 1949 he went to Pyramid Peak with the Swiss Sutter and Dittert, then with Thomas to Panch Chuli. 1950 saw him on Kailas Peak, and 1951 once more on Panch Chuli. In 1952 he was with the Swiss on Everest up to about 21,500 feet. Before coming with us to Nun Kun he had accompanied the Swiss expedition to Dhaulagiri.

Ang Phuter, Ang Tharkay's brother, is forty; married and the father of four daughters. He is as strong as a lion and carries the heaviest loads with a smile. He was on Everest in 1936, 1938, and 1951; on Cho Oyu in 1952, and this year on Dhaulagiri.

And now we come to our Sirdar. He is the equal of Tensing, and vice versa. Both are aces of their profession. Ang Tharkay no longer needs any references, though on our return to Srinagar he asked me for one. Perhaps it was just to please me. This is what I wrote: "It is difficult to say anything more in praise of a Sirdar with such an extraordinary record of expeditions, and who has such a tremendous reputation. All the same, I would like to say how greatly I appreciated his integrity, his conscientiousness, his spirit of initiative, and his remarkable gift for organisation. Ang Tharkay loves mountains and is genuinely overjoyed when the summit is reached. We all regarded him as a true friend."

His life history is worth telling. He is now forty-five years old, married, and has four daughters. He is Tensing's brother-in-law: actually his wife is only a cousin by marriage of that famous Sherpa; the daughter of one of her uncles (on her father's side) married the conqueror of Everest as her second husband; put it another way, it's the daughter of the brother of Ang Tharkay's father who married Tensing. Quite simple! But in this country of polyandry one is never quite sure about the exact degree of relationship.

In 1931, when he was twenty-three, Ang Tharkay began his career with the Germans on Kanchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world (27,146 feet). Two years later he was a

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porter on Everest, one of the splendid band of Sherpas who succeeded in establishing Camp VI at 27,400 feet in a blizzard. This tremendous feat brought him to the notice of Eric Shipton, who later wrote of Ang Tharkay: "His exceptional qualities make him the best Sherpa I have ever known." The following year he accompanied Shipton on the reconnaissance of the Nanda Devi massif, and in 1935 he was once again with Shipton on the slopes of Everest. That same year he went with C. R. Cooke to Kabru (24,076 feet), which was climbed for the first time; 1936 saw him again on Everest with Shipton, who the following year took him to the Shaksgam; in 1938 he was once more with Shipton on Everest, and once more at Camp VI at 27,198 feet. In 1939 Shipton decided to organise a light-weight expedition to explore some of the glaciers of the Karakoram, and Ang Tharkay was invited to lead his nine Sherpas; the war cut the expedition short.

In 1940 he met C. R. Cooke again and made the acquaintance of the man who, thirteen years later, was to lead the successful Everest expedition—John Hunt. Their objective was a reconnaissance of Pandim, in Sikkim. From 1940 to 1943 events forced him to desert the mountains for the plains, and he took a job as cook to the Indian Army officer he had climbed with, C. R. Cooke. In 1943 and 1944 he was employed by the Survey of India and travelled in Nepal, Sikkim, Garhwal, and Kashmir.

At the end of hostilities, Himalayan climbing came into its own again, and once more his services were in demand. Wilfrid Noyce, who was subsequently to be a member of the 1953 expedition to Everest, engaged Ang Tharkay in 1945 for Pauhunri (23,385 feet), of which they made the second ascent. The same year Ang Tharkay accompanied Tilly to the summit of Chomiomo (22,402 feet). From 1947 to 1949 he took part in a number of minor expeditions.

1950 was the year of Annapurna, where Maurice Herzog made him Sirdar of his Sherpas. It was Ang Tharkay who established the last camp—Camp V at 24,600 feet. He was very happy to have taken part in the conquest of the first "eight-thousander"; it was a great feather in his cap to crown an already extensive career.

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Upon his return to the valley he was greeted by the sad news that a landslide had devastated Darjeeling and carried away the little house which it had taken him years to save up for and build. After three ghastly sleepless nights he arrived exhausted at the scene of the disaster.

“I could not believe my eyes. For a long while I was speechless, as I saw the awful mess of beams and earth, and masonry. All my belongings were destroyed. When I looked away from the ruins there were the five members of my family staring at me, with questioning eyes. I was their only support, their only hope. I realised that I must carry on and begin all over again.”

So, at an age when most people begin to think of retiring, Ang Tharkay returned to the struggle against want and misfortune. Once again he found his old friend Shipton in 1951, and with him made the reconnaissance of the south face of Everest. In 1952 he went to Cho Oyu, again with Shipton. In 1953 it was Dhaulagiri and Nun Kun.

Such is the man, and such is his roll of honours. I must admit that before I met him I did not know he had done so much. If I had, I should perhaps never have dared ask him to be the Sirdar of our expedition.

We paused for a little after this long story to which the Sherpas had listened religiously. The way in which they looked at Ang Tharkay while he talked was living proof of their admiration and affection for this man, who was not only their Sirdar, but also a religious authority. We had often, in the evenings, heard Ang Tharkay reciting prayers in which they all joined, and the silence of Base Camp would be broken by the strange, rugged tones of their chants. But there were more questions to be asked.

“Where were you born and what did your parents do?”

It was Ang Tharkay who replied. All six of them were natives of the famous valley of Sola Khumbu, the country of the Sherpas. Some were born in Namche Bazar, others at Khunde. Their parents were simple peasants who made a hard living from the produce of their fields (potatoes, barley, oats) and from their flocks of goats and sheep.

“Why did you leave the Sola Khumbu valley?”

“We could not make a living. So we emigrated to Darjeeling.”

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“Why did you choose Darjeeling?”

“Because there’s a good chance of finding work—as tailors, butchers, or shoe-makers, for instance. One can also get work on the tea-plantations.”

“Then why did you change to a dangerous job like a Sherpa’s, when you might have stayed on quietly as butchers, tailors, or shoe-makers?”

This time Ang Tharkay was not the only one to reply. They were unanimous:

“Because we like it.” Pemba added as well: “You see the country, and you earn more money than any other way. You’re well fed and well clothed.” And Gyaldzen wound up: “When we return home after an expedition everyone admires us!”

Ang Tharkay then went on to explain to Pierre that there had been some antagonism between themselves and the “Tibetans”, the people who live on the southern frontier of Tibet. Before the frontier was closed for the political reasons with which we are all familiar, the British expeditions that attacked Everest from the north recruited Sherpas not only from Darjeeling but also on the way, in Tibet. A great rivalry developed between them. “The real Sherpas are those from Sola Khumbu,” he declared proudly.

“How long do you carry on in this job?”

“We stop when we can’t climb mountains any more. We’ll be pretty old by then!”

“And when you are old, as you call it, what will you do?”

Gyaldzen, who is a bit of a wag, said something, at which Pierre burst out laughing, and so did all the Sherpas, who revel in a joke. Mongolian gaiety is more than an empty phrase. I asked Pierre the reason for this general hilarity.

Gyaldzen had replied: “We shall return to Sola Khumbu, buy a field, take a wife, and watch her work.”

“And your children? Would you like them to take up the same job as yourselves?”

They all answered: “Yes.”

Then I came to various questions regarding their “corporation”. Actually they were not organised. “We are free men,” Ang Tharkay declared proudly. The Sherpas had not formed a syndicate like the guides of Chamonix and Zermatt. They

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have no one chief, but they do recognise the authority of four Sirdars: Gyalgen (I imagine this must be Gyalgen II, called Mikchen, born in 1915, who was on Everest in 1936 and 1938, in the Karakoram with Eric Shipton in 1939, on Nun Kun in 1946, Pyramid Peak in 1949, and on the expedition to the south face of Everest with Houston and Tilman in 1950); Pasang Lama (the Sherpa of K2 fame, who for a long time—until 1952—held the altitude record for Sherpas with his 27,329 feet); Tensing, and our Ang Tharkay. They have no system of social security. "But," said Ang Tharkay, "the Government allows us three rupees a week in case of illness. In addition, if any one of us dies we all club together to give the deceased an honourable burial."

There is, therefore, no formal organisation.¹ But our Sirdar told us that the Sherpas are a very united body and do not hesitate to lend each other money without interest on the basis that one good turn deserves another. If they applied to money-lenders the interest would be twenty-five per cent!

"How many active Sherpas are there?"

"About thirty-five."

On this point I think Ang Tharkay is mistaken and that there are more, if one can go by the lists in the *Himalayan Journal*. Here it will be as well to make a digression to give some information about the Himalayan Club. This remarkable institution is a private organisation just like the Alpine Club or the Groupe de Haute Montagne. Its origin really goes back to 1921, the year of the first Everest Expedition.² On this occasion the high-altitude porters were christened "Tigers". Seventeen, who had distinguished themselves during the expeditions of 1921, 1922, and 1924, were later to receive a medal showing a tiger outlined

¹ It is distressing to think that these men do not have the benefit, when they have to retire from their profession, of a modest pension to add to their savings which would keep them from destitution. In all fairness, the sahibs should think of the future of the Sherpas. Medals, certificates, praise are not enough to meet the case. Nations who have taken part in the conquest of the Himalaya, and whose successes have been due in great measure to the devotion and heroism of these men, might form an international fund, administered by the Himalayan Club, for instance, which could devise an appropriate pension scheme.

² See the *Journal de la Fondation Suisse pour Explorations Alpines*, No. 1, April 1953, Ed. Marcel Kurz.

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against a snowy summit. These Tigers—only half of whom are still alive—formed the nucleus of the Sherpas. Since then the Tiger medal has continued to be presented to Sherpas who have gone to a certain height: round about 25,000 feet.

The Himalayan Club was officially constituted in 1928. All the Sherpas—and they then numbered over a hundred—received a reference number and their names were listed on a register. To-day, in principle, each Sherpa is given a reference number, and he has a book in which are entered all the expeditions in which he has taken part, the services which he has rendered, and, usually, the remarks of the leaders of the expeditions.

The Himalayan Club gives great assistance to the leaders of both large and small expeditions. It puts them in touch with the Sirdar and with the Sherpas they require, when no arrangement has been made direct. In either case the Himalayan Club plays an important part, making the men pass a medical inspection, obtaining for them an advance of pay, and making the employer sign an undertaking to pay an indemnity in the event of an accident: frostbite, the loss of one or more limbs, or death. This organisation has also drawn up regulations governing rates of pay, advances, equipment, food, and so on. Finally, it publishes the *Himalayan Journal*, an authoritative publication which gives detailed accounts of all expeditions as well as a multitude of useful information.

This interview seemed to surprise our Sherpas, as well as amuse them. And perhaps they may even have been flattered by our curiosity. We now asked two questions about their religion and political life. First of all, how did they practise the former in Darjeeling and when on expeditions?

They were all Buddhists. At Darjeeling there are no convents or monasteries. But among the Sherpas there was a lama or priest, who was indeed the Sirdar, Pasang Lama of whom we have already spoken. And itinerant lamas go to Darjeeling when there are religious ceremonies to be celebrated. And during expeditions? Ang Tharkay answered us in metaphor: "We live like chickens, we do not try to reach heaven."

And now for politics: Had Ang Tharkay voted during the 1951 elections? The reply was: "Yes, there was something or other like that—I don't remember very well."

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As they did not appear to be very interested, we changed the subject. We put two questions to the unmarried men, Kami, Pemba Norbu, and Pa Norbu. How did they spend the money they earned? The reply was unanimous. They supported their old parents: this is a law in Tibet. And they saved.

Did they intend to get married? Certainly: "We'll take wives when we have enough money." "And then will you marry women from Sola Khumbu or from Darjeeling?"

There was general agreement on this subject: they would marry women from Sola Khumbu. The Darjeeling ones were no use at all: they hadn't any fields to cultivate. But the women of their native valley were first-class, for they worked in the fields *and* looked after the livestock.

And now a question for all of them: what did they do during the winter? Some remained in Darjeeling. But most of them returned to the Sola Khumbu valley, fifteen days' march from Darjeeling. Their faces lit up when they spoke of their paradise: "We're happy there and we get fat," added Gyaldzen.

Changing the subject completely, I asked Pierre to interrogate Ang Tharkay about his recent trip to Paris. He told us that it had been a great honour for him to be the guest of the French; he would remember it all his life. Paris was vast; one was lost in all those streets and avenues, and the traffic had terrified him. The people were very pleasant, and he found the food delicious. He was much astonished by the Eiffel Tower: it must be very high. But the idea of climbing up to the top never occurred to him.

"I want to know," I said to Pierre, "whether he associates the Himalayan peaks with divinities as the old Sherpas used to do."

"No," Ang Tharkay replied, "the present generation no longer believes this."

"And what does he think of the sahibs who climb mountains?"

"I do not find it surprising that they want to do so," he declared, "since I want to do it myself. After I have been at home a while, I want to be off again; I get restless and unhappy."

I jumped at the opportunity:

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“What does happiness depend upon?”

Ang Tharkay thought for a moment. Then his face broke into a mischievous smile:

“It depends on the sahibs!”

Outside the snow was still coming down in great flakes.

CHAPTER VIII
THE AVALANCHE

THE inexorable date was approaching far too quickly; and yet these meaningless days of inaction went on and on. On August 28, now so horribly close, the coolies would arrive. And when the last grain of sand had run out, victors or vanquished, we should have to pack up and go.

It was now August 17—only twelve days left! More than enough in actual time, yet not half long enough to get the better of Nun. Our dream was to plant our ice-axes on that little square of snow, whether bathed in sunlight or swept by storm, and then hurry away with our treasure safe in our hearts for ever. Everything depended on the weather: *we* could do nothing. Here the mountains were masters.

And yet on August 17 the sky was full of promise. It no longer rained or snowed or hailed, and even the mist had gone. Certainly the great clouds sweeping along with the wind still looked menacing, but the sun was behind, ready to warm the earth again, to transform the snow, to caress the rock and rejoice our spirits. The sun is meant to give that hope which strengthens faith, and many times that day it appeared and disappeared. As night fell, the wind broke up the vault of cloud as if by magic, and stars we hadn't seen for days again appeared in the Himalayan sky—the Great Bear, the little Pole star, and the proud Southern Cross. Yet it never occurred to us to start off. We just did not believe in this sudden change.

* * * * *

It was two o'clock in the morning, and I could not get to sleep. For hours I had been twisting and turning and sighing. I was the only one who couldn't sleep, and it wasn't for lack of sleeping-pills. But I was obsessed by Nun; it had gripped me and would not let me go.

Once again I wriggled out of my sleeping-bag, got up and went out of the tent, hoping that a turn in the night air would

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soothe me. A hundred yards from the tents I sat on a rock facing Nun. The sky was a galaxy of stars. It was mild, deliciously mild. Not a sound, not a breath of life. Then, occasionally the crash of a stone-fall on the south face—an evil noise, like an express coming out of a tunnel—a few straggling stones, then nothing. Everything returned to normal and the silence of the grave.

