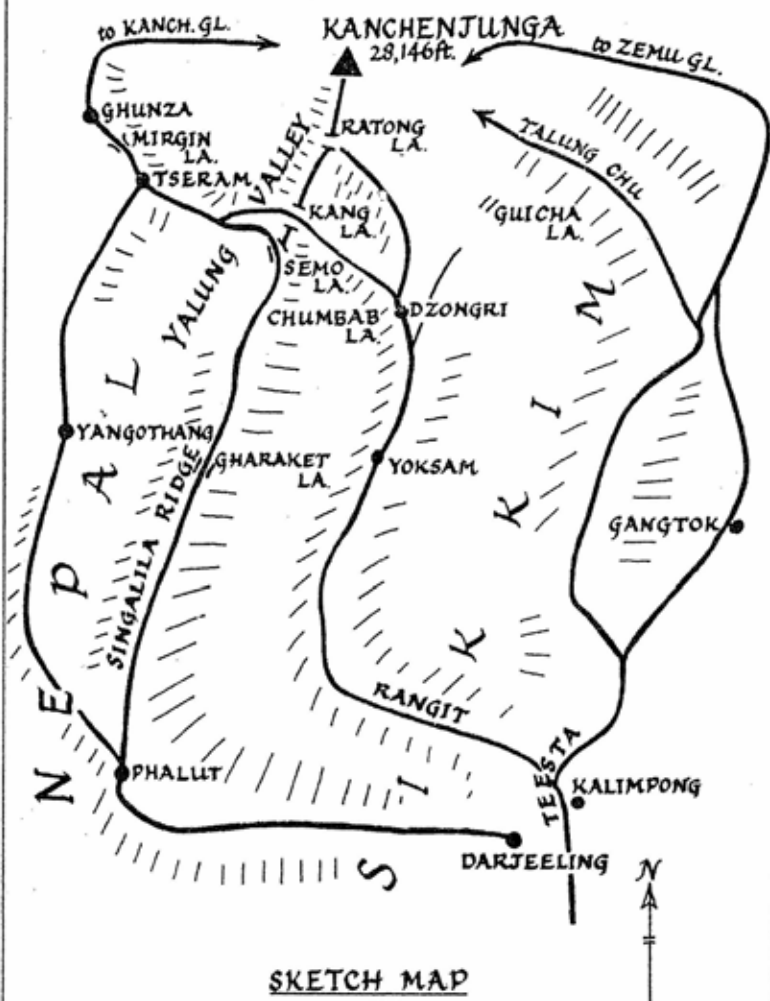


KANCHENJUNGA



SKETCH MAP
OF
MAIN APPROACHES TO KANCHENJUNGA

KANCHENJUNGA

JOHN TUCKER

FOREWORD BY

BRIG. SIR JOHN HUNT, Kt.C.B.E., D.S.O.

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198.520954

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LONDON
ELEK BOOKS

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published by Elek Books Ltd.
14 Great James Street
London, W.C.1

and simultaneously in Canada by the
Ryerson Press
299 Queen Street
Toronto 2b
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To
MR. and MRS. J. HENDERSON
of Darjeeling

without whose help many
expeditions could not even
start.

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Foreword

It was natural that the thoughts of British climbers should have turned to Kanchenjunga after Everest, for the Everest Expedition of 1953 would probably have been switched to this, the third highest mountain, if the Swiss had climbed Everest in the autumn of 1952. I had made this alternative proposal in a paper placed before the Himalayan Joint Committee in November of that year, during those anxious days when we were waiting for news of the second attempt by the Swiss.

With this background, and as one who had already examined the defences of Kanchenjunga in the years before the war, how intrigued I was when, shortly after we returned from Everest, Kempe and Lewis claimed to have seen, from a neighbouring peak, a possible line up the South-West Face. Kempe's expedition to explore this route in 1954 went with a special blessing from myself; it was a first step in solving what I have long reckoned to be the greatest problem in mountaineering.

Of that first step you will read in this book, told with the entertaining humour of my friend Jack Tucker and with all the fresh enthusiasm of one whose cherished dream of exploring in the Himalaya has come true. As you read it, it is as well to bear in mind that Kanchenjunga would not have been climbed in 1955 by Evans' party, but for this modest but spirited first step. As I write this Foreword on the lawn of my bungalow at Camberley on a sunny Sunday afternoon, I recall that it was here, on just such an afternoon in August last year, that I received this report from Jack Tucker and Ron Jackson. Here it was that, thanks to the fine efforts of Kempe and his comrades, the momentous decision was made to take the second and, as it proved to be, final step towards the top of the third highest point on earth.

Camberley,
26th June, 1955

JOHN HUNT

KANCHENJUNGA

The author wishes to express his apologies to those who find the spelling as Kanchenjunga jarring. The more authentic version is of course Kangchenjunga. *The former has been chosen because of its familiarity through use by the British Press.

Introduction

THE brilliant ascent of Mount Everest on May 29th, 1953, focused the attention of the whole world on the Himalaya. Many people thought that this great mountain would never be climbed while others, and not a few of these were mountaineers themselves, hoped that the peak would always remain untrodden. But, just as surely as man reached the Poles, flew in the air and split the atom, so now he stood on the highest point of the earth's surface. To some the great accomplishment seemed to put an end to all adventure; it appeared that there was nothing left to explore or discover and that in future man would have to be content with lesser achievements. But this is not so. A look at any good atlas shows that there are still, in many parts of the world, vast areas to be explored and mapped. Not the least of these areas is the great chain of the Himalaya, where there are hundreds of peaks still unclimbed and unnamed. In this great range there are no less than fourteen peaks standing over 25,000 ft. in height, and, of these, only Everest, K2, Annapurna and Nanga Parbat have been climbed. One of these giants is Kanchenjunga.

It has been said that Kanchenjunga is a far tougher proposition than Everest, and what is more natural than that mountaineers should take up this challenge? And quite apart from this, any true mountaineer, once having seen this wonderful mountain, is fired with a great longing to get closer and ever closer to its incredible beauty.

In the past the way to Kanchenjunga led through Sikkim, and the most successful attempts were from the north and east. Other attempts have, however, been made both from Kanchenjunga glacier in Nepal and along the south-west approach to the mountain. Three of these attempts ended in tragedy and, largely as a result of this, and possibly because of Mr. F. S. Smythe's condemnation of this side of the mountain no further attempts were made from the west.

Kanchenjunga

After the war, the opening up of Nepal provided mountaineers with access to the south side of Everest. Mr. Eric Shipton's reconnaissance of 1951 opened a new approach and Everest was once again the aim and ambition of all mountaineers. Kanchenjunga was almost forgotten.

But in 1951 an Englishman, Gilmour Lewis, was climbing some of the lesser peaks at the lower end of the Yalung glacier which flows down from the west side of Kanchenjunga. During the course of his climbs he saw the South-West Face of this mountain and it occurred to him that past opinion could have been wrong. Two years later in the company of John Kempe he returned to the valley. The expedition succeeded in climbing Kabru (24,006 ft.) and from here got a closer look at the face of Kanchenjunga. As a result of this inspection it was decided to try to raise a party to carry out further exploration from the Yalung valley.

In the spring of 1954 a small party under the leadership of Kempe left Darjeeling for Kanchenjunga. The objects of the expedition were to carry out a thorough reconnaissance of the south-west approach to the mountain and to see if a practicable route to the summit existed.

The vicissitudes of this reconnaissance expedition are recounted in this book. It almost failed while probing the South-West Face itself, but by a last-minute dash up the Talung Peak when supplies were running dangerously short, it was possible to establish the soundness of the last attempted route. The official British 1955 expedition to Kanchenjunga, launched under the auspices and supported by the larger resources of official organisations, moved up the mountain in its footsteps. What greater success could Kempe's small band of climbers hope for?

PART ONE

I

The Kanchenjunga Massif

OF the great mountains of the world there can be few whose beauty and remoteness can be so readily appreciated as Kanchenjunga. Every year many thousands of tourists visit the Indian Hill station of Darjeeling, one of their primary objects being to make the ascent of Tiger Hill to see the tips of Everest and Makalu standing out from the great ranges to the west. Almost invariably they suffer a feeling of disappointment; from such a great distance the highest mountain in the world looks insignificant. With perhaps a lingering doubt of the accuracy of surveyors' measurements the observer's eye turns to the north, and there, standing full-square to the view, its ice-draped precipices glistening in the sunlight is one of the loveliest of earthly mountains—Kanchenjunga. The tremendous impact of one's first view of Kanchenjunga can never be forgotten. Far below Darjeeling is the bed of the Rangit river, a mere thousand feet above sea-level; and as one's eye takes in the scene, covering in wide sweeps the intervening ranges of foothills, first green with vegetation, then changing slowly to blue in the distance, it finally comes to rest on the great white snow crest rising to the summit of Kanchenjunga. But the view which makes the greatest impression is not seen on fine September and October mornings when the summits of the Kanchenjunga group stand out sharply as though etched against the clear blue sky, but on the all too rare mornings in March and April with mist swirling in the valleys of the Rangit and the Teesta and clouds gathering at the head of these valleys. On such days one suddenly realizes that the white tips to the clouds are not moving but still; that they are in truth the mountains one has come to see and perhaps to climb. At such times, with the ever present hum of busy Darjeeling in one's ears, the mountains seem incredibly remote and take on an almost fairy-tale beauty. It is indeed hardly surprising that the

Kanchenjunga

superstitious hill tribes should have regarded them as the seat of an all-powerful god—a belief that persists to this day. The very name “Kan-chen-ju-nga”—“the five treasure houses of the snow” tells of the long history of snow falls and avalanches and the legacy of floods following the melting of snow in the summer that must be part of the race-memory of the peoples of Sikkim.

Kanchenjunga is situated some 45 miles to the north of Darjeeling and about 80 miles to the east of Everest on the border of Sikkim and Nepal, the main north-south ridges of the mountain forming the boundary between the two states as well as the watershed between the river systems of the Teesta and the Kosi. It is not, as is generally supposed, part of the main Himalayan range, but a huge independent mountain mass some 12 miles south of the main chain of the Himalayas. As such it receives the first and heaviest discharges from the monsoon and is also the first to be affected by the winter snow falls. It is probably true to say that no other mountain, with perhaps the exception of Nanga Parbat, has such a tremendous annual precipitation of snow; and in consequence, much of the mountain is plastered with snow and ice, often hundreds of feet thick. Pushed by the increasing weight of snow above and under the incessant pull of gravity, these masses of snow and ice move downward, slowly in the form of glaciers or tumbling over in great avalanches often weighing millions of tons. To the mountaineer these avalanches are an ever present source of danger and even when in places of comparative security the almost continuous creaking and groaning of the moving ice and the terrible roar of the avalanches combine to create a sense of instability and apprehension.

While the pre-monsoon period was considered to offer the best conditions on Mount Everest and Nanga Parbat, it remains doubtful whether on Kanchenjunga the pre- or post-monsoon season is more favourable. In the pre-monsoon period the high passes of the lengthy approach routes have to be crossed while the winter snow is still lying. This puts a serious strain on physical stamina and material supplies which a Kanchenjunga expedition can ill afford. It was perhaps for this reason that the 1955 British expedition sailed in the early spring. Indeed the start cannot be too early. Dyhrenfurth speaks of a “race” with the monsoon, the onset of which varies from year to year and can occur even at the end of May.

The Kanchenjunga Massif

The end of the monsoon rains is similarly erratic and may cause serious inconvenience to expeditions choosing the post-monsoon season. The approach routes, instead of being covered by snow, may be made impassable by torrential floods. Even the first probings of the mountain itself may have to be undertaken while the monsoon still holds sway. During November the shortening of the hours of daylight and the lower temperature may increase the dangers of high altitude. But the end of the post-monsoon period is not threatened by sudden catastrophic changes which accompany the "race" with the monsoon in the later stages of the pre-monsoon season.

The general structure of the Kanchenjunga massif is shown in the sketch map (facing page 16). The main backbone of the mountain is the long north-south ridge. To the south it may be said to commence at the Ratong La, whence it rises steeply to the summits of Kabru and Talung Peak from where it falls sharply to the Talung Saddle. From the saddle the main South Ridge of the mountain rises to the South Peak, 27,810 ft., then three-quarters of a mile of summit ridge curves in a slightly westerly direction in a jagged cockscomb to the main summit at 28,156 ft. before falling again to the North Ridge and the North Col. From the North Ridge, about three-quarters of a mile north of the main summit, a subsidiary ridge, the North-East Spur, falls steeply to the Zemu glacier. From the South Summit a long ridge runs eastwards to the Zemu Gap, while from the main summit another ridge runs westwards to Kangbachen and then splits into a series of subsidiary ridges, one running south-west to Jannu, enclosing the Yalung glacier while the others form the watersheds between the Yamatari, Jannu, Ramthang and Kanchenjunga glaciers. These four main ridges enclose the four faces of the mountain, each of which generates a great glacier; the North-West Face the Kanchenjunga glacier, the South-West the Yalung glacier, the South-East Face the Talung glacier and the North-East the Zemu glacier. These glaciers provide the direct means of access for attempts on the mountain, though the Talung glacier is of only minor importance since the peak at the head of the valley is the subsidiary south summit.

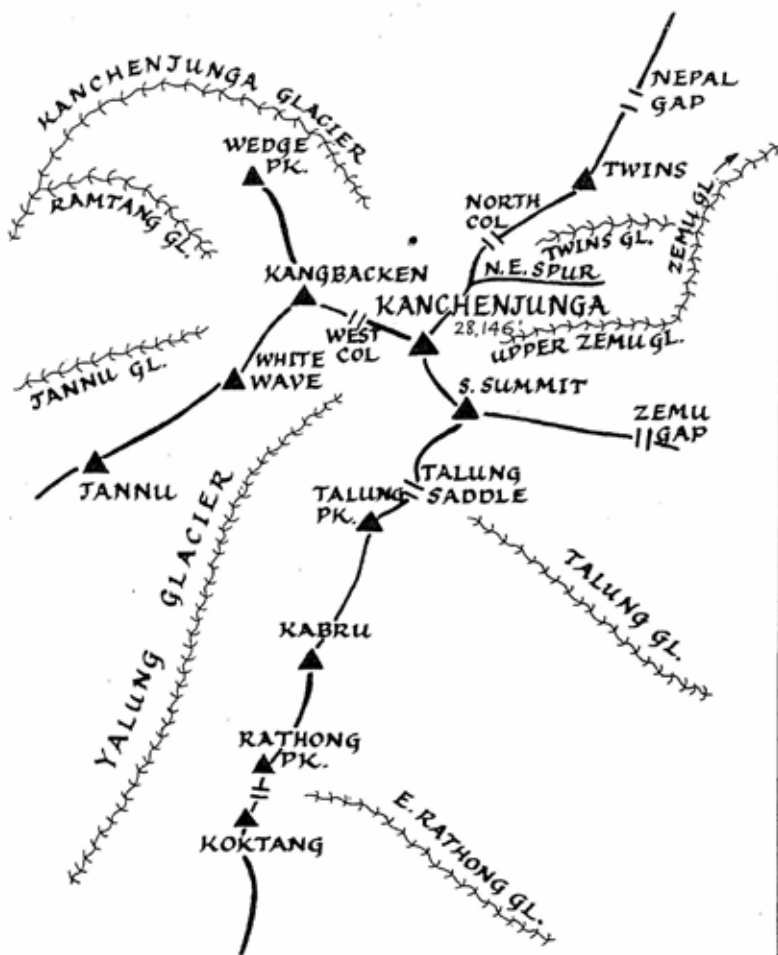
Today all these glaciers have been explored and many routes leading to them have been found though even now there is still much to be discovered in the lower reaches of these valleys.

Kanchenjunga

Though the history of the expeditions at first glance seems involved and somewhat inconclusive, the great expeditions undertaken from 1929–1931 have all aimed at the same target: the North Ridge which continues towards the North Col and beyond to the Twins. The German expeditions in 1929 and 1931 under Paul Bauer tried to gain the North Ridge from the Zemu glacier via the North-East Spur (*Ost-Sporn*); while the International Himalaya Expedition of 1930 under Professor Dyhrenfurth attacked the North Ridge from the other side across the Kanchenjunga glacier.

The best-known and shortest approach route is that chosen by Bauer via the Zemu glacier from the east. It used the important trade route going up the Teesta valley which was well known in the last century, long before exploration of the Kanchenjunga massif began. There exist two lesser known trade routes leading in from the south and south-west, through the Rangit and the Tamur valleys. The Rangit valley opens up also the approach to the Talung glacier which lies next to the Zemu glacier. The lower part of the Talung valley is covered with dense jungle and undergrowth and no path exists to its head. But its upper reaches can be gained from the trade route through the Rangit valley cutting across the Guicha La Pass. More important, however, are the passes which lead from the Rangit valley in the opposite westward direction across the Nepalese frontier in the neighbouring Yalung valley. The route in general use leads as far as the Yak station of Dzongri, but from there, there are several alternatives. The main valley leads across the Ratong La Pass to Tseram in the Yalung valley, while a further route—and the most popular one—crosses the Kang La Pass to Tseram. From Tseram the route lies along the Yalung valley to the Yalung glacier and the South-West Face. For some reason expeditions, including Dyhrenfurth's International Himalaya Expedition of 1930, usually passed the Yalung glacier by and struck across to neighbouring valleys and glaciers. After crossing another high pass, the Mirgin La, they reached Ghunza and from there the Kanchenjunga glacier, which lies to the north-west of the summit.

Our 1954 reconnaissance expedition used a more westerly route which traverses the Singalila Ridge. This choice was prompted partly by the need to keep on the Nepalese side owing to travelling restrictions in Sikkim. The route is a high level one and the high passes of the Gharaket La, the Dain La, the Chumbab La and



SKETCH MAP
OF
KANCHENJUNGA MASSIF



Slopes on which accident occurred on the ill fated expedition
of 1905

The slopes above Pache's Grave. The camp was situated on
the large moraine in the centre foreground



The Kanchenjunga Massif

the Semo La must be crossed; but all these passes are deep in winter snow in March and April. Further to the west again is the third mentioned trade route along the Tamur valley which leads by way of the Marsang La and the Nanga La Passes to Ghunza.

One further approach to Tseram remains, this following the Singalila Ridge to Phalut and then via Yangothang on the western Nepalese side of the ridge. This route was followed by Gilmour Lewis, a member of the 1954 expedition and appears to offer more reasonable travelling conditions than any other.

Summarizing briefly, it may be said that while access to the Zemu glacier is comparatively easy, the approaches to the other glaciers are often difficult; high passes must be crossed with the result that all too often transport arrangements are far from easy. This is particularly the case along the Singalila Ridge where supplies cannot be purchased locally and every item of food for the explorers and coolies alike must be transported.

II

The Kanchenjunga Massif— Early Exploration

THE history of the exploration of many mountains is comparatively straightforward and easy to follow. One thinks perhaps of Everest, where the final epic achievement is in reality the culminating event in a series of major explorations along two main routes; first the journey through Tibet ending in the attempts on the North Ridge and second, the march from Kathmandu to carry out the assault from the famous Western Cwm.

But the story of Kanchenjunga is different; there have been several expeditions to climb the mountain but to tell only of these would be to give but a small part of an absorbing tale. Much of our present day knowledge of this wonderful peak is derived from explorations carried out by men who had no thought of climbing great mountains but who, in the course of their travels in the mountainous country of Sikkim and Nepal learned much about its people and about the paths and by-ways which were later to provide access to Kanchenjunga itself.

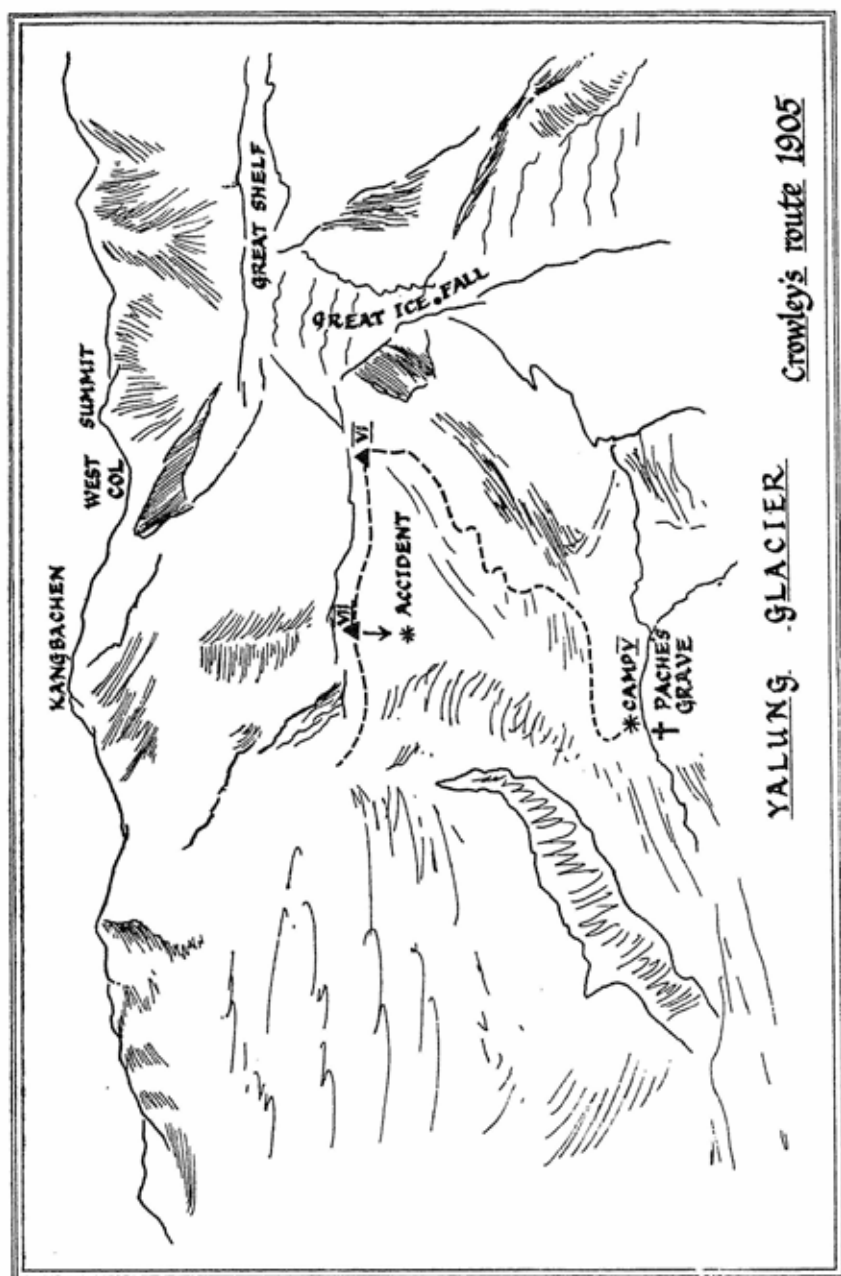
Kanchenjunga

It has been said that Everest was climbed on the backs of previous expeditions; when Kanchenjunga is climbed the successful expedition will owe much not only to previous climbing expeditions but also to others whose love of mountain scenery provided the spur to wander the remote valleys of Sikkim and Nepal. Much credit is also due to the British officers who, while stationed in India, spent their short leaves exploring and perhaps orchid-collecting in the valleys; to the Indian surveyors who carried out their work often in great danger; and to many others almost unknown.

Indeed their story is not easy to fit together, for often these men left no record of their travels other than that told verbally to their friends; and the books of those who did write of their travels are no longer readily available to a public newly aware of the romance and adventure of high mountaineering.

These early explorers were men whose names rarely if ever became widely known, who carried out their travels with no thought of public acclaim and who, if they had found their doings mentioned in a newspaper, would probably have been embarrassed. They left little or no record of their travels, and mountaineering literature is all the poorer for it; but what information is available gives us a fairly comprehensive and a most romantic picture of this wonderful mountain and its unique position in the minds of the people living within its shadow.

To understand these men and appreciate the measure of their achievement one must step back a century in time and many more centuries in actual truth; for Sikkim in the nineteenth century was inhabited by a superstitious people whose religion though nominally Buddhism was in fact very little removed from the old Tibetan "Böw". This primitive Lamaism has been described by L. A. Waddell as "a priestly mixture of Sivaite mysticism, magic and Indo-Tibetan demonolatry, overlaid by a thin varnish of Mahayana Buddhism" (L. A. Waddell *The Buddhism of Tibet*). To them the mountains were the strongholds of all-powerful gods and for the early explorers to travel among the mountains was almost sacrilege. Coupled with this was the inaccessibility of even the lower valleys; few paths existed and axes for hacking a way through the tangled and dense undergrowth were an indispensable part of every traveller's equipment. Again, the western side of Kanchenjunga lay in the forbidden country of Nepal and few natives



Kanchenjunga

were brave enough to cross the Nepalese border, while to the north lay the unknown and mysterious country of Tibet. Finally Sikkim itself was not easily accessible. Although from 1817 the East India Company exercised some authority over Sikkim, communications were difficult. Instead of the modern railways and well-maintained roads which now lead from the plains to Darjeeling, Kalimpong and Gangtok, there were mere bridle paths often in bad repair. It was not until Sir John Ware-Edgar was appointed Deputy Commissioner at Darjeeling in 1873 that the importance of maintaining adequate communications throughout the State was realized.

Such then was the country and such the people, forming the background against which these early explorers played their parts. And Kanchenjunga at that time was generally supposed to be the highest mountain in the world, a supposition based upon observations published by Colebrooke in 1845.

The first explorations to be carried out by a European were those of the distinguished botanist, Sir Joseph Hooker, a name well known in another field of adventure, the Antarctic. His travels may be conveniently divided into three parts. In 1848 he visited North-East Nepal, ascending the Tamur valley and making valuable geological observations in the Yangma and Ghunza districts. He then returned to Kangbachen and Tseram and traversed the Singalila Ridge back to Darjeeling. This early exploration of the Singalila Ridge route to Tseram had great influence on later parties visiting Tseram, since there is no doubt that, rightly or wrongly, it was assumed that a route followed by a non-mountaineering party must of necessity be easy. This is in fact not the case as the Singalila Ridge, though in September an easy walk, presents in spring conditions great difficulties and is probably the most inconvenient of the many routes to Tseram.

In January 1849 Hooker ascended the Rangit valley to Dzongri but heavy winter snow prevented him from proceeding further. Nevertheless he again obtained most valuable botanical and geological information.

In April of the same year he visited the Teesta valley and ascended to Lachen, from where he made several attempts to climb Langebo Peak, 19,250 ft. From Lachen he attempted to reach the Zemu glacier but was turned back by difficult conditions.

The Kanchenjunga Massif—Early Exploration

Undaunted he then returned to Lachen and the Lachung valley, making attempts on Kanchenjau, 22,700 ft., and Panhunri, 23,180 ft. Defeated in these gallant exploits he ascended the Lachen valley to its head and crossed to the Lachung valley by the Dankya La, 18,130 ft. To see these exploits in their true context, one must remember that mountain exploration even in Europe was then in its infancy. It was five years after Hooker's exploits, in 1854, that the almost legendary ascent of the Wetterhorn by Sir Alfred Wills was to usher in the "Golden Age of Mountaineering" and sixteen years later, in 1865, after the tragic accident on the first ascent of the Matterhorn that Queen Victoria gave serious consideration to banning the "new and dangerous sport of mountaineering". And yet Sir Joseph Hooker was attempting peaks many thousands of feet higher than those of the European Alps in a virtually unknown country and with only untrained natives to assist him!

While returning from Lachen to Darjeeling, Hooker and Dr. Campbell who accompanied him were seized at Tumlung and imprisoned by order of the Dewan, or Prime Minister, of Sikkim. As a direct reprisal the British Government promptly annexed that part of Sikkim to the south of the Rangit valley; in later years however there was considerable friction and other British subjects were captured and held to ransom. Finally British troops advanced to Tumlung, then the capital of Sikkim, and a very stringent treaty was enforced. The British Government assumed control over much of the country and exercised complete authority on matters of foreign policy. It is not every day that a mountaineer has the opportunity, albeit unwittingly, of being the prime mover in such great affairs of state.

In 1852, Captain Sherwill, a revenue surveyor, traversed the Singalila Ridge to Gombotang with the intention of inspecting the South-West Face of Kanchenjunga. The previous year it was reported that an "earthquake threw down several thousand square yards of the South-West Face of the perpetually snow covered mountain, Kunchinjunga, exposing a dark mass of rock". It was Sherwill's intention to investigate this occurrence, but he proceeded no further than Gombotang. It may well be that this "dark mass of rock" referred to above is the sickle-shaped cliff which is now so prominent a feature of the upper South-West Face.

Kanchenjunga

In 1856, Hermann Schlagintweit visited Phalut on the Singalila Ridge, where he was stopped by a Nepalese guard and sent back to Darjeeling. This visit to Phalut is of interest because Schlagintweit made some useful sketches of the Everest-Makalu group and suggested that one of these peaks might well be higher than Kanchenjunga.

Schlagintweit and his brother did much survey work throughout the whole chain of the Himalaya, and devised the curious method of obtaining the lengths of glaciers by measuring them up one side of the watershed and down the other. By this method they easily managed to find glaciers of great length.

Another curious misconception about glaciers is to be found in the Survey Reports of 1883-4. "Mr. Robert has brought back the unlooked-for intelligence that to the North-West of Kanchenjunga, that is, on the shady side of peaks which vary from 23,000 ft. to 28,000 ft. and which are nowhere under 20,000 ft. there is not a single glacier. Masses of glacier ice and névé skirt the lower slopes, but in none of the valleys does the ice flow away to any distance from the immediate foot of the mountains. . . . In clear weather small glaciers may be seen from Darjeeling at the foot of Kubroo and Jannoo, but it hardly reaches the valleys. In fact Kanchenjunga may be said to have no glacier worthy of the name, and certainly none half the size of those given off by a Gilgit mountain of the comparatively low altitude of 18,000 ft. A very few days ago I was looking straight up a valley to the very base of Mount Everest, and there also I could not detect glaciers of any noteworthy size. Along the Nepal snowy ranges, for a hundred and fifty miles west of Everest I have closely examined the valleys with rather high telescopic lenses, and, except on the lower slopes, I can discover no glaciers."

This strange mis-statement was caused by the fact that, to Indian cartographers, the word glacier meant bare ice, and due to the glaciers in this part of the Himalaya being heavily covered with moraine debris in their lower reaches they are hardly recognizable as glaciers when viewed through a telescope.

The scene was now set for the appearance of the first mountaineering party proper, that of W. W. Graham in 1883. On October 1st they ascended Jubonu (19,350 ft.), a peak to the south of the Praig Chu; and then on October 7th climbed Kabru (24,006 ft.), from the south-east, a record height at that time. Much controversy

The Kanchenjunga Massif—Early Exploration

was caused by this ascent, which was disputed by many people for many years, and indeed the subject is often raised even today. The main objectors to Graham's story do not decry his achievement but suggest that he may perhaps have been mistaken and in fact had climbed Forked Peak, a lower peak in the Kabru group. At this later date it is impossible to say whether or not Graham's story is true; but in support of his statement it should be said that the party was a fast and skilful one; that they had suffered no distress while climbing high peaks in Garwhal a few months previously; that Ulrich Kauffmann was, reputedly, exceptionally fast in cutting ice steps; and that Emil Boss was a skilled geographer and unlikely to be mistaken in his identification of the mountain.

After this first intrusion of the mountaineer, there followed a period of very little activity, but in 1899, one of the greatest of mountaineers, Douglas Freshfield and his distinguished companions, Professor Garwood and Signor Vittorio Sella, perhaps the greatest of mountain photographers, made the first round tour of Kanchenjunga. The expedition left Darjeeling on September 5th and travelled up the Teesta valley to the Zemu glacier. Here they suffered a set-back when an exceptionally heavy snowfall forced them to abandon their plans for any high ascents. It is interesting to note here that the approach of this storm (its magnitude can be judged from the fact that in Darjeeling 27 inches of rain fell in 28 hours) was heralded by a strange atmospheric disturbance, the sky taking on a curious green colour. Dr. Bauer observed a similar phenomenon before the great snowfall in 1929, as did the late F. S. Smythe on the Schreckhorn in the Alps before a severe storm.

After exploring the head of the Zemu glacier they crossed by several high passes to the Lhonak valley, and then crossed the 20,000 ft. Jonsong La, before descending to the vale of Kangbachen. From Ghunza they went over the Mirgin La to Tseram, but unfortunately they were unable to explore the Yalung glacier. Had they done so the later story of the mountain might well have been different. The International Himalaya Expedition of 1930 might have attempted the South-West Face instead of plodding on to the north-west side of the mountain.

Freshfield crossed the Kang La to Dzongri and visited the Guicha La and then returned to Darjeeling by the Rangit valley.

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It is interesting to note that this tour of Kanchenjunga has been repeated recently by Mr. Hruska of the Himalayan Club who made a most beautiful colour film of his journey.

Freshfield recorded his own story in a classic book *Round Kanchenjunga*, which unfortunately has been out of print for many years. This book is probably the most valuable of any that have been written about the mountain and many of the opinions expressed in it have had great effect on later expeditions by diverting them to the North Ridge of the mountain.

Shortly after Freshfield's journey the first attempts to climb Kanchenjunga started in earnest and these attempts are reported in later chapters. But before passing on to discuss these expeditions reference must be made first to the attempt on the summit of Kabru by two Norwegians—Rubenson and Aas. They attempted the mountain by way of the Kabru glacier in October 1907 and climbed to within 200 ft. of the top. This was a remarkably plucky effort, especially as Rubenson had no previous mountaineering experience. It also provided valuable information on man's powers of acclimatization and ability to work at high altitudes, as the party spent twelve days above 20,000 ft.

Kabru was eventually climbed by the Rubenson-Aas route by C. R. Cooke in 1935.

No account of the exploration of the Kanchenjunga area would be complete without mentioning the remarkable climbing activities of Dr. A. M. Kellas whose series of ascents in Sikkim have rarely been equalled in the annals of Himalayan mountaineering. The great merit of Kellas' work was that he climbed almost always with Sherpa and Bhutia porters. He was one of the first to recognize the native mountaineering ability of these men and was probably the first systematically to train and equip them for higher mountaineering. Wherever men climb with these fine mountain peoples his name, coupled with that of General Bruce, will be remembered.

This then is briefly the account of how Sikkim, from being a virtually unknown country in the early nineteenth century, became known. The paths and main trade routes are now well trodden. Few of the early dangers remain to menace the present-day traveller, though modern leeches are no doubt still as voracious as their forebears and the mosquitos in the valleys still bite as virulently. But higher up, things are much as they were, many

peaks are still untrodden and Kanchenjunga, even to those who climb on her, is still as enigmatic, as forbidding and as beautiful as ever.

III

Bauer's Expedition of 1929

THE first expedition in the modern sense belongs to the earliest days of Himalayan climbing, when the main attraction was that of climbing to heights greater than was possible in Europe. It took place in 1905 and was led by the notorious Aleister Crowley. It ended in shameful disaster. The disrepute attaching to this man has caused the high endeavour and achievement of this expedition to fall into undeserved obscurity. The series of great expeditions, recognized as such, started almost a quarter of a century later.

After visiting the Kanchenjunga area in 1899 Douglas Freshfield expressed the opinion that "the obvious key to the upper part of the mountain is the northern ridge" and suggested that the most likely approach to this ridge was from the head of the Kanchenjunga glacier. Though he visited the upper reaches of the Zemu glacier his experienced eye detected no possibility of reaching the North Ridge. He mentioned a subsidiary spur "The right hand buttress is a marvel of mountain architecture: it springs from a low mass or pedestal of splintered granite, and flies up in an ice *arête*, of a length and steepness which defy Alpine comparison, until it rests against the northern ridge". The possibility of climbing this spur did not occur to him.

In 1929, for the first time, there came to Kanchenjunga a team of well-tried and enterprising mountaineers, with equipment and sufficient porters for a full scale assault on the mountain. The party was a German one, all the climbers being members of the Akademischer Alpenverein of Munich. The leader was Dr. Paul Bauer, who had taken part in the 1928 Bavarian Expedition to the Caucasus, and his companions were Eugen Allwein (one of the conquerors of Mt. Kaufmann in the Pamirs), Peter Aufschnaiter, Ernst Beigel, Julius Brenner, Wilhelm Fendt, Karl von Kraus, Joachim Leupold and Alexander Thoenes.

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Transport arrangements had been made in advance by Colonel Tobin, Darjeeling Secretary of the Himalayan Club, and Mr. E. O. Shebbeare, Transport Officer of the 1924 Everest Expedition. It reflects great credit on all concerned that, only three days after their arrival, the first half of the expedition was able to leave Darjeeling. Two days later the second half followed them, accompanied by Col. Tobin. In all, 86 porters were employed.

They proceeded by way of Gangtok and Lachen to the Zemu glacier and, on August 18th Base Camp (Camp III) was established on what was known as the Green Lake Plateau at a height of 14,300 ft. Exploration began immediately. One party climbed the Simvu Saddle, an attempt on Simvu itself being defeated by bad weather. A second party set out for the foot of Kanchenjunga, there to examine the possible routes to the summit. The East Ridge was immediately dismissed as being too long and terribly exposed to wind, and because it led only to a secondary summit. The North Ridge offered a more feasible route; it looks, and almost certainly is, the easiest of the Kanchenjunga ridges. Two miles long, it descends from the summit to the North Col (sometimes known as the Munich Gap) and from the ridge it rises again to "The Twins", two summits standing on the ridge. Unfortunately the 3,000 ft. wall which leads from the Zemu glacier to the North Col was considered to be quite hopeless. The only remaining possibility was a steep subsidiary east spur which rose from the Zemu glacier and joined the main North Ridge about 1,500 ft. below the summit.

To get on to the ridge at all, it would first be necessary to climb a precipitous wall, fluted with ice gullies; a climber in one of these gullies would be continually exposed to the dangers of falling stones. If the wall were climbable the crest of the ridge would be reached at a height of about 19,700 ft. From this point the ridge rose for thousands of feet in a series of snow and ice-embossed towers; but at one place there was a prominent gap of 200 ft.; above this gap the ridge looked less difficult. It was decided to make the attempt on this, the North-East Spur.

The assault began on August 26th. Advanced Base Camp (Camp VI) was established at 16,200 ft., where the walls of the mountain rise from the upper Zemu glacier and climbing difficulties begin. After an initial failure a route was found through a 700 ft. ice-fall and Camp VII was made below the cliffs of the North-East

Spur at 17,750 ft. From here the intention was to reach the crest at a gap just below the first of the series of vertical steps which are so prominent a feature of the lower part of the ridge. On the first day the party had nearly attained this objective when the weather worsened and compelled them to retreat. The next day Bauer, Aufschnaiter, Allwein, Thoenes and three porters set off with tents and provisions to establish a camp on the crest. The steep slope leading to the depression in the ridge was riven with ice flutings and sharp serrated ribs of rock. The traverse of this slope was impracticable; but in trying to climb straight up, they soon found themselves strung out on the slope with not one of the party in a secure place for holding the others in the event of a slip; also there was grave danger of the leaders dislodging stones on to the other climbers. Bauer and Aufschnaiter then led down the three porters while Allwein and Thoenes tried to reach the ridge without packs; but this attempt also failed. Next day Allwein and Thoenes reached the ridge by an ice gully further to the right; it was judged however that this gully was too difficult for the porters; also the view that had been obtained of the crest of the ridge was far from encouraging.

It was decided to make one last attempt to force a route upwards and Camp VII was pitched some 900 ft. higher on the slope. The next day the weather was bad, but, in spite of this, they were determined to press the attack. Bauer had conceived a new and daring plan. This was, in essence, literally to cut a stairway in the snow and ice, and where cornices and ice-bulges prevented this, to cut a way through or demolish them. This, as can be imagined, was no easy task; the leader was changed every fifteen minutes and slowly but surely they forged their way upwards. The day's work was halted because of the avalanche danger but they returned to Camp VII secure in the knowledge that they had found the necessary technique to make the route to the crest suitable for porters. Snowfall that night made the steep wall unsafe so the higher camp was evacuated and supplies were moved down to Camp VI.

The weather at last cleared up on September 13th and Camp VIIb was re-established at 1,860 ft. on the wall. It was christened the "Adlerhorst" (The Eyrie) as it was situated on a rock barely seven feet square, overhanging a tremendous slope just below a vertical tower. The numbering of the camps here is somewhat

confusing; there were *two* Camps VII; the lower one was abandoned later on and only VIIb, the higher, was used. Two days of step-cutting from this camp brought them to the crest of the ridge and a further two days were spent in overcoming the difficulties of three ice towers which were, Bauer says, "so inconspicuous from below". The foot of the steepest section of the ridge had been reached. Bauer had selected a prominent ledge for the site of Camp VIII but they were about 300 ft. below this when evening came the next day. A niche was carved out of the cornice of the ridge for the tent of Bauer and Beigel whilst Aufschneider and Kraus took the porters down to Camp VIIb. Bauer's account of the camp site is a masterpiece of understatement: "The spot was not altogether trustworthy since in one place where the axe had been deeply driven, we could look down through a hole on to the Twins glacier. We slept well but at dawn great care was necessary in distributing our stiffened limbs properly while wriggling out of the insecurely pitched tent." As soon as the sun was up they attacked the wall of the tower above them. They hewed a path along the left flank, then zig-zagged up a 70° *névé* slope. The route above this led up a steep crack, to the site of Camp VIII (20,700 ft.).

The ascent of the next thousand feet was surely one of the greatest feats of snow and ice work ever carried out by a climbing party. Above Camp VIII there were a series of vertical steps in the ridge and all the climbing was of a very high standard with four "pitches" of extreme severity. The first of these was a tower 70 ft. high which was climbed by way of an overhanging crack filled with powder-snow; the exit from the crack was blocked by a cornice which had to be hacked away. The second "pitch" was harder—a steep ice runnel was climbed, then an awkward traverse to the left; the crest of the ridge was then reached by the ascent of a steep ice-wall. Above this was a mushroom-shaped pinnacle with overhangs, which was ascended on the right side by climbing a wall of treacherous powder-snow. The fourth tower was hardest of all. This step in the ridge was vertical and, like the pinnacle, overhanging in part. On the left-hand side there was a slight hope; a tiny ledge led upward until it petered out beneath a great beetling overhang of ice and snow. With typical audacity a shaft was tunnelled through this cornice—which took two days of hard and exacting labour—and once more the crest was regained.

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From here the descent was made, along a snow rib corniced on both sides to the foot of the 200 ft. gap, which had been so prominent and disturbing a feature from below. The first step of the great tower above was comparatively easy but fatiguing, as masses of soft snow had to be cleared away so that steps could be cut in the firm snow-ice that lay underneath. Once again, in order to regain the ridge a huge rotten cornice had to be flogged down and here Camp IX was pitched, at a height of 21,700 ft. The last great obstacle had been overcome and signals were sent down to the lower camps that the way was open.

Ice-caves were scooped out at Camps VIII and IX large enough to accommodate six to eight persons. These were most valuable and in spite of extreme outside cold the temperature inside the caves rarely sank below -2 or -3 degrees C.

The going above Camp IX was less difficult and at Camp X, another ice-cave was soon established at a height of 23,050 ft. on "easy and open terrain". On October 3rd Allwein and Kraus went on to reconnoitre the route and climbed to a height of 24,272 ft. (7,400 m.). Their impression was that no further difficulties were to be expected.

That night, at Camp X, where most of the party were now gathered, hopes ran high, but by next morning it was snowing hard. There was nothing to do but call off the assault; so plans were altered and preparations made for a siege. Kraus and Thoenes descended with Lewa and Chettan, to save food in the high camp and to help Brenner and Fendt with the handling of supplies lower on the ridge. At nightfall, however, the snow was still falling heavily and the climbers realized that the ascent was no longer possible without a deliberate abandonment of their "safety first" tactics—as support for the summit party would be impossible to achieve. Plans were again changed. When the snow ceased falling on October 6th, Beigel and Aufschnaiter descended at once, while Bauer and Allwein with two porters and four days' provisions started upwards. After forcing the way, often waist deep in snow to a height of about 24,000 ft. they realized that they must allow time for the snow to consolidate. They returned to the ice-cave.

That evening they were amazed at the terrible appearance of the southern sky. A huge cloudbank was forming at a height of 30,000–40,000 ft. while the sky "became of an extraordinary sea green colour—altogether a most threatening and terrible sight".

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Next morning it was snowing fiercely; the entrance to the cave had continually to be swept clear and by nightfall at least seven feet of snow had fallen. The position was grave—to stay at Camp X would mean starvation as there was no hope of supplies reaching them from below. Bauer says: “On the following morning, trusting to our powers and experience, we determined to ‘wrestle one more fall’. The descent seemed humanly impossible, yet an attempt had to be made.”

With 130 ft. of rope between each man, they fought their way downward, carving a furrow^o the height of a man. A slightly ascending bit, of less than 150 ft. took nearly two hours. The steeper slopes usually avalanched as the leader, tightly held by the rope from above, stepped on to them. The most dangerous slope, fortunately, had already avalanched; but on one occasion Allwein and the two porters were together on a snow slope when it broke away and it was only a desperate effort on the part of Bauer that saved them. They eventually reached Camp IX where the entrance to the cave was buried by seven feet of snow.

Next day the porters were understandably nervous and Bauer and Allwein spent the day preparing the route down the steepest of the towers. The following day half the loads were jettisoned, and, with the sun now shining they became more hopeful. As they forced their way down the ridge their great concern was the fate of their companions, as they could see no signs of life anywhere on the spur. It was not until two days later, on reaching Camp VIIb, the “Adlerhorst”, that their anxiety was relieved and they learned that all the ridge party were alive. The two parties descending from Camp X had encountered great difficulties; the exhausted porters kept slipping and there were continual avalanches. Beigel and Aufschnaiter had a particularly trying experience; on October 7th when they were between Camps IX and VII, leading alternately, each in turn was swept from his footing by small avalanches, and once while traversing just below the crest of the spur, the leader slipped and was held only by the second man making a despairing leap over to the reverse side of the ridge. Both rucksacks were lost in this mishap and the climbers had to spend that night under a cornice without any kind of shelter. Beigel suffered severe frostbite in his feet and could no longer walk.

On October 12th they all set out for Camp VI where they were

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met by Brenner and Fendt. Communications from below were still cut off and it took four days to plough a track through to Base Camp, the Germans in the front breaking the trail followed by the porters and last, the gallant Beigel, carried on an improvised stretcher. Base Camp was reached on October 17th. Even then there was little respite and they suffered continual rain until they arrived, on October 20th, at Lachen, utterly exhausted and battered by the elements.

Comment on this tale of achievement and high courage in the face of almost overwhelming difficulties would be presumptuous and indeed superfluous. As an epic of man's will to achieve even the impossible, one can but echo the words of the editor of the *Alpine Journal* ". . . a feat without parallel, perhaps, in all the annals of mountaineering."

IV

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FRESHFIELD'S penetrating observation that the only practicable route to the summit lay along the North Ridge and that the only possibility of reaching the crest of this ridge was by way of the Northern Face of the mountain, the face that lies at the head of the Kanchenjunga glacier, deserves to be given in its entirety:

"This glacier," he said, "descends from the recess between the northern and western crests of Kanchenjunga. It has its origin in a snow-plateau, or rather terrace, lying under the highest peak at an elevation of about 27,000 ft., that is only some 1,200 ft. below the top, the final rock-ridges leading to which look very accessible. Below this terrace, however, stretches a most formidable horseshoe of precipices, or what at least the ordinary traveller would describe as precipices. Since, however, this glacier affords what is in my opinion, the only direct route to Kanchenjunga which is not impracticable, I must qualify the word. Under the critical eye of the mountaineer the precipices resolve themselves into a series of icy banks and short cliffs. The ice banks are formidably steep and riven by crevasses; the rocks do not look

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easy, while the vertical ascent, some 6,000 or 7,000 ft. of difficult ground, is a very formidable element in the problem.

"But if there were no other dangers to be reckoned with, a bold mountaineer need not be deterred from attacking the ascent by its length and steepness, and I should be sorry to risk a prophecy of his failure. His chief difficulty would be on the lower steps of the cirque; here I believe he should search to the left towards the saddle that connects Kanchenjunga and the Twins. There are rocks for a bivouac on the high plateau, and the final climb would be practicable, if the difficulties of altitude do not supervene. But—and it is a 'but' I desire to emphasize—the routes I can discern by careful study of my companions' photographs are more or less exposed to the worst, because the least avoidable by human skill, of all mountain risks. Steep places will have to be surmounted by a series of slopes, in which the crevasses and séracs have been filled in or beaten down by avalanches from hanging ice-cliffs above, and when the peril of their staircase has been run, a way must be found along a shelf similarly exposed. The whole face of the mountain might be imagined to have been constructed by the Demon of Kanchenjunga for the express purpose of defence against human assault, so skilfully is each comparatively weak spot raked by the ice and snow batteries. I failed at the time to trace any route on which skill could avert this danger. . . ."

In spite of this rather fearsome account of the Kanchenjunga Face, an international expedition under the leadership of Professor Dyhrenfurth set out in 1930 to attempt the northern face of the mountain. It was a strong team and consisted of Mrs. Dyhrenfurth, Marcel Kurtz and C. Duvanel, the photographer, all Swiss nationals; four Germans, Wieland (who later died on Nanga Parbat), Schneider, Hoerlin and Richter, and the English climber, F. S. Smythe. None of the party had previous Himalayan experience, though Schneider had climbed in the Pamirs, but nearly all had done a great deal of winter climbing in the Alps. They were fortunate in securing as transport officers Colonel Tobin and A. Wood-Johnson. Later the expedition was joined by J. S. Hannah, another English climber.

Large quantities of stores were taken and a vast caravan of porters. The main party left Darjeeling on April 7th and travelled to Tseram by way of Pamionchi, Yoksam, Dzongri and the Kang



Crossing the Ghariket La

Mathews and Thami resting on march. Chumbab La in the distance





Bok-Toh

Camp I above Upper Ramser



La. It should be mentioned here that no food for coolies could be obtained on this route beyond Yoksam; their food had therefore to be carried, thus reducing carrying efficiency. The standard porter load in Sikkim is 60 lbs.; if a 10-day march has to be made with no local food supplies, assuming a daily food intake of 2 lbs., then 20 lbs. of this must be food for porters, or, making allowance for the return journey, 30 lbs. This means that the porter is, as regards the carrying of expedition stores, only 50 per cent efficient. This fact made the 1930 porter caravan excessively large.

The crossing of the Kang La was extremely difficult, due to heavy winter snow lying on the pass. This experience is a usual one in March or April and it is surprising that this route should have been favoured by so many parties. A further difficulty experienced by Dyhrenfurth's expedition was that, due to the excessive number of porters required, the caravan set out in three parties, a day or so between each one. In consequence the organization of the crossing of the Kang La was extremely complicated.

The party eventually crossed the pass and made camp at Tseram where they rested, and, like the 1954 Expedition to the Yalung valley, had to send out foraging parties for coolie food. It was four days before the party could move off, but no doubt the rest was welcome after the struggle over the Kang La.

Leaving Tseram the Expedition made its way over the Mirgin La to Ghunza and then on to Kangbachen, a small village below the extreme end of the Kanchenjunga glacier. Leaving the village behind they moved up the glacier and finally pitched their tents about five miles from the mountain and made this their Base Camp.

After a close study of the face there appeared to be two alternatives. The first route suggested was to reach the North Ridge if possible at the lowest point between the summit and The Twins (this is the North Col which C. R. Cooke very nearly reached from the Zemu side on his fine climb in November 1937). From here the party would be in a favourable position to attack the summit ridge. The alternative to this route was to make a frontal assault on the great Western Face and to try to gain the upper terrace from where the summit could be attained. Smythe echoed Freshfield's fears that the most dangerous part of the assault up this face lay on the lower slopes, where a constant barrage of avalanche debris hurled itself to the glacier below.