Lit up by the moon, the face of Nun gleamed fantastically. The play of light and shade combined to give an enhanced severity to this monstrous edifice, at once confused yet mighty. I questioned Nun. When would she give herself up? She remained as silent and impassive as a Sphinx, and mocked me. Who was it who said: "One must enjoy nature, not worship it. Mountains and the stars should not be taken seriously"? I got up and moved slowly up the scree. I had to consider the problem calmly. Two camps were now well established, with equipment and provisions. The way to the third was begun. We were in splendid fettle physically, perfectly acclimatised, and our will to win was stronger than ever. What were we waiting for here? The sky was blue and cloudless. This was ridiculous, we must go up to meet the fine weather, it must find us at a high camp. If we waited, and then had to go up to Camp III, it would be too late. Our look-out ought to be established high up, in view of the summit; we must be up there to snatch opportunity when it came. At present, we were losing the game: our adversary had almost lulled us to sleep.

I was all keyed up as I made my way back to the tent, and decided I'd wake Pierre, and tell him everything.

While I was taking off my boots, I heard a little cough, and the rustle of an air-mattress. Someone else was sleepless: and that person, I thought, was Pierre. So I whispered:

"Is that you, Pierre? You're not asleep, either?"

"No, I've been thinking of Nun."

"Me too. I feel all worked up. I've just been taking a turn outside. The weather's magnificent . . . and I've been thinking things out. I've a plan. It's lucky you're awake—I couldn't keep it to myself any longer."

"I'm listening."

I began in a low, conspiratorial voice.

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“The weather seems to have improved. Maybe it is not yet set fair. But I think the really bad period is over. To-morrow we’ll go carefully over the inventories of each camp, draw up a list of what each of us must carry, and settle our system of support; in short, we’ll prepare the assault down to the last detail. I think that to-morrow we must send up an advance party of Sherpas to Camp I to prepare for our arrival and to repair the damage. There must have been quite a bit with all this snow.

“The following day the rest of us will leave Base Camp. We must snatch at the fine weather, go ahead and be ready for it. Otherwise we shall stupidly lose all too precious days.

“On the 21st we’ll establish Camp III, following the route we have already begun. It’s safer, and we haven’t the time to look for another way. Then on the 22nd we’ll try for the summit. Of course we may fail. But we shall still have a week in which to launch one or even two more attempts.

“Given reasonable weather, it’ll be hellish bad luck if we don’t succeed. Anyway, we shall have set our consciences at rest. We shall have done everything we could. Now what’s your view?”

“It seems perfectly reasonable to me. We must go up.”

For another half-hour we discussed a whole lot of things, gradually raising our voices as if we’d been alone. We finished by waking Claude, who joined in the discussion. She is very well balanced, and her views are always full of good sense.

Another half-hour went by while Michel slept peacefully and Jean snored like Napoleon on the eve of battle. Our conversation was now less animated, more broken.

“What time is it?” inquired Claude.

Three-fifteen.”

“Don’t you think it’s time to go to sleep again?”

Unburdened and at peace, we settled back in our sleeping-bags.

* * * * *

“Bernard’s impatience is as refreshing as a thunderstorm,” said Claude to Jean and Michel as she explained to them what had happened the previous night. Meanwhile Pierre and I flew across to the Sherpas’ tent to tell Ang Tharkay of our plans. He was delighted, and a broad smile lit up his kindly face. He

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hadn't dared say anything, but he, too, had had enough of inaction. The Sherpas had been following the conversation, and these quiet and sensible men began to sing and to whistle and bounce about. Pemba grabbed the saucepan, filled it with water, and lit the fire as though we were off at once to conquer Nun.

From his tent Nalni had become aware of all this early-morning rumpus. Guessing that something was afoot, he came to find out, even before cleaning his teeth. I told him of the decision, and, although usually so reserved, he gave me a great pat on the back, with a "Good idea, Bernard!"

Half an hour later the sahibs were collected in the mess-tent with porridge and tea before them. As we ate we made final arrangements for our departure. There was a good deal of discussion. The atmosphere was very different from the previous day: to the flatness, lethargy, and disenchantment to which we had fallen victims, happiness had now succeeded, and the wish to be in the fight again, and sudden exhilaration. How strong a motive power is hope!

Breakfast over, everyone threw themselves into their jobs, happy to satisfy their thirst for action. Sahibs and Sherpas were milling around, all busily asking questions. The ground was littered with little piles of equipment and provisions, and ice-axes were stuck in the earth in a circle. Boots shone with grease. It was a regular clearing of the decks for action. I could not help comparing Base Camp with the deck of a corsair just before boarding a ship. We were like buccaneers who for days had vainly scanned the four corners of the sea for some unhappy victim and had now just sighted one on the horizon.

Meanwhile Nun watched us; perhaps she was saying: "I'm waiting for them, those insects! They've no idea of the reception I am preparing for them." Our adversary was of a suspicious nature, and, as Michel declared, "She's easily roused."

The sky was mediocre: cloudy, with intermittent sun. We didn't care. At four in the afternoon, two Sherpas, Gyalzen and Pa Norbu, left for Camp I. Satisfied with the work accomplished, we swallowed bowls of tea and went on with an unfinished game of *belote*.

"Shall we play seriously, or shall we cheat?" inquired Pierre.

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August 19, the day we were to set out, the weather was not too good, with clouds blowing over from Zaskar. These were our nightmare. They reminded us of those which, the previous year, had come up from the Amazon, always bringing rain, snow, wind, and storms. And it would be the same here. But no matter, we had decided to leave. Anyway, we waited until the afternoon so as not to use up the provisions and Calor gas at Camp I.

Although there were plenty of jokes, there was also a feeling of tension. We were all on edge, as before an exam. "To come so far and make such an effort and then go home without the summit would be simply frightful!" sighed Claude.

In spite of our considerable anxiety we did honour to the copious lunch prepared by that master-cook, Ang Tharkay. An hour later on the humpy moraine all was not so well; particularly as the previous days' inactivity had considerably softened up our muscles. However, we were evidently in good form, since we took barely two hours to reach Camp I, thus beating our own record.

Nun rose before us splendid and immaculate, more beautiful and desirable than ever. This vision reconciled us with our mountain. Michel and I still had in mind the image which had appeared before us on August 11 for a few moments in that dramatic break in the clouds: a ferocious Nun, with an immense great face, interminable ridges, and a summit cone, cold and, above all, distant.

During a part of the night it snowed. In the morning there was a radiant sun. Never had we seen such weather. If only it would last, even just for two or three days. . . . At nine-thirty we took leave of Nalni and Ang Phuter, who would remain at Camp I; higher up there would not be enough tents for everyone. Our plan of action was as follows. Five sahibs and three Sherpas would spend the night at Camp II. Two of the Sherpas would then return directly and go up again to Camp II early the following morning with Nalni and Ang Phuter. From there the Sherpas would come on with us to establish Camp III; then all of them, except Ang Tharkay, would return the same day to Camp II. Nalni and the five Sherpas would thus form the first support party. The second would have to be constituted later,

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at Camp III, to back up the summit party. On the face of it this system looked sound enough.

An hour and a half later, when we were half-way up the Tower, there was a total change in outlook: the sun had disappeared and the sky had grown dark; we realised, with a sinking of the heart, that we were in for trouble. A close-packed army of greenish clouds, heavy and menacing, was preparing to storm Nun. We were for it all right. Soon torrents of hail poured down upon us; hailstones as big as marbles drummed on our anoraks and lashed savagely at our faces. Then the wind joined in, and the squalls were of such violence that at times we had to cling to our ice-axes to keep our balance.

Half an hour later the hail stopped, but things were little better: it began to snow. Nevertheless, we continued to ascend resolutely; at one-thirty we reached Camp II. It was a bad sight. Our tents had not been able to withstand the storm. Inside they were filled with puddles of water. As for the terraces we had levelled—they were just a memory. We looked at all this stunned, amazed, and discouraged.

Well, if we were going to spend the night there, there was no time to be lost. We set to with a will, helping the Sherpas, who were putting their backs into it. Gyaldzen and Kami were to leave at once: if the bad weather persisted, they would be stuck here and we had not enough sleeping-bags. Ang Tharkay impressed on them that the following day they must come up as early as possible with Ang Phuter and Nalni.

Working away in the falling snow, we baled out the puddles, took down the tents and put them up again after having remade the terraces.

It took us three hours' steady work to make good the damage. We would certainly remember that day! At last, around five o'clock, we were able to burrow into our shelters. Alas, they were like ice-boxes. We could find no warmth in our eiderdown sleeping-bags, nor in the scalding tea we gulped down. Yet what tremendous moral support these frail canvas shelters can give! As evening drew in, the sun infuriated us by putting in an appearance too late to be any use. We were condemned to spend the night in our refrigerators.

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Never shall we forget the luminous Himalayan evening next day on August 21, at Camp III at 21,000 feet. The last rays of the sun caught the flurries of blown snow so that the atmosphere was coloured by a myriad crystals. To the south the Zaskar peaks were submerged by a vast sea of cloud which swirled round Nun, and spent itself on the mountain's flanks. The Bat Kol glacier could be seen through a clearing, bathed in a golden light, then the ocean of mist pressed in again, hiding the Suru valley and extending beyond it as far as the eye could see. On the hazy northern horizon, hung between earth and sky like dream mountains, emerged the eight-thousanders of the Karakoram and the round hump of Nanga Parbat.

And close at hand, but cold and haughty, was Nun, at which we scarcely dared look, with three little tents buried in the snow at its feet. Never had we been so impressed by the grandeur of the Himalaya, at once so heartening and so devastating. Never had we understood so well the real stature of man, at once so insignificant and so indomitable.

The Sherpas had left us an hour ago—we had followed them down with our eyes, and from time to time they turned round to wave before disappearing finally behind a big white bulge. As they vanished we couldn't help a twinge of melancholy, like lighthouse-keepers gazing at the departing relief boat. We were now alone with our destiny. Would it be the top, to-morrow? Perhaps, if the heavens smiled. Four of us—Claude, Michel, Pierre, and myself—were on this last lap, and would try to make the last 2,300 feet. Jean, who had done so very well for the party the year before on Salcantay, knew that his duties as doctor didn't allow him to take part in the final assault. He would stay in support with Ang Tharkay.

We should climb on two separate ropes. I was convinced that two parties were better than two men alone. For one thing they can relieve each other at breaking the trail, and if one is hurt there are three to help him. And finally, from the standpoint of morale, this arrangement has many advantages. Possibly two parties travel slightly less fast than one, but on balance it works well.

We had an early supper so as to have a longer night before going into action. Our appetites were quite good—an excellent

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sign. But we were affected by the height, all the same, and in each one of us this produced different reactions. Claude was over-excited and chattered like a magpie; Pierre, who isn't so talkative, was satisfied by indicating approval from time to time; Jean and Ang Tharkay kept silent; Michel and I built castles in the air, discussing just how we would take the summit photograph. Vanity of vanities!

The next day the alarm went off at 5 a.m. My hands were trembling as I opened the flap of the tent. Cloud and mist. What had happened to the evening's promise, to the hopeful-looking sunset? Pierre had been looking at the sky too, and made no bones about his disappointment. In any case we had to act as though we were going to leave. Maybe the clouds would disperse with the first rays of the sun. Silently, with slow and clumsy movements, we made our preparations. Then Ang Tharkay brought the porridge. It did not go down very well.

At six-thirty the mist cleared. But over to the south lowering clouds were coming from the Zaskar region and approaching us rapidly. Certainly the sky was quite clear towards the Karakoram, but this was of no interest to us. It was not from the northern sky that we could foretell the future; nothing could stop the inexorable approach of the monsoon from the south.

At seven-thirty we had to decide whether to leave—it was a case of now or never. We shouldn't have any too much time to climb the 2,300 feet in the day. My view was that it was too risky in such uncertain weather. I asked the others what they thought.

“No good. Do you agree?”

“Yes.”

“No good”—how sadly the phrase echoed in our hearts. Well, the die was cast.

At ten o'clock the snow began to fall gently, but half an hour later it was snowing heavily. So the decision not to attack Nun was wise. There was a short break about midday, but soon after the snow came on again. The hours dragged endlessly by. Inaction sapped our strength and whittled away at our reserves of nervous energy. Michel and I were silent in our tent, and so were the others. What ought we to do? Remain where we were and wait for fine weather? But we were eating into a limited

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stock of provisions, and we ran the risk of being dangerously cut off by the storm. Return to Camp II, then? But this would mean losing a day coming up again. Stay or go down? Go down or stay?

To relieve our impatience and distract our minds, we decided on a game of *belote*—a game of 6,420 points, since the height was 6,420 metres. Hunched up in Claude and Pierre's two-man tent, we forced ourselves to play. Gradually we became immersed in the game; we almost succeeded in forgetting that we were at Camp III and that it was snowing hopelessly. It is impossible to imagine what a stand-by cards can be during a Himalayan expedition!

Thanks to *belote* the afternoon at last came to an end. The snow had stopped, it was even quite fine for a while and Nun unveiled herself. But this was not enough to make us at all hopeful. We knew only too well that we had struck a spell of bad weather. Again we had supper early, and sleeping-pills sent us straight off to sleep, but unhappily not for long. "Just listen to the snow!" whispered Michel. We had to flick the canvas continually with the back of a hand to prevent the snow collecting on the roof. The same performance was going on in the other two tents, where they weren't sleeping any better than we were. Would the night never end?

* * * * *

At six o'clock in the morning of August 23 it was still snowing, and in addition there was a high wind, which shook the tents fiercely. There was no doubt now: at the first break in the weather we must pack up and go. I left my tent to visit Pierre and Claude in theirs. What quantities of snow! The terraces we had levelled had disappeared, the tents were half-buried, I sank in up to the knees in powder snow, and the gusts whipped my face. I dived into their tent, which adjoined Jean's and Ang Tharkay's. They looked gloomy. There seemed to be no need for long explanations.

"We must get down as soon as possible. Food's running short, and we're deteriorating physically. I don't know whether you feel like me, but I've got the jitters—something tells me we shouldn't stay here."

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"That goes for us too," replied Pierre and Jean. "We were going to suggest retreat."

"What rotten luck," sighed Claude. "To have to give up when we're so near our goal."

And Ang Tharkay, usually so optimistic, was also in favour of evacuating the camp; so there was nothing more to be said.

There was no getting round it. So far Nun Kun had beaten us. We had been rebuffed. But we didn't despair. We would come back.

Six o'clock, seven o'clock, eight o'clock—it was certainly snowing less heavily, but the mist was just as thick, and there now seemed to be no hope of it lifting. We would have to get ready to go down. We left some of our personal belongings behind—gloves, socks, and also cameras, films, exposure meters, a dozen reels for the cine-camera. I hesitated about taking the latter with me: it weighed a couple of pounds, and I should only have to bring it up again. And above 20,000 feet it weighs more than two pounds! Michel resolved my doubt.

"I'd take it along, you never know."

We were all ready with our rucksacks on, and the tents were fastened. Good-bye to Camp III! We stepped out into the powder snow, and sank well in. Pierre, who had Claude and Jean on his rope, went first; then I followed with Michel and Ang Tharkay, who came down last.

After we had gone about a hundred yards I called to Pierre to stop, and when we caught them up I suggested that Ang Tharkay went down first. "He has far more experience than us. The old boy's seen worse weather than this during his twenty years mountaineering, and he'll know how to get us down."

"Right you are. But we must all keep together. This mist's so thick, you could cut it with a knife."

We started off again, absolutely blind. Should we ever, in this pea-souper, find the flags with which we had prudently marked the ascent on August 21? They were now our only landmarks, for there was no question of picking out our tracks with the new snow that had fallen since then. And a compass was clearly no use at all.

We couldn't find the first flag. Ang Tharkay took off his glasses, went forward thirty yards and stopped. Not a thing. He

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went on again for another hundred yards. Still not a thing. It was incredible. Could the markers have been covered up by the snow? Yet Pierre was quite sure he had put one in just before reaching Camp III. It meant we weren't going in the right direction.

If we could not find Camp II, then it was good-bye to all hope of shelter, and survival itself would probably have to be paid for with serious frost-bite. If we went on wandering about in the mist like this we'd run into the seracs and crevasses of the ice-fall. And we shouldn't be able to guess where the crevasses were, since they would be masked by the new snow.

Ang Tharkay smelt danger and slanted right over to the left. The descent proceeded slowly and deliberately, in the uneasy silence of a muffled world. A few snowflakes eddied in the mist, but the wind had lost its force, and the temperature had risen: a really bad sign. It was about to snow again.

The six climbers who only two days before had been pressing to the attack, were now reduced to six anxious creatures concerned only with their safety.

How on earth were we to find our way in this white desert? Between the old Camp III at 20,200 feet, which was now our first objective, and the final Camp III at 21,000, there was nothing—as we well remembered—but a vast expanse of snow, lying at an angle of not more than 30°, which was practically featureless. Thus it was difficult, if not impossible, to recognise where we were. But, on the contrary, between the old Camp III and Camp II route-finding would be much easier: there were seracs, knolls, crevasses, a large spur, and a long couloir; landmarks which we remembered clearly. But here there was nothing, not a damn thing.

Mechanically we continued the monotonous and discouraging descent, sinking in up to the knees and sometimes to the thighs. Then suddenly Ang Tharkay gave a cry of joy. He had found a small piece of yellow paper. And the triangle emerging from the snow was a flag. Victory! We broke into smiles. It put new heart into us, and as the snow was falling less thickly, our morale went soaring up.

Clearly luck was with us, and half an hour later we came upon the old Camp III. Ang Tharkay's instinct had triumphed again,

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and we congratulated him warmly. We now decided to make a halt and feed: it was twelve-thirty, which meant we had taken more than three hours to descend less than 1,000 feet, whereas in fine weather half an hour would have been enough.

We left again at one o'clock, quite easy in our minds, for this part of the route would be far easier to find. One by one we picked out the features which we had registered in our memories; and even the flags were now visible. The wind had probably blown away a good deal of the new snow, and our landmarks were no longer completely submerged as they had been higher up.

For an hour and a half we zig-zagged through a very broken-up area; we advanced very slowly, for we were blinded by the mist, but we were on the right track, and now came to the long couloir leading to the foot of the spur, from which point we would have to slant across to the left. Suddenly the veil of mist parted and Ang Tharkay, always on the alert, saw three of his Sherpas in the distance. They thought we were still at Camp III and, spurred on by that admirable Sherpa sense of duty, they were determined at all costs to bring us food. Our Sirdar let out a yodel; startled by this unexpected call, they stopped, then answered. Ang Tharkay then turned towards us and, pointing with his ice-axe, he cried:

“Sahibs, sahibs, Camp II!”

His words put new heart into us. In an hour we should be out of the wood. We were overjoyed, and our joy made us oblivious of danger. We had entirely forgotten that the Himalaya possess a most formidable weapon: the avalanche. Not for a second had we reflected that the mass of new snow might slide down at any moment and drag us with it like straws.

At the end of the long couloir we found a marker flag, where the route doubled back. We had to make right over to the left to traverse across the flank of the great dome, whose slope lay at a fairly steep angle, 35° to 40°, if I remembered rightly. We began the traverse.

There was a *pfft*, like the noise you make when you tear a piece of silk, then a grinding which grew louder and turned into a sinister cracking . . .

I turned round. There was a jagged line across the snow



Under the Tower: Claude Kogan in action.



Breaking the trail in soft snow.



Cutting steps on the Tower; note the fixed rope to safeguard laden Sherpas.

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just below Pierre, who was first man on the second rope. A great slab came away.

Even before I was able instinctively to ram my ice-axe deep into the snow, my feet slid forward and I fell over backwards. I was swiftly carried away on a sliding carpet, while at the same time a heavy mass of snow fell on top of me. Fortunately my *cagoule* slipped right over my head, and saved me from having my face buried in the snow, and perhaps from being suffocated.

One is always told that the thing to do in an avalanche is to make a swimming motion. But, alas, I was bound and held as if I'd been in a vice. I could not make even the slightest move to protect myself, and my chest was crushed in by a tremendous weight. The mountain was tossing me about, like a cork bobbing around in a raging torrent, thrown from rock to rock; now submerged by an eddy, now brought to the surface, only to disappear again farther on.

In spite of the rapidity with which everything happened, and in spite of the extreme violence of the shock, my mind seemed to be absolutely clear. That made it all the more frightful that I was incapable of doing anything at all. We were done for. We had thought of everything, except an avalanche. And it was I, the leader of the expedition, who had lured the others into this adventure. It is said that on the threshold of death you re-live your life and see the faces of your dear ones. I found this absolutely true, and all these faces flashed before my eyes, like a film gone mad.

Then suddenly, having touched the depths of misery, I pulled myself together, I revolted against this surrender and renunciation. Why should I die? I must go on struggling to the bitter end. And just then I had the feeling that the vice was relaxing its grip, and at once I began to swim. My *cagoule* was still pressed against my face, but in the darkness I seemed to guess that I had come to the surface, since I no longer felt any weight on my chest.

It was only a reprieve. My fall began again, and worse. The speed at which I was carried down increased. An undercurrent lifted me up, turned me over on my stomach, and sent me rolling head first with my feet in the air. Instinctively I stretched out my arms with my palms flat on the snow, trying to keep myself

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from sinking in. But at this moment a big block of compacted snow hit my back, knocked me on the head, and stunned me.

Hope: I don't know how, but a few seconds later I was again on the surface. I quickly breathed in some fresh air. Despair: once more I was submerged, twisted and turned, and knocked about. The rope between Michel and me cut into my chest, crushing my ribs. I was stifled.

Hope: I seemed to come to the surface again, to live once more. Despair: the avalanche continued on its way. The whole sea was in tumult, I tried hard with all my might to swim. Once more I endured the double torture of being submerged and choked.

Despair: I was right under. Arms and legs were powerless. My chest felt as though it would burst. I was suffocating. This was the end. My eyes began to cloud, my limbs to stiffen.

Then I was delivered. I went up into a cloud, sprang on its back, and flew away.

* * * * *

How long had I been unconscious? Where was I? What had happened? A miracle. The foot of the avalanche slope ran out on to a level plateau, and it was here that the mass of snow came to rest.

I was alive; but bruised and battered all over. I moaned and groaned and gasped. The rope cut into my chest, and I still don't know how I succeeded in undoing it. Then I got my *cagoule* off and could breathe more freely. I opened my mouth wildly for great gulps of air. But each breath drew a cry from me: Oh, my ribs! I was blinded by the glare from the snow—my goggles had disappeared, and when I raised my hand to protect my eyes I felt them absolutely icy, for I had lost my gloves.

But where, in heaven's name, were the others?

The shock had made me lose all sense of actuality. Since regaining consciousness I had completely forgotten that we were on Nun Kun, and that a few moments ago we had all been talking cheerfully together on the way down from Camp III. What had happened to all the others? The only answer was an utter and heart-rending silence. Not a groan, not a cry, not a shout. Could they be . . .? No, it couldn't be thought of.

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I had my back to the slope, and I dared not turn round to size up the extent of the catastrophe. Yet I simply must do so.

But first of all I had to get up. It had become an obsession. Like a boxer who has been knocked out and who longs to get on his feet as he hears, as in a dream, the referee counting the seconds. With a violent effort of will I succeeded in getting to my knees, then, helping myself with my hands, I stood up, only to flop back into the snow through dizziness. I was furious with myself: if I couldn't stand up I would go on all fours. Making a fresh effort, I turned myself facing the slope. I lifted my head. High up, about a thousand feet above me were three black specks. They moved. . . . So the second rope, with Pierre, Claude, and Jean, were alive. By good luck the tail of the avalanche had only dragged them down fifty yards or so. Of course, I remembered then: Pierre had been just above the split, just above the mass of snow which had carried us down.

But about fifty feet from me there was a tragic sight. Ang Tharkay, spitting blood, was clawing the snow furiously, his face set in a ghastly grin. Had he lost his wits? Near him, a dreadful sight, a hand stuck up—nothing but a hand!

Ang Tharkay was yelling, "Sahib! Sahib!" Then I understood, Michel was buried. In a flash I remembered that before leaving France, I had written a letter to Michel's mother to reassure her that we would do nothing rash, that nothing would happen to him. And now, I'd broken my word.

I cried, "Michel, Michel, where is Michel?" I shouted to the others to come and help. Pierre began to run full speed down the slope. Painfully, and still on all fours, I climbed up towards Ang Tharkay. When at last I reached him he had succeeded in freeing Michel's head, and he had the presence of mind, in spite of his own suffering, to remove the snow plugging Michel's mouth, and thus saved him from certain suffocation.

"Michel, Michel . . ."

Our eyes met. He still had the strength to smile faintly. Thank God, he was alive!

I fainted with relief.

CHAPTER IX

DISAPPEARANCE OF CAMP III

THE accident had taken place before the eyes of the startled Sherpas, who immediately took off their rucksacks and rushed to our help. They had the presence of mind to bring with them an oxygen cylinder which they were taking up to Camp III. This was how I came to be breathing in the life-giving stuff when I regained consciousness; but as my wits were a bit scattered I couldn't make out why I had a tube in my mouth. Pemba Norbu, seeing I had no glasses, had put his own over my eyes without thought of the probable risk to his own eyes; then he set to and vigorously rubbed my frozen hands. Kami had already taken off my boots and was rubbing one foot, having wrapped the other in his own down jacket. As a result of his devotion he contracted pneumonia, from which he subsequently nearly died.

The oxygen acted as a strong pick-me-up, and I completely recovered my senses. When I looked round, I saw the M.O., who, with the aid of a Sherpa, was helping Michel back to Camp II, and behind them Ang Tharkay staggering down supported by another Sherpa. That Jean was with us, and that the Sherpas had come immediately to our rescue, were the two strokes of luck in our misadventure.

Claude and Pierre were collecting various objects that had been wrenched from us by the avalanche: here a sack, there an ice-axe or glove. It looked as if we'd lost quite a number of things. The slope was a proper battlefield—ploughed up into vast furrows, or a series of frozen waves which reached practically down to where we were now. Enormous blocks of compacted snow littered the ground, and out of one of them stuck a marker-flag. I couldn't think how it was still on the surface.

Claude and Pierre came slowly down to join me, looking all round them.

“We've come back from the dead.”

“You're quite right.”

Disappearance of Camp III

"We can thank God for our lives."

"You can indeed," replied Pierre.

These were our first words; but it was only a few minutes ago that we had been chatting away so gaily, happy to have seen the last of our troubles. The avalanche, the escape from death, the arrival of help, the removal of the injured—all this had happened in a nightmare flash.

"And how are you feeling yourself?" asked Claude.

"I'm sore all over, especially my ribs. But it's nothing much. What about the others?"

There was a moment's silence; the other two looked down.

"Michel seems to be badly hurt," Pierre began. "The M.O. is very pessimistic. When I got him out he was in an impossible position: doubled right up. The rope between him and you was pulling his chest forward, whilst blocks of snow were pushing him back. I thought his back was broken and that he was about to die before my eyes. It was frightful—I'll never forget it. Yet Michel still had his wits about him. He asked me to cut the rope. But as he was gripped in this sort of vice, Ang Tharkay and I had great difficulty in freeing first his chest, then a leg. However, I'd shouted for help, and Claude and Jean came down; they helped me to get Michel right out and sit him down. Then Ang Tharkay collapsed, exhausted by the effort, and lay beside us moaning quietly. Just then the Sherpas arrived, and Pemba and Kami took charge of you—you were pretty nearly unconscious. The doctor shoved the oxygen tube in your mouth and then went on with the most urgent job: getting Michel down. Then Ang Tharkay got up with the help of a Sherpa and went off towards the camp. Jean says there doesn't seem to be anything seriously wrong with him except shock and chest bruises, like yourself."

"But if Michel can walk, maybe it's not so serious?"

"Let's hope not. But the M.O. is pretty gloomy about it, all the same."

"We'll just have to wait for Jean's report. But I want to know about you. Tell me what happened while we go down to the camp."

"It's quite close," said Claude. "About three or four hundred yards. There's just this bit to cross."

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"Then we must have fallen a height of nearly five hundred feet over a distance of three hundred yards. On August 11, the day Michel, Ang Tharkay, Pemba, and I tried to establish Camp III, I had looked at my altimeter at the bottom of the couloir, a little bit above the point at which the avalanche started. It registered about 19,700 feet. Since Camp II is at 19,200 feet . . . that makes quite a decent fall. And I've never had an accident in the mountains before. Well, I shan't forget this first experience in a hurry! However, we've escaped with our lives, which is the main thing. And how about you?"

Pierre told me briefly what had happened to his party:

"For a long time I had been close behind you. I don't know why, but when we got to the bottom of the couloir I stopped a minute, so that there was at least fifty feet between us when the avalanche started."

"You certainly had a hunch!"