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After carrying out some training climbs near the Base Camp, the party advanced further up the glacier. Douglas Freshfield had suggested that the most likely place for a line of weakness on the face was in that part of it which lay beneath The Twins. However, when the face was examined in detail, from near the glacier, no such line of weakness could be found. The only possibility seemed to be to ascend to the lower ice terrace directly below the main summit of Kanchenjunga, and then traverse left to the end of the terrace, and to reach the North Ridge by a steep snow slope. The upper part looked hopeful; the problem was, to reach the terrace. It was decided that an attempt would be made to climb the great ice-wall which guarded this first objective.

Below the great ice-wall was a subsidiary terrace, which was gained by steep snow slopes. The work here was strenuous, as vast quantities of snow had to be removed in order to cut steps in the firm ice underneath. Above this things were vastly different. On May 5th, Wieland, Duvanel and Smythe completed the route up to the lower shelf and hand-rails were fixed. Then the real work began. Smythe's description of the problem which faced them cannot be bettered.

"Above . . . the ice-wall rose in what a mountaineer, despairing of a suitable descriptive term, might call a 'vertical overhang'. It was certainly vertical for twenty-five feet and, about fifteen feet up, the ice bulged out, forming a genuine overhang. Only from the point where we were standing was there the remotest possibility of climbing the wall. Twenty-five feet above our heads it 'eased off' to an angle of 70 degrees. This 'eased-off' portion extended through a vertical height of about two hundred and fifty feet; crowning this slope, and leering down on us rose a final and vertical barrier of ice fifty feet high."

The advance party, comprising Smythe, Wieland and Duvanel set to work on this great ice-wall. Such a task at this altitude was staggering; but patiently, and showing a brilliant standard of icemanship, the mountaineers slowly prepared the route. At the end of several hours they had gained only eighteen feet, such was the difficulty of the work. At this rate it would have taken *five days* to climb the five hundred feet of ice!

The following day Schneider took up the work with Smythe and Wieland in support, and showing great energy and enthusiasm succeeded in gaining a few more feet. At the end of the day, in

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making their way down, the party had two minor slips which although not disastrous served to make the porters a little nervous. At one stage Duvanel who had ascended to film the operation on the ice-wall shot out of the steps carved in the steep slopes leading up to the wall but was held in a very businesslike way by Saram, one of the Sherpas. Later one of the porters slipped but was held successfully.

Hoerlin now arrived to strengthen the party, and Smythe and Wieland, who had been ceaselessly occupied for six days, took a rest while Schneider and Hoerlin continued to cut a route up the wall. They gradually made height until they reached a large crack running vertically up the wall and continued putting in pitons and fixed ropes alongside this fault.

On May 9th Schneider with the porter Chettan left to continue making the route up the wall. Following on were Duvanel and three porters with ciné equipment, and behind these were Hoerlin and eight porters carrying heavy loads. Smythe stayed in camp and for a while sat outside his tent watching the party moving upwards. Suddenly there was a tremendous roar and as Smythe watched an enormous section of the great ice-wall crumbled and broke away immediately above the advancing party. The men on the glacier were in a direct line with the avalanche and though they ran as fast as their legs could carry them they were hopelessly engulfed. These avalanches tear along with the speed of an express train carrying all before them, and everything in the path of one of these devastating falls is swept away to destruction. Even Smythe back in the camp made a dash for safety but fortunately for him the tremendous avalanche stopped about two hundred yards from the tents. Seizing an axe Smythe set off for the scene of the disaster but on arriving there was relieved to see signs of life. In some miraculous fashion everyone had escaped the debacle except poor Chettan; he had been carried about 300 ft. in the midst of great ice boulders and was crushed to death. The day before he had warned Schneider about the dangers of the ice-fall with the words: "Sahib, no good," pointing to the route between Camp II and the prospective Camp III. Schneider who was with him escaped without a scratch but all the party were very badly shaken. The avalanche had also completely destroyed the route and altered the whole of the topography of the area. Carrying the lifeless body of poor Chettan the party made all speed for the

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safety of the lower slopes. Chettan was buried near the site of Camp II and after the ceremony the remainder of the party descended in a frightful snowstorm to Camp I. Tired and miserable they crept into their sleeping-bags—once more Kanchenjunga had scored heavily.

On May 10th a council of war was held and it was, quite rightly, decided that the route up the ice-wall should be abandoned. It was then decided to attempt to climb the North-West Ridge to a large snow terrace just beneath the summit named Kangbachen; this is a subsidiary summit of Kanchenjunga and stands at a height of 25,782 ft.

Camp I was moved to a safer place but even here another large avalanche swept down which, while not actually doing any damage, served to remind the party that Kanchenjunga was no ordinary mountain.

A dreary and arduous ascent was made by Smythe and Wieland up the western tributary glacier leading up to the North-West Spur, and after negotiating two difficult ice-falls the party camped in a suitable spot from where an assault on the spur could be carried out. The ridge looked extremely difficult and Smythe was of the opinion that while the North-East Spur, which was attempted by Bauer's Expedition the year before, was formidable it was nothing like so fierce as the one which Dyhrenfurth's party was about to attempt.

The bottom section of the ridge was hopelessly out of the question and a start was made by using a steep snow couloir rising for about 600 ft. Arriving at the top of the couloir Hoerlin who was in the lead had to flog down a large cornice before access could be gained to the ridge. Once on the ridge the party stopped to regain its breath. They found themselves on a knife-edged crest of rock which was unstable and very steep on either side. Leaving their rucksacks behind they proceeded to move along the ridge which became more and more rotten and was in places covered alarmingly with loose snow. They negotiated several towers until they were brought up abruptly against a 300-ft. pinnacle of difficult looking rock; above the rock a thin shattered ice-ridge swept upwards in a steep curve. After examining the tower the climbers returned the way they had come and took their report to Professor Dyhrenfurth in the lower camp. None of the three men who had ascended the ridge was very hopeful about the

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route but Dyhrenfurth convinced them that the attempt should go on. That night a terrific wind tore at the tents threatening to carry them away; this wind was accompanied by a heavy snowstorm, but towards the early hours the tempest abated and the next day dawned clear and calm. The North-West Ridge however was plastered with new snow and the attempt was temporarily abandoned in favour of a small point about 20,800 ft. high which the party climbed to take pictures of the Ramthang Peak and glacier.

The next day Professor Dyhrenfurth, Schneider, Wieland and Smythe continued the attack on the North-West Ridge. The couloir gave them a considerable amount of trouble as it was covered in new powder-snow but eventually they reached the crest of the ridge and made off towards the great tower. Where the reconnaissance of the day before had ended the party were met with a steep and almost holdless granite slab descending to a gap at the foot of the great tower. Schneider and Wieland fixed a rope and descended hand over hand. Dyhrenfurth and Smythe from their position on the ridge then witnessed what Smythe described as the finest feat of rock climbing he had ever seen. Wieland and Schneider ascended the great tower on smooth polished slabs (exacting work at 21,000 ft.) until mist obscured them from view, whereupon Dyhrenfurth and Smythe returned to camp. At dusk their two companions returned and reported that the route was totally impractical for the porters. There was no alternative but to abandon the attempt and the party withdrew from the mountain.

For the next few weeks the expedition climbed and skied in the area and made ascents of Ramthang Peak and the Jonsong Peak. But it had failed to get even within striking distance of the summit of the major objective. This fact reflects no discredit on the members of the expedition; they gave an excellent account of themselves, but Kanchenjunga is a mountain which does not respond to normal mountaineering technique. The psychological effects of the ever-present danger from the terrible avalanches which pour down day and night from the mountain, the extreme technical difficulty and the awful weather, coupled with the very short period when it is possible to climb on Kanchenjunga, make this peak just that much more dangerous and inaccessible than even Everest. Any expedition which hopes to reach the summit must possess courage, endurance and very great technical skill;

but above all its members must approach the mountain with something of the philosophy of a fanatic. Every nerve and every fibre must be devoted to one cause—the attainment of the summit.

V

The 1931 Attempt

IN 1931, Paul Bauer, convinced by the defeat of the 1930 International Expedition that his was the only feasible route to the summit, returned to the attack with five veterans of the 1929 expedition, Allwein, Aufschnaiter, Brenner, Fendt and Leupold, and four newcomers, Hans Hartmann, Hans Pircher, Hermann Schaller and Karl Wien. Equipment and supplies were on a more lavish scale than previously; this year 200 porters were necessary for the transport to Base Camp. Once again Colonel Tobin and E. O. Shebbeare did valuable preparatory work, Shebbeare conveying the first line transport and food to the Zemu glacier ahead of the main party.

By July 14th Camp VI was established in force and all was ready for the assault. They found that the ridge had many surprises in store, even for the veterans of 1929. Rock climbs alter little with the passing of the years, but snow and ice climbs, especially in the Himalaya, may change almost out of recognition. In 1931 the way up to Camp VII was especially dangerous due to falling stones and avalanches; the experience of 1929 was particularly valuable here. A continual watch was kept, day and night, noting the times and directions of these falls of rock and ice, the route and the times for climbing on it being planned accordingly. Rarely was it safe to be on these slopes after 10 a.m. Camp VII was made on July 19th—this was to be the “advanced base” for future operations—and over eighty loads were carried up to it. While ferrying supplies along this route, Bauer and his companions managed to treat the dodging of the hurtling stones as a good game. This detachment of mind, which many may admire but few attain, is a necessity for the climber on Kanchenjunga.

Above this camp there was much snow and ice and many

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hundreds of tons of the stuff had to be hacked away before porters could make use of the route. It was not until July 22nd that the crest of the spur was gained, and then Bauer suffered another unexpected setback. The weather grew warmer and the snow began to deteriorate; as the track was in part destroyed a half-way camp became a necessity. No level spot could be found so the crest of the ridge was cut away to make place for a tiny bivouac tent. The warm moist weather also brought other misfortunes in its train. Every member of the party, sahibs and porters alike, suffered from chills. Allwein became ill with lumbago and many of the porters developed mumps. This naturally had its effect on the efficiency of the party, as in high climbing physical fitness is possibly of greater importance than climbing ability. In addition the climbing strength was depleted, thereby throwing a greater strain on the fitter members of the party.

On August 8th the signal came from above that the route was ready for porters to carry supplies up to Camp VIII. Above the point where in 1929 Bauer and Beigel had spent that memorable night in a niche carved from an overhanging cornice, the route differed considerably from that followed by the previous expedition. It led across the face for about fifty yards, then went up an ice-gully for 100 feet and across a rib which bounded the gully on the far side. Two Germans, Hartmann and Wien, climbed this gully and Bauer watched from below as Schaller followed on a second rope with two porters. Schaller climbed the gully and disappeared across the rib; Pasang, the second man, "an elderly and steady porter", followed next, up the gully and across the rib, while Tsim Norbu paid out the rope from a stance and belay at the foot of the gully. Suddenly Pasang was seen to shoot down the groove, followed immediately by Schaller, who flew over Pasang's head. Tsim Norbu was saved as the rope broke over the belay but the others continued falling without pause. There was nothing to be done and they perished on the rocks below.

The night was spent on the scene of the accident and the next day the whole party descended to search for the victims. They were buried on a rocky islet on the glacier. In Schaller they had lost an outstanding mountaineer, one of the best, perhaps the very best, of the expedition. Pasang too was a great loss, typical of the best type of Sherpa in his courage and devotion.

It was not until August 24th that Camp VIII was attained.

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Five mushroom-like towers below the camp had to be completely hacked away. Above the camp, gaps and towers were even more difficult than those of 1929, and the whole route was more dangerous because of the treacherous condition of the snow. From the beginning of September there were five days of continuous snow; but more than this would have been necessary to halt these indomitable men. On September 4th Hartmann, Pircher and Wien forced their way over the ice-pinnacles to Camp IX, and on September 10th they contrived to pitch Camp X at 23,050 ft. Bauer, Aufschnaiter and Allwein joined them there two days later.

Once again a party was gathered at this high camp, with the knowledge that almost insuperable difficulties had been overcome. The summit seemed once more within reach. Bauer was suffering from an enlarged heart and had, reluctantly, to stay at this camp. Allwein and Pircher pushed on up the spur and over a final steep ice-slope to a site for Camp XI at 25,100 ft. Hartmann and Wien followed, dug out an ice-cave and slept there that night. Next day, September 17th, these two reached the top of the spur at about 25,500 ft.; beyond this point it dropped slightly to the junction with the North Ridge, which rose a further 2,500 ft. to the summit of Kanchenjunga a mile away. The North Ridge appeared to present no great technical difficulties but access to this ridge was by a steep 400-ft. snow slope and this was in a very dangerous condition, with about eighteen inches of powder-snow resting on a hard under-surface.

There was no time then to make a detailed examination, so next day Allwein, Aufschnaiter and Pircher went over the spur to the foot of the slope hoping to dig out an igloo for Camp XII, but the snow-slope proved to be as dangerous as it looked and it would have been virtual suicide to attempt it.

At Camp XI a fateful decision had to be made. The slope would not be in climbable condition for several days. Could they wait that long? Bauer gives a concise picture of the factors that influenced their decision: ". . . there was no prospect now of any improvement in the slope, as it snowed daily for several hours. Moreover we had to beware of the great snowfalls due about this time, and which, two years ago had compelled our retreat under the most trying conditions. From where we now stood the results of such a retreat over snowed-up slopes and ridges were not to be thought of. Again, one cannot hold out for long at a height of

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7,650 m. Although our high-altitude party had now, through a sojourn of six weeks at a height of over 6,000 m. become thoroughly acclimatized, and our speed with loads up to 8,000 m. was about half of that obtainable on our home mountains, one should nevertheless remember that for more than forty days, with hardly a day's rest, we had carried our heavy rucksacks and performed severe step-cutting, thus causing a heavy drain on our bodily reserves. By playing our very last card, we might indeed have survived *one* storm on the summit, but a delay of a week at this altitude—assuming it were possible—called for powers in reserve." Hartmann said: "After all these considerations, there remained no alternative but to retreat. An immediate attack on the slope was both senseless and unjustifiable; the other possibilities had to be dismissed almost before they were considered."

They retreated down the ridge, though not this year under the terrible conditions that had prevailed in 1929. So ended another stirring chapter in the history of Kanchenjunga.

For the final verdict on this Expedition we turn once more to the pages of the *Alpine Journal*, where the Editor writes: "We have described the Bavarian 1929 attempt and retreat as 'a feat without parallel perhaps in all the annals of mountaineering!' This verdict has been accepted generally. To comment at length on the great 1931 struggle would be mere presumption. It will be sufficient to state that for skill, endurance, cold-blooded courage, and especially for *judgment* the expedition will stand as the classical model for all time."

Today, even though many of the higher summits of the Himalaya have been climbed, this verdict still stands.

The North-East Spur to this day has never been revisited and perhaps it should not be until another German Expedition is raised to attempt it. This is peculiarly "German ground" in the old tradition of Himalayan climbing; and even though some nations seem to want to make nationalist issues out of climbing these great peaks it is almost certain that most mountaineers will always connect the famous North-East Spur with Paul Bauer and his great team of mountaineers and would rejoice to see this formidable adversary fall to a team from that country.

However, it is interesting to note that one more visit was paid to the Zemu glacier and this time by a British party.

In the autumn of 1937 a small party of three climbers organized

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by C. R. Cooke, including John Hunt (now Sir John Hunt) and his wife Joy, left Darjeeling and travelled through Lachen to the Green Lake where a base camp was established. For several weeks this small but highly efficient team did a phenomenal amount of climbing and exploration. But the main point of interest to this narrative is the brilliant attempt by Cooke to reach the crest of the North Col of Kanchenjunga.

On November 14th, Cooke skirted The Twins glacier and forced a way, in rather robust conditions, up the ice-fall to an upper névé basin at about 19,700 ft. The next day he fashioned a route across the *Bergschrund* at the foot of the North Col to the lower rocks where the party camped. On the 17th Cooke managed to get his party up to a very exposed camp site under a big overhang well up near the top of the Col, after having climbed on extremely difficult slopes for seven hours continuously. The next day after a good night's rest in spite of the airy camp site, they managed to gain more height, but when victory was almost within sight Cooke had to admit defeat. He was cutting laboriously up a very steep slope of pure blue ice and deemed that the risk involved was not worth while. Accordingly he called a retreat and on the morning of November 19th returned to Base Camp where he found Hunt had paid a call in his absence and left behind that most welcome of gifts to a mountaineer—a box of food.

So ended the last attempt to breach Kanchenjunga's defences from Sikkim. It is quite possible that if the way to the summit does not in fact lie up the inhospitable South-West Face of the mountain then another look at this approach via the North Col would be well worth while.

VI

The Yalung Glacier and the S.W. Face of Kanchenjunga

OF all the great valleys leading up to Kanchenjunga perhaps the most romantic and the one most steeped in folk-lore is the Yalung. With the gradual encroachment of civilization many of the wonderful stories and legends from all corners of the world tend

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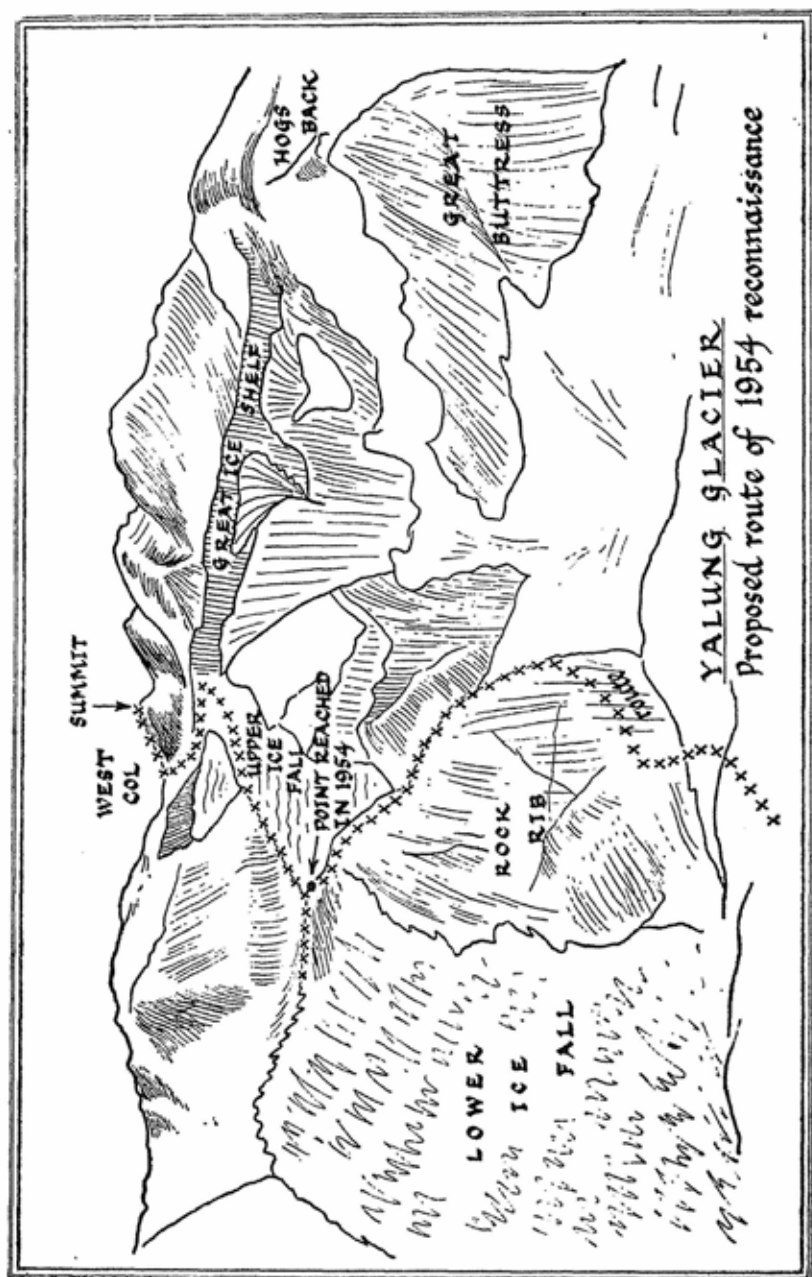
to get lost and forgotten and this would appear to be true of many parts of the Himalaya. The fascinating history of the Yalung valley is a long and involved one but mainly owing to the visit made by "Babu" Sarat Chandra Das on his early explorations in 1879 and 1881 many of the Yalung's beautiful legends and much of its history have been preserved.

Chandra Das must have had a remarkable memory and his powers of observation were phenomenal; both these talents combined to save for us many of the loveliest and most fascinating legends of the Himalaya and its peoples. It was on his visit in 1881 to the monastery at Dachenrol, just above Tseram in the Yalung valley that Das learned the stories of this valley.

There are two main approaches to the Yalung valley from Sikkim, both of them crossing high passes often blocked with snow, and both used by Chandra Das. One of these routes lies over the Kang La (used by Dyhrenfurth's Expedition) and the other by way of the Chumbab La and the Semo La, the route of the 1954 reconnaissance. If the traveller enters the Yalung valley via the Semo La he descends the pass to arrive in a rather bare valley which accommodates a swiftly flowing river, the Yangma Chu. As one descends the Yangma Chu the scenery takes on a softer look; fir, rhododendron and bamboo forests appear, and just above the junction with the main valley a most delightful meadow of lush grass is reached; here flowers grow in abundance; and here and there boulders covered in colourful lichens are dotted about making a giant's rockery. The whole place is peaceful and deliciously relaxing after the toil and tribulation of the Semo La and indeed its name adequately describes it—Namga-Tsal, "the place of joy" or, as it is sometimes more romantically translated, "the heavenly garden".

After leaving Namga-Tsal one reaches the Yalung by a narrow twisting path down the hillside to the rather fine solid bridge of stones which fords the river at Tseram. From Tseram it is possible to cross the high pass known as the Mirgin La to Ghunza or descend along the river bank to Yalung and the villages lower down. If the valley is followed up towards the Yalung glacier at its head the traveller reaches the ruined monastery of Dachenrol and beyond this Upper Ramser, now deserted.

After the journeys of Das, no traveller visited the valley until Freshfield arrived with his party in 1899. They were



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unable to explore the valley and stated that "the southern cliffs are in appearance hopeless". However Freshfield suggested that though he did not consider that a possible route to the summit of Kanchenjunga existed on the south-western side, the upper part of the Yalung glacier would be a district which would well repay an exploration by a competent mountaineering party.

Unfortunately the first party to explore the South-West Face was the ill-assorted and ill-fated expedition led by Aleister Crowley in 1905. It was organized by the Swiss doctor, Jacot-Guillarmod who was joined by his fellow Swiss, M. Reymond and Lieutenant Pache. The commissariat arrangements were taken over by an Italian, de Righi. Crowley was then still a young man; later he was to win notoriety as the self-styled "Great Beast" of the Apocalypse, black magician and Satanist. This strange man was a friend of Oscar Eckenstein, a distinguished climber who has become known chiefly for his invention of the crampons named after him. Crowley had climbed with Eckenstein in Mexico and was selected by Eckenstein to take part in the first great expedition to K2 in 1902. His eccentric behaviour soon proved a nuisance. He insisted on taking with him a small library of poems because literary food seemed more essential to him than material supplies. Yet his qualifications as a climber were acknowledged and he took charge of the spearhead of the expedition. It is therefore not true that Crowley was entirely unsuited to lead an expedition, as was said after the shameful end of the 1905 expedition; it was rather his reckless personality that disqualified him.

No doubt Dr. Jacot-Guillarmod knew Crowley's prowess as a climber when he invited him to take part in his expedition to Kanchenjunga; but it is inexplicable that he should have acceded to Crowley's demand to lead the expedition. Crowley's insistence upon being the leader made Oscar Eckenstein refuse to take part. Knowles, another member of the previous K2 expedition, also declined Guillarmod's invitation because he did not want to risk another climb with Crowley who on K2 had tried to shoot him at an altitude of 20,000 ft.

The party reached the Yalung valley by way of the Singalila Ridge and the Chumbab La Pass. Crowley at the sight of the South-West Face of Kanchenjunga was in high spirits. Guillarmod, however, did not share his optimism. He stated later that he had never found a glacier so tangled and torn. Still more pessimistic

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was his estimate of the South-West Face and the West Ridge itself which, he said, was constantly swept by avalanches, while the route leading up to it proffered no possibility of a camp site even for the smallest of tents. The rock faces falling down from the ridge seemed to him unclimbable and he declared that there was not a single weak point in the mountain's defences.

After our 1954 reconnaissance which, it is true, took the climbers nearer to the face itself—Guillarmod's pessimism appears excessive. Nor is it possible in the light of our reconnaissance to dismiss Crowley's excessive optimism as springing from a lack of technical knowledge. Guillarmod's defeatist attitude may well have contributed to the long-standing neglect of Kanchenjunga's West Ridge and South-West Face. It must also be conceded that Crowley's route up the steep slopes towards the Kangbachen Peak (one of the lower summits of the Kanchenjunga West Ridge), was not ill-chosen. Kempe, the leader of the 1954 reconnaissance, has made the following observations: "The bottom part of this route is to some extent threatened by ice-cliffs from above, but the danger of passing below them is not unduly great and only one large avalanche was observed by us. After the first thousand feet there do not seem any objective dangers. The well-known disadvantage of this route is that it leads to the West Ridge about three-quarters of a mile from the main summit and that a difficult traverse at this height may well prove an insuperable obstacle." Yet the route turned out to be relatively good compared with other alternatives explored by our 1954 reconnaissance, the Talung Cwm and the Great Ice-fall, for example.

While our reconnaissance penetrated to the foot of the Great Ice-fall on the South-West Face, Crowley's party stopped at a large moraine under the steep slopes of the Kangbachen summit. Just to right of this big moraine lies the Great Ice-fall tumbling down from the Great Shelf, the lower portion of which was climbed by our party in 1954. Crowley established his Camp V on the moraine and prepared for the assault. Tension had arisen between him and Guillarmod because of Crowley's brutal treatment of the porters and his failure to mark the route properly for them. When the porters reached the last moraine camp they were still bare-footed. This did not matter much as long as they were on the moraine-covered Yalung glacier itself, but it was a different thing on the ice-slopes of Kangbachen. It appeared now that

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Crowley in spite of his repeated assurances to the contrary, had not provided the porters with boots. Little wonder that the morale of the porters weakened and they tried to desert. In order to restore their morale Crowley tried to impress them by his supernatural powers. He flung himself deliberately down a steep ice-slope overhanging a rock cliff, and at the very verge of the precipice righted himself and jumped to his feet.

On the Kangbachen slope Camp VI was set up on the "most grandiose site imaginable" astride a small sharp snow-ridge. Camp VII, the last camp, was pitched at a height of about 20,400 ft. and Crowley, Pache and Reymond apparently climbed for a further 1,000 ft. above this. This would bring them somewhere near the ice-cliffs mentioned by Kempe in his survey of the Crowley route and on steep snow-slopes which would be far from safe in the afternoon when the sun had been at work on them for a few hours. Indeed Crowley reports that at the height of about 21,000 ft. a small avalanche broke loose which completely demoralized one of the porters. He screamed and tried to undo his rope. Crowley promptly "took aim" with his ice-axe and gave him a blow which returned him to his senses. But the party had to return. Meanwhile Guillardmod in the lower camp had decided to divest Crowley formally of his leadership and suggested a conference to de Righi. They climbed to the top camp and the conference was held much to Crowley's wounded surprise. Guillardmod, as the new leader, decided to break off the expedition at once. Only Reymond stayed with Crowley in the top camp. Crowley, as he watched the party getting ready for the descent, claims to have prophesied that Pache would be dead within ten minutes. Guillardmod went first, then de Righi, two porters (without crampons) followed, then Pache and, as the last, Guillardmod's native servant who was equipped with crampons. Fourteen porters went down on their own. The first part of the descent came off well enough. The porters going in the middle slipped at times, but the rope was well stretched and they were easily held. But a little further down the route made a sharp turn and for a while became horizontal. Guillardmod and de Righi had already turned into the new direction when the first of the porters behind them slipped, dragging with him the next porter behind. Pache, still on the steep slope above could not hold the two porters, was pulled from his foothold, fell and took the third porter with him. Guillardmod

and de Righi in front planted their feet firmly apart and belayed themselves, hoping to be able to hold all the four men who were hurtling down past them with increasing speed. But as soon as the rope tightened the snow below their feet too began to slide and suddenly set off an avalanche that grew to an enormous size clearing the whole slope of its snow surface for an area about fifty yards wide. Guillardmod, having lost his foot-hold, still clung in despair to his ice-axe and thus could hold de Righi when he was carried down by the avalanche. But when the weight of all five men came to bear on him his hands were forced to let go of the ice-axe and he followed the others down into the abyss. The whole incident was over within about five seconds. Guillardmod in his head-long fall tried to grasp another ice-axe lying across his path, but missed. He tried to make swimming movements in the swirling masses of snow to keep on the surface of the avalanche. He saw his comrades disappear one after the other. Then he himself was thrown into a crevasse and was dragged even further down half suffocated by the snow breaking down from above. For a few seconds he lay on his back only half conscious and gasping for air. As soon as he could breathe more freely he hoisted himself up on the rope to the edge of the crevasse. There he found de Righi lying motionless on his back, half buried in snow. With great effort Guillardmod freed him, but de Righi was so badly shaken that at first he could scarcely stand up. Thus Guillardmod was obliged to start rescue operations more or less on his own. Helplessly he tugged on the rope that tied him to the others buried in the depths below them. With de Righi joining him the two dug with their naked hands to uncover the rope that extended down vertically. Their desperate efforts proved futile. Guillardmod at last called out for help and miraculously Reymond appeared far above on the top of the slope. Fortunately the air was quite calm and they could hear each other. Reymond, though not fully comprehending what had happened, climbed down as quickly as the steep angle of the slope permitted. He collected ice-axes scattered about in the trail of the avalanche and the three men continued to dig up the snow with the determination of despair; but a full hour passed and the rope still stretched down vertically without a trace of the other men tied to it. The grim irony of fate willed that a wonderful night began gradually to close in, calm and star-lit, preceded by a sun-set steeped in colours of a

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delicacy such as Pache had always been eager to admire. But the three men only dimly realized the advancing hour of the day, taking turns in climbing to the bottom of the deepening pit; but their efforts remained unrewarded. Their clothes became encased in ice and at last they had no choice but to stop. Guillaumod had two toes frozen and his hands were without feeling. He knew that his comrades must have died long since. All that remained to be done was to return the next day and recover the bodies for burial. Two hours had passed since the accident occurred; two more hours were needed to reach the safety of Camp V, not an easy task in the darkness of the night and in their exhausted state. In fact they now stood in danger of their lives, for a bivouac in the open would almost certainly prove fatal. They had to descend at once. They tottered downward, often slipping dangerously, particularly de Righi who, however, was held by Reymond. After they had proceeded for one hour in this manner their cries were heard below in the camp. Lights appeared and a man was seen climbing upwards to meet them. By a cruel coincidence the man who saved them was the son of one of the porters who now lay buried at the bottom of the crevasse. Under his guidance the three reached the camp and without taking food fell exhausted into the tents; there they lay without finding sleep.

Crowley that same night wrote a letter which was published in *The Pioneer*, deploring the rashness of his unfortunate companions and professing no sympathy with them whatever. He stated quite baldly that he was "not over anxious in the circumstances to render help".

The next morning Crowley was seen to come down, but he did not halt to enquire. As Guillaumod put it, he "deserted" the expedition. The others dug for three days until all the bodies were found. The porters lowered their dead comrades into a crevasse, but Pache's body was carried down to Camp V. With the help of fifty porters the climbers erected a "mausoleum" of rough stones and Reymond worked three days long to engrave laboriously on a slab of granite the name of his friend Pache and the date of his death; he was thirty-one years old.

The evil figure of the "Great Beast" seemed to cast a fatal spell which may have discouraged later expeditions from continuing where the 1905 party had left off. We of the 1954 reconnaissance did not follow up Crowley's route (which we preferred to call

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"Pache's Grave" route) though it might have been more promising than some of the other routes to which we gave serious consideration. Our short visit to Pache's grave impressed us with a very queer feeling of a real presence at large in the deserted camp.

It was not until 1920 that Kanchenjunga again felt the tread of the mountaineer. Two British climbers, H. Raeburn and C. G. Crawford, travelled to Tseram via the Singalila Ridge, arriving there on September 10th. They experienced very heavy rains and it was two weeks before they were able to move up the Yalung glacier. They crossed to the left bank of the ice and explored the lower slopes of Kabru and appear to have climbed a high spur from which they obtained a good view of the South-West Face. Encouraged by what they saw they camped not far from the site of the Moraine Camp of the later 1954 Expedition and then crossed the Yalung glacier to the foot of the rocks by the Great Ice-fall.

Unfortunately they had sufficient supplies for only two days and their porter strength was totally inadequate for a serious attempt on the mountain, so they very reluctantly withdrew from the Yalung glacier and crossed into Sikkim over a new pass between Rathong Peak and Koktang. They named this pass the Rathong La.

Raeburn's observations are worthy of note. "The Talung Saddle," he said, "looks vicious in the extreme, everywhere defended by overhanging masses of ice, and the beautifully grooved accordion pleated skirts of the upper slopes were a serious warning. The roar of ice avalanches from Kanchenjunga and Talung Peak seldom ceased for long, day or night."

But he did not say that the South-West Face of Kanchenjunga looked impossible.

Once more the great mountain had, with little difficulty, repulsed its assailants but on this occasion the withdrawal was orderly and well under control, instigated as it was by good practical mountain sense.

The next phase in the story of the South-West Face is a very strange and rather pathetic one. This expedition (if one can apply the term to such a small party) consisted of one man with four Sherpa porters. He was a young American named Farmer and he made his attempt in May 1929. Farmer does not seem to have been very experienced, although he had climbed in the Rockies. He had promised not to enter Nepal or Tibet but left Darjeeling telling

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no one of his intentions. After some wandering in Sikkim he secretly crossed the Kang La into the Yalung valley. To avoid detection at Tseram he made his way up the eastern side of the river to the glacier, and May 26th found him making an attempt on the Talung Saddle. He had with him Lobsang (of the 1930 Dyhrenfurth Expedition) and three porters of the 1924 Everest Expedition. All were seasoned and trustworthy men but they were very badly equipped and when they saw that Farmer intended to go higher, they pointed out the risks and tried to make him change his mind. Farmer, however, who was very well equipped, decided to continue with his plans, but he agreed to the porters returning to the base camp. Not long after the porters left, thick mists began to obscure the face of the mountain and Farmer was lost to view. Later, at about 5 p.m., visibility improved and the porters caught sight of him, still climbing, near the entrance to what is now known as the Talung Cwm. The next day the porters climbed to a point from where they could observe Farmer's route and shortly after first light they caught a brief glimpse of him high up on a steep snow-slope. He was moving jerkily and with outstretched arms. His men watched for him all day but Farmer was never seen again.

This story was pieced together from accounts given by the porters to the Secretary of the Himalayan Club on their return to Darjeeling, and not all of it is clear; but there is no doubt that on this occasion Lobsang and his men behaved in a manner which reflects great credit on the Sherpas of that day.

Kanchenjunga had scored very heavily and with hardly any impression having been made on the mountain. The beautiful peak now had a notorious reputation and in particular the South-West Face was considered absolutely out of the question for a major assault. But when one ponders the feeble skirmishes in which these early expeditions engaged with the giant, it is hardly common sense to dismiss the South-West Face as a possible assault route. After all, the first expedition was a lamentable and tragic affair badly led by a strange man; the second was merely a look around by two curious mountaineers (*who incidentally did not give an adverse picture of Kanchenjunga itself*), and the third attempt was not really an expedition at all.

Perhaps the late F. S. Smythe in his book *The Kanchenjunga Adventure* did more to prejudice men against the South-West Face

than anyone else. In an early chapter of his fine book he sums up as follows: "This face is exceedingly steep and consists for the most part of granite precipices. At one point, however, there is a snowy shelf, conspicuous from Darjeeling, which leads up to the ridge, falling in a westerly direction from the third highest summit of Kanchenjunga. This appears to be the only breach in the great curtain of precipices hemming in the head of the Yalung glacier. Even supposing this face to be climbed, it would still be necessary for the mountaineer to traverse a long distance from the third highest summit to the highest summit, a distance which, in the opinion of all who have seen the intervening ridge and noted its exposure to the west wind, is too great. The snowy shelf looks, and probably is, desperately dangerous owing to falling stones and avalanches, and its dangers must be considerably increased by its southern, and consequently warm, aspect."

Now these opinions were not formed from a close inspection of the face, but from a view obtained from a considerable distance through a telescope. Such views are notoriously deceptive; from just such observations came the conclusion that Kanchenjunga had no glaciers.

Secondly, the opinion of no mountaineer, even such a great one as Smythe, is infallible. The history of mountaineering reveals many examples of peaks and routes being declared "impossible"; a few years or decades later, these same peaks and routes have passed through all the phases described so wittily by A. F. Mummery and become an "easy day for a lady". One does not suggest that such a fate is likely to befall Kanchenjunga but nevertheless, the fact remains that what is true for one generation is not necessarily true twenty or thirty years later. For instance, the Great Ice-fall which became the principal object of interest for our 1954 reconnaissance was ignored by the 1905 expedition and does not feature in any of the later appraisals of the South-West Face, possibly because of the mountaineering technique of the day. It is a comparatively new innovation in Himalaya mountaineering to tackle the tremendous ice-falls with which many of the great Himalaya giants are studded. Apart from one or two exceptions in the past these ice-falls have not been considered as routes, the pre-war mountaineers preferring the more "classic" ridge and face approaches. In the case of the Great Ice-fall of the South-West Face of Kanchenjunga one would hardly blame our

The Yalung Glacier and the S.W. Face of Kanchenjunga

predecessors for passing it by as impossible; the 1954 reconnaissance party only tackled it as a last resort and it is perhaps because of its apparent inaccessibility that the Fall has never been mentioned in earlier reports.

For the next twenty years the Yalung glacier remained untrodden; but on the west side from the Kanchenjunga glacier and from the North-East Spur in Sikkim the first really well organized and suitably equipped expeditions were being ruthlessly driven back by the mountain which summoned every natural resource at its command. Climbers perished or were turned back on both sides of the mountain either in the great avalanches or on the exceedingly difficult slopes. The cream of Europe's mountaineers were defeated at every turn and still man was no nearer than three thousand feet from the top.

After the last German expedition of 1931, apart from the delightfully daring little sortie of C. R. Cooke's party in 1937, Kanchenjunga was left in peace for another eighteen years. But in September 1951 George Frey, a Swiss climber, and Gilmour Lewis, a Welshman, left Darjeeling to climb in the Kangla Nangma near the head of the Yalung valley. They travelled to Tseram by the now well tried route of the Singalila Ridge. From Tseram an 18,000 ft. rock peak in the Kangla Nangma was climbed. They then proceeded up the glacier, using the same camp sites as Raeburn and Crawford. Frey and Tenzing (later to achieve such fame on Everest) visited Pache's Grave while Lewis and Ang Dawa IV made some tentative exploration of the great western rib on Talung Peak. While viewing the Kanchenjunga face from this rib and at about 18,000 ft. Frey and Lewis came to the conclusion that this face might well repay investigation by a larger party, being not nearly as impossible as at first sight it appeared to be.

But Lewis's leave was nearly finished and he was also suffering from an unpleasant attack of jaundice; so the party regretfully turned back down the valley. From Upper Ramser they crossed into Sikkim over the Rathong La, Lewis returning direct to Darjeeling while Frey remained at Dzongri to carry out some ascents on the neighbouring peaks. A few days later, while attempting a 19,000 ft. peak about a mile and a half south-east of Koktang with Tenzing and Ang Dawa IV, Frey was tragically killed. In the accident both Tenzing and Ang Dawa IV were also badly hurt.

Kanchenjunga

In April 1953, Lewis returned to the Yalung valley with John Kempe, an experienced English climber fresh from exploits in the Garwhal Himalayas. Kempe had hoped to organize a larger party to carry out a reconnaissance of the South-West Face of Kanchenjunga, but unfortunately the other members of the party were at the last moment prevented from joining the expedition. They travelled to Tseram by the Singalila Ridge, in very trying conditions with heavy winter snow lying on the high passes. On one of these, the Garaket La, Lewis distinguished himself by vanishing from sight for three days; the site of this quaint trick (to the mortification of Lewis) was pointed out to the members of the 1954 party with great glee by the Sherpas. After reaching Tseram, Kempe and Tashi climbed the 18,000 ft. peak which had been scaled by the 1951 party. Moving further up the valley the party attempted Boktoh (20,000 ft.), but after some interesting climbing were defeated by huge crevasses on the plateau below the final pyramid. They then crossed the Yalung glacier to try Koktang, 21,000 ft. After inspecting various routes and almost completely circumnavigating the mountain they eventually succeeded in climbing the North Peak of Koktang by a pleasing snow and ice *arête*.

Returning to Upper Ramser they proceeded up the Yalung glacier to attempt Kabru, 24,000 ft. by the rib of Talung Peak which Lewis had investigated in 1951. High up on this rib a tangled ice-fall was climbed and a camp established at about 22,800 ft. From this camp Kempe with Mingma Gyaljen and Tashi Sherpa succeeded in climbing Kabru North Peak—a very fine achievement and certainly the best feat of climbing so far carried out in the Yalung valley. It is interesting to note that this side of Kabru had been described by members of the 1930 Dyhrenfurth expedition as impossible—one more example of the fallibility of mountaineering judgment.

While Kempe rested from his exertions on Kabru, Lewis and Pamu ascended the upper basin of the Yalung glacier to a point near where "Glacier Camp" was established in 1954.

But nothing more could be done. Kempe had to return to his school in Hyderabad and Lewis to England. They crossed the Rathong La and returned to Darjeeling; but not without making further plans. For Kempe from high up on Kabru, and Lewis from the upper Yalung basin had discerned several possibilities on the

The Yalung Glacier and the S.W. Face of Kanchenjunga

South-West Face of Kanchenjunga. These possibilities, they felt, should be tested.

And so permits were obtained from the Nepalese Government to revisit the Yalung glacier in 1954 and the Kanchenjunga Reconnaissance Expedition of 1954 came into being. This party was privately organized and did not at first have the backing of any recognized body. Because of limited funds, equipment was not by any means up to the standard of the Everest or other large sponsored expeditions to the Himalaya, and, of course, carried no oxygen. Sir John Hunt showed great interest in the project and mainly owing to his efforts and to the sympathetic understanding of the Joint Committee of the Royal Geographical Society and Alpine Club, the expedition received a grant which was used to pay the return passages to India of the three members of the party then in England. But the bulk of the expense was shouldered by the individual members of the party.

We felt rather apprehensive in the early stages of the expedition. We were about to embark on an adventure which some of the world's greatest mountaineers had deemed inadvisable, and not a few people told us we were taking on more than we could possibly manage. However, the expedition sailed with high hopes, little dreaming that as a result of this reconnaissance a large sponsored party led by one of our finest mountaineers and fitted out with oxygen and the latest equipment would sail a year later (1955) to continue the exploration of the great South-West Face and using the route discovered in 1954.

PART TWO

VII

Bromsgrove to Bombay

WHEN I received an invitation to join the 1954 Kanchenjunga Expedition I was naturally pleased. The letter containing the invitation had been sent to the wrong address and it was only by sheer chance that I ever received it; but it finally reached me to be read and re-read a dozen times.

For several months I had been living in an Everest atmosphere and I assumed that the forthcoming Kanchenjunga Expedition would follow a similar pattern in organization. The invitation was issued by one Gilmour Lewis who signed himself "Expedition Secretary". A wire, followed by a phone call, resulted in my entertaining him for the weekend to talk things over. It was something of a shock to find that the expedition had neither funds nor equipment. The party was a little on the small side at that stage; it consisted of Lewis. In India was another possible member by the name of John Kempe who was undecided whether to join the Kanchenjunga party or Raymond Lambert, at that time trying to obtain permission to visit Cho-Oyu. There was one thing, however, in which the party was not lacking: enthusiasm.

Lewis talked me right to the top of Kanchenjunga and it was only by the greatest effort that I managed to retain my sense of proportion. Photographs were produced which showed an ice-fall of frightening steepness and in an advanced stage of disintegration. Further pictures showed a great face of vertical rock along the top of which ran an impressive ice-shelf; the whole of this face was overhung by massive ice-cliffs. I was well aware that Kanchenjunga was no ordinary mountaineering problem, and I knew that the South-West Face in particular had a very bad reputation. I was most apprehensive about the whole thing, but in spite of this I could not suppress a growing enthusiasm and we sat far into the night discussing the project. As I studied the pictures

Bromsgrove to Bombay

closely and read over and over again Raeburn's account of the South-West Face, I was convinced that Lewis was right and that a practicable route did exist.

Unfortunately the question of finance was a difficult one; my total assets were a rather dejected bank balance, a small car, dozens of books and a dog. Obviously to join the party would mean a large overdraft and a couple of years hard work on my return to pay off the debt. I shelved the idea and Lewis wandered off looking for wealthier clients. A few days later I started my Christmas vacation and for five weeks took no further action regarding the expedition. But I found myself thinking of Kanchenjunga almost all the time and eventually sent a letter off to Lewis arranging a meeting on my return to Bromsgrove. He answered by taking lodgings near my school and we got down to the business of organization. Lewis had approached several sources for financial assistance but without success. "After Everest," it was said, "anything else will be in the nature of an anti-climax."

In spite of this, confident that we should manage somehow, we carried on with our plans. By this time John Kempe had decided to reject Lambert's offer and was trying hard to get a party together for Kanchenjunga. He was also very busy with all the work to be done in India, the most important part of which was obtaining a permit to enter Nepal. This permit was granted and we felt more determined than ever that the expedition should be launched. Night after night, and any spare time we had, we would use writing to various organizations and firms seeking advice and assistance.

We were now joined by Ron Jackson of Burnley and after a brief conference it was decided that Jackson should handle the food arrangements while Lewis and myself should see to equipment and shipping.

Life became very hectic. It was then the middle of January and as we wanted to sail on March 7th, we would have our work cut out to complete our organization in time.

Meanwhile the team was causing some concern. From time to time John Kempe would write to us from India suggesting names or asking if we knew so-and-so, as in the course of his enquiries all sorts of people approached him. Many of these applications were from Indians; an indication of how these people are awakening to the fact that right on their doorsteps is a new world of fun

and adventure. There is no doubt that the ascent of Everest and the example of Tenzing in India have stirred up an interest in mountaineering which never before existed. The new School of Mountaineering which is to be opened near the Yalung valley may well result in our seeing many Indian expeditions to the Himalaya in the future.

However, the party of five climbers and a doctor was eventually completed. We placed ourselves under the leadership of John Kempe, who is 37, and the Headmaster of Hyderabad Public School. He had four Himalayan seasons behind him and had proved his ability to go high the year before when he climbed with a Sherpa to the summit of Kabru (24,006 ft.).

Trevor Braham, 32, the Secretary of the Himalayan Club and a Calcutta business man was the second member. Trevor had also enjoyed many seasons of Himalayan climbing and has a good record of ascents.

The third member, Gilmour Lewis, 31, a mining engineer, had been to Yalung valley twice before and knows more of the history of this area than anyone I have met.

Ronald Jackson, 37, chief designer for Lucas, was making his first visit to the Himalaya. He is a very fine rock climber and had Alpine experience.

Our doctor was a New Zealander practising in Calcutta; Donald Stafford Mathews, 37. Don had no climbing experience at all but was very keen to come. He is a gynaecologist and I thought this an odd qualification for Kanchenjunga. But Don was a happy choice; he was always a wonderful influence and great company.

Lastly, to complete the party, was myself, aged 31 and a school-master. I have had several Alpine seasons and had been chosen for the 1953 Post Monsoon attempt on Everest.

It was hoped that John Jackson of Nelson, another Everest reserve and Ron's brother, would be able to join us, but as he was already in Nepal with the *Daily Mail* "Yeti" Expedition it seemed unlikely that he would be able to reach us except in the closing stages of the reconnaissance. He did, however, join the 1955 British Expedition to continue from where our party left off.

In the meantime planning went ahead. Miss L. M. Buckley, the head teacher of my school, had very kindly given us permission to store and pack our goods on the premises; and about

Bromsgrove to Bombay

a dozen of my senior pupils were assisting in the work. These boys were in a seventh heaven and I would often catch them surreptitiously trying on climbing boots or windproof jackets. They did a wonderful piece of work and made such a fine job of the packing that I was not too distressed to find that a slab of Kendal Mint Cake had unaccountably disappeared. The rations brought forth loud cries of concern for our welfare; schoolboys being what they are paled at the thought of only two and a quarter pounds of food a day. I was told quite seriously by one red-haired, freckle-faced youth, that we were bound to starve to death; and that he, personally, could have eaten the entire porridge ration for the party then and there. However, Ron Jackson was as interested in eating as we were and we had every confidence that this part of the planning was in capable hands.

Since the expedition was purely a reconnaissance we did not anticipate needing very special high altitude clothing or equipment. Further, expense was a very serious consideration; so this, naturally, cut out such items as specially made tents, down clothing and oxygen equipment. Various victualling firms were very generous in their assistance and many of the suppliers provided special packing and protection to ensure that their provisions arrived at the mountain in good condition. Other firms making our equipment were no less generous and went to considerable trouble to ensure that everything was to our satisfaction. It was remarkable how these firms met our requirements at such short notice and, when we sailed, every item of equipment was safely aboard and ready for use. Tents, pitons and several other items were hired from the Himalayan Club and this part of the organization was handled by Trevor Braham with efficiency and meticulous attention to detail. Don Mathews was busy getting his medical supplies and, rather ominously I thought, contacting such people as Griffith Pugh, the physiologist. I never think of physiology now without connecting it with hard work and blood-letting.

Our leader had the worst job of all. Kempe had the terrible headache of arranging duty-free passage for our stores, hiring Sherpas, fixing permits and visas and a dozen other jobs which could only be done through diplomatic and government channels with all that that entails. In spite of all his efforts we still met with shocking delay and considerable expense on arriving in Bombay.

Kanchenjunga

The difficulties of planning were made more complicated because half the party was in India and half in Great Britain; but gradually chaos gave place to orderliness and, as the day for sailing drew near, the dream became a reality.

A fortnight before we left England it suddenly occurred to me that I had forgotten to tell my parents about my plans; so I dispatched a telegram saying I was sailing on March 7th, and went to stay with them for a couple of days before leaving. My father, well seasoned to surprise as a result of bringing up a large and rather eccentric family, did not turn a hair; my mother was most concerned about the welfare of my dog.

The last three days in England were the most hectic and exhausting I can remember. We rushed up to Burnley for a meeting with Ron Jackson, we dashed off to London to tie up loose ends in the organization, and finally, the night of March 6th saw Gil Lewis and myself installed in a hotel at Southampton.

There was little peace even then, however. A Leica camera and two supplementary lenses intended for use on the expedition had been stolen the day before and the telephone wires were humming between London and our hotel far into the night. The next day, after a hurried statement to the police, a flurry of customs formalities and a brief encounter with the press, we sat back with a sigh of relief in the lounge of the S.S. *Corfu*. At last, we thought, peace and quiet! We were wrong; no sooner had we lit our pipes than a dozen representatives of the press arrived and a clicking of cameras and a scratching of pens began. These gentlemen were most considerate, very polite, and very interested in our plans, but we were weary and longed for rest. Release came with the arrival on board of Dr. Michael Ball, Norman Hardie and William Beaven. These three were members of Sir Edmund Hillary's expedition to the Barun valley and it was a matter of only a few seconds to put the newshounds on to the scent. Now we really had peace. We sat back waiting for the ship to sail and contemplating the quiet glass of beer we intended to have just as soon as we could catch the steward's eye.