"There was a dull noise, a great crack appeared, and you had gone. The tail of the avalanche followed in the same tracks, and I found myself lying on my side. But I immediately realised that my party was in no danger. In spite of my position, I was able to make use of my crampons, which held well, and I clawed the snow with my hands, which were bare, goodness knows why. Twice I felt the jerk of the rope, and I told myself that it was Claude and Jean trying to drive their axes in. My fall slowed up an instant, then I began sliding again. At last, after about fifty yards, I was able to drive my axe in, and I came to a stop. Looking round, I saw that Jean had succeeded in doing likewise, thus stopping Claude. I at once unroped and ran as fast as I could to the bottom of the slope. I saw that you were lying still, but luckily you weren't buried. Michel had disappeared, so I rushed to help Ang Tharkay dig him out. The rest you know. . . ."

I reflected how lucky it was that Claude and Pierre were unhurt, for they were the two trump cards of our expedition; they made a strong and experienced rope whose morale was unbreakable. All hope was not lost: with these two the summit might still be gained, but only if Michel's condition did not prove serious. Otherwise there was no question—we would have to give up and return to the valley as quickly as possible to get him to hospital.

Disappearance of Camp III

When we reached camp it started to hail. I rushed to Michel's tent. He was crying with pain as the Sherpas rubbed his hands. Pemba was giving him scalding tea to drink with pure alcohol in it, since we hadn't any rum. Jean had been able to make a preliminary examination. "No damage to the spine," he said, "but severe bruising to the back." What a relief! Ang Tharkay was also the object of the Sherpas' devoted attention. They were amazed to see Jean give their Sirdar a morphia injection in the thigh, when it was his ribs which were giving him pain.

As for myself, I was feeling faint again, for the bracing effect of the oxygen had ceased. I began to vomit, my head swam, and my legs trembled. "Pierre," I called out, "I'm all in. I know I'm going to faint again. You take over."

Kami laid me in a tent, took off my boots, and tried to bring the circulation back to my feet. My left ribs were very painful: possibly one was broken.

"It is the inevitable reaction now that the muscles are cold," Jean informed me. "It's quite normal."

The M.O. gave himself up to looking after us, and we admired his devotion. What on earth should we have done without him? He went from one tent to the next, attending to the injured, giving heart stimulants, morphia injections, and oxygen. By four o'clock he had us on our feet and ready to go down to Camp I. Pierre had in fact decided that there was still time to get away, and it was a wise decision. If the appalling bad weather continued we ran the risk of being besieged, and the next day would perhaps have been even more painful for the injured, if not actually more dangerous. Once at Camp I it would be an easy matter to get down to Base Camp. Furthermore, we should be losing height, which would allow us to recuperate more easily.

The descent began in the semi-obscurity of a thick mist in which a few snowflakes fluttered down. We split up into several ropes. Gyaldzen and Pa Norbu (who had remained in the camp and had not been aware of the accident) made the trail, followed by Michel with Pierre holding him on a tight rope.

Then came Ang Tharkay between Ang Phuter and Pemba

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Norbu. Claude, myself, and Jean brought up the rear. Nalni, whom we had supposed to be at Camp II, had not been able to get up there, for he was not well, the Sherpas told us. So he would be at Camp I.

It was a nightmare descent, with Michel crying out at every false step, Ang Tharkay shaken by bouts of vomiting, and myself groaning as my ribs hurt more and more. And we were frightened too, and turned anxious eyes on the snow slopes, wondering if they were going to give way under us. It took us nearly three hours to descend the Tower. It was horribly painful, but at last, admirably supported by our friends, we came to the end of our ordeal. To reach Camp I we had to climb up a slope of only about a hundred yards. But it was too much. The injured men were exhausted and stopped every ten steps. When Michel collapsed, Pierre supported him under the arms and on they went. Somehow the caravan stumbled up to the col we had christened, in unconscious irony, Col of Good Hope. We must have looked absurd, ten tiny creatures against this vast majestic background, bowed by their defeat, wounded in their pride.

The silence was overwhelming. It was no longer snowing, but heavy banks of mist still hung about the dreary landscape. The sky grew darker; the light faded, and the sadness of twilight reflected the sadness in our hearts. Yet we could not but thank God that we had returned alive from our venture.

* * * * *

Forgetting their own exhaustion, the other climbers and Sherpas had no thought except for us. Scarcely had we arrived when they rushed to get the camp ready so that the injured could get some rest, and then they undressed us and took off our boots. We were absolutely at the end of our tether.

In spite of our exhaustion, it was an enormous relief to know that, by our horrible descent from Camp II, we had put ourselves out of reach of the thunder of Nun. To-morrow we would be at Base Camp, a heavenly prospect, and all our wounds, of body and spirit, would begin to heal.

Nalni was not there. Before leaving he had left a long note, which I read by the light of a flickering candle.

Disappearance of Camp III

“Camp I. August 22. 20 hrs.

“My dear Bernard,

“What awful weather for your attack! Early this morning the sky looked very uncertain. I thought the weather might improve, but soon the clouds covered Nun, the wind rose, the snow began to fall and a fierce storm broke, that looked as if it might carry Camp I away. At the moment it’s snowing and the wind is blowing fiercely. It must be like this on the South Col of Everest in bad weather.

“I don’t need to tell you that without anything to read I am absolutely lost, and the tent feels like a prison. Time passes terribly slowly. Occasionally I look outside, but I see nothing but gloom, damnation, disillusionment, and death. A day of judgment atmosphere.

“Perhaps to-morrow will look more hopeful. May your efforts be crowned with success!

“No doubt the Sherpas will have told you why I didn’t go up to Camp II, as you asked me to. You were probably rather annoyed, but this is what happened. When I woke yesterday I had an attack of vomiting. Although I felt very weak, because I hadn’t been able to swallow anything, I still wanted to start. But after going a third of the way, and in spite of desperate efforts, I simply had no strength left, and was reduced to going helplessly on all fours. When a climber reaches this stage it is certainly not lack of will-power or morale, but because his body won’t stand it. So I had to give up and I hated doing so; our splendid Sherpas helped me down and then went up themselves to Camp II. So here I am alone, but thinking of you all the time.

“To-day, in spite of our prayers, the Gods have shown themselves relentless. I suppose I must assume that your plans have failed. At the moment my tent is flapping madly and the wind is howling desperately. Is this the monsoon again? I hope not.

“To-morrow I know that I shall have to go back to Base Camp and retire from the field of action. It isn’t that I want to cut myself off from the rest of you, but I consider that, here at Camp I, I’ve become a parasite, consuming food and fuel that you may urgently need. Yet I can’t bring myself to leave this camp, for I am desperately anxious for news of you.

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“Forgive this lengthy epistle. I can’t sleep. I’m thinking of you all. I wanted to take advantage of the last glimmers of a dying candle to talk a bit with you.

“*Bonne chance. Au revoir.*

“Yours Nalni.”

“P.S. August 23, 17 hrs. I am leaving Camp I to go down to Base Camp after having waited in vain for some sign from you. The wind is howling more fiercely than ever.”

* * * * *

On August 24 we were back at Base Camp. Here we found the sun once more, and the earth, and as much tea as we wanted, and the comfort of the big tent, and even our appetites. It was decidedly good to be alive! But we should have to begin all over again, for in this dreadful game of snakes and ladders we had come back to our starting-point. After moving up so carefully, step by step, Camp I, Camp II, Camp III, till we were within an ace of success, we had been brutally halted and flung back. Our efforts now seemed useless, our confidence and enthusiasm of no account.

In four or five days the coolies would be arriving: we hadn’t even a week left. Yet, little as it was, it was still enough to launch a final attack. The weather was fine, and we had just enough fuel for one final attempt. It was the very last chance, and we had to seize it.

The M.O. had made a thorough estimate of the damage. Ang Tharkay was laid out with broken ribs, and contusions. Michel was also out of action, for though his spine was luckily not damaged, there could be no question of his making the slightest effort. Although not so badly hurt as they were, I was still in a pretty poor way. I could neither bend down nor get up after lying down. When I breathed I felt as though a knife had been stuck into my ribs. All the same, I had made my decision. I could walk, and this, after all, was the main thing; so I would go with Claude and Pierre. I still cherished a faint hope of reaching the summit with them. But above all—and it was this that had really decided me—I felt absolutely incapable of letting Claude and Pierre go alone, on this last lap of our adventure, while I sat about far below. If I suffered agonies well that just

Disappearance of Camp III

couldn't be helped. I would go with them, it was my plain duty as leader of the expedition. But if at any moment I saw that I should handicap their chances of success, then I would drop out. The victory of the team, the collective triumph, is what counts above everything in Himalayan expeditions. I would know how to accept my disappointment. That, too, was my duty.

* * * * *

We left Base Camp in the early morning of August 25 in brilliant sunshine accompanied by four Sherpas: Pa Norbu, Gyaldzen, Ang Phuter, and Pemba Norbu. Ang Tharkay and Kami, who were showing the first symptoms of pneumonia, Nalni, due to go back the following day as his leave was up, and Michel and Jean all watched us go with melancholy resignation. If he were up to it Michel would come and meet us with Jean, who planned to get up to Camp II in order to give immediate attention in the event of accident or frost-bite.

"Now, mind, in four days you are to bring me a stone from the summit," Michel called out after us. On the chaos of the moraine I thought sadly of those we had left behind. They had the same right as we had to continue the struggle, and win the fruits of their labours, the object of their desires. They had worked whole-heartedly with all their might, and they had wished for the summit every bit as much as we had.

Our objective was to make Camp II in the day—3,700 feet in one go—it was a lot, particularly for me, for I found every step an effort. Claude and Pierre had settled on this plan, with a view to saving time, and they were quite right. Half-way up to Camp I the others had already out-distanced me. Far ahead on the great snow and rock slope leading to the Col of Good Hope, I could see two little black specks climbing briskly. However should I succeed in keeping up with them to the end, even with the best will in the world? I gritted my teeth and called up every ounce of energy. When I caught up with them at Camp I, I threw myself down on the platform of stones round the tents. Pierre took off my crampons, and Claude brought me a cup of pemmican. Half an hour later we set out for Camp II. Claude, Pierre, and the Sherpas were going far too quick; soon I was alone with Ang Phuter. A violent hail-storm caught us right on

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the Tower. I thought this was a bit much. I dragged along more and more, and Ang Phuter looked at me with large, compassionate eyes—he must have been wondering why on earth I had got myself into such a situation. So did I. But I was determined to go on until I came to the end of my strength. To reach Camp II before nightfall was all that I asked of my body. Gritting my teeth, I fought for each foot of the mountain. The hail stopped when we came to the foot of the great snow-slope, and I clung to the fixed rope. Farther on, before launching out on the long traverse, I looked anxiously round. Were the slopes firm? Might they not carry us away? I was obsessed by fear of another avalanche. At last, dead beat, I reached Camp II.

“God, I’ve been through it. I’ve never known such torture since I started climbing,” I said to Claude and Pierre. They took pity on my exhaustion, and helped me off with my things. Then the rest, the comfort of a sleeping-bag, a good dinner, and the warmth of friendship renewed my strength and courage. Before turning in, Claude and Pierre came to me in my tent.

“Bernard,” said Claude, “we admire your pluck and your stubbornness. But in your present condition do you really think you can carry on?”

“As long as I don’t hold you up more than I have done, I’ll keep on. But I swear that when I consider I am compromising your chances I will give up. Till then I shall carry on. I intend to go with you as far as Camp III. I quite realise I may not be able to get to the top, but at least I shall be with the Sherpas, to support you. I long to share the last hours of the climb with you.”

“Very well, but don’t put that face on. It makes you look quite spiteful,” replied Claude.

“You’re right. I’m letting myself go, and I oughtn’t to. But I’m sure you realise I don’t like feeling below par. Blast that avalanche!”

I looked straight at Claude and Pierre, and tried to smile; they warmly grasped my outstretched hands.

Next morning the weather was very bad. These Himalayan changes were enough to drive one crazy. Yesterday it had been so fine. Now the tents were shaking beneath the squalls, and the ground-sheet was lifted up by the wind. Hail beat on the

Disappearance of Camp III

canvas, and once more mist enveloped the mountain. However, it was not very thick, and we hadn't given up all hope of making Camp III during the day. We should have to wait and see. If the following day showed a brilliant sun shining in a cloudless sky, then we should bitterly regret not being in position. Three hours later the mist seemed to be clearing, and at ten-thirty we left camp.

Pierre and Claude made the track. After an hour it began to snow and we were stopped by the mist, just about fifty yards from the spot at which the avalanche had started. I was horribly afraid. Montherlant makes one of his heroes say: "I like fear." Well I don't, not at all. I find no charm in it whatever: no doubt because I have not the soul of a hero. And I think it was the same with Claude and Pierre, only they didn't say so. Sitting on the snow, they were looking up towards the summit, and trying not to look at the tracks of the avalanche. I broke the silence: "I think we should go down again. We can't see more than fifty yards. In this pea-soup we shall never find our way to Camp III. It would be stupid to continue. If we are going to wander about for hours, then I'm against it. Our experience of coming down the other day is enough. Don't you agree?"

No answer. No doubt Claude and Pierre hoped that the mist would lift. Perhaps my suggestion was prompted by fear and physical weakness. Was I being too prudent, too fearful?

"Well, let's wait," I said philosophically. "It's such a lovely place!"

It was true that it was no longer snowing, but the mist was still just as thick. Five minutes went by, a quarter of an hour, half an hour . . .

"Well, are you still for going on? We're getting frozen here. I suggest we go back to Camp II, even if we have to start again if the weather improves."

"Ye . . . es."

Finally, the others decided to turn back, but I could see they did so unwillingly. When at one o'clock we got back to Camp II it began to snow.

"I think we were right to turn back," admitted Pierre. But Claude wasn't convinced. She sulked, sure that the mist was

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only temporary and that the sun would soon come out. And in fact it did appear, but not until five o'clock. We had lost all that we had gained the day before. Below, in the valley, the coolies would be getting near to Base Camp.

* * * * *

At 7 a.m. on August 27 the weather was fair. We decided to set out.

"Shall we take a tent? It would allow the Sherpas to remain in support at Camp III, and one of them might even come with us to the top. They deserve this treat; without them we shouldn't be here. What d'you think?"

"I quite agree," replied Pierre, "you know how much I think of them."

"Good idea," added Claude. "But as we were already rather short of food on August 23, we'll have to take extra provisions."

"And tell the Sherpas to bring their sleeping-bags," added Pierre.

By the time we had got ready, made up our sacks and struck one of the tents it was nine o'clock before we were away. In the Himalaya one proceeds at a snail's pace. Once again it was Pierre and Claude who gallantly made the track. It was hard work: the layer of powder snow which had fallen the day before covered a hard crust through which we broke and sank in up to our knees.