As the *Corfu* drew away from the quay I settled back and tried to think of anything we had forgotten. Apart from one or two calls we should have made, but which pressure of work had prevented, everything seemed to be in order. I then let my mind dwell on the weeks ahead. It was my first trip to the East, and I

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looked forward with keen excitement to seeing India and the Himalayas. For nearly three weeks we would plough our way through sea and sunshine; all we had to do was to eat and sleep, and the prospect was heavenly.

I sat and read the telegrams bearing good wishes for our success; most of these were from my school, and my old friends of the Outward Bound Mountain School, where for some time I had been the Chief Instructor. It is nice to know that one is remembered at such times and I had a warm comfortable feeling as I saw the coastline of England gradually fall away.

Lewis and I occupied a cabin opposite the New Zealand party and we soon had ourselves organized. I heard of a certain expedition whose members on the voyage out would rise at 5 a.m. and run several times round the deck. They would then spend the rest of the day climbing the rigging and generally "keeping fit"; they drank no alcohol and retired at 8.30 p.m. We on the *Corfu* were not of the same mettle. The first thing we did was to arrange a table together for the second sitting; we then forbade the steward on peril of his life to bring us early morning tea. This little arrangement was most satisfactory and ensured that we could sleep until 8.45 a.m. By careful planning we managed to avoid too much deck tennis and quoits, and spent endless days in contemplation of the blue sky from a horizontal position.

And so we slipped pleasantly along towards Bombay, rarely coming out of our peaceful reverie of eating and sunbathing. Port Said and Aden gave us a few hours on land, when we amused ourselves haggling over prices with the oriental gentlemen who ply their trade up and down the streets of these towns.

On arrival at Bombay our troubles started. I was met on board by a representative of a shipping agent who insisted on whisking me away to discuss problems which had cropped up with regard to customs duties. One of his men took my personal luggage ashore which I myself wanted to see through the customs as it contained the whole of our film. Owing to being detained so long by this well intentioned fellow the whole of our equipment and luggage was taken away to the customs shed. It took us forty-eight hours to get it out and not before we had run up a bill for over £150.

The Bombay Customs insisted on normal customs procedure, and we had to go through every item of food and equipment giving the cost of each and arriving at a total on which we were

charged duty. Our cases were opened and examined; and repacked by *us*. For two days we sat about the customs sheds while all sorts of petty restrictions were applied. I had a small camera range-finder which caused a terrific amount of fuss as it was a "scientific instrument". I had been carrying it around Bombay since landing and could quite easily have disposed of it at any time. This and my compass—another "scientific instrument"—were with great ceremony put under lock and key until we left for Darjeeling. The crowning indignity, and one which really hurt our feelings, came when our ice-axes were tied together and listed as "Item — bundle of iron". Through all this Mr. Hawkins of the Oxford University Press, deputizing for the secretary of the Bombay section of the Himalayan Club, was a pillar of strength. His efforts to help us were prodigious and finally he stood guarantee for a very large sum of money against our not exporting non-consumable goods. Without him our stay in Bombay would have been one of complete frustration.

We let Kempe know what was happening in Bombay and since his letter to Delhi had had little or no effect he took the great step of writing direct to Mr. Nehru appealing for a customs official to go to the Nepalese border to see our stores through. It is worthy of note that this great man took time to help us and as a result of this letter the whole atmosphere changed. It was too late by then to do anything about the equipment on the journey to Nepal, but when we returned three months later, a customs officer met us at the frontier. The customs official with great courtesy carefully checked our loads, sealed our boxes, and issued a customs clearance. The whole business took only an hour or so and thus we were able to ship our equipment from Calcutta with the minimum of fuss and bother.

Once clear of the Bombay Customs we had time to relax. I had been asked by Kempe to go to Hyderabad to tie up final details of our plans and so Gil Lewis with great magnanimity offered to travel to Calcutta alone with the whole of the expedition supplies. This was a fine gesture, as our stores filled thirty-seven different cases and bags and the whole weighed about a ton and a half. Only those who at some time have had to travel across India with a lot of luggage can appreciate fully the burden he cheerfully undertook. It is a tribute to Lewis that thirty-six hours later he arrived at Calcutta with not a thing broken or missing.

From Bombay

The night we left Bombay we were guests at a delightful cocktail party given by the New Zealand High Commissioner. At this party we were staggered to learn that one newspaper had reported us as taking part in a "Neck and Neck race for Summit". Apparently the other starters were from the Commonwealth, one of the more prominent being a New Zealander named Hillary. We sent a message of encouragement to Hillary via Dr. Ball and the New Zealand party.

VIII

From Bombay

AFTER the party in Bombay Lewis set off on his weary journey to Calcutta while I boarded a train for Hyderabad. Travelling second class I found I shared a rather dirty carriage with two Indians, one a very silent but enormous black moustached figure who sat, like a great Buddha, on the bunk opposite to mine. Above me two brown legs dangled over the edge of the bunk swaying rhythmically to the jolting of the train as we made our way through the night. I became so fascinated by my large companion opposite that I found myself unable to take my eyes off him. Thinking I might embarrass the poor fellow I risked the well tried gambit of "been a glorious day, hasn't it?" I felt slightly ridiculous when I remembered that at this time of the year the hot tropical sun beats down day after day on Bombay and the surrounding country with blistering and unbroken monotony. Anyhow, my words had little effect; with a slight twitch of a large black eyebrow and a rather wary smile my enormous friend grunted, rolled onto his bunk, and lay there with one eye closed and the other cautiously open. After about an hour of lying in my bunk sweating profusely I suddenly became aware of someone talking to me; it was the upper bunk. Very soon we were sitting side by side, he smoking a rank Indian cigar and I smoking my pipe. My new friend was a young and very intelligent Indian who had been on a course in engineering in Birmingham and knew the area in which I was then living very well. We sat and talked about England, engineering, climbing and finally the future of India, a future which

promises to be great if all the youth of that country are as single-minded as my young companion of the upper berth.

Eventually I reached Hyderabad and left the train clad in grimy white shorts, shirt and sun hat. Before the horrified gaze of the local inhabitants I refused a taxi and walked in the blistering heat to Kempe's school, a beautiful and imposing building laid out in large playing-fields and gardens. A smart chaukidar, obviously ex-army, flung me up a terrific salute as I approached the gate and with stiff back and crisp military stride led the way to Kempe's residence. John paled a little at my appearance and was frankly shocked when by way of luggage I produced a brief case containing one crumpled shirt and toilet kit. But John is a resilient fellow and he soon shed the apologetic air with which he at first introduced me to his friends. He had a most remarkable and efficient bearer by the name of Rassouel. This fine fellow did not bat an eyelid as he led me to my room; as if from nowhere, spotless whites were laid out for me and my shoes were whisked away and returned highly polished. For the next six days I was a picture of sartorial splendour always immaculate in freshly cleaned whites; and John Kempe's prestige as a host spread rapidly giving him lots of "face" in the eyes of his little community. I could not help noticing, however, that as my stay lengthened John appeared to get more and more scruffy. He even appeared a little testy one day when on calling for his dark glasses Rassouel respectfully informed him that he had lent them to the honoured guest Tucker Sahib.

I lived for a few days in a delightful atmosphere of friendliness and courtesy. Never have I met such hospitality. After the expedition was over I spent another month as John's guest and this holiday is without a doubt one of the happiest I have ever spent anywhere. The people who entertained me in Hyderabad both Indian and European were wonderfully kind and generous and for me this particular corner of the earth conjures up treasured memories.

Good things end all too quickly and with something of a shock I found myself once more aboard a train en route for Calcutta. For a couple of days and a night I suffered the miseries of a hot, dusty and extremely sticky journey through India. At one station I had to wait from midnight to 5 a.m. sitting among a mass of luggage which I was transporting for Kempe (who was flying up)

From Bombay

while the heat and the overpowering smell of unwashed bodies lying around in hundreds all over the platforms combined to make me utterly "fed up" and nauseated. I sat smoking my pipe while the sweat trickled down my neck and my shirt stuck to my back. At one stage in the long night a great fat sow with a litter of filthy little piglets came grunting and grubbing round in search of any odd scraps of food; they stank abominably. And when a large flying cockroach lodged in my moustache with a disgusting plop and tried to crawl up my left nostril, I nearly vomited. It gave me a fierce pleasure to fight my way into the train when it arrived; I was assisted by a whole string of dark-skinned half-naked coolies who entered into the spirit of the thing with such gusto that I and my baggage were carried, to the accompaniment of fierce yells, right into a good big compartment which I shared with only one other passenger, a wiry little Indian who had worked a neat flanking movement to outdo me for the top bunk under the electric fan.

Perspiring and dirty, and constantly taking great gulps of water from a monster earthenware jar which Rassouel had supplied me with I travelled to Calcutta.

Arriving at Howrah station I was amused to find Lewis leading a band of red smocked coolies up and down the platform; it was such a relief to have the luggage off my hands that I nearly kissed him. I shall always respect Gil for his lone journey from Bombay to Calcutta with the expedition gear.

Now came the moment which I had awaited with some trepidation, when I should meet the other members of the team. First I was whisked away in a taxi to Don Mathews' flat and we were introduced. Later that evening I met Trevor Braham and was immediately impressed by his quiet determined manner. Don gave us a wonderful dinner and it was not until quite late (after Don had rushed off, delivered a baby and rushed back again) that we rather alcoholically got down to business.

In two days spent as Don's guest we tied up all the loose ends of organization, played a deal of squash, swam at a delightful club and danced at the same place. I drank Don's stock of beer thinking I was being polite in accepting the cheapest drink and it was only later, on the Yalung glacier, that Don told me he was glad to be rid of me before I ran him into debt. Beer was 6s. a bottle.

Kanchenjunga

Adding another small mountain of kit to our already large pile (Trevor and Don, like Kempe, were flying up), Lewis and I set off for Darjeeling. We finally arrived at a little place called Siliguri, the hopping-off station for Darjeeling, to be met by Ang Dawa IV, one of our Sherpas, with a very dilapidated bus, and an even more dilapidated figure I took to be the driver, who subsequently turned out to be a character hoping for a free lift to Darjeeling. Leaving Ang Dawa to stow the kit away Lewis and I went off to the remarkably clean restaurant and worked our way through three omelettes and a great pile of fried potatoes. This serious business over we returned to our bus and Ang Dawa introduced us to the driver, who was a very sporty looking character. We climbed aboard and then found we had half a dozen passengers climbing all round the vehicle. As the bus gathered speed Ang Dawa managed to knock off one or two of the hitch-hikers and by the time we were rattling and wheezing along at a steady fifty miles an hour all those who were still aboard were settled amongst the luggage and gave us engaging salaams every time we looked round. The journey up the steep mountain road involving about 6,000 ft. of climbing, with hairpin bends every half mile or so and sheer drops on the near side, gave me the most terrifying drive I have ever known. If I were ever asked to choose between a Kanchenjunga avalanche and a bus ride with an Indian driver I think I should choose the former.

By the grace of God we arrived at Darjeeling in one piece and with a sigh of relief we felt our bus pull up by the front porch of the Hendersons' bungalow at Rungneet Tea Estate. Mrs. Henderson is the local secretary for the Himalayan Club and few expeditions can do without her help. Leaving Ang Dawa to organize the unloading we climbed out of the vehicle to be met with gracious salaams and the broad grins of the Hendersons' two house-boys. These two fellows were wonderful chaps; they rushed about getting us tea and drawing us baths and for all of our stay at Rungneet both before and after the expedition looked after us wonderfully well. Mrs. Henderson is known by all the Sherpas as *the* memsahib and she does a great deal for them. Our party not only had the benefit of her great experience but through her we hired various items of equipment from the Himalayan Club. She and her husband most generously allowed us to use their very nice home as our Darjeeling base and the house soon began to look like a

quartermaster's store. Within a day of arriving Lewis and I were buying odds and ends of equipment and stores, but we postponed the bulk buying of food until the arrival of Trevor Braham, who knew the language better than any of us. This was a wise move and ensured that we were not robbed too barefacedly.

In two or three days we had engaged our Sherpas and instructed Ajeeba the Sirdar to take on coolies. All that remained was to purchase the bulk stocks of food and kerosene and weigh everything out into loads of 60 lb. By April 10th Ron Jackson, Don Mathews and Trevor Braham had arrived; the food had been purchased and bagged into coolie loads, and we were ready to move off. But before we could go we had to give each man a metal tally which he had to produce to Mr. Singh, the overseer at Rungneet, before he was able to receive his advance pay of 10 rupees. This tally was checked in my little account book against each man's name and as we paid the coolies off I gave them a chit showing the amount owing; on their return to Darjeeling Mr. Singh, acting as paymaster, gave them their dues and away they went home. This method worked satisfactorily and saved the worry and inconvenience of carrying a bulky cash box.

The Sherpas we engaged were a mixed lot. Ajeeba the Sirdar (or headman) was greatly experienced in Himalayan travel. I knew about him from a close friend of mine, Dick Marsh, who had employed him on his expedition to Nanga Parbat in 1950. He was also famous for his exploits with Maurice Hertzog on Annapurna. Ajeeba is a good fellow but our large party was too much for him. Second to Ajeeba was Pasang Phutar. This is not the Pasang Phutar who went with Wilfred Noyce to the South Col of Everest but a young man of 21 who was dismissed from the 1953 Everest Expedition because of his very bad behaviour. I might be open to criticism here but I think it only fair to say that in spite of Pasang's terrible reputation as a trouble maker he came out on the credit side on our expedition. He is a strange chap; tempestuous and at times most disagreeable and unpleasant but at others quite warm and friendly. He attached himself to me as my retainer and although he was far from being perfect three things about him impressed me tremendously. The first was his love of music; he would sit for hours playing the most beautiful and plaintive airs on his home-made reed pipe; secondly he is a very good rock climber; and thirdly, when he was put in charge

during Ajeeba's absence he was efficient and businesslike. From a purely personal point of view I found him loyal and at times very thoughtful.

Ang Dawa IV who had met us at Siliguri station later became our expedition cook; he was a wizened little man with many expeditions behind him and had also been on Annapurna with Hertzog. Most of us liked Ang Dawa and he was not *too* bad a cook.

By far the most amusing Sherpa we had was Ang Dawa III whom we christened "The Intellectual" because he claimed he could read and write. "The Intellectual" turned up at Rungneet proudly sporting his "Tiger" medal and the Coronation Medal. All the Sherpas who carried to the South Col on Everest in 1953 were given the Coronation Medal in recognition of their great efforts and "The Intellectual" very smugly told me that the "Queen Elizabeth Memsahib" had actually come to Darjeeling and given him *his* medal in person. He told so many people this tale that he had reached the stage of believing it himself. Some of us thought him a little crazy.

The rest of our Sherpa strength consisted of Pasang Dorji, Lakaya, Thami Ang Dawa and "Balu". Of this quartet both Pasang and Lakaya were making their first trip while Thami was on his second. They were quiet conscientious chaps who carried out their duties reasonably well. Thami showed exceptional promise for the future; he is a great-hearted little man and intensely loyal. "Balu" was not an equal success with us. No doubt due to some differences of temperament he did not fit in well with us, though there is no reason to suppose that in different circumstances he would not be valuable.

A great deal has been written about Sherpas, much of it over-enthusiastic and even fulsome. It seems to me that Sherpas are like any other men anywhere in the world; there are good and bad. A good Sherpa is *really* first rate and for loyalty and devotion to his task cannot, probably, be equalled. Our particular team were not startling but perhaps we did not push them hard enough.

On the morning of April 10th a most ragged harum-scarum dirty crowd of figures descended on Rungneet. Ajeeba had arrived with his coolie band. I was horrified at the sight of them. Men and women alike chewed at great mouthfuls of red "Pan",¹ a mixture of beetel leaf and spices, and most of them wore great

¹ Pronounced *parn*.

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knives or kukris. A more murderous looking bunch it would have been difficult to find. They all talked at once and it took us a couple of hours to book down their names and get their "marks" as receipts for pay. Each man was given his tally and then joined the queue to pick up a load. Suddenly something went wrong. With wild shouts the coolies started to fight for the loads and Rungneet lawn took on the appearance of another Plassey; everywhere both dark and white figures struggled and bellowed in confusion until finally order was restored and the loads recovered. In the middle of the re-sorting of loads a small fleet of battered motor coaches arrived to convey our party to Mani Bendjien roadhead from where we would start our march.

"The Intellectual", who was not travelling with the main advance party, took on the job of getting everyone aboard. Our buses were hired from a car-hire company of Darjeeling and in spite of the fact that we had agreed on a price the day before, as soon as the coolies were aboard the proprietor started to haggle for more money. The bus drivers refused to move and we had no alternative but to pay up.

Leaving a few instructions and last minute details of transport for Kempe, who was not able to arrive at Darjeeling until April 15th, we stowed our rucksacks into a large American taxi which was waiting to carry us to the start of our march. Lewis and "The Intellectual" were staying at Darjeeling to arrange coolies and food for Kempe and then the three of them were to follow on to Tseram, travelling fast and light. "The Intellectual" gave the buses instructions to move and arranged our kit more comfortably in the taxi, then, giving us a big salaam, he boarded the bus at the end of the convoy and disappeared from our sight for nearly three weeks.

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As the last creaky vehicle exploded its way up the road to Darjeeling the four of us heaved a terrific sigh of relief. A last look round, hurried farewells taken of Mr. Singh and our friends at Rungneet, and we climbed aboard our luxurious taxi. Lewis had been

despatched to collect a few odds and ends and so far had not returned. We met him on the road looking dazed; he had just passed our convoy. A last few points were discussed and we parted. I thought I noticed a happy light in Lewis's eyes at the prospect of another day or two sunbathing on the Henderson lawn.

As we approached Darjeeling we were met by policemen blowing whistles and gesticulating wildly. A very large crowd had gathered in the market square, completely jamming the road, while dozens of cars added to the din with ear-splitting blasts on their horns. The centre of this chaos was our caravan. The coolies had decided to go shopping, so the six buses had pulled up and the men had got out. The result was a complete road block. It looked very much as if whoever claimed to be in charge of the convoy would be instantly arrested; so we decided to disown the whole lot of them. Seeing Pasang Phutar in the crowd we grabbed hold of him, gave him strict instructions to have everyone at the station and aboard the buses in half an hour, and then melted unnoticed into a restaurant where we ordered an enormous pile of ham and eggs.

Trevor, convinced that the coolies would just absent themselves and pocket their ten rupees, could not concentrate on the business in hand. Finally he could stand it no longer and dashed off to the bazaar to get things under control. We ate his ham and eggs, and as we prepared to go in search of him he reappeared in the doorway. Happy and smiling, he announced that all the buses complete with personnel were quietly waiting at the station. Ajeeba and his Sherpas had kept a faithful eye on their charges and everything was under control.

We went outside to board our limousine and were met with another crisis. The manager of the car firm was waiting for us with a melancholy expression to tell us that he could not allow us to continue in his beautiful car; we should now have to take two small cars. He did not make it quite clear why this was so, but he was very smart in getting over his point about our having to pay extra. We treated him to a fairly detailed description of his parentage and eventually convinced him that it would be much better for all concerned if we proceeded with the two small cars at the originally agreed price. We climbed aboard and set off waving our convoy to go on ahead.

I shared a car with Braham and as we settled back our driver

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shot off at a breakneck speed with a terrific blast on the horn, down the valley. The road wound and twisted its way down to Mani Bandjien in the valley bottom and any minute I expected to shoot off one of the bends and hurtle down the mountainside. To take my mind off things I turned to Trevor and started a conversation about boots; but after one or two hysterical comments I lapsed into silence and contemplated the ugly immediate future. By some miracle we reached Mani Bandjien and hurriedly paid off the driver before he offered to take us further.

Mani Bandjien now took on a festive air. Dogs barked, chickens and pigs dashed around in an ecstasy of excitement while the local population turned out in force to give us a good send-off. While we were paying off the bus drivers and persuading the coolies to start, we were hemmed in by an admiring crowd. Most of our fans were grubby but delightful children, with running noses and bare bottoms. They pulled at our trousers and tried to deprive us of our equipment, all the time keeping up a steady demand for "baksheesh". Our Sherpas strutted about full of importance shoos the people off and yelling at the coolies, "Jaldi, jaldi!" ("Quickly, quickly!") Eventually the party started to lead off and with a last look around, we set off along the track.

The way lay steeply upward and as I looked I could see the coolies strung out in a line plodding steadily along or pausing to put down their loads and rest their legs. As they climbed they shouted or whistled cheerily to each other and I felt a terrific relief that we were off at last.

I dwelt for some time on how pleasant the next few days were going to be. I had read a lot about trekking in the Himalaya. From various friends, I knew that the pleasantest part of any Himalayan expedition was the march. The recent Everest film had wonderful and idyllic shots of the Sahibs walking along in shorts with cheery smiles or stopping to take photographs of the incomparable scenery. Pictures of camp life showed the climbers lounging around in glorious sunshine writing up their diaries or reading mail from home. The whole thing appealed to me tremendously and I let my mind linger over the treats in store before the grimmer business of the mountain.

But our march in was nothing like this.

The first three nights of our trek were to be spent at Dak Bungalows which are pleasant buildings situated in beauty spots.

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The first of these bungalows was at Tanglu which is at a height of about 10,000 ft. We were all a little unfit and I felt the steepness of the track and the unaccustomed strain on my legs after the sedentary life of the past three months; but I cheered myself with the knowledge that in a day or two I would be fit. Ron Jackson had been troubled with his stomach and was finding the hard work very tiring; for three days he was really unwell and every now and then he reported with scientific detachment that he felt a little better or worse as the case happened to be.

Trevor Braham like myself was "walking himself in", but Mathews had shot off to the head of the column like a rocket and we did not see him again until we arrived at Tanglu where he greeted us with great mugs of steaming tea.

Arriving at the bungalow we settled in, checked the loads, and waited impatiently for a meal. Ang Dawa, our cook, repaired to his cookhouse from which clouds of blue smoke poured. I ventured inside to look and within a minute my eyes streamed tears and I was forced to withdraw. Ang Dawa grinning all over his sooty face urged me not to worry and fell to his task quite untroubled by the dense atmosphere. However, we ate well, slept well, and the next morning rose in high anticipation.

The day dawned misty and dismal and the coolies were a long time starting. Conditions all that day were not too good and at 3 p.m. it started to rain. The wind rose and by 4 p.m. we were enveloped in driving hail, while a bitter wind cut at our faces and hands. I arrived early at Sandakphu, the next bungalow, and did not have to suffer much of the bad weather; but our coolies who had dallied somewhat received the whole brunt of the storm. Pasang Phutar with Thami went back to urge the men on, while, to boost morale, Ajeeba greeted each coolie with a packet of cigarettes. It was a ghastly night and for hours the coolies straggled in wet, cold and utterly miserable. One or two of them were in a terrible state, but these were without exception the "Nepali" coolies. These pathetic creatures dropped their loads, then cringed and crawled to our fire, or just lay on the verandah of the bungalow without making the slightest effort to help themselves. It was pitiful to see them completely demoralized as they curled up like whipped curs, moaning dismally. Our Sherpas treated them with utter contempt and made no bones about showing their disgust. A pleasant contrast was the behaviour of

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our Sherpa coolies and Sherpanis. These people are of the same race as the expedition Sherpas (some of whom themselves started as coolies) and many of them live in Darjeeling and spend most of their time carrying for expeditions. They were usually quite unperturbed by bad weather or misfortune and later when the trek became really difficult they were only once guilty of breach of confidence. These coolies walked in cheerful and smiling, took their cigarettes and stalked off to the coolie quarters. Very soon they had a large fire going and the rest of the night was spent in eating and sleeping.

The Sherpanis, as women will, took matters into their own hands. They came into our dining room and immediately began to dry their wet things by our fires and dress their hair. They commandeered the whole place, only making room by the fire for Don Mathews who flirted with them outrageously. He was a great favourite with the ladies who vied with each other in giving him smiles and making brazen advances; Don's answers, in English, were ribald in the extreme, and they brought roars of laughter from any of the Sherpas who understood. However, authority had to be maintained and when it began to look as if the ladies were settling in for the night we chased them across to their own quarters. They left with much giggling and more brazen looks in the direction of our gay Lothario who wore an expression of smug conceit.

We fed and then sat about discussing the route over the Singalila. Ajeeba came to tell us that the Nepalese coolies were talking of leaving and he was very worried about the possible results of such an occurrence. If they left us now we should have tremendous difficulty and Ajeeba urged us to alter our plans and take the low level route we had earlier discarded. Jackson was all for following Ajeeba's suggestion but Braham and I felt that to alter our plans so early in the expedition would have a bad effect, especially on morale. Surely the weather (we thought) could not possibly stay as bad as it had been that afternoon and a further consideration was that anyway we had insufficient coolie food for the six or seven days extra journey involved. As things turned out it might have been better in that the Nepalese coolies might have stayed with us; on the other hand, had we changed our plans and had these coolies still deserted we should have been in an even worse position. However, we decided to carry on with our original route and told

Ajeeba to have the men ready to move off at 7 a.m. the next day.

The doctor visited the porters every evening to give out morale boosters; he carried a large bottle of vitamin tablets and they had a pronounced effect on our men. The Sherpas came religiously, every evening, to see Don for their tablets, and the performance was something of a ceremony. They used to line up with very solemn expressions and as they took their tablets they popped them into their mouths and with much working of their Adam's apples, gobbled them down. Pasang Phutar was the only exception; being rather more sophisticated and a man of the world he took his with water. Mathews was particularly amusing when speaking to the Sherpas and coolies. Knowing only a few words of their language he shouted at them in English on the principle that to shout loudly is to be understood. The reaction of Thami his servant, was always the same; he would screw up his face, close his eyes and say, "Doctor Sahib", the accompanying gestures of his hands more eloquent than any speech.

I went to bed that night quite worried about the coolie situation. Only two days out and a threatened strike on our hands already was too much, I dreamed of coolies deserting and ourselves returning to Darjeeling without so much as ever seeing Kanchenjunga; I wakened next day depressed and irritable.