At midday my two friends and three Sherpas reached the old temporary Camp III at 20,200 feet which Ang Tharkay, Pemba Norbu, Michel, and I had established on August 11. I arrived soon after with Ang Phuter, who accompanied me faithfully the whole time. Claude and Pierre handed us food. The sky was overcast, but happily there was hardly any mist. Suddenly a cloud let fly at us with a regular packet of hail. However, Nun had accustomed us to this sort of joke, and we scarcely paid any attention. Philosophically chewing a bit of ham which didn't go down very well, so dry were our throats, we listened to the song of the hailstones as they pattered on our *cagoules*. But this was only a passing unpleasantness. The sun would shine again.

At one o'clock we started off once more. The snow was even thicker on the great sloping plane leading to Camp III, and this

Disappearance of Camp III

made the going very exhausting. Yet the others seemed to fly along; Ang Phuter and I were soon out-distanced. Claude and Pierre were in amazing form. Next day, weather permitting, Nun could not possibly escape them—in spite of the wretchedly deep snow, so rotten and treacherous, and in spite of the steepness of the great face which was now visible, for the hail had stopped.

I was far behind, and I was in difficulties. My strength was gradually giving out. Every fifty yards I collapsed on the snow to get my breath. I was at the end of my tether. My ribs were causing me agony, my legs were shaking, my breath came in gasps, the pulses in my temples were hammering, and my heart knocked. What torture!

Pride was now powerless. I was absolutely worn out. "Not quite the form for the leader of an expedition," Ang Phuter must have been saying to himself.

Come on, show some spirit. Camp III must be reached at all costs! I looked at my watch: three o'clock. The tents ought not to be far off. Three-thirty. The slope seemed to be endless. But I think more likely it was I who was making scarcely any advance at all. At four o'clock I could still see no sign. The others had disappeared behind a hump. Abruptly the feeling of loneliness overwhelmed me, and yet again I sat down hopelessly in the snow.

I would never reach the summit. I was finished. At my present speed I should delay Claude and Pierre. I should have to resign myself. But to-morrow, after a night's rest, I should feel stronger again—should I then find the strength of mind to thrust away a hope that insisted on rising up more persistently than ever?

When at last I came up with the others and their Sherpas I could not believe my eyes: Camp III had disappeared!

It had been swept away by an avalanche. Hundreds of tons of seracs had crushed our tents and buried provisions, equipment, personal belongings, cameras, films, refills for the cine-camera, cooking-stoves, and above all our precious cylinder of Calor gas.

Claude, Pierre, and the Sherpas were searching over a wide area all hummocky with enormous blocks of ice; they probed the

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fresh snow with their axes in an attempt to find some remains. But it was no good: there was nothing to be seen; not the slightest clue, not the smallest trace. I was dumbfounded, and I let myself sink down on the snow, as much from hopelessness as from exhaustion.

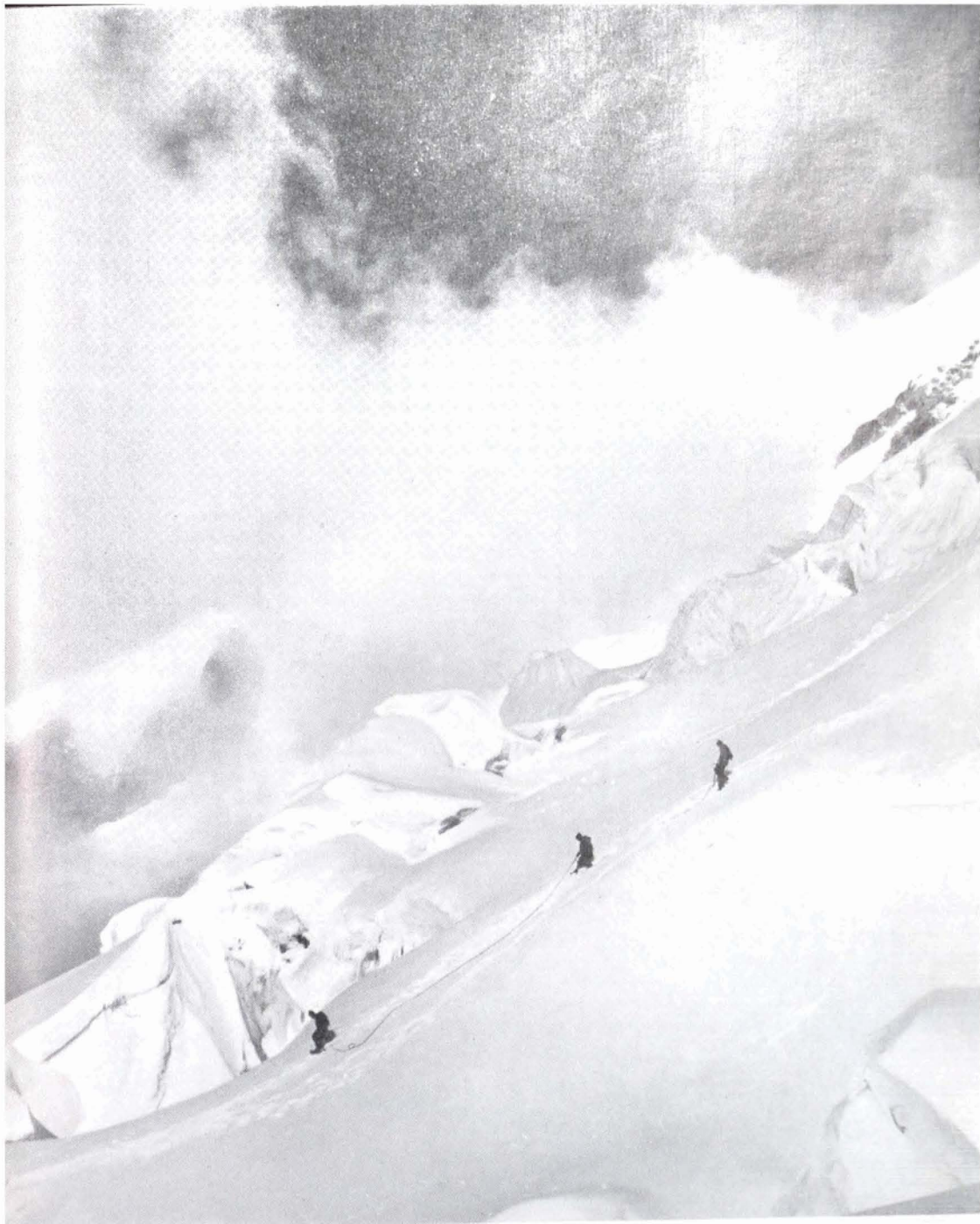
With my elbows on my knees and my head in my hands, I tried to take in the situation. Our hopes were quenched. A few days ago we had narrowly missed being buried in an avalanche towards which fate had drawn us, so that we should escape this other avalanche which would have been fatal. If, on August 23, we had still been up at Camp III . . .

Wasn't this second catastrophe a warning from heaven? I wanted to give it all up; I wanted to give the Sherpas the order to go down immediately without even asking Claude and Pierre for their opinions; I wanted to get away as fast as I possibly could myself. The Himalaya, which for years I had so longed for, I now loathed. It was madness to pit ourselves against them.

Lifting my head, I followed the track of the avalanche. Why on earth shouldn't that mass of half-fallen seracs, hanging over our heads like the sword of Damocles, barely a hundred yards away, come crashing down as well? And this was the only possible place for our camp!

I was most horribly afraid. Vivid in my mind was August 23: the start of the avalanche, the interminable moments when I hung between life and death, the miraculous slowing down and stopping of the vast mass of snow; and I seemed to be looking again at Ang Tharkay as he yelled, "Sahib! Sahib!" and spat blood while he clawed at the snow which covered Michel's head. I was responsible for the others, and I certainly would not run that particular risk again. I found other reasons to back up my decision. We only had a two-man tent for three or four people—and though we might manage at a pinch, since we had sleeping-bags, there was probably not enough food; and worst of all, no Calor gas, no stove; so we couldn't melt snow for our drink. This was extremely serious, for dehydration is one of the causes of frost-bite.

What would become of us if a storm broke and we had to stay put where we were? No, clearly: we must now go back down to



Coming down from Nun.



Pandit Nehru receives members of the Expedition. Pierre Vittoz, Claude Kogan, Bernard Pierre, Michel Desorbay, Nalni Jayal.

Disappearance of Camp III

Camp II and come up again to-morrow with an extra tent, provisions, a stove, and the last container of Calor gas. Were we coming up again to launch a final assault? Were the Himalaya, which a moment ago I'd been loathing, once more casting their spell on me?

Pierre and Claude gave up their fruitless search and sat down exhausted beside me, while the Sherpas got on with pitching the tent. Claude was the first to break silence.

"Bernard," she said gravely, "we must make a decision."

I didn't say anything, but I looked at them, and in their eyes I could read stern resolve. I guessed what they were about to say. And sure enough, Pierre said abruptly:

"I want permission to stay."

"So do I," said Claude in the same tone of voice.

"But you're quite crazy! It would be suicide."

"Those seracs won't fall," replied Pierre roundly.

"Aren't two avalanches enough for you?"

Then we all let fly. We threw self-control to the winds and swore at each other and told each other all sorts of home-truths. The Sherpas were highly embarrassed, and bustled about the tent, pretending not to hear. The storm lasted ten minutes, and then stopped as suddenly as it had started: we had spoken our minds. I started putting my point of view quietly to the others, but their resolution was so apparent in their answers that I began to waver. Supposing it were fine next day, how bitterly I'd regret my decision! And the others would never forgive me. They were in grand physical trim, and as the avalanche had hardly touched them, their morale had barely suffered. They might have reasoned differently if they had had my experience, and I knew that my judgment was strongly coloured both by my exhaustion and by the memory of that dreadful day.

I glanced at the sky: it looked very promising. To the south, over towards the Zaskar—an atmospheric nerve centre—there were scarcely any clouds: a good sign. To-morrow *could* be D day. There was a long silence. Then Claude and Pierre returned to the attack.

"Bernard, we must stay. If we go down we shall certainly never come up again."

"Never come up again"—the words galvanised me. All the

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effort of the past twenty-seven days—indeed, all the effort of a year—to get so near and then give up. No, it just wasn't possible. It began to look as if the others were right after all. All the same, I found it incredibly hard to make the decision; and all the various possibilities went round and round in my head.

If a storm came on, what would happen to us in such a precarious position? *If* we went down we should lose a day. *If* it were fine to-morrow I should always regret it, and they would always reproach me. *If* it were to snow the day after, our last hope would be gone for ever. *If* . . .

"Bernard, make up your mind," said Claude. "You're the leader."

I still couldn't answer, and we all looked down for fear of meeting each other's eyes. Then suddenly I burst out:

"Very well, let's stay! We've got to take some risks. But I am going to share those risks. I'm going to stay, too. If there's trouble, I want to be with you."

The Sherpas were preparing to go down; only our faithful Pemba was to stay on with the sahibs. As we moved towards the tent I took Pierre and Claude by the arm:

"Do forgive me, I was terribly upset. But really it was very hard to decide. I'm sure you understand."

And indeed they did. We shall all remember our words at 21,000 feet, which in fact helped to cement our friendship.

The storm in my heart had abated too. I felt like a pilot who, after braving the tempest, comes into harbour on a calm sea. I felt an extraordinary serenity, matched by the serenity of the marvellous Himalayan evening. I searched the horizon. The sky was a bluey mauve, practically flawless, with only a few small, scattered clouds. There was no breath of wind, the air was absolutely still. The summit cone of Nun turned purple in the light of the setting sun.

To-morrow would be the summit day. I was certain of it now. But I realised also that in my present state of exhaustion I would be going no farther. What rest would I get from a cold, uncomfortable night with four in a tent meant for two? There was very little food, and practically nothing to drink. I knew that very soon I should have to give up my own chance. But I knew too, that thanks to Claude and Pierre, Nun would be ours.

CHAPTER X

“AND NOW WE CAN BEHOLD THE WAYS THAT LEAD TO THE GODS”¹

WE awoke on August 28 at five-thirty, with mumblings and grumblings all round. Half an hour later we still hadn't stirred. It was a fearful struggle to force ourselves out of our heavy, drugged sleep. We were far from happy. Our heads were heavy, our mouths hot, and we felt sick from want of food. Pierre was the first to make an effort. He sat up, not without difficulty, for we were packed like sardines.

“What sort of weather, little brother?” Pierre asked Pemba, who was near the opening of the tent.

Pemba stuck his head out and took a good look, and a rush of icy air came into the tent. “Little brother” shut the flap leisurely:

“Fine weather, O precious being!”

Pierre made a dive for the entrance, opened the zip-fastener and put his head out.

“Magnificent weather! Nun's in the bag!”

In an attempt to keep warm (it had frozen inside the tent) we had slept in all our clothes, so we only had our boots to pull on. Putting on our gaiters was an endless job, for our movements were so slow and clumsy. We moved about mechanically, numbed by the cold, dulled by soporifics, weak from want of food.

We had slept very badly, squeezed like sardines into our minute tent. Our supper the night before had consisted simply of a slice of ham, a small piece of *pain d'épice*, and a few lumps of sugar, the whole washed down with acid pineapple juice, which burned our throats and sun-parched lips. We each had two mouthfuls of grog. Just like Charlie Chaplin in *City Lights*, our excellent Pemba had discovered at the bottom of his pockets a candle and a flask of neat alcohol. Patiently he had melted snow in an empty tin and added the spirit. He looked as calm as if he'd been at Base Camp—it came so naturally to him to

¹ From an Indian poem dedicated to the goddesses of the mountains.

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have to do things for others; it was part of his nature as, indeed, it is part of all Sherpas' nature.

Breakfast was scanty too, for we had to keep some provisions in reserve. Fresh stocks would come up, but only later in the morning, from Camp II. The Sherpas would also bring a tent. Ang Phuter, Pa Norbu, and Gyaldzen would thus form a support party while we were making our attempt on the summit.

By way of breakfast we chewed oat-flakes, which obstinately remained in our mouths. Pierre opened a tin of fruit juice which he had attempted to warm a little by holding it between his legs. Ice crystals floated on top. "Two mouthfuls each," he enjoined. We made faces as we drank. It stung horribly.

What an utterly ridiculous situation into which we had got ourselves of our own free will!

"And we do all this out of love of the mountains!" I exclaimed. "It isn't really love any more, it's madness. Really, it's laughable."

We had to wait for the sun now before starting, for it was still too cold. We sucked a little oxygen to give us strength, but we should have done better to have brought food instead of this cylinder; or even better, a stove and a gas container.

"What's the time?" asked Pierre.

"Seven-fifteen."

"Already? . . . Never mind about the sun. We must push off, or we'll be too late."

"O.K."

One after the other we left the tent, which now seemed a most desirable haven. Heavens, what a sky! Not a single cloud. Not even over the Zaskar, which for weeks past had sent over snow, mist, and storm in our direction. In the distance Nanga Parbat and the giants of the Karakoram, dominated by K2, rose up more magnificent, more dazzling than ever, standing out unbelievably clear in the morning light. It was the day of all days for our final assault. The apparent madness of Claude and Pierre had contained a good deal of wisdom, after all.

We were still imprisoned in shadow, and the cold was cruel and biting. In a few minutes my feet were icy, while Claude, looking very pale, clapped her hands to warm herself, and Pemba shivered. Only Pierre seemed at ease.

“And now we can behold the ways that lead to the gods”

The tent was taken down and folded, and Pemba put it in his sack. We might perhaps have to bivouac; we did not know what difficulties lay ahead, and there was another 2,300 feet to climb. The year before on Salcantay we had been thankful for one, for we had been benighted on the way down and, thanks to that scrap of canvas, had spent fifteen hours “comfortably” in a crevasse at 20,000 feet.

I also took my cine-camera. Alas, I had only a few yards of film in it, and the refills had disappeared with Camp III, buried with all our cameras for ever beneath the avalanche, only a few hundred feet away.

We roped up: Pierre and Claude, Pemba and myself. At seven-thirty exactly we set off. The die was cast. Nun would be conquered, now, or we should be defeated, and this time there would be no second chance. The dark mass of our adversary rose before us, with only the summit cone lit up. The sun was on our right, and we would go to meet it. In any case it was not possible to make a frontal attack, for the face was barred by that same band of threatening seracs from which the avalanche had crashed down on our camp. We had, therefore, to make a wide detour, going up a combe which would take us up to a shoulder on our right; from there we should have to slant over to the left, and then up a slope which would finally bring us on to the face.

Pierre made the track, sinking in up to the knees, and both ropes made extremely slow progress. There was no sound but the crunch of our steps and our breath, which came in gasps: it was gruelling work. We crossed the bergschrund, and climbed up a steep wall on the farther side. Pierre came out on to the shoulder, which was, in reality, the last bastion of the south face and overlooked 6,000 feet of appalling precipices. I looked at my altimeter and my watch: 21,400 feet, eight-thirty. About three hundred and fifty feet an hour—not much. On the other hand, we were now in the sun, and about time too. Claude admitted that she hadn't thought she could make it. Pemba complained of the cold, and Pierre banged his chest. I was feeling pretty far gone: I had hardly any sensation in my feet, even though I had never stopped wagging my toes while I was climbing. My right hand was numb, and the fingers hard as wood.

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"I don't like the look of it," said Pierre, taking my hand. "I'll rub it."

Pemba took advantage of the halt to remove my boots and massage my feet energetically. They were all worried, and so was I. It was no state to be in, barely an hour after the start.

We set off again at eight-forty-five. The slope up to the face became steeper, and soon we were halted by an enormous crevasse. Fortunately two knife-edge ribs of ice offered a way across; Pierre, who was in the lead, advanced cautiously, testing every step with his axe like a blind man. When he reached the far side, he called us to come over, which took some time, for we had to belay each other across.

After this the snow became harder and bore our weight better, so we were able to increase our pace. But with me things were going from bad to worse. Life had partially returned to my hand, but my feet were numb again. All the same, I carried on somehow, making a desperate effort to stick it out. But my strength gradually ebbed. I felt that everything was giving way—both my physical strength and my morale—and that I had used up all my reserves. And the cold watches out for its defenceless prey.

At ten o'clock we stopped: 21,800 feet. It was another 1,600 feet to the top, and that was too much for me. I should never make it.

They took off my boots again; there was no life in my feet. Later, Pierre wrote: "Pemba and I rubbed a long time, but it was no good. It was a ghastly sensation, for I seemed to be rubbing the feet of a corpse. . . . Bernard's determination was no longer any help: he just wasn't in a fit state to go on."

If I insisted on going on I would certainly be badly frost-bitten: my toes, white and numb and hard as wood, left me in no doubt on that point. I looked at the summit which I had longed for so ardently. Would I allow myself to be bewitched? No! I love the mountains, I have loved them profoundly ever since that day in 1945 on the Matterhorn when I first set foot on them. But not for the world would I deliberately sacrifice even one toe.

It would be sheer madness to go on. I could conceivably have done so by giving myself the artificial stimulus of drugs; I was

“*And now we can behold the ways that lead to the gods*”

carrying some tablets of *orthédrine* and *maxiton*. But it wouldn't do to use them. The return to reality would be too dearly bought. Common sense and duty alike insisted that I give up: and I had promised myself to do so as soon as I considered that I was compromising the others' success.

“Pierre, Claude, this is where I turn back!” Holding back my tears with difficulty, I gave them the reasons for my decision. Pemba would stay with me to help me down.

“Good luck!” Even in my disappointment I was happy, for I knew that in a few hours Nun would at last be ours. They embraced me, concealing their feelings with difficulty. Now our chance of success lay entirely in their hands.

My friends went on their way, and I filmed them as they started up, and kept them in the sights as they carved out “the way to the Gods”. And I thought that fate had chosen well in sparing our two best climbers from the avalanche. The cine-camera stopped: the spool was finished—just like myself. Then with a gesture of resignation I let my arms fall, and slowly looked up at the cone of snow and ice lost in the azure sky: the summit to which I was now saying good-bye.

That day I took the first steps in the practice of a virtue for which I am but poorly equipped: renunciation.

* * * * *

My nerves went to pieces, and I let myself sink down and cried bitter tears. Pemba sat down beside me; taking my hand and comforting me as one comforts a child, murmuring soothing words which I did not understand. I thanked him with a smile. He knew no English, I knew no Tibetan, and the only language we could speak was that of the heart, in which we could speak to each other plainly.

An hour and a quarter later we were back at the site of Camp III. The tent was put up at once and we dived into it. Pemba hurried to take my boots off and began to rub for all he was worth. It was only at the end of an hour that the circulation returned. This time I was able to feel my toes; I even yelled when Pemba pressed them in his burning hands. Now that all danger of frost-bite was over, an irrational fear possessed me, and I felt like taking to my heels. Wouldn't those seracs break

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off and fall on the tent? After all, they'd done so once already. But this was ridiculous. There was no room for cowardice. I just had to stay where I was until Claude and Pierre returned. The Sherpas would soon be coming up from Camp II, and we must all stay here in support, for the summit party might need us.

I stuck my head out of the tent. On the immense sunlit face of Nun two little black specks were moving like flies on a wall.

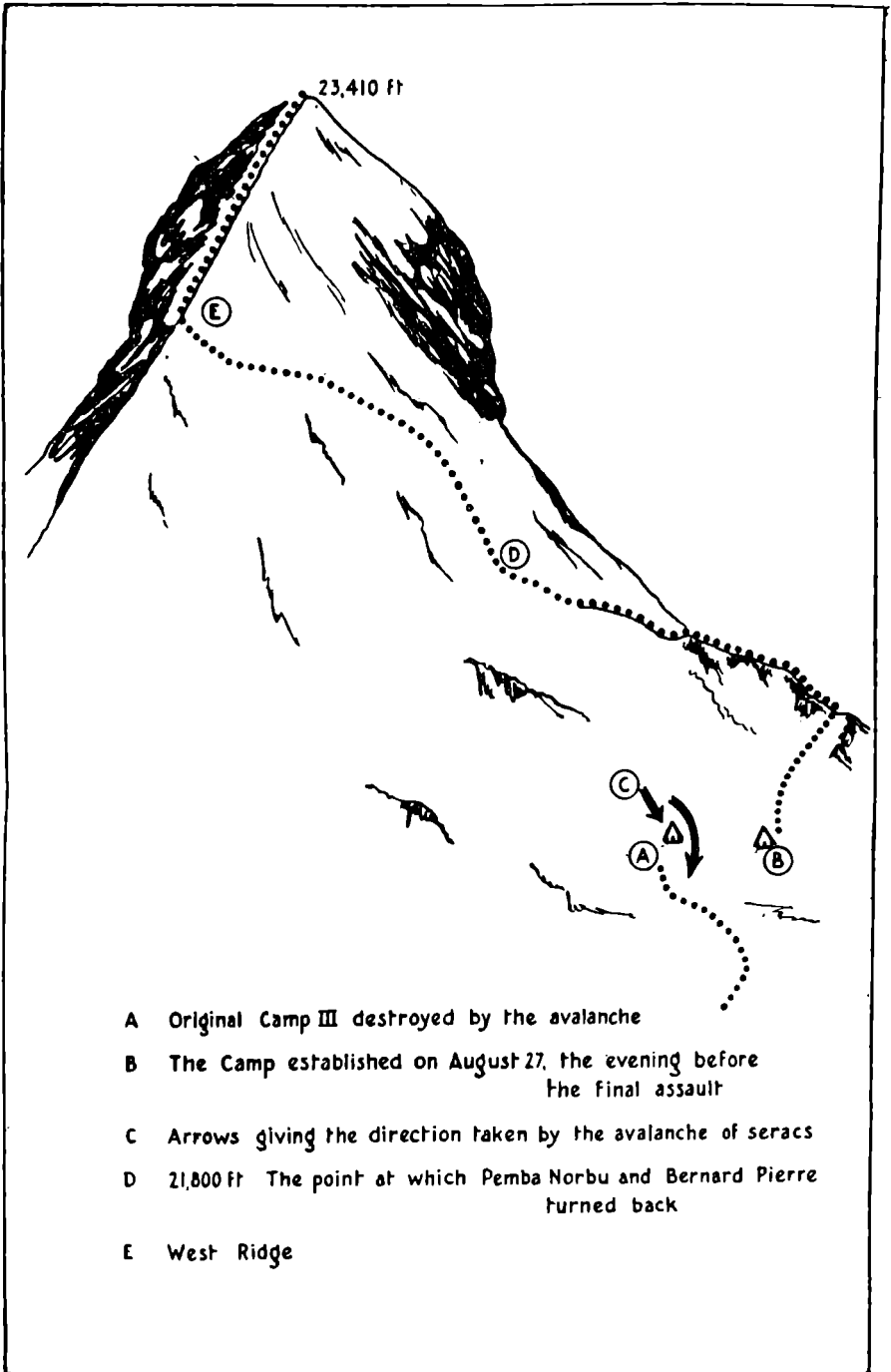
* * * * *

The final phase of the ascent is best described in Pierre's own words. Here they are:

"The snow slope ran up at an easy angle at first and then continued very steeply to two rocks about a third of the way up. Above the slope on the right there towered a high rock step, on the left was the west ridge. The snow was foul—crust over unconsolidated powder snow. I had often ploughed through this kind of stuff before, going full steam ahead with a certain satisfaction. But on the Nordend, on the Täschhorn, and elsewhere I'd been pretty sure the snow was sound. Here I was envisaging an avalanche at every step. Those two rocks seemed almost within reach. Yet, although we went as fast as we could, they never seemed to get any nearer. It was a tremendous relief to reach them at last, after a pretty strenuous effort. That was one stage over, and at least this perch wouldn't give way beneath us.

"Directly below us, at Camp III, Bernard and Pemba were putting up the tent. Farther off, among the seracs a party was coming up—the three Sherpas whom we had sent down the evening before, and who were now bringing up equipment and provisions. Probably Jean and Michel were struggling up the slopes of the great Tower. I was pretty sure that in spite of their bruises they meant to come up in support."

Meanwhile I was watching the two black dots leave their perch and start up the slope. I could guess their mode of progress as they slowly went up, knee-deep in snow—first breaking the snow crust, still hard from the night frost; then searching about for something solid on which their crampons could get a hold; driving their ice-axes deep in at every step.



ROUTE FROM CAMP III TO THE SUMMIT

A Mountain Called Nun Kun

They were now well in the middle of the face, and behind them a white frothy furrow made a long diagonal. Some 1,300 feet below was the bar of seracs which threatened our tent; should the climbers be carried away by an avalanche, it was there that they would land up. I shivered at the thought. Now for Pierre again:

“Above us the slope eased slightly, then steepened again to an angle which it was hard to estimate. Claude wanted to go straight up so as to avoid cutting across the slope; I favoured traversing left to the west ridge before it became too steep. Neither course was particularly attractive. We found ourselves glancing downwards, towards security. Was Nun worth risking our lives on wind-slab? We must advance, somehow.”

(Their voices carried down quite startingly. I heard Claude say calmly to Pierre:

“Shall we go on?”

“Yes, let’s.”)

“Claude attacked the horrible snow of the face. The going was hard, even for the second man. Claude climbed straight up. She thrust her ice-axe in above her and pulled herself up from one foot to the other. But soon she came to an area of wind-slab which made her take a slanting line to the left. This wind-slab formed long festoons starting from the west ridge and running down obliquely. Afraid that they would not bear our weight, we went along beneath them, traversing more and more horizontally. Often neither crampons nor ice-axe found firm snow, and we no longer dared make any violent effort for fear of breaking through a slab; we had to slide forward patiently, step by step, on powder snow which did not consolidate. The sun beat full down on the fragile mass which was disintegrating further every minute.”

I could still hear their words and shared their anxiety.

“Belay me well while I traverse across this slab,” Claude said to Pierre. “I’m afraid of its giving way.”

My eyes were riveted to the face where the fate of Nun and of our party hung in the balance. Ang Phuter, Pa Norbu, and Gyaldzen had just come up. I told Gyaldzen, who understands a little English, to put up the second tent, unpack the rucksacks, and wait. Pemba made straight for the cylinder of Calor gas, lit

“And now we can behold the ways that lead to the gods”

the burner, and filled a saucepan with snow. The tea he prepared was to be our first hot drink since the morning before.

The party on the face still progressed slowly. Minute by minute they gained ground and drew nearer to the west ridge, which spelled salvation for them. It had a huge cornice, a mass of snow accumulated by the wind on the very crest of the ridge curled over into space. All danger was not yet over, the cornices might give way beneath the weight of the climbers. But on the whole there was less risk here than on the face with the snow liable to avalanche at any minute. How right they had been not to go straight up in a direct line to the summit.

Pierre's narrative continues:

“Near the ridge the slope bulged out. Fortunately we found a band of hard snow along which Claude made her way upwards into the sky with small, careful steps. Her axe gleamed as she thrust it over the crest of the ridge. At once our visions of avalanches vanished. We laughed when we found ourselves on an easy ridge leading straight up to the summit. Twelve-thirty . . . Nun was ours!”

(The Sherpas abandoned their usual reserve and gave tongue with joyous yodels. The two climbers stopped a minute as if they had heard.)