And what a day it was! The wind howled round the bungalow as if to jeer at us. Outside Ajeeba and the Sherpas were trying hard to get the coolies on the move but not a man would stir. It was bitterly cold and frozen hail covered the ground. We snatched a hurried breakfast and went outside. Don Mathews had his movie camera set up and was busily filming the efforts of Balu and Ajeeba to get the coolies to start. The Sherpa men and the Sherpanis stood around enjoying the show and making helpful suggestions which ranged from giving baksheesh to administering hearty thrashings. The worst offender was a frightful crafty-faced individual who crouched down puffing at a cigarette, all the time shaking with great tremors in an effort to convince me that he was cold. It is true that he had no shoes but this is their normal state; he was warmly wrapped in a great blanket, the dirt of which alone would have kept out any storm however severe. This character was obviously the ring leader and it was equally obvious that whatever he started the rest would follow. He made his big

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mistake when he sneered openly and asked for baksheesh. I was already annoyed by the delay, so I lifted him on to his feet and propelled him to his load. Putting the load on his back, Balu adjusted his headband, planted a hearty kick in the seat of his pants and chased him up the path. Ron Jackson, aided by Pasang Phutar, carried out a repeat performance and shortly we had the whole caravan under way.

The wind had dropped considerably by this time and presently the sun made a welcome appearance. Immediately the whole outlook changed. The coolies once more started their chatter and a brief halt for a smoke restored their good spirits completely. Even "Crafty Face" gave me a leering smile and enquired after my welfare.

We now had brief but wonderful views of Kanchenjunga and her neighbours. Far across to the west we could see Makalu and the Everest massif; beyond these we could make out the wild country bordering on Tibet. It was really wonderful and for the first time in two days things seemed to be going well. Unfortunately this brief spell of fine weather lasted but a couple of hours and very soon we were once more enveloped in mist and heavy rain.

That night at Phalut, the last of the bungalows, we had the Sherpas in to give them a pep talk. They had not helped as they might have done and we felt that a little boost was necessary. It was rather amusing to see them as they filed in, Ajeeba at their head; I was reminded very strongly of an occasion when a dozen of my pupils were brought into me by the janitor for stealing apples from the school orchard. We spoke to them and told them what we wanted. They were on the whole a fairly inexperienced lot but once we made it plain that we required more supervision of the loads on the march, and that we were putting some of the responsibility on to them they assumed the air of old hands at the game.

We were all looking forward to getting into camp. The bungalows do not give the atmosphere of an expedition, nor do they give rise to those little incidents which make camp life so free and pleasant. Later in the trip on many an occasion I cursed tents and camp life; but for all this it is the camps which leave the deepest impression on the mind. From Phalut onwards we should be under canvas and we were pleased that our next march would be a short one. This would give us plenty of time to reorganize ourselves and establish our camp routine.

The next morning dawned rather smokily. I was sharing a room with Don Mathews and his early morning activities caused me some alarm. I awakened to a smell of burning and watched with amazement as our doctor tore in and out of the lavatory with a large jug. The bungalow was on fire! Mathews and the chaukidar were slopping water all over the place in a hilarious and light-hearted manner. All the time the chaukidar was delightedly quoting what it was going to cost us in repairs and Don countered each figure with a stream of abuse centred on the chaukidar's crass inefficiency. The rest of us stood around offering useful suggestions to the fire fighters. The "fire" was caused by some hot ash which had fallen onto the hearth and set light to the wooden floor; there was a charred hole about four inches across which was the source of all the smoke. It was a relief to find that the rug was untouched; the price of that might well have cost the expedition all its spare cash! When we left, after a long and most enjoyable haggle about the cost of repairs, the weather was kind; once more we had magnificent views and the coolies were chirping away in high spirits. I stayed awhile to photograph the chaukidar. He was such a picturesque old rascal that I could not resist it. I last saw him standing with a broad grin on his bewhiskered walnut face as he salaamed us away up the path. He made a fine picture in his bright red turban, his Tibetan boots and trousers, and an old R.A.F. flying jacket, a large kukri in his belt. He looked a real old brigand. The photograph taken, I hurried off after the Sherpas and came upon them in a group round a youngster who had a large basket of chickens. Ang Dawa and Ajeeba were solemnly prodding the wretched things. After the usual haggling a figure satisfactory to all was agreed upon, cigarettes were passed round, and we parted from our chicken vendors; Ang Dawa proudly shot off to the front of the column carrying a squawking chicken under his arm while another poked its head out of the top of his rucksack.

Ang Dawa had appointed himself the route finder for the party. He had an infallible nose for the right direction, and in addition to this he had been over the route before. Later in the trek he proved invaluable and his unswerving accuracy more than once saved us many hours march in bad weather.

A very short march in perfect weather took us to our first camp site at Nyathang. It was a delightful spot and we very soon had

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large fires going and settled ourselves in to the new routine. The Sherpas were very quick in putting up our tents, although in some cases the rather unorthodox manner of tying the guy ropes in large loops and using huge boulders as pegs was a bit hard on the tents. We forbade this practice, pointing out the correct way to go about the job. The Sherpas appeared duly impressed, then carried on as before. Ron and Trevor decided to repack some of the rations which were getting knocked about pretty badly. The food had been split up into four day units and carried in bags. This proved a mistake because packets of soup powder and other loosely packed foods burst open when the loads were handled a little roughly. Light boxes would have been much better and in the end more economical. The food was repacked but it was still in bags and a little later we had lots of amusement trying to decide what the contents of each tin were, the labels having come off in transit. A typical conversation at meal time would be something like this: "What's for supper, Ron?" "Well"—thoughtful pause—"Tomato soup, followed by steak and kidney pudding with either carrots or peas, depending on what's in the tin."

"What's the sweet?"

"Well"—even more thoughtful pause—"It might be strawberries, blackcurrants or even carrots!" It was invariably blackcurrants and it is a tribute to Ron's digestive system that later he was the only one who could face this particular fruit.

One of my jobs each evening was to issue the coolie food. Until Phalut it was agreed that they supply their own and from Nyathang onwards it was our responsibility. This was my first day of issuing rations and I was ably assisted by Pasang Phutar. I was becoming quite conscious of Pasang's qualities and he was proving efficient and helpful; on this particular evening he was a great asset. The coolies lined up with their dirty bits of rag and caps to carry away their rations and Pasang opened up the bags of rice, atta,¹ and dal. I issued the first man's ration and immediately this was a signal for a loud and long wail from the men. The Sahibs were deliberately trying to starve them to death! How could a man live on such niggardly fare? In a body the Nepalese coolies walked off to their camp spot and set up another long wail about the poor rations. In fact, one day's ration was more than most of them had carried for the first three days. I can fairly say

¹Atta: a type of flour. Dal: a pulse rather like lentil.

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that our ration scales for coolies were as good as and far better than most expeditions. Each man was given:

12 oz. rice
12 oz. atta
4 oz. dal
1 oz. salt
2 oz. sugar
a little tea and fat.

It was obvious that the coolies were trying to hold us to ransom, and the whole of the Nepalese refused to accept the rations and said they were going home. We argued and coaxed and raged but to no avail. The Sherpa coolies stood by to see what the outcome would be and again offered us their usual advice. Finally we took hold of the ring leader my old adversary "Crafty Face" and ordered him out of the camp without pay or food. This did the trick. After a great crying from the others about "Crafty Face's" virtues we agreed to let him stay if they went back to work. I returned to the issuing of the food. The coolies then started all over again and this time the Sherpa coolies joined them; they now wanted more rice and atta. A short consultation with Trevor Braham resulted in our increasing the rice ration and everyone was happy. We knew that we might run short but as an arrangement had been made for supplies of rice to be picked up in Ghunza we were not too worried.

Don Mathews, on arriving at the camp, held his sick parade. It was delightful to see the way Thami doled out the pills or splashed iodine on cuts with all the importance of a King's physician. His position as the Doctor's retainer and medical orderly enhanced his prestige enormously and he was well aware of the fact that he was a man of some standing. He would keep an eye on Sherpas and coolies alike and for the slightest injury would produce his iodine bottle (which he always carried on his person) and generously treat the affected part.

That night we had our first camp fire and we were quite content. A huge pile of burning rhododendron threw up bright red and orange flames and we sat around chatting and drinking tea. Trevor recited some poetry for us, an art at which he excels and Pasang Phutar played his reed pipe with a flawless technique. It was a wonderful night.

The Singalila Ridge

On this particular evening we were treated to an interesting spectacle. Mathews' medical advice was being flouted and a second opinion brought in. One of our Sherpanis, a nice little thing of about sixteen years, complained of severe stomach pains. She lay doubled up groaning like a little child. It is always the same with these people, men and women alike, when they are sick they lie helpless making no effort to do anything about it. Don treated the girl and joined us at the fire. A few minutes later we noticed one of the coolies squatting down by the girl and muttering some sort of incantation. He had in his hand seven blades of grass and a few grains of rice. The rice was scattered all over the girl while he chanted in the most eerie fashion. He suddenly changed his note to a very low muttering and then with each blade of grass in turn, stroked the girl's body for several minutes. The performance finished, the medicine man walked past Don with great dignity while Don looked from him to the girl, no doubt hoping she would not leap up and start rushing about. I felt that the question of professional status and prestige had arisen. Don was left a little dazed by the incident.

As I walked back to my tent I noticed Thami go across to the child and wrap her in his own sleeping-bag. It was typical of him and showed something of the warm and friendly character which endeared him to us all.

That night I sat a long time by the door of my tent looking out at the stars and listening to the coolies chattering and singing their strange and often tuneless songs. The fire died away and the camp became quiet and still, and I prayed that this was the start of many such days and nights. For a little longer I sat there until the air became chill and the silence wrapped round the camp like a great invisible cloak. Crawling into the tent I snuggled down into my sleeping-bag and fell asleep.

X

The Singalila Ridge

THE Singalila Ridge maintains an average height of about 12,000 ft. The paths wind along fine ridges through rhododendron, fir and bamboo, and on either side one looks down into great valleys

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carved by milky white torrents. Mysterious and fascinating in their coverings of thick silent green, these valleys are a constant invitation to the traveller to descend and explore. I found myself wondering what lay beyond every turn and felt a little frustrated that I was not just drifting along with time to go where I pleased. The walk is pleasant and not difficult under normal conditions but we were not to see it fine like this until our return from Kanchenjunga. Our march out was marred constantly by exceptionally bad weather and each day some new crisis developed concerning coolies or loads.

Water was a serious problem and the length of the day's journey was governed by this factor rather than by weather conditions or by how far we wished to travel. April 14th dawned fine and warm; we had only a short march along one of the nicest parts of the ridge and we pottered along lazily. The coolies were in high spirits and whenever we passed they set up a great chatter or sang ribald songs about us, the Sherpas, and each other. Everyone was in the best of spirits and it seemed that at last we were going to enjoy better weather. The prospect of lazing in camp in the warm sunshine was a pleasant one.

By midday when we reached our camp site, a few fluffy white clouds appeared in the valleys but we were not worried. The tents were pitched, we drank tea, and ate scones, and everyone settled down to enjoy an evening of idleness.

Our camp was situated on a small col with a tiny plateau, at the centre of which was a very dirty-looking pool, the only water supply for miles.

About a quarter of a mile from the camp was a ramshackle hut and one or two of the Nepalese took this over for the night, while others spread their blankets on the far side of a pool well away from the Sherpa coolies. The Nepalese and Sherpas always keep to themselves and one of our most picturesque little groups consisted of an old man and his two sons. The old man was the father of Ang Nyima who in the company of Gregory and Lowe set up the highest camp on Everest in 1953. He was very conscious of his sons, looking at them with great pride and pointing to the great loads which they carried. This little group sat in their picturesque Tibetan clothes round a small fire, completely oblivious to the rest of the party. The old man would produce a small book and for hours on end his thin cracked voice could be



John Kempe



John Tucker



Ron Jackson



Gilmour Lewis



Trevor Braham



Dr. Donald Stafford Mathews

"Dum Dum"



"The Mayor of Tseram"



The Singalila Ridge

heard chanting prayers and religious songs. His two sons sat with impassive faces making the chapatties for the day's meal or spinning wool thread by the curious hand method still used in these parts. They looked at peace, and well content with their way of life.

The Sherpanis were chattering in a group near to our tents, pursuing their favourite pastime of combing out their hair and twisting it into intricate and beautiful braids. It was always a pleasant domestic scene, the picture of these smiling stocky little women sitting patiently or clicking away on their needles while a friend squatted behind them deftly plaiting and arranging their hair. The plaits finished they would work into the ends bright-coloured threads of wool and silk and then finish the job with a colourful tassel; they have lovely hair, these women, jet black and reaching down past their waists. Many of the men too keep their hair like this and are often very vain about it; they sit for hours combing away and rubbing in butter until it shines like highly polished ebony.

Another larger party of Sherpa coolies under their leader Angharkay Sherpa¹ was squatting round a great crackling fire of rhododendron. This was a very jolly crowd who sang and yelled at one another. Three Sherpanis in this party, the wives of Angharkay and two of his men, did all the cooking, washing and similar chores. These girls were held in high esteem and the men would always make sure that they had the best places to sleep and the driest shelter. They were a fine lot; they later carried double loads and on several occasions double marched to ensure that the loads reached their destination.

Our expedition Sherpas were in a sheltered corner busy with the jobs of preparing our meal, sorting our kit or checking the loads and covering them for the night.

Wandering aimlessly from group to group was our most lovable character whom we had picked up at the bungalow at Tanglu as an extra coolie. He was a very short, squat and immensely deep chested little man, and although a Nepalese, was of an entirely different type from the others. He was the ugliest person I have ever seen but quite the most gentle and kind, and was so simple, backward, and silent that I nicknamed him "Dum Dum". The name stuck, and he came to accept it; I don't think we ever found

¹Not the famous Angharkay of Annapurna.

out what his real name was. Poor "Dum Dum" belonged to no group at all and would waddle about on his bow legs, looking for somewhere to sleep or light his fire. He always wore a dismal cowlike expression, but whenever he was amused a great grin, which showed his stumpy little teeth and most of his tonsils, would transform his face into that of a friendly little gnome. On his head he wore a greasy brimless cap; his black jacket with four pockets was sleeveless and tight fitting, with about twenty buttons down the front made from small silver coins; the once white tight-legged but baggy seated trousers made him look shorter than ever and emphasized his bow legs. Usually he went barefoot but when we reached snow he produced an enormous pair of army boots which he wore with great pride. He was so simple that everyone used to impose on him and often we would see him toiling along under twice the load carried by the other coolies. We were amused to find that later in the trip in spite of his lack of beauty two of the Sherpanis took him into their care and very soon we had another exclusive and domesticated little group with "Dum Dum" as the proud head.

But now "Dum Dum" was wandering round lost and so I went to talk to him as he finally sat down by a large rock and set about cooking his rice. He seemed very grateful for the company. We became firm friends and every night after this he would come and join us at our fire or follow me around with a broad grin all over his face.

By two o'clock the small fluffy clouds had become large and grey, building up into big storm clouds, and by 2.30 the usual daily bad weather started. The wind blew strong and all the coolies started tying down their belongings or adjusting branches across the shelters they had built. It became obvious that we were in for a bad night. Low rumbling thunder gave an ominous note as the wind grew in strength and the sky darkened to an angry grey; the first flicker of lightning accompanied by a sudden heavy shower of hail gave notice of the fierce storm which was to follow. Our Sherpas hurriedly erected the large mess tents for the coolies. Soon it was almost pitch dark and the lightning played continuously round the nearby ridges. The Nepalese coolies had gone off in a body to the hut below the camp but something like thirty or forty of the Sherpa coolies and Sherpanis were crowded into the large tent. We adjusted the guy ropes of our own tents and crawled

inside. I took a last look round and saw "Dum Dum" still crouching by his rock wearing his usual sorrowful expression; I shoved him into the big tent and climbed through my little sleeve-opening out of the storm.

It was now as dark as night; the wind shrieked with hurricane force over the col as rain and hail driving like great needles cut at our faces and drove straight through our clothing. Looking out of my tent I could see Ang Dawa manfully struggling with his fire in an effort to cook his Sahibs a meal. Pasang Phutar was engaged in plucking our last chicken and with each deafening crash of thunder he gave a loud whoop; the other Sherpas following suit with yells and cheers. They had built a small but strong shelter made from bamboo and large fir branches and, well protected by this contraption, were thoroughly enjoying the storm. The lightning was now continuous and the noise terrific; the screaming wind, crash after crash of deafening thunder, and the yells of the Sherpas combined to make an absolute bedlam. Sometimes the thunder came in sudden great bursts like shell-fire and it seemed to shake the whole of the ridge as each peal rumbled and echoed away. The effect was almost physical and I found myself holding on to the tent convinced that the very vibration was going to tear it away.

Suddenly the sleeve of the tent was ripped open and a grinning Pasang pushed a plate of food and a mug of hot tea into my hands. He hurried round making sure the guy ropes were secure then scurried back to the shelter. How Ang Dawa did it I shall never know but he cooked us a dinner of chicken, potatoes, carrots and peas! I tied up the tent sleeve and settled down to eat. The noise was still as loud as ever and the tent was flapping and straining like a wild thing when suddenly, a crash, paralyzing in its violence, accompanied by a brilliant flame, enveloped the camp. Some terrific force tore my tin plate out of my hands and hurled it across the tent and at the same time I felt a searing shock up my legs. For a second I was completely stunned and only vaguely heard the loud shout from Ron Jackson in the next tent; we had been struck! Ron, later, and with obvious pride, showed a slight burn as a result of the thunderbolt, but at the moment he was busy holding a shouted conversation with Trevor Braham. The three of us had been startled badly but by far the most serious thing was the temporary loss of our food.

I was lying on my Li-lo in an ever-deepening pool of water, chicken and vegetables were floating around all over the place, and my tin mug was lying emptied and slightly battered at my feet; I was soaking wet and very annoyed at the loss of my dinner. The rescue of the chicken was simple but the peas took longer.

The storm was now at its height and to add to the discomfort the rain changed to snow. I was sitting hunched in my sopping sleeping-bag with my feet in a haversack trying to be philosophical about the whole situation when I became aware of voices shouting, "Sahib! Sahib!"

A ripping sound and more yells brought me out of the tent to see an absolute shambles. The large coolie tent had been torn from top to bottom and long strips of canvas were flapping madly in the wind. The storm raged and shrieked and I could hardly stand against the gale and driving snow. A heaving struggling mass of soaking bodies lay in a hopeless tangle at my feet. A sudden extra strong gust sent the remains of the tent and some of the poles sweeping away over the ridge, while guy ropes and scraps of canvas combined to make the chaos where the tent had been even more acute. Yelling coolies fought and struggled to get out and rolled into the storm in various stages of undress and terror. Ang Dawa and I, shaking with laughter, sorted them out and the poor bedraggled wretches tottered off to the hut. The camp was in a terrible state. The large tent was completely destroyed and two of the smaller ones were beyond repair. Even the Sherpas' little shelter was torn apart and lay strewn all over the col while coolies' belongings, abandoned in the panic, were being blown away to disappear for ever. Those whose tents were intact were quite happy to stay where they were after I had assured them that there was nothing they could do, then Ang Dawa and I went to the loads to make sure they were quite secure.

Just then I felt someone at my elbow and turning round saw "Dum Dum" wearing a rather bewildered expression. He was holding on like grim death to his hat and his rice bag and was obviously relying on me to make the next move. Ang Dawa and I made a little cubby hole in the store dump and installed him with a lot of pushing and shoving into the very centre. He sat there, an amazingly ugly little gnome smiling his gratitude. Ang Dawa, to complete the picture, lit a cigarette, stuck it between "Dum

The Singalila Ridge

Dum's" lips, and we left him puffing magnificently with the storm howling round him.

Towards morning the storm died away and for an hour or two during the next day we were able to dry off our belongings. There was a longer march before us than we had had up to this date and we lost no time in getting away. "Dum Dum" was ousted out of his hole, a huge load was placed on his back and like a great faithful, ugly dog he waddled off up the track.

To our surprise the Nepalese coolies set off quite cheerfully and within an hour we were again on the march.

We were climbing a little higher now and snow patches became more and more frequent, making the going heavier. We could see the Nepalese did not like it and it was only a matter of time before they gave in. The other coolies too began to complain that they had no boots and the Witch Doctor of Nyathang came up from time to time asking for snow glasses and to make a great to-do about pains in his head. I suggested that he should work it out with some blades of grass and a handful of rice.

As we neared Meguthang, where we were to camp, we had to plough through quite a lot of soft snow patches and here our Sherpanis behaved like spoiled girls. They would twitter away and try to get the men to take their loads. It is sad to relate that only when the men considered it extra hard-going did they adopt a chivalrous attitude; the Sherpanis were there to carry loads and carry they must!

At one particular stretch of snow which had to be traversed we had an interesting diversion, in the form of a demonstration of a new ice technique, the originator being Dr. Mathews. As Don and I approached we saw a Sherpani stuck in the middle of the steep snow obviously unable to move. The snow was a bit harder than any we had met up to now and in some parts quite icy and it was on such a patch that our little lady was stranded. As becomes an English gentleman I helped her across and down to the bottom of the slope. All the time Don made sarcastic but amusing comments on the chivalry of the English; he added that the Sherpani was really all right and that I had fallen for the age old technique of the "helpless female". With suitable dignity I ignored his remarks and sent the lady on her way. Don then started down. He had taken a couple of steps when his feet shot out into space and describing a graceful arc he hit the ice with the back of

his neck. Shooting past me in fine style he came to rest in deep soft snow a couple of yards further on. Pointing out that as a result of his earlier remarks I had decided the days of chivalry were passed, I sat and smoked a pipe while he wearily dragged himself out.

Half an hour later we were installed in camp and Don was resting happily on his Li-lo.

As I said, it was one of my jobs each night on getting into camp to issue the coolie rations. I hated this job thoroughly and was always glad when it was finished. Usually someone complained that he was given a short ration, and there was always a demand (which was never met) for such extras as chillies. We had agreed on ration scales and we were determined that having given way once we should not do so again. Often this job was carried out in shocking weather and Pasang Phutar and I used to get wet through. Not having the large tent any longer the job had to be done in the open even when it was raining or snowing and on this particular night it snowed heavily. The rice bags filled with snow almost as quickly as I dished the stuff out and the salt and atta became a wet soggy mass even as we looked at it. I was tired and irritable and resented being outside while the others were snug in their bags. I think Pasang must have sensed my mood because he suddenly rushed away and in a moment returned with a steaming mug of tea and a hot buttered chapatti; I have seldom been more grateful for anything in my life.

Pasang often surprised me with these flashes of intuition and kindness. He was a strange lad and in spite of his trouble with the 1953 Everest party I am sure that with a little care he will make not only a good Sherpa but eventually a good Sirdar. As a personal retainer on the march to Tseram he was not very good, being rather tied up with the many self-appointed tasks he took on in the caravan; but once at the mountain I was always well looked after and Pasang was as reliable and as good company on a rope as anyone I have ever climbed with.

On April 16th the blow fell. The grey light of day crept miserably over the ridge bringing snow flurries and cold wind as its companions. We crawled from our tents and knew that more trouble was in store. Lamely and like miserable beggars our coolies started to complain about the food, the snow, and a dozen other irrelevant things. The fact was they had had enough, and

knowing that the most difficult part was to come were determined to go no further.

We haggled and coaxed and went through the by now familiar arguments to keep them on the move, but this time it was no use. We threatened and cajoled and finally said quite flatly that we could give them none of our stores nor would we pay them for the return journey. They were delighted to accept these terms and with "Crafty Face" in the lead straggled off over the skyline back to Darjeeling.

We were all a little depressed and after a rather melancholy breakfast set about solving the immediate problem of transport. We disposed of two loads by caching a bag of atta, a box of ration packs and a supply of cigarettes in a well hidden cave; the intention being to pick them up on our return. But this still left us with sixty-five loads and only thirty-nine coolies and there was no knowing how long these would stay with us if the bad weather continued.

Faced with this crisis, Ajeeba was not a great help. He is a fine man, kindly and honest and on the mountain one hundred per cent reliable; but this rather big problem was obviously a little too much for him. There was a discussion which resulted in twenty-six loads being sent off to the Gharaket La, the first of the higher passes we had to cross before reaching Tseram. We adopted a ferry system of sending some loads on in advance, then returning for more, and this system worked satisfactorily, but it meant that we should now take almost twice as long to do the march. If the weather turned in our favour we should have little to worry about but otherwise there was a serious problem of delay and the consequent dwindling of our coolie food. However, we pushed on as fast as we could, chafing at each delay as every day saw us having to send half the coolies back for the surplus loads.

Our next camp was to be at Gombotang, a delightful spot at the head of a pleasant valley which eventually runs below Pamionchi, in Sikkim. The camp site was near the river and surrounded by rocky hills which reminded one of some of the more rugged parts of the Lake District. There was a large yak-herd's shelter for the coolies, and pleasant sites for the tents; a truly lovely spot which for me represented all I had heard about Himalayan camps.

But to reach Gombotang we had a long and weary march and

there is no need to dwell for long on this particular misery. The first two hours were pleasant enough to the foot of the Gharaket La, a steep pass deep in soft snow. Here some of our coolies, for a bribe of one rupee, made double trips to carry the surplus loads nearer the camp ready for recovery the next day. The pass presents only a short but laborious ascent and before reaching the top the mist was sighing regretfully round us as if to hide the rough and bleak course we should have to follow. The wind again blew strongly and snow flurries spitefully blinded us with whirling flakes and stinging icy crystals.

For eleven hours we trudged on, conversation stilled and senses dulled. Occasionally a coolie would fall on a patch of ice or in a deep snow trough and then those nearest would laboriously help him to his feet and send him on his way.

It was with more than relief that I finally looked down through a clearing in the mist to see the camp site about two thousand feet below. We lost a lot of height dropping down to the river but it was as welcome as going into a cheery fire-lighted pub from the raw dampness of a November day. Pasang Phutar and Balu started a race down the steep mountainside and it was a question of pride rather than of enthusiasm which drove me down after them. Slipping and tumbling in the slushy snow and on the wet rocks we hurled down in a cloud of steam to arrive in camp dripping with perspiration; we were more than ready for the mug of hot sweet tea Ang Dawa thrust upon us.