“I took off my sack and began making the track with great zest. The snow was once more unstable. On the right of the crest it had been rotted through by the sun; on the left it was powdery and loose; beneath the actual crest of the ridge all was rotten. I have always liked snow, and these bad snow conditions fascinated me. There was no kicking steps, no swing of the ice-axe. But as my foot sank in I tried to estimate the cohesion of the snow—whether powder or coarse-grained crystals—to judge just how far it would support my weight and when it would give way. It seemed to me that I developed a sixth sense through my heavy boots; a sense capable of judging an ever-changing element. Balance now came into play, there must be no jerk, no sudden twist of the boot as one transferred one's weight from one foot to the other. One also had to move rhythmically so as to climb quickly and without fatigue. A delicate rhythm which must be adapted to the changing snow. . . . Once this rhythm and balance was found, I enjoyed letting

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my legs carry me along, leaving my mind free to dream, my eyes full of the brilliance of the scene.

“Happily there were neither seracs nor crevasses barring the ridge, and we made height much more rapidly than on the avalanchy face.”

(At two-thirty a light mist blew up, but it was transitory and thin—fortunately nothing like the thick fog of the previous days. It swirled round the face and gradually floated upward. The two small black specks disappeared. How long the minutes seemed!)

“On the ridge, which had now become very steep, the snow had collected in drifts through which it was gruelling work making tracks. Claude insisted that we should share the work by changing the lead at each rope’s length. She seemed to consider it all in the day’s work that she should make the track, and whenever it was my turn to wait my eyes were fixed on the tiny figure in sky blue, poised on the immensity of the ridge. From where did she draw the vitality to battle through such exhausting snow at 23,000 feet and more?”

(Again and again I came out of the tent. But Nun was still cloaked in her veil of mist. Nothing but silence and mystery.)

“In the mist we were able to make out some rocks, flanking the ridge, which we passed one by one. Then we came out on to a snow dome. A rock tower with a great beak appeared on a level with us. It still looked a long way. But we were deceived by the mist, for in a moment we were at the foot of the tower.

“‘Go ahead, Claude.’

“‘No, you deserve to be first on top.’

“‘And what about you?’

“Claude went ahead, and was hidden for an instant. The rope ran out, then stopped. I felt a wave of joy spread over me—she must have reached the top. But no, her clear voice rang out:

“‘Come along, the last few yards are wide enough for us to go together.’

“With our eyes fixed on the end of the little snow crest running up into the sky, we went forward arm in arm, slowly, the better to savour our enormous joy.

“And now we can behold the ways that lead to the gods”

“All our hopes and efforts—last year’s attempt, this year’s progress and disappointments—all now took shape, all were now crowned, on this minute dome of snow upon which we sat, so gloriously happy. We forgot fatigue and thirst, even the dangers of the descent. We passed into an inexpressible and irrational ecstasy, in harmony with the reddish mists and the diffused light of the sun. But gradually this extraordinary happiness fell into place. To the celestial visions succeeded the images of certain faces. First that of my wife. Two months ago, when I had thought it would not be possible for me to join the expedition, she had cried in disappointment! To-day was her birthday—what a present for her! Then came my old friend Edouard Pidoux, the companion of so many of my wanderings, who had done so much to make a mountaineer of me—and a man. Then my comrades, the French and the Sherpas, strung out on the flanks of the mountain all waiting confidently for our success. There would be joy for all these friends as well as for myself. Claude alone was there before me, but her tenacity and her gentleness reminded me of all those others, and conjured up all these friends before my eyes. For three years I had wandered over the mountains by myself, over face and ridge, and made many splendid expeditions in this marvellous country. But my pleasure had been limited because I had had no companion with whom to share the joy either of climbing or of contemplation. But now I had friends. Perhaps I had looked upon the mountains as a game, a field for exploits, or even an ivory tower. But in them now I had found the joys of friendship.

“And we mustn’t forget to take a stone from the top for Michel.”

* * * * *

At four-thirty a cry from one of the Sherpas broke the silence. “Sahib! Sahib!”

I rushed outside the tent. The mist which had hidden the mountain for the past two hours was rather theatrically breaking up. Like a vision the summit of Nun appeared, then the break extended. Anxiously we looked for signs of life. Nothing. . . . At four-forty there was some excitement among the Sherpas. They pointed to the dizzy heights of the west ridge. Two

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barely visible black specks were majestically descending in the steps which they had cut to victory. We had conquered Nun!

Suddenly a great wave of happiness came over me and made me tremble with emotion. I was spellbound by the vision, and saw it as a symbol. Those two black specks, lost in a sea of white, were the focal point of a dream which we had pursued for years. Preparation, worries and set-backs, hopes and disappointments, hardships and joys, progress and retreat, fears, anxieties, sufferings, and accidents, all these had not been in vain. The irresistible passion, the never satisfied urge, the unshakable pride, which draws one year after year towards the summits, had now at last found its fulfilment.

GLOSSARY

anorak: wind-proof jacket with hood attached.

arête: ridge.

belay: to secure the climber to a projection with the rope; the projection itself.

bergschrund: a large crevasse separating the upper slopes of a glacier from the steeper ice or rock above.

cagoule: long anorak descending below the knees.

chimney: a narrow vertical gully in rock or ice.

col: pass.

cornice: overhanging mass of snow or ice along a ridge, shaped like the curling crest of a wave and generally formed by the prevailing wind; an overhanging ledge of rock.

couloir: gully or furrow in a mountain-side; may be of rock, ice, or snow.

crampons: metal frame with spikes, fitting the soles of the boots, for use on hard snow or ice.

crevasse: a fissure in a glacier, often of great depth.

gendarme: rock tower or tooth on a ridge.

glissade: to slide down a snow slope, either sitting or standing, using the ice-axe to control speed and direction.

ice-fall: a much torn and crevassed portion of a glacier caused by a change of angle or direction in the slope.

karabiner or *snap-link*: a large metal link with a spring-loaded hinged opening; can be clipped on to a piton or the rope.

line: a thin rope used for roping down (*q.v.*).

moraine: long ridge or bank formed of stones and débris carried down by a glacier.

névé: upper snows which feed the glaciers; patch of old hardened snow, usually above the permanent snow line.

pitch: section of difficult ice or rock, anything from 10 to 120 feet in length.

piton: metal spike with a hole in the head (sometimes with a ring attached) for driving into cracks in the rock; a long, thin type is used for ice.

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rappel or *rope-down*: system of descending steep pitches by means of a rope doubled round a projection. Usually the thin rope known as line is used.

rognon: large hummock of rock protruding through a glacier.

rope: attaches members of a party together; a party may be referred to as "a rope."

scree: slope of small loose stones.

serac: tower or pinnacle of ice, mainly found in ice-falls.

snow-bridge: a layer of snow bridging a crevasse.

traverse: to cross a slope horizontally; to cross a mountain from one side to another.

tsampa: roasted and ground barley or other grain.

verglas: thin coating of ice on rock.

SHERPA VOCABULARY

(With the corresponding terms in Tibetan)

By PIERRE VITTOZ

It is of interest to compare the Sherpa dialect with the classic Tibetan from which it derives. In the following pages the classic Tibetan and the Sherpa terms are given side by side. Classic Tibetan was very probably spoken ten or twelve centuries ago over the vast territory (more than 1,500 miles from east to west) occupied by the Tibetans. This tongue was written as early as the 7th century and is still the sole written language of the inhabitants, although not spoken in any part of the country. Classic Tibetan is relatively well known, and there are dictionaries as well as translations of a number of works. In the following list I have given the original spelling of the classic Tibetan words, but the spelling of Sherpa terms—of which no written example exists, and of which this is a first draft study—is entirely of my own construction in which I have endeavoured to compromise between simplicity and accuracy.

LIST OF WORDS

I. *Current Everyday Terms*

<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>acho</i>	<i>p'u</i>	elder brother; also used as a term of friendship for an older person without any family connection.
<i>no</i>	<i>nu</i>	younger brother; <i>ibid.</i>
<i>kyermen</i>	<i>ch'ung-ma</i>	literally: of low birth, wife, woman! As everyone knows, orientals are not feminists. Tibetans consider to be re-born a woman a punishment for having committed some particularly serious sin in a previous life.
<i>pulsa</i>	<i>bu</i>	son.

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<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>pumo</i>	<i>bumo</i>	daughter.
<i>kusho</i>	<i>rje-btsun</i>	Your Excellency; commonly: sir.
<i>tokpo</i>	<i>grogs</i>	friend.
<i>ming</i>	<i>ming</i>	name.
<i>k'angpa</i>	<i>k'angpa</i>	house.
<i>changma</i>	<i>lchang-ma</i>	willow; the least rare Tibetan tree; thus " <i>changma</i> " is often used to denote leafy trees in general.
<i>shupa</i> } <i>shukpa</i> }	<i>shug-pa</i>	Himalayan juniper; a fine tree in low-lying or sheltered regions; deformed and stunted specimens are found up to between 14,500 and 15,000 feet; much sought-after for fuel.
<i>tsa</i>	<i>rtswa</i>	grass.
<i>lakpa</i>	<i>lagpa</i>	hand.
<i>ch'ak</i>	<i>p'yag</i>	hand. We touch here upon one of the beauties of Tibetan: most current terms have a special form for use in connection with any important personage. The Sherpas rarely use this deferential vocabulary, but they constantly make use of certain terms, and " <i>ch'ak</i> " is one of them.
<i>kangpa</i>	<i>rkang-pa</i>	foot.
<i>shap</i>	<i>zhabs</i>	foot (deferential form).
<i>go</i>	<i>mgo</i>	head.
<i>mik</i>	<i>mig</i>	eye.
<i>k'amsang</i>	<i>k'ams</i>	health, good health.
<i>men</i>	<i>sman</i>	medicine.
<i>mik-men</i>	<i>mig-sman</i>	medicine for the eyes.
<i>ts'at</i> } <i>ts'e</i> }	<i>ts'ad-pa</i>	fever.
<i>surmo</i>	<i>zug</i>	pain, illness.
<i>t'ak</i>	<i>k'rag</i>	blood.
<i>p'i</i>	<i>p'yid</i>	to freeze.

Sherpa Vocabulary

<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>kangpa p'is</i> <i>pö</i>	<i>bod</i>	the foot was frozen. Tibet. The word "Tibet" is unknown in Central Asia.
<i>pöpa</i>	<i>bod-pa</i>	Tibetan.
<i>pöke</i>	<i>bod-skad</i>	Tibetan language.
<i>sherpa ke</i>	(unknown)	Sherpa dialect.
<i>garpo</i>	<i>rgad-po</i>	old.
<i>shömpa</i>	<i>gzhon-pa</i>	young.
<i>leka</i>	<i>las</i>	work.
<i>du</i> }	<i>adug</i>	there exists, there is.
<i>yö</i> }	<i>yod</i>	
<i>midu</i> }	<i>mi-adug</i>	there is not.
<i>me</i> }	<i>med</i>	
<i>du!</i>	<i>adug</i>	stay, sit down!
<i>sho!</i>	<i>shog</i>	come along!
<i>tong!</i>	<i>tong!</i>	give!
<i>song!</i>	<i>song!</i>	go!
<i>ji!</i> }	<i>byos</i>	do!
<i>chi!</i> }		
<i>p'ep</i>	<i>p'eps</i>	come! go! (very current deferential form).
<i>shu!</i>	<i>bzhugs</i>	stay! please be seated! (<i>ibid.</i>).
<i>bor!</i>	<i>azhog</i>	to leave; put down!
<i>t'aldik chi!</i>	<i>shom</i>	to make ready; prepare!
<i>len</i>	<i>len</i>	to take.
<i>nyo</i> }	<i>nyo</i>	to buy.
<i>nyö</i> }		
<i>ser</i> }	<i>zer</i>	to say.
<i>zer</i> }		
<i>la!</i>	<i>lags</i>	at your service! Also a syllable denoting respect when added to the end of a phrase. " <i>Gur nyi du la</i> " means "There are two tents, sir." We called Ang Tharkay " <i>Acho la</i> ", which means "respected elder brother"!

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<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>nga</i>	<i>nga</i>	I.
<i>k'yörang</i>	<i>k'yod</i>	thou, you.
<i>nyirang</i>	<i>k'yed</i>	you (deferential form in the singular).
<i>k'o</i>	<i>de</i>	he, she.
<i>k'ong</i>	<i>k'ong</i>	he, she, (deferential).
<i>ngatang</i>	<i>nged-chag</i>	we (inclusive: you and me).
<i>nga</i> } <i>ngacha</i> }	<i>nged-chag</i>	we (exclusive: others and myself, without including you).
<i>k'yöcha</i>	<i>k'yod-chag</i>	you (ordinary plural).
<i>nyicha</i>	<i>k'yed-chag</i>	you (deferential form, plural).
<i>k'ocha</i>	<i>de-dag</i>	they, masculine and feminine.
<i>k'ongts'o</i>	<i>k'ong</i>	they, masculine and feminine deferential. The above forms are employed either as subjects of intransitive verbs or direct objects of a transitive verb. The indirect object is formed by adding the suffix " <i>la</i> ". Thus " <i>nga-la ser!</i> " means "tell me!". The genitive form or possessive adjective is made by adding the suffix " <i>i</i> ". Thus " <i>k'o-i no</i> ", means "his younger brother". A curious rule insists that a transitive verb shall not be expressed in its simple form, but with the addition of the suffix " <i>i</i> " (basically differing from the previous case). Thus " <i>k'o du</i> " means "he stays" (intransitive verb); but " <i>k'o-i ser</i> " means "he says" (transitive verb).
<i>ta</i>	<i>rta</i>	horse, pony.
<i>ga</i>	<i>sga</i>	saddle.
<i>luk</i>	<i>lug</i>	sheep.
<i>rama</i>	<i>rama</i>	goat.
<i>p'ak</i>	<i>p'ag</i>	pig.

Sherpa Vocabulary

<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>k'yi</i>	<i>k'yi</i>	dog.
<i>riong</i>	<i>ri-bong</i>	hare (literally: mountain donkey, on account of the ears!).
<i>shik</i>	<i>shig</i>	flea.
<i>goa</i>	<i>dgo-ba</i>	Tibetan chamois with small sharp horns.
<i>kyin</i>	<i>skyin</i>	ibex (the Himalayan ibex has magnificent horns and may weigh up to 260 pounds).
<i>teu</i>	<i>spre</i>	monkey.
<i>p'ea</i>	<i>p'yi-ba</i>	marmot (a typical example: in Central Tibetan dialects <i>p</i> + <i>y</i> becomes <i>ch</i> ; the Sherpa dialect often follows this rule, but in this case the pronunciation has remained near to that of the classic word).
<i>balu</i>	—	bear. A Hindustani name; in Tibetan the Sherpas distinguish between:
<i>tom</i>	<i>dom</i>	black bear of the forests.
<i>tetmo</i>	<i>dred</i>	brown bear of the pasture lands.
<i>lak</i>	<i>glag</i>	eagle.
<i>t'a</i>	<i>k'ra</i>	small common falcon.
<i>k'ata</i>	<i>k'wa-ta</i>	raven.
<i>dünshak</i>	<i>bdun-p'rag</i>	week.
<i>nyima</i>	<i>nyima</i>	Sunday, Literally—sun; cf. <i>Sonntag</i> , Sunday.
<i>dawa</i>	<i>zla-ba</i>	Monday, literally—moon.
<i>mingma</i>	<i>mig-dmar</i>	Tuesday, literally—red eye, i.e., the planet Mars.
<i>lakpa</i>	<i>lhag-pa</i>	Wednesday, literally—the planet Mercury.
<i>p'urbu</i>	<i>p'urbu</i>	Thursday, literally—the planet Jupiter.
<i>pasang</i>	<i>pasang</i>	Friday, literally—the planet Venus.
<i>pemba</i>	<i>spen-pa</i>	Saturday, literally—the planet Saturn.

The seven above-mentioned stars,

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Sherpa

Tibetan

Remarks on the Sherpa terms

all considered to be planets of our earth, have been known since time immemorial. The fact that they bear the same relation to the days of the week in Tibet as they do in Europe is explained by the link between the Sanskrit and the Indo-Aryan tradition. There is no connection between Tibetan and the Sanskrit family of languages, but Tibetan culture is directly inherited from India. Note that “*dawa*” also means month, for the Tibetan calendar is based on the lunar month, and each month begins with the new moon.

<i>karma</i>	<i>skar-ma</i>	star.
<i>yark'a</i>	<i>dbyar</i>	summer.
<i>tonk'a</i>	<i>ston</i>	autumn.
<i>gunk'a</i>	<i>dgun</i>	winter.
<i>pitk'a</i>	<i>dpyid</i>	spring.
<i>lo</i>	<i>lo</i>	year.
<i>naning</i>	<i>naning</i>	last year.
<i>shening</i>		the previous year, two years ago.
<i>chik</i>	<i>gchig</i>	one.
<i>nyi</i>	<i>gnyis</i>	two.
<i>sum</i>	<i>gsum</i>	three.
<i>zhi</i>	<i>bzhi</i>	four. The pronunciation of “four” is particularly interesting; while in the central dialects it is always pronounced “ <i>chee</i> ”, the Sherpas pronounce it like the French “ <i>ji</i> ” in common with the western dialects and with what little is known of the eastern dialects.
<i>nga</i>	<i>lnga</i>	five.

Sherpa Vocabulary

<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>tuk</i>	<i>drug</i>	six.
<i>dün</i>	<i>bdun</i>	seven.
<i>gye</i>	<i>brgyad</i>	eight.
<i>gu</i>	<i>dgu</i>	nine.
<i>chu</i>	<i>bchu</i>	ten.
<i>chu-chik</i>	<i>bchu-gchig</i>	eleven.
<i>chu-nyi</i>	<i>bchu-gnyis</i>	twelve.
<i>chuk-sum</i>	<i>bchu-gsum</i>	thirteen.
<i>chub-zhi</i>	<i>bchu-bzhi</i>	fourteen.
<i>chö-nga</i>	<i>bcho-nga</i>	fifteen.
<i>chu-tuk</i>	<i>bchu-drug</i>	sixteen.
<i>chub-dün</i>	<i>bchu-bdun</i>	seventeen.
<i>chöb-gye</i>	<i>bcho-brgyad</i>	eighteen.
<i>chur-gu</i>	<i>bchu-dgu</i>	nineteen.
<i>nyi-shu</i>	<i>nyi-shu</i>	twenty.
<i>sum-ju</i>	<i>sum-chu</i>	thirty.
<i>zhip-shu</i>	<i>bzhi-bchu</i>	forty.
<i>ngap-shu</i>	<i>nga-bchu</i>	fifty.
<i>tuk-shu</i>	<i>drug-chu</i>	sixty.
<i>dün-ju</i>	<i>bdun-chu</i>	seventy.
<i>gye-chu</i>	<i>brgyad-chu</i>	eighty.
<i>gup-shu</i>	<i>dgu-bchu</i>	ninety.
<i>gya-t'emba</i>	<i>brgya</i>	hundred.
<i>gormo</i>	<i>dngul</i>	rupee.
<i>ser</i>	<i>gser</i>	gold.
<i>ngul</i>	<i>dngul</i>	silver (metal and money).
<i>cha</i>	<i>lchags</i>	iron, steel.
<i>yige</i>	<i>yige</i>	letter, written message.
<i>shogu</i>	<i>shog-bu</i>	paper.
<i>pecha</i>	<i>dpe</i>	book; the word "kitab", derived from the Arab, is also frequently used.
<i>ch'ö</i>	<i>ch'os</i>	religion; religious book; book.

A Mountain Called Nun Kun

II. *Expedition Terms*

<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>base camp</i>		The Sherpas cannot be persuaded to use a Tibetan word to denote the geographical headquarters of an expedition.
<i>lambar</i>		high camp.
<i>lambar tangpo</i>		Camp 1.
<i>lambar nyiwa</i>		Camp 2.
<i>lambar sumba</i>		Camp 3.
<i>ek lambar</i>		Camp 1
<i>do lambar</i>		Camp 2
<i>tin lambar</i>		Camp 3
<i>gur</i>	<i>gur</i>	tent.
<i>den</i>	<i>stan</i>	mattress.
<i>malch'e</i>	<i>mal-gos</i>	sleeping-bag.
<i>lak-shup</i>	<i>lag-shubs</i>	glove.
<i>kang-shup</i>	<i>rkang-shubs</i>	socks.
<i>mikshe</i>	<i>shel-mig</i>	goggles.
<i>t'akpa</i>	<i>t'agpa</i>	rope.
<i>bur</i>		corruption of the English "boot".
<i>kor</i>		coat, down jacket (after considerable reflection upon the origin of this word, I realised that it, too, was just a corruption of the English "coat"!)
<i>aisa</i>		ice-axe.
<i>martel</i>		hammer. One might think the Sherpas speak French! They know the Tibetan word, " <i>t'ojung</i> ", but do not use it among themselves; they insist that " <i>martel</i> " is purely local; it probably derives from the two Hindustani words for "to hit" and "to throw".

Sherpa Vocabulary

<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>ser</i>	<i>gzer</i>	nail. This word might be used for "piton", but the Sherpas have become accustomed to use English words for those items of their equipment which are unknown to Tibetans.
<i>me</i>	<i>me</i>	fire.
<i>shing</i>	<i>shing</i>	wood, fire-wood.
<i>ot</i>	<i>sgron-ma</i>	light, lamp.
<i>mumbati</i>		candle. A Hindustani word, candles are not known in Tibet.
<i>kutpa</i>	<i>skud-pa</i>	string, thread.
<i>sabon</i>		soap. A Hindustani word; it is well known that Tibetans profess complete ignorance of this by-product of civilisation, but the Sherpas are remarkably clean.
<i>p'orpa</i>	<i>p'orpa</i>	cup, bowl.
<i>t'ali</i>		plate. The word as well as the object are imported from India; the Tibetans eat out of their "p'orpa".
<i>ti</i>	<i>gri</i>	knife.
<i>sang</i>	<i>zang's</i>	saucepan. The beginning of this word is pronounced in a deep tone; there are other instances, but the tone system (Chinese influence) plays but a small part in the Sherpa dialect.
<i>cha</i>	<i>ja</i>	tea (a word of Chinese origin); one must distinguish "poja"—Tibetan tea with butter, and "cha ngarmo" or "Lipton cha"—sweetened tea.
<i>solja</i>	<i>gsol-ja</i>	tea (deferential).

A Mountain Called Nun Kun

Sherpa	Tibetan	Remarks on the Sherpa terms
<i>chema-kara</i>	<i>kara</i>	literally: sand sugar, castor sugar; in practice is used for refined white sugar as opposed to moist or brown sugar—"guram".
<i>to</i>	<i>k'a-zas</i>	food.
<i>t'ukpa</i>	<i>t'ug-pa</i>	soup, porridge; deferential, "jam".
<i>gyat'uk</i>	<i>rgya-t'ug</i>	literally: Chinese soup, broth and macaroni; used for macaroni.
<i>ts'a</i>	<i>ts'wa</i>	salt.
<i>tsong</i>	<i>btsong</i>	onion.
<i>sha</i>	<i>sha</i>	meat.
<i>gyuma</i>	<i>rgyu-ma</i>	sausage.
<i>chapo</i>	<i>bya-po</i>	cock.
<i>tsamba</i>	<i>rtsam-pa</i>	flour made from roasted grain, generally barley; mixed raw into tea with butter, "tsamba" forms the Tibetan bread; it can be very insipid, but with sufficient butter (rancid) and a little sugar it becomes agreeable and nourishing.
<i>chapati</i>		pancake (Hindustani).
<i>biscur</i>		biscuit.
<i>de</i>	<i>abras</i>	rice.
<i>mar</i>	<i>mar</i>	butter.
<i>oma</i>	<i>oma</i>	milk.
<i>go-nga</i>	<i>sgo-nga</i>	egg.
<i>ch'ang</i>	<i>ch'ang</i>	beer made from barley.
<i>arak</i>	<i>arag</i>	distilled spirit.
<i>dang</i>	<i>mdang</i>	yesterday.
<i>sang nyi</i>	<i>sang</i>	to-morrow.
<i>nang</i>	<i>gnang</i>	the day after to-morrow.
<i>ngamo</i>	<i>sang snga-dro</i>	to-morrow morning.
<i>k'yong!</i>		bring!
<i>k'ur sho!</i>	<i>ak'ur shog!</i>	bring!
<i>do!</i>	<i>agro</i>	walk! let's go!

Sherpa Vocabulary

<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>gyokpo</i>	<i>myurdu</i>	quick.
<i>go</i>	<i>dgos</i>	I need, it is necessary.
<i>mik to!</i>	<i>ltos</i>	look!
<i>t'onga?</i>	<i>mt'ong-gam</i>	do you see? can you find?
<i>yul</i>	<i>yul</i>	country, district.
<i>tong</i>	<i>grong</i>	village.

III Mountain Terms.

<i>ri</i>	<i>ri</i>	mountain, hill.
<i>ri ngo</i>	<i>ri ngo</i>	side or face of a mountain.
<i>kang</i>	<i>gangs</i>	ice, hard snow.
<i>kangri</i>	<i>gangs-ri</i>	glacier, snow mountain.
<i>kang ch'en</i>	<i>gangs-ch'en</i>	glacier, glacier river.
<i>do</i>	<i>rdo</i>	stone.
<i>p'abong</i>	<i>brag</i>	rock.
<i>shalma</i>		scree.
<i>sa</i>	<i>sa</i>	earth.
<i>chema</i>	<i>bye-ma.</i>	sand.
<i>ch'u</i>	<i>ch'u</i>	water, river.
<i>ch'u mik</i>	<i>ch'u-mig</i>	spring.
<i>rong</i>	<i>rong</i>	gorge.
<i>tokpo</i>	<i>grog-po.</i>	ravine.
<i>ts'o</i>	<i>mts'o</i>	lake.
<i>la</i>	<i>la</i>	pass.
<i>tse</i>	<i>rtse</i>	summit.
<i>lartse</i>	<i>lartse</i>	summit of a pass.
<i>gangk'a</i>	<i>sgang</i>	spur, rib, ridge.
<i>p'ark'a la</i>	<i>p'arol-du</i>	the other side (of a river, glacier, etc.).
<i>ts'urk'a la</i>	<i>ts'ur-du</i>	this side, on this side of.
<i>serka</i>	<i>serka</i>	crevasse.
<i>k'a</i>	<i>k'a-ba</i>	snow.
<i>k'a-ts'up</i>	<i>k'a-ts'ub</i>	snow-storm.
<i>k'yak</i>	<i>k'yags-pa</i>	ice (such as forms in a receptacle, for instance).

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<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>k'aru</i>	<i>k'a-rud</i>	avalanche.
<i>ch'arpa</i>	<i>ch'arpa</i>	rain.
<i>mukpa</i>	<i>mug-pa</i>	mist.
<i>nyima</i>	<i>nyima</i>	sun.
<i>lungpa</i>	<i>lungpa</i>	valley, glen; often the valley or district where a certain person lives.
<i>t'ang</i>	<i>t'ang</i>	plain, flat space.
<i>lamk'a</i>	<i>lam</i>	road, route.
<i>kyok</i>		bend, the bend of a road or valley.
<i>yarla</i>	<i>yar</i>	up above.
<i>marla</i>	<i>mar</i>	down below.
<i>ye ngo la</i>	<i>gyas-su</i>	on the right.
<i>yön ngo la</i>	<i>gyon-du</i>	on the left.
<i>sarpo</i>	<i>gzar-ba</i>	steep.
<i>lamo</i>	<i>sla-ba</i>	easy.
<i>kakpo</i>	<i>dka-ba</i>	difficult.
<i>t'ömpo</i>	<i>mt'o-ba</i>	high.
<i>yakpo</i>	<i>legs-pa</i>	good, safe.
<i>risokpa</i>	<i>ngan-pa</i>	bad.
<i>dewa</i>	<i>bde-ba</i>	beautiful.
<i>t'ak ringpo</i>	<i>rgyans</i>	distant.
<i>samba</i>	<i>zam-pa</i>	bridge.
<i>kangsam</i>		snow- or ice-bridge.
<i>tempo</i>	<i>sra-ba</i>	sound, firm (bridge, snow, etc.).
<i>ch'ok</i>	<i>p'yogs</i>	direction.
<i>chang</i>	<i>byang</i>	north. The Sherpas have a good knowledge of the points of the compass owing to their practice of telling the time by the sun.
<i>shar</i>	<i>shar</i>	east.
<i>lo</i>	<i>lho</i>	south.
<i>nup</i>	<i>nub</i>	west.
<i>dzok!</i>	<i>adzog</i>	climb!
<i>bop!</i>	<i>abob</i>	go down!
<i>ch'empo</i>	<i>ch'en-po</i>	big.
<i>ch'ung ch'ung</i>	<i>ch'ung-ngu</i>	little.

Sherpa Vocabulary

<i>Sherpa</i>	<i>Tibetan</i>	<i>Remarks on the Sherpa terms</i>
<i>kale</i>	<i>ngang-gis</i>	slowly, carefully.
<i>karpo</i>	<i>dkar-ba</i>	white.
<i>serpo</i>	<i>serpo</i>	yellow.
<i>marpo</i>	<i>dmar-po</i>	red.
<i>ngömpo</i>	<i>sngo</i>	blue, green (Tibetans scarcely differentiate between these two colours!).
<i>nakpo</i>	<i>nag-po</i>	black.
<i>tangpo</i>	<i>grang-ba</i>	cold.
<i>tönmo</i>	<i>dron-mo</i>	hot.