An hour or two later the coolies straggled in wet and tired to crawl off to their shelter for food and the heart raising comfort of a big fire. Ron Jackson was busy organizing our evening meal, Trevor Braham in consultation with Ajeeba about the next day's march sat in the smoke of the kitchen, while I, weary and stiff, got down to the detested job of issuing the rations. There was no sign of Mathews. A word to Thami sent him off with a torch looking for his Sahib, and half an hour later the exhausted bedraggled figure of our expedition doctor squelched its way into camp. He set his weary limbs on a packing case by the fire, Thami removed his boots and socks and Don asked him to bring a degtchi¹ of hot water for his feet. Thami went through his usual eye screwing motions, repeated "Degtchi, Sahib", and shot off to return with a large empty degtchi and a rather puzzled

¹Degtchi—large cooking pot.

The Chumbab La

expression. Don bellowed at him and then added, "Degtchi with hot pani hai for my feet hai!" which translated reads something like "Degtchi with hot water is for my feet is!" Thami grasped the situation in a flash but unfortunately got a little mixed up. He took away the degtchi and returned with a kettle of boiling water which he was prepared to pour over Don's feet. Don with a long-suffering and patient expression took a firm grip on himself and quietly explained to Thami that all he wanted was a degtch of hot water in which to bathe his poor blistered feet. Thami walked sadly off and in a few moments returned with a much smaller degtchi filled with ice cold water from the river. Don, with an appeal to the Almighty for forgiveness and understanding, plunged his feet into the water while he cursed Thami with thoroughness and in detail. Thami walked proudly away having done his duty.

XI

The Chumbab La

GOMBOTANG on a fine day was too much to resist; with the sun shining and birds and flowers to photograph we decided to take a day's rest. Balu with some of the coolies was sent to recover the loads on the Gharaket La while Ajeeba, taking the remainder of the coolies, went off in the opposite direction with instructions to make a dump as near to the Chumbab La as he could. Those of us left in camp spent the day doing odd jobs and lazing about.

Ang Dawa took the opportunity to try his hand at making scones under the expert tuition of Ron Jackson. We had a special mixture which had been tried out on Everest and was highly recommended by Sir John Hunt. Ron had taken a special course in making these scones and was rather proud of the fact. A cloak of secrecy wrapped itself round the cookhouse while cook and teacher whisked, mixed, scraped and beat at a frightful greyish mess. After a few minutes of this Ron Jackson joined us where we were drinking lemonade (a bribe to keep us out of the kitchen) and his face bore a look of supercilious pride. In a mysterious fashion he counselled us: "Just wait. Your mouths will water in a minute."

A little later a grimy Ang Dawa proudly bore his scone to where we lounged in our tents. Such a scone was never seen before; even Ron was a little shaken. The texture was light and feathery, the flavour delicious and a hot sweet and heady fragrance rose up in a gentle caressing vapour. All good things should come in large quantities and this scone did; it was about eighteen inches across and at least four inches thick. We fell on it, spread the whole thickly with butter, and as quick as lightning ate the lot. For some time afterwards we reclined on our Li-los in the sunshine, the peace of the day broken only by an occasional impolite noise from one of the Sahibs accompanied by a discreet covering of the mouth; each time this gesture brought a proud and happy smile to the face of Ang Dawa.

Ang Dawa gave us many moments of amusement in his capacity as cook. On one occasion he was a very long time producing the evening meal; Ron in exasperation went along to the kitchen to find the reason for the delay. When he got there he found a pathetic and utterly miserable Ang Dawa aided by a puzzled Pasang Dorji sieving the soup. Ron had given them dehydrated chicken noodle soup to prepare and Ang Dawa tearfully explained to Ron that no matter what he did "worms" kept appearing in the brew. He had hoped to fish them all out before the Sahib discovered the sad mess. It had been a great strain also for Pasang Dorji who looked upon the whole thing as a revolting miracle. When Ron explained that the Sahibs actually ate the "worms" he hovered round for quite some time no doubt ready to lend a hand should one of us be taken ill.

One afternoon in camp I sent Balu to Ang Dawa with instructions to produce the gorgonzola which Don Mathews, knowing my liking for strong cheeses, had purchased as a special treat. Minutes passed and I became impatient to the extent of shouting to Balu to hurry. Balu and Ang Dawa at length came across carrying the polythene bag containing the cheese; they were looking sideways at each other obviously quite distressed. Balu with a little prompting explained that in spite of the extra-special care taken with this commodity, and in spite of their personal interest in ensuring that the cheese was well looked after, the cheese had gone bad! Should Balu bury it? To their absolute horror and obvious disgust I cut a large piece and ate it with great relish. For some time after this I would catch Balu and Ang Dawa watching me with

The Chumbab La

expectant looks on their faces. After several repeat performances on the cheese these looks changed to frank disbelief, and finally to marked respect.

On Sunday, April 18th, we were determined to have a change from the slogging and wearying march, hence our day off. We had been very unlucky on the ridge and had experienced all the worst of the elements. The nagging worry of coolies deserting had made us all a little uncertain of the days to follow; but now the crisis was passed we were able to settle down to making alternative plans. Although this brought up new problems we did at least know where we stood; we knew exactly how many loads we had to move, how far we had to move them and how many coolies we had for the job.

This rest day gave us an opportunity to do any small jobs which were outstanding. Trevor Braham informed us he had a bad foot and asked Dr. Mathews to take a look at it. We teased him and accused him of being "soft" until we saw the cause of the irritation. The whole of the sole of his foot was covered by a large, ugly and puffed out blister; however Trevor had managed to walk at all is a mystery. The Doctor treated him and then quite rightly gave us a lecture on false heroics and why we should not ignore even the tiniest injury. From that day Trevor put away his baseball boots which he always used and walked in stouter footwear.

Most people on a trek seem to like canvas boots, but for my part I much prefer nailed boots. Of our party the only two who wore canvas shoes on the march suffered from bad feet, while the rest of us arrived at the mountain free from any foot complaint at all. However, the conditions we experienced on the way to the Yalung glacier were without doubt exceptionally severe and it may be that in normal circumstances canvas shoes are adequate.

I took a few minutes from my lazing to check the coolie rations and, as I expected, we were going to be short of rice by the time we reached Tseram. In his reconnaissance earlier in the year Ajeeba had made arrangements for rice, potatoes and tsampa to be available for us at Ghunza, and as it was essential that these supplies be ready at Tseram when we arrived it was decided to send Ajeeba and Lakaya on ahead to pick up the food.

In our party was a colourful and cheery character who lived at Ghunza and was on his way home; he had attached himself to us at Meguthang and when the coolies deserted he took over a

load and carried for us. We nicknamed him "Ghunza" and as he claimed to know of a short cut to the village from Tseram, Ajeeba took him along as a guide. From Tseram to Ghunza was a day's journey which made another two days back again with loads; given a day at Ghunza this meant that Ajeeba should be back at Tseram a day after we arrived. This was a suitable arrangement and Ajeeba with his two men marched off over the ridge. We did not see him again for two whole weeks.

Meanwhile the camp was showing other signs of activity. Several of the Sherpanis who had not been sent off with loads, were busy doing odd chores. The usual hair plaiting was in full swing, but in addition a great scrubbing of pots and pans, a clapping of wet clothes against stones, and a dozen other domestic duties were under way.

By far the nicest of our Sherpanis was Mrs. Temba. This fine woman was the wife of a well-known Sherpa named Ang Temba. She had classic features and the carriage of a shy girl newly conscious of her feminine charm. Always she was serene, unruffled and wore a look of such calm and dignity that she might never have known trouble or sorrow. I never saw her dirty or lazy and of all the women she was the only one who never complained. No matter how bad the weather or the terrain, Mrs. Temba could be seen plodding along patiently carrying a load as well as any man. Very popular with the Sherpas, she did their cooking and mending and looked after them like a mother. Pasang had collected some of my dirty clothes and passed them on to Mrs. Temba and they were returned the next day washed and mended. I had split a bright yellow shirt up the back and this came back intricately repaired with bright blue wool; socks too had been darned in bright patches of red and green. I felt rather conspicuous the next day when I dressed but Pasang, who seemed to have a very soft spot for the lady, was most impressed and dilated on Mrs. Temba's cleverness and my smartness.

Our route the following day lay over the Chumbab La.¹ This pass rises to a height of nearly 16,000 ft. and for the greater part of its length is rough and steep. From the camp we would have to cross the river and climb steeply up through the forest for about a thousand feet. The route then follows what is normally a very wide and pleasant path along a gradually ascending ridge

¹ Often spelt Chongpa La.

The Chumbab La

overlooking the valley. For several miles the path winds through rhododendrons until at a higher altitude these give way to dwarf rhododendrons. An hour or two's march leaves the dwarf rhododendrons behind and one climbs rather more sharply into a large flat basin surrounded on three sides by harsh craggy mountains of about 16,000 to 17,000 ft. Two large and pleasant lakes lie in the basin and stepping stones take one through a sheet of very shallow water about four hundred yards across, where the larger of the two lakes empties itself into the valley below. This larger stretch of water is followed round its rim and the base of the highest of the mountains is reached. From here the climb starts up very steep rocks to a tiny col on which stands a large cairn surrounded with the fluttering remnants of prayer flags placed there by earlier travellers. Once over the pass the descent is longer but just as steep only now over ground littered with huge rocks which make the going awkward. The pass winds down to the head of a steep valley and from this a descent can be made into the valley bottom or one can follow the alternative route across the ridge and over to the Semo La; this latter was the route we had to follow.

We got away to a good start the next day hoping to reach the foot of the next pass, the Semo La, that night. The coolies were going well and we could see little splashes of colour as they made their way through the forest. Trevor Braham and I waited until everyone had left before moving off; we shouldered our packs, crossed the rickety bridge, and started up through the woods. It was delightful weaving through the trees on a soft carpet of leaves and pine needles. Every so often a squirrel or some similar animal would scuttle past as if to let us know that they were the rightful inhabitants and would have us gone. I felt the peace of the forest wrap round me and I experienced the absolute luxury of contentment born of a close contact with the earth and the sky. For the first time on the march I was really enjoying myself, and all the hardships, and bad weather, were forgotten and more than compensated for in those first two peaceful hours of the day. Halfway up the steep hillside a strange animal scent filled the air and Trevor observed that it signified either wolves or bears. As I was not at all certain that I wanted to see our carnivorous friends outside a zoo I found myself taking a tight grip of my ice-axe. The smell stayed with us for nearly ten minutes before the

sweeter scent of rhododendron took me out of the primitive jungle back to the peaceful enchantment of the forest glades.

But soon our peace was broken. The forest was left behind and the faint sighing of the wind on the higher ridge gave us news of yet more bad weather. The sun tried for another hour or so to cheer us on our way but the struggle was too much, and with a last desperate yellow gleam it was swallowed up in an angry greenish bank of thick cloud. The ridge gathered its forces and once more we were at the old battle with the elements.

Visibility dropped to only a few yards and the wind shrieked with gale force driving thick snow before it; very soon each of us was alone in a whirling cloud of white.

Braham had gone on while I stopped to chat with Don Mathews who was religiously shooting everything of interest with his large movie camera. No matter how hard the going he did not neglect this important job, and was often to be seen struggling thigh deep in snow with the heavy camera slung round his neck, or perched up on a rock with Thami holding on to him to prevent a slip. I helped him put his camera away and then pushed on up the steeper approach to the basin. By now the weather was awful. It was difficult to stand and I was cased in snow from head to foot. The cold was intense and without goggles, eyelashes froze together in a matter of seconds; the wind howled and tore at our windproofs and all one could see was a blank mist of whirling snowflakes. As I reached the rim of the basin I saw a few yards ahead a dim shape against the whiteness and could hear cries and shouts. I pushed on a little quicker and found five or six coolies cowering behind their loads crying with fear; they were completely demoralized and talked wildly of going to die in the storm. Thami reached me at this stage and taking the law into his own hands started to lay about him with the shaft of his ice-axe. The coolies were stung into action and after much praying and pleading for mercy picked up the loads and staggered on into the blizzard. It was essential that the men be kept moving; to stay in the basin and spend a night out without shelter would have been very bad for morale and might well have been in some cases fatal.

We pushed on past the dump of loads left on the previous day's ferry and made our way through deep snow into the teeth of the storm. The lakes were frozen over except for one small piece of water which rose up in icy spray stinging our faces and beating

The Chumbab La

a harsh tattoo on our windproofs. Time and time again coolies would be dragged from behind rocks to pick up their loads and join the plodding march to the Chumbab La. The women could not be found anywhere and at the first opportunity we rounded up all the coolies and checked our numbers.

Ron Jackson and Trevor Braham were having a terrible time of it. The women were all crouching down under a huge boulder by the lake obviously intent on staying there and in the centre of the shivering group was the biggest and strongest of our coolies. He was an evil-looking character with yellow and blood-shot eyes, and his nerve was completely shattered. Normally he was an arrogant type and to see him in this state left one a little disgusted. He had fled for the boulder and in the process had thrown away his load; it was never recovered. Now he was faced with a furiously angry Ron Jackson. Ron wasted no time and ousted the fellow in a few seconds; he was far from gentle and seeing him handling this great lout in so summary a fashion had a remarkable effect on the rest of the coolies. Very soon we had them all together in a pathetic shivering crowd and proceeded to take stock of the situation.

We were now faced with a full scale rebellion. The coolies wanted to stay where they were without shelter and fuel. Most of them were completely demoralized and sat muttering prayers or begging to be allowed to go back. It was unthinkable that we should go back to Gombotang and to stay where we were was impracticable. On the other hand we were not too sure where the pass lay nor how we should manage to cross with the coolies as they were. Ang Dawa saved the day; he vowed he knew the way and suggested he lead on over the pass; we had a consultation and decided to cross. With Ron Jackson, Don Mathews and Ang Dawa at the front and Braham, myself and Thami bringing up the rear, with much encouragement and teasing we got the coolies on the move up the steep mountain side. Visibility had improved but was still only about one hundred yards. Ang Dawa never faltered; he led the way up and over the pass as if he did it every day. Once or twice from the rear the pass looked hopeless and Braham or I would ask if we were on the correct route; a shout from up front assured us that everything was all right. We cut steps in places for the coolies, and in others helped them and their loads out of deep drifts of snow. It took hours of sweating, heartbreaking toil to reach the top of the pass but eventually

Kanchenjunga

we reached the col and sat round in a shivering crowd trying to find some shelter from the wind. The old man, Ang Nyima's father, added two more prayer flags to the cairn and we all subscribed an "Om Mani Padme Hum"¹ for good measure.

We now had the descent to make but the weather was a little better although the mist still enveloped us and the wind whipped up the snow in angry flurries. The snow on the ground was deep and soft, and walking was a nightmare; each step was an agony. The spaces between the large boulders were filled with snow and it was impossible to pick out which spot was solid and which was not. We could place a foot on what appeared to be firm snow in order to test it, but as soon as the whole of our weight was taken on the leg a sickening lurch would bury us waist deep, and it needed the combined strength of two companions to help us to struggle free. The coolies with their big loads had an awful time and three hours later we decided to abandon all hope of reaching the Semo La and looked around for a camp site.

We were at the foot of the Chumbab La; behind us and a little lower down we found shrub fuel and great rocks for shelter. The order to camp was given and we all sank down on rocks or in the scrub; a battered, dejected and utterly worn out party!

But fortune never frowns on the deserving for long. An hour after raising camp the wind died, the clouds rose up over the mountain tops, gradually disappearing altogether and the night scattered its stars like precious stones over a purple velvet sky. Coolies began to chatter, fires twinkled in the darkness and a delicious smell of juniper came drifting by on the night air. For that single hour, when storm and stress changed to magic and enchantment, I would have made the crossing a dozen times.

For a short time I preferred to sit quietly and watch the camp fires. The place looked like a bandit's hide-out and among ourselves we still speak of this spot as the Brigands' Camp. Dotted all round among the great boulders little groups of people were busy cooking and eating. To my left the old man and his two sturdy sons sat as impassive and calm as Buddhas, the boys listening intently as their father read to them in his musical sing-song voice. Occasionally a kukri flashed in the light of a fire as one of the Sherpas hacked away at the tough scrub fuel. A dim shape passed carrying a large degtchi. It was "Dum Dum", carrying water for his

¹ Buddhist prayer.



Kabru 24,006 ft. and Rathong Peak. The first ascent of this face was made by Kempe in 1953

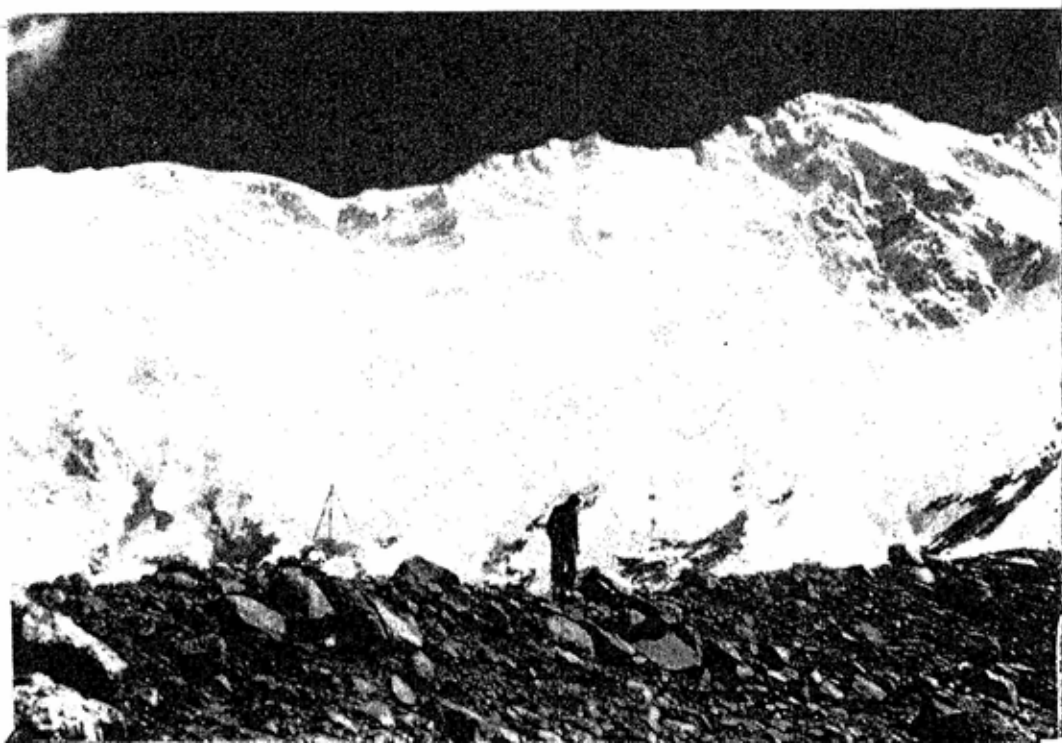
Koktang. The North summit was climbed by Kempe in 1953





The Sherpas. Standing L. to R. Pasang Phutar, Balu, Ajeeba (Sirdar),
"The Intellectual" Pasang Dorji. Kneeling L. to R. Lakaya, Thami,
Ang Dawa IV

Kangbachen from Camp IV



The Chumbab La

newly collected harem. He gave me a broad grin and he looked like a great ghostly frog. In our own cookhouse Ang Dawa crouched like some sorcerer mixing a devil's brew; the flames silhouetted his figure and flickered all round him making him appear solid and chunky but not quite real. Ron Jackson and Trevor Braham sat contentedly smoking their pipes by our big fire, occasionally exchanging a word or two. In his tent by the light of a torch Don sat writing his diary. The Chumbab lay behind us and this knowledge added to the air of peace and contentment about the camp. After supper we sat about talking until one by one the fires died. All around silent figures sat perched on rocks by glowing embers, or lay wrapped in great cloaks or colourful blankets in the rocks and crevices of the boulder strewn slopes. The sound of Pasang's flute carried softly on the breeze and I sat listening for a long time to the melancholy and plaintive music. Pasang played the flute beautifully and often sat alone by the fire improvising with delicate skill. His love of music was one of the nicest aspects of this strange boy's character and as far as I was concerned more than adequately compensated for some of his faults.

Although we had crossed the Chumbab La there were still a number of loads to recover and the following day Pasang Phutar (who was acting as Sirdar in Ajeeba's absence) was ordered to detail a party to return over the pass. The weather was very kind and for the first time on the march we had a full day of sunshine. It seemed as if the ridge was acknowledging our efforts and for the time being at least called off its attack.

Pasang experienced some trouble in getting coolies to return the loads and we were treated to the worst side of his make-up. He shouted, threatened, and finally in a violent fit of temper flung his ice-axe into the air and literally chased the coolies over the pass. It was a bad mistake on our part that we did not officially make him temporary Sirdar; he was the obvious choice, and when Ajeeba left he automatically took the lead. Had we announced that he acted with our authority I think his position would have been accepted; but as it was, Balu became a rather subtle trouble-maker, although unfortunately it was not until much later that we discovered this. This however did not excuse Pasang and when he returned to camp that night I gave him a long talking to. It is to his credit that he listened and admitted his faults.

By this time we had quite a few loads less due to the amount of coolie food the party had consumed, and we proposed on the following day to absorb the surplus by spreading the weight between the total number of coolies. This would enable us to dispense with relaying and move as a complete unit. In the meantime Angtharkay Sherpa and his group had offered to carry double loads.

Accordingly we moved off to camp at the foot of the Semo La, the last pass before reaching Tseram and only one day's march from there. The coolies who had gone back over the Chumbab La joined us late in the afternoon and we settled down to another peaceful night.

About this time the Sherpanis became quite troublesome. One could not blame them overmuch; the way had been difficult and the weather severe and they were wanting to be away home. Two in particular made themselves infernal nuisances. One of the pair, a very plump and lazy individual, persistently complained that her load was too heavy and her back ached; or her feet were sore and the snow glare hurt her eyes (in spite of our having given them all goggles); she was perpetually complaining. On the day after the Chumbab crossing while traversing a steep grassy hillside she deliberately put down her load and let it roll down the mountain side without making the slightest effort to prevent it. I was a little way behind her and shouted across; she just laughed and treated the whole thing as a joke. I came nearer to striking a woman than I have ever been in my life, but with a great effort I remained calm and ordered her down after what remained of the load. She went off in company with a Sherpa and later turned up as if nothing had happened. Her counterpart and close friend was a tiny wizened creature with a pushed-in face as ugly as sin. She was quite the grubbiest person I have ever seen and kept up a high-pitched whining chatter which just about sent us crazy. Nothing was right for this frightful shrew, who scolded and complained her way along like a fussy old hen. Don Mathews used to talk away to her, calling her the most frightful names and passing uncomplimentary remarks about her face, figure and parentage; meanwhile she would continue to screech on, convinced that the "Doctor Sahib" was her only friend. When she reached the stage of making eyes at him even Don quailed and kept out of the way. The other Sherpanis too began to complain

The Semo La

of the hard going and we decided on reaching Tseram to pay them off, keeping only the men, supplemented by the coolies Ajeeba would have with him from Ghunza.

XII

The Semo La

WEDNESDAY, April 21st, was the last day of the march to Tseram. We left our camp early and in glorious sunshine set off up the Semo La. From our camp the path lay up a gradually steepening incline over pleasant slopes for the most part covered in a short brown grass. The going looked easy and the party left in good spirits.

We dallied a short time while Don examined some recent animal tracks claiming that they were of a Yeti. We pointed out that they were not large enough for a Yeti whereupon Don appealed to our common sense and suggested even Yetis had little Yetis. We couldn't argue against this so Don happily filmed away. Not far from these tracks (which the others considered were made by a snow leopard) some strange paw marks attracted further attention. These tracks were rather like those left by a hare but were smaller and about fourteen to sixteen inches apart. Don immediately worked himself up into a frenzy of excitement and indulged in all sorts of wild speculations; we were all a little puzzled and cast around for further clues. The answer came quite unexpectedly. Suddenly right across our path shot a little marmot and before we had time to catch him he scampered quickly over the snow and disappeared in a flurry into a hole between some large rocks. We measured the tracks and without doubt they were identical to the ones which had puzzled us. I have often seen marmots on previous occasions but this was the first time I had seen their tracks. We were all surprised that so small an animal was capable of such great leaps. Don applied his lively imagination to this phenomenon and shortly expounded a theory that here was the origin of the Yeti tracks. About this time Don passed through a period of seeing Yeti tracks here and there and everywhere; as the only scientist in the party he was determined there

should be something (as he put it) of value come out of the expedition. Unfortunately for us he replaced his enthusiasm for Yeti hunting with the more grizzly and sadistic scientific study of human blood—our blood.

After the diversion of Yeti hunting we strolled up to the top of the Semo La to find all the coolies sitting about in the sunshine smoking and chatting. They were oblivious to the fact that every day, with one exception, the weather had turned bad, and they never learned to move quickly enough to reach camp before the storm began. We urged them to start the crossing and make the descent and after a lot of good-natured banter we set off on the last leg, downhill all the way, to Tseram and the Yalung valley.

We thought the difficulties were passed but as we started the descent to the valley the Semo La gave us a parting sample of the struggle of the last few days.

Before the whole of the party were on the move the mist came down, the wind blew and once more we experienced the discomfort of deep soft snow on huge boulders. For about a mile we were faced with only a gradual descent and we ploughed, fell, and cursed our way for what seemed hours to where the route lay across the hillside, easing the angle considerably, but the slope was plastered in deep snow with the track completely obliterated.

Before we knew what was happening the Sherpanis were throwing their loads down the steep slopes below the proper route and then sitting on their bottoms sliding down after them. This was all very well with things like sacks of atta but our equipment and tinned stores suffered terribly. After a great deal of remonstrance we convinced them they ought to carry the loads and soon we were struggling down the steep snow with everything under control.

One Sherpani (my plump friend of the thrown-away load), in the very act of disobeying our orders slipped at the crucial moment; as she threw down her load the headband caught on her shoulder and in a flurry of grimy skirts she and the load went careering down into the rocks below. I shall not describe my feelings when she climbed out of a snowdrift unhurt.

It took us almost two and a half hours to get everyone safely down the last thousand feet of the Semo La, this stretch consisting of very steep snow with an icy crust. The coolies laboriously struggled downhill while the Sherpas and ourselves went up and down helping them out of deep holes or assisting with their loads.

The Semo La

Poor "Dum Dum" seemed to be making very heavy going on this stretch and feeling sorry for him I gave him my rucksack and sent him down. Placing his load, which was packed in a huge basket, on a nearby rock I adjusted the headband and stepped on to the snow. I immediately disappeared up to my ears and it was only the timely intervention of Thami and Pasang Phutar that prevented me from suffocating. After that I walked down backwards guiding the load as I went. As usual "Dum Dum" had been exploited and his load was twice as heavy as any other.

My last trip to the top of the slope was to aid one of the Sherpanis who was having trouble with a bag of atta. I wearily toiled up the snow, relieved her of the load and sent her down. By now there were one or two deep troughs down the slope ploughed out by the descending coolies; so I chose the easy way out. Yelling a warning I sat atop my bag of atta and pushed off. I shot away like a rocket, clinging to the top with my knees and steering with my axe. In fine style I whooshed down the trough at Olympic speed. Near the bottom a wonderfully banked corner added a finishing touch to my hair-raising descent; I shot round this corner at terrific speed skittling coolies and Sherpas right and left. If it had not been for the effort involved I should have gone back for another run!

Once over the pass we found ourselves in a wide valley obviously not far from the snout of a glacier. A foaming white torrent swept through great heaps of dirty rocks and rubble, but on either side of the main river were pleasant tracks through dwarf rhododendrons and grassy banks leading down to the Yalung valley. Far down the valley we could see the luxuriant tropical forest swallowing up any further view of the river.

The sight of the end of the first stage of our journey plus the knowledge that soon we should be free of our coolies and able to get on with the job we came out to do, acted like a spur. We ran down the bank of the stream to the main river and picked our way across. About half a mile down on the right bank was a delightful little clearing with a crystal spring. A few small flowers pushed their way up through the tough grass and skylarks sang unceasingly with shrill and unfamiliar voices. Yaks, the first I had ever seen, plodded methodically about or just stood gazing placidly before them. The yak-herds had woven bright silks into the long hair of their charges and large red, blue and gold tassels

hung from their ears and noses. Yaks are fascinating animals and are not as placid as they look; if it were not for the disgusting grunts and tummy noises they constantly emit, they would be quite attractive. The dung of these animals seems to be used for everything; the locals burn it, use it for manure, and even build houses with it. I think one reason for this is the necessity to clear the ground; there is such an abundance of this ubiquitous commodity that were it not used in this way the community would soon have a serious social problem on its hands. Yaks are truly quaint and remarkable animals.

We paused awhile in this heavenly little spot eating chapattis and drinking tea. Balu was always near at hand whenever we stopped and never failed to produce something to eat. He seemed to pride himself on varying the food, one day giving us Kendal Mint Cake, the next chapattis and jam; and on one remarkable occasion he heroically carried a high-smelling piece of Gorgonzola especially for my benefit. The reader has to appreciate the horror with which Balu regarded Gorgonzola before he can give him the credit which is his due for this act of self sacrifice. However, to mark the occasion of the end of the first stage of the journey Balu did us proud with chocolate, chapattis, jam and tea; and when we had eaten our fill he melted off leaving us to potter down the valley at our leisure. Jackson, Braham and I walked lazily along following the stream, with our minds on the pleasant camp site which we knew awaited us at Tseram. We talked of the feed we should have when Ajeeba and Lakaya returned with the potatoes and the goat we had instructed them to bring.

But the sight of a stumpy waddling figure obviously very tired cut our conversation short. A few hundred yards ahead was poor "Dum Dum" and by the look of him he had even more on his back than an hour or two previously when I took his load down the slope. We stopped him and took some weight from him. I added to my load a large pressure cooker full of odd items of food weighing all told about ten pounds; Braham took a small sack weighing about fifteen pounds and Jackson relieved him of about ten pounds of other odds and ends. When I weighed the remainder of his load on reaching camp he was still carrying well over sixty pounds! Every day I always carefully weighed the loads to make sure they were even in weight but no matter what happened "Dum Dum" was so simple he allowed all and sundry to exploit him and

he inevitably finished up with eighty or ninety pounds on his back.

The last hour of our march took us down a delightful trough of rhododendron and bamboo forests; the fir trees, with beautiful gossamer-like streamers of lichen festooning their branches, stood back on either side like giant Christmas trees hung with green tinsel. The path twisted through the forest until it reached the bank of the river; here a picturesque and solid looking stone bridge carried us to the other side and I was thankful that we did not have to cross the river on foot; any step into that white angry flood could only prove fatal. From the bridge a short climb of two or three minutes brought us to a delightful meadow of lush green grass startling in its vividness of colour. This was to be our Tseram camp. Yak grazed lazily and grunted contentedly in the warmth of the day while their owners, two fierce warlike-looking ruffians, decked in large earrings and tasselled pigtailed and wearing great knives in their belts, regarded us coolly from a ramshackle tent nearby. A woman filthy with the dirt of ages and yet with the poise of a queen watched us with deep black eyes, and two or three naked children ran to her skirts to hide their faces at our approach.

We salaamed and received a haughty indifferent salute in return. We did not seem too welcome in Tseram!

The Sherpas had erected our tents a little aside from the main camp within a small paddock arrangement where we were sheltered and commanded a wonderful view down the valley. We could see little up the valley because of light clouds drifting along and obscuring the slopes above us.

The main part of the journey was over and given good weather we had every chance of success with the reconnaissance. We knew our capabilities, and whatever happened now depended on ourselves entirely. It was a wonderful relief to know that we were no longer wholly dependant on coolies who might desert on the least provocation.

We could have had an easier march and there is no doubt that the difficult journey had taken a lot out of us. We were tired and in need of a rest; but from now on we had the incentive of a great valley practically unexplored waiting for us, and a dozen miles of broken glacier at the end of which lay a mountain, second to none as a field of adventure. We were eager to press on and see what lay high up and round the turn of the great grey snout of the glacier above.

XIII

Tseram

WE now had to make plans for the transport of our equipment up the glacier; but before any move could be made several problems had to be faced and solved. It was essential that someone travelling light should go on ahead to site the Base Camp as high up as possible. We anticipated that our stay on the mountain would last about four weeks, and it was undesirable that we should spend valuable time moving up and establishing camps which we might have to evacuate after only one or two nights. Our explorations therefore would take the form of a series of short investigations wherever likely routes existed, followed by a more serious attempt to get high should we be lucky enough to strike an obvious way to the great shelf, which was our main objective.

Kempe and Lewis, who knew the Yalung glacier, were still several days behind us, but our Ang Dawa had been as far as the Tso glacier, which is a tributary of the Yalung, in 1951. We decided that two Europeans with Ang Dawa and one other Sherpa should move off as soon as possible to look for a suitable site for our Camp. Don Mathews, pointing out that he would be most useful in his capacity as Doctor if he moved up with the main party, very sportingly offered to stay behind. Braham, Jackson and I did not make similar offers in case they were accepted; so we reverted to the time-honoured method of drawing lots. Braham and Jackson were the lucky ones and did their best to appear sympathetic as I swallowed my disappointment.

Over a pint of tea we discussed the programme for the next two days. We had loads to reorganize, climbing equipment to check, coolies to pay off and a dozen lesser jobs to complete. One of our biggest worries was the absence of Ajeeba with the Sherpa food. He was a day overdue and the prospect of being without this food was not a pleasant one. However we presumed he had met with some slight hold-up so we decided to carry on with our plans without delay and get the ferry started up the glacier. We planned to use some of the stronger and more willing coolies in conjunction

with our Sherpas for the ferry up the lower part of the glacier and called for volunteers to stay on a further three days. The result was disappointing but we succeeded in persuading seventeen of the men to stay with us. The Sherpanis we paid off immediately; they had had enough and were making themselves a nuisance in many ways. They complained interminably about rations and we noticed that many of them were coyly standing about wearing articles of Sherpa clothing, which we had taken out on hire from the Himalayan Club. It was obvious that we had to pay them off before they began to affect the morale of our men and even take over the expedition equipment. We were glad to see them go and once they were away the Sherpas seemed to take a keener interest in the expedition.

By this time the Yak-herds and their families were a little more friendly and distribution of largesse in the form of cigarettes put us on conversation level. One little chap, a filthily dirty urchin of about four years of age dressed in a long coat and an enormous hat came across to see what was going on. He very quickly became a great favourite and showed great aptitude at extracting sweets from us all. He changed his policy, however, when he found out that we had cigarettes; he then rejected such childish things as sweets and was satisfied only when we issued him a ration of our rank Indian weeds which he undoubtedly enjoyed and smoked as long as we could keep him supplied. We nicknamed him the "Mayor of Tseram" and indeed he seemed to rule the place. It may not be the common rule with the Sherpas and hill people but I particularly noticed how tolerant and indulgent they were with their children. The "Mayor" took a keen interest in all our doings and never failed to be around when any tin or similar item was jettisoned; he would pounce on anything he saw and bear it away in triumph to the large communal family tent.

April 22nd gave us a day of pleasant weather which helped considerably when we set about the many tasks before us. Dr. Mathews took this opportunity to carry out more of his blood sampling and physiological tests and this afforded great delight to the "Mayor" and his fellows. They crowded round with great interest and even the adults could not restrain their curiosity. During the course of his scientific dabbings Mathews used some ammonia which was contained in a large cork-stoppered bottle, and after taking a little of the liquid out he stood the bottle on a

packing case which was doing duty as a surgery table. At the height of the show, as Mathews was extracting a little blood from the unwilling person of Trevor Braham, a loud report from the bottle, followed by a jet of ammonia shooting up into the air, scattered the admiring crowd in all directions. The poor little "Mayor" let out a shriek of terror and rushed off to hide under a great rock from where he peeped out like a frightened puppy. It was some time before we could persuade him to come out and ever after that he regarded us all with an expression of extreme distrust and avoided Mathews and his bottles like the plague.

A check over our loads revealed that we had lost a considerable amount of high altitude and European food, and far more serious was the discovery that a great deal of our kerosene had leaked away through cracks which had appeared in two of our large tins. The tins had first sprung leaks several days before but in spite of Ron Jackson's untiring efforts to prevent our fuel running away the battering they had received crossing the Chumbab La and the Semo La had proved too much for the makeshift repairs. It was a most unwelcome prospect but there was nothing for it but to send a couple of men back to Darjeeling for more kerosene. Once we were high on the mountain our only source of liquid was the snow and ice around us and without fuel for our stoves we would have found it impossible to live at any high camp. The food problem was not quite so serious; only two days' march away was Ghunza and from here we could get potatoes and rice.

That night as we sat round the fire we talked of the past attempts on Kanchenjunga. With the yak-herds and the Sherpas we engaged in a three-way trilingual conversation and heard of Dyhrenfurth's expedition of 1930. The yak-herd remembered this party and spoke of the late F. S. Smythe and Schneider, the great German mountaineer. It was a rather sobering thought that some of the world's greatest mountaineers many years before had tried and failed at what we were setting out to attempt. For a brief moment I fancied I saw the dim shadows of figures other than ours moving restlessly in the flickering light of our fires. We discussed and pondered the conclusions reached by our forerunners and wondered if we had made a mistake in selecting the South-West Face for our reconnaissance; nowhere had we found an encouraging remark about the face other than Crawford's statement concerning the rock climbing involved. But the adventure is all

the more exciting when the task seems insurmountable, and we looked forward with keen anticipation to the morrow.

Tinkling yak bells and the crackle of burning rhododendron wakened us the next day and Ron and Trevor lost no time in striking camp and moving off. I watched them disappear over the rise and into the woods with a feeling of envy which was almost jealousy and then turned to the many small jobs still to be done.

Don Mathews and I were faced with the prospect of two, or maybe three, idle days of waiting for Kempe and Lewis from Darjeeling and Ajeeba and Lakaya from Ghunza. We soon completed the outstanding tasks of sorting the remaining equipment into loads and despatched our remaining coolies under Pasang Phutar to Upper Ramser (which is a ruined village high up the valley and on the fringe of the Yalung glacier), with instructions to dump their loads and return to Camp. We turned to checking Primuses, sorting out ropes and pitons, and doing many other little tasks to while away the time. We adjusted ourselves to our enforced period of waiting by stretching out on our Li-los in the warm sunshine and wallowing in idleness. We philosophized and argued, we shouted for tea which appeared hot and strong with great spots of grease floating on the surface; and we swapped yarns about our work and various travels. Mathews had an inexhaustible fund of delightful stories gathered in the course of a nomadic life as a doctor in the Royal Navy, in Africa, as a ship's doctor plying round South America in tramp ships, and on his travels in many other remote countries. Don did not just tell you of his adventures—he shared them with you.

Our pleasant idyll was rudely shattered in the early afternoon with shouts from our two Sherpas: "Sahib! Sahibs come!" And to our amazement a bewhiskered sun-hatted figure wearing a pleasant quiet smile strolled into camp and asked for tea. John Kempe had arrived two days before schedule. An hour or so later the phlegmatic Lewis lounged towards us with the affable enquiry: "Well, how do you like Tseram?" They had with them a motley crew of half a dozen coolies, four of them looking like small boys and the other two energetic and cheerfully grinning Sherpanis. Also in the party, sweating profusely under a thick woollen balaclava helmet and wearing a grin which split his face from ear to ear, was the redoubtable Ang Dawa III, "The Intellectual", our most amusing Sherpa porter.

"The Intellectual" had been left behind to accompany John Kempe as he was supposed to be able to speak English. What we had not discovered was that he was definitely odd in several ways and one of these oddities was to do the most unpredictable things. Further, he was not particularly bright and could hardly be said to possess a great deal of initiative. A typical instance of this latter failing occurred on our return journey. "The Intellectual" was busy cleaning out John Kempe's tent (unfortunately for John, "The Intellectual" appointed himself his personal retainer for the whole of the trip and usually referred to John as "My Sahib"). We were on the fringe of the monsoon and in the middle of the operation of tent-cleaning it started to rain. Poor John could not get into his tent and to make matters worse "The Intellectual" stoically continued pulling all John's belongings outside, the better to clean the ground sheet. The more urgently John appealed to him to leave the job and put the gear under cover the wider spread "The Intellectual's" grin and the more industrious he became.

John Kempe is a remarkable man in that he never seems to get angry; always a perfect gentleman, he is patient and courteous in the extreme. With some surprise, therefore, I heard him curse roundly as "The Intellectual" started to erect his tent on arrival in Tseram. John had grounds for complaint as the tent was being put up very efficiently in the most squalid and yak-infested area of the camp. Kempe had suffered like this all the way out and "The Intellectual" had tried his patience severely. John complained bitterly that we had left him a lunatic as a porter. Such is the adaptability of Kempe however that by the end of the expedition he was quite philosophical about the treatment he received at the hands of "The Intellectual". The good fellow for his part swelled with pride as the personal retainer of the expedition's "Barra Sahib".

The arrival of Kempe put a different complexion on things. We were now in a position to move up the valley ourselves and although there was still no sign of Ajeeba and Lakaya we decided to continue the movement of our loads, leaving instructions with the yak-herds for our men to follow on.

In the early hours of Saturday, April 24th, Kempe and I left Tseram with the intention of moving up in support of Braham and Jackson. Mathews and Lewis were to organize the movement of the loads up to the lateral moraine of the glacier where we were to rendezvous the whole party and establish our Base Camp.

XIV

The Yalung Glacier

I WAS tingling with excitement as we moved off. Over the grass sparkling with dewdrops we walked into the damp pinewood, slightly mysterious in the cold morning mists. As we plodded on and upwards I thought of all the books on adventure I had devoured eagerly as a boy. I had done this very same thing before at home and in the Alps but this was different. I was at last on my first really serious expedition! I first read about Kanchenjunga when I was a boy at school. Smythe's account of the Dyhrenfurth Expedition had given this terrific mountain a very special place in my ambitions and I felt a wonderful elation at finding one of my cherished dreams come true.

By a rushing torrent carving its way frantically through the woods and down the hillside, we stopped and drank some lemonade. I felt wonderful and everything *was* wonderful, even the damp chilly mist and the soft patter of the water droplets as the dew, reinforced by the moisture in the swirling grey mist about us, dripped erratically but continuously on to the leaves and grass and down our necks. Nothing can ever spoil that memory for me and I can never have another day like it.

We left our noisy river and climbed steeply over rocks and grass to a small plateau. Here a clearly distinguishable track led gradually upwards past the remains of Dachenrol monastery long disused and in ruins but still retaining an atmosphere of calm and beauty. The last Mani wall¹ we were to see for some time was passed on the left; moss and lichen covered the broken and jumbled ruin but we could still make out the worn carving with which it was richly adorned and noted the flagstones on either side worn smooth with the passing of countless shuffling feet. It is many decades since Dachenrol prospered and functioned as a monastery but there was still a feeling of life and the living about the place.

Higher still we climbed, and leaving the woods behind, broke out into a lush meadow flanked on one side by steep rocky

¹ Prayer wall.

Kanchenjunga

hillsides and on the other by the heap of the lateral moraine on the right bank of the Yalung glacier. Underfoot grew dwarf rhododendron and as the mists cleared and the sun shone weakly, the air gradually filled with the delicate incense smell of these delightful shrubs. Great flocks of chough swung through the air creating a confused din with their harsh cries and here and there rock doves darted for cover away from us.

Rounding a corner I had my first close view of the Himalayas. A stately shining mass of sparkling ice, blue- and green-tinted in the sunlight, sitting atop thousands of feet of black rock presented itself to my gaze. Standing, it seemed, just behind was a majestic and towering mass of white with a delicately carved crest of feathered ice running for perhaps two miles first downwards and then up in a sudden sweep of beautiful and fantastic tracery to its sister summit. I stood spellbound at its loveliness, and a little awed at such might. We were looking at Rathong Peak with Kabru in the rear, and with a feeling of humility I remembered that this giant confronting us was 4,000 ft. *lower* than our objective. Over to the left rose the most beautiful symmetrical summit of Boktoh, looking quite easy and most inviting in the morning sunshine. But most beautiful of all to the right of Rathong Peak and across the glacier, Kaktang raised her streamlined and stately slopes for our contemplation. This is a most exquisite mountain of great loveliness and always had a profound effect on John Kempe. In 1953 he and a Sherpa managed to climb to the North Summit and to within two hundred feet of the true summit only to be stopped by an almost vertical and knife-edged crest of hard ice. We pushed on up the valley and past Upper Ramser where a partly destroyed yak-herd's shelter stood guardian over the last green meadow. The already narrow strips of grassland diminished in width as we approached the glacier, until we found ourselves right under the first steep slopes leading up to the Jannu massif and only about two hundred yards on our right the top of the great lateral moraine. We were still on scrubby grass but it was the last we should see for some time, for once we moved up the glacier we should be on rock or ice.

The weather was showing signs of breaking, as it usually did at about three in the afternoon, and over a tin of sardines we discussed our next move. John, who knew the glacier well, decided to camp where we were and this became Camp I. We had a

The Yalung Glacier

pleasant camp site with that rare commodity on big mountains, drinking water, and as it would have been impossible to get the coolies across that day we felt a last night on grass would be most welcome. However, I wanted to see the glacier; so we left our rucksacks to mark the site for Mathews and the coolies who were following us up, and walked on a half mile or so and climbed to the top of the moraine. The first impression I had was of looking down on a gigantic rubbish dump. The incoherent jumbled mass of ice pinnacles and gaping crevasses almost entirely covered by filthy grey and brown rubble did not look inviting. Every so often a low rumble and a rattle announced the descent of some boulder into the bowels of the glacier to be slowly ground to powder, or alternatively to finish up on the huge terminal moraine at the glacier's snout. John assured me that the glacier was as bad as it looked and announced with some pride that here was the worst, the most inhospitable, the most gruelling and soul-destroying glacier in the world. After reducing me to a suitable state of depression he cheerfully added that it would not be so bad now as when we returned—it would be hotter then.

The sound of voices brought us to our feet, and we were most surprised to see Jackson, Braham and their Sherpas moving back down the moraine towards us. They had tried to continue up the left-hand side of the glacier but had been stopped by the ice pinnacles of the Tso glacier which plunges down steeply to meet the Yalung in a crazy cascade of ice blocks and towers. The little party was now retracing its steps looking for an alternative route. We discussed the descent on to the Yalung and Kempe's previous knowledge gave us a great advantage. The plan was to find a way down the moraine and on to the Yalung, then keeping to the right bank (i.e. the left-hand side) until we passed under the Tso glacier, we should be able to break across right to the opposite side where we should once again find a suitable camp spot.

After this short discussion Jackson and Braham returned to the site we had chosen for Camp I, while John Kempe and I went along to take a look at the Tso glacier. The Tso was well worth seeing and although it demanded considerable will power to push on over the rubble tracks of the moraine, instead of returning to camp and tea, I counted the expenditure of energy well worth while. How this glacier hangs together at all is a mystery.

By now a steady snowfall had put down a couple of inches

of new and very wet snow and John and I retraced our steps to find the camp humming with activity. Our tents looked cheerful and inviting and the Sherpas had carried up great loads of wood from Upper Ramser so that we should not be without a fire. I crawled gratefully into my sleeping-bag after exchanging a few cheery greetings with Don Mathews, whose grinning face beamed at me from underneath the fantastic fur helmet he usually wore. Mathews was busy bellowing his mixture of English and ten words of Hindustani into the ear of Ang Dawa IV our cook, who gave a peculiar little twitch of the head to show he understood—and then produced the same ingredients for the evening meal as we had consumed night after night since leaving Darjeeling.

The night of the 24th-25th April was very cold and cheerless. After the first luxury of crawling into the sleeping-bag, letting an ecstasy of rest and warmth lull and deaden the senses, one gradually became aware of the less immediate discomforts. A cold wind drove the snow against the walls of the tent in a wet sticky mass and gradually the temperature dropped until it was necessary to wriggle deeper into the comforting folds of the eiderdown to save what little warmth there was. The worst thing, I always found, above the level where a wood fire kept the traveller out late under the stars, was the necessity of spending long hours in the tent. The first grateful relaxing out of the wind and weather soon gave way to a desire for some little task to keep the mind occupied. At this moraine camp we were not high enough to suffer from the mentally deadening effects of high altitude, and I personally soon tired of just lying on my back contemplating my narrow canvas world. I turned to reading as a relief from boredom and many an hour I passed in the company of De Quincy and his spirits of the world of the opium eater. Delightfully nostalgic too were his fine accounts of his wandering in Wales and his peaceful later life in a Lakeland cottage. As an alternative to the "Confessions" I delved and nibbled amongst Bridges' *Spirit of Man* and never failed to find something to suit my mood. But the hours passed slowly and sleep was always long in stealing in.

As usual, to lull us with a false sense of security, a bright cold morning showed promise of good weather but we were now quite used to this and made an early start in an effort to get across the Yalung to our new camp before the afternoon snow began to fall.

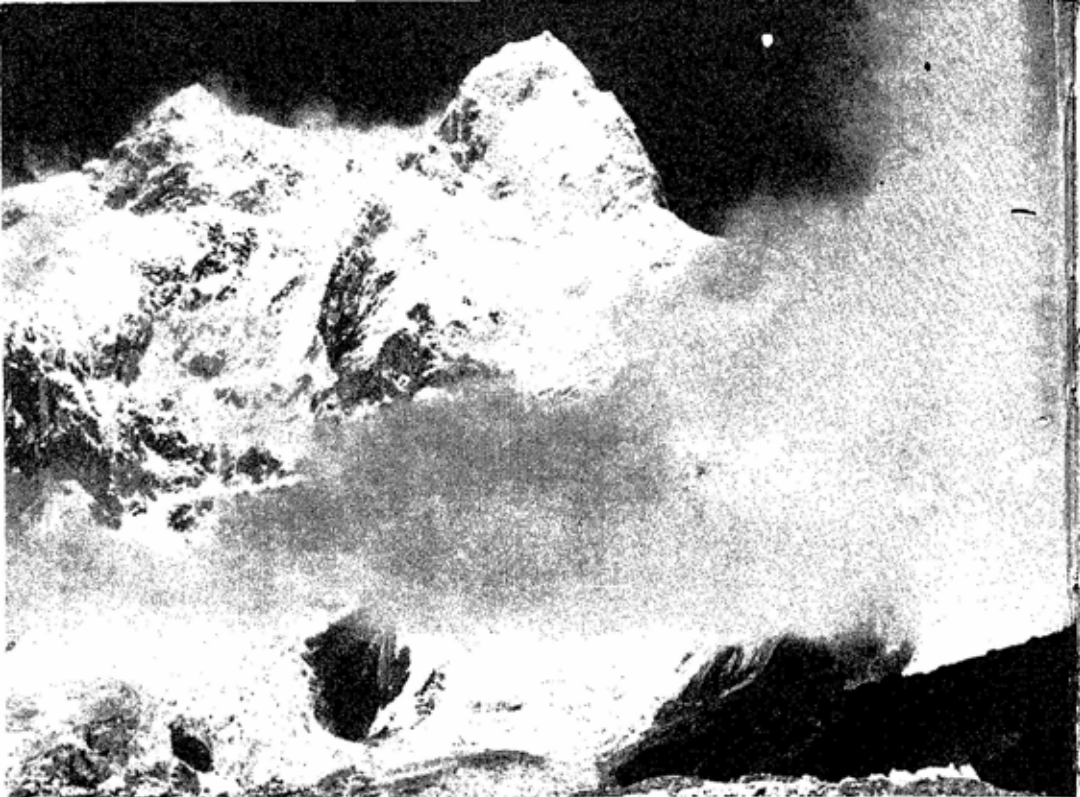
While we were eating breakfast a solitary figure was seen



Kempe taking a party up to Camp V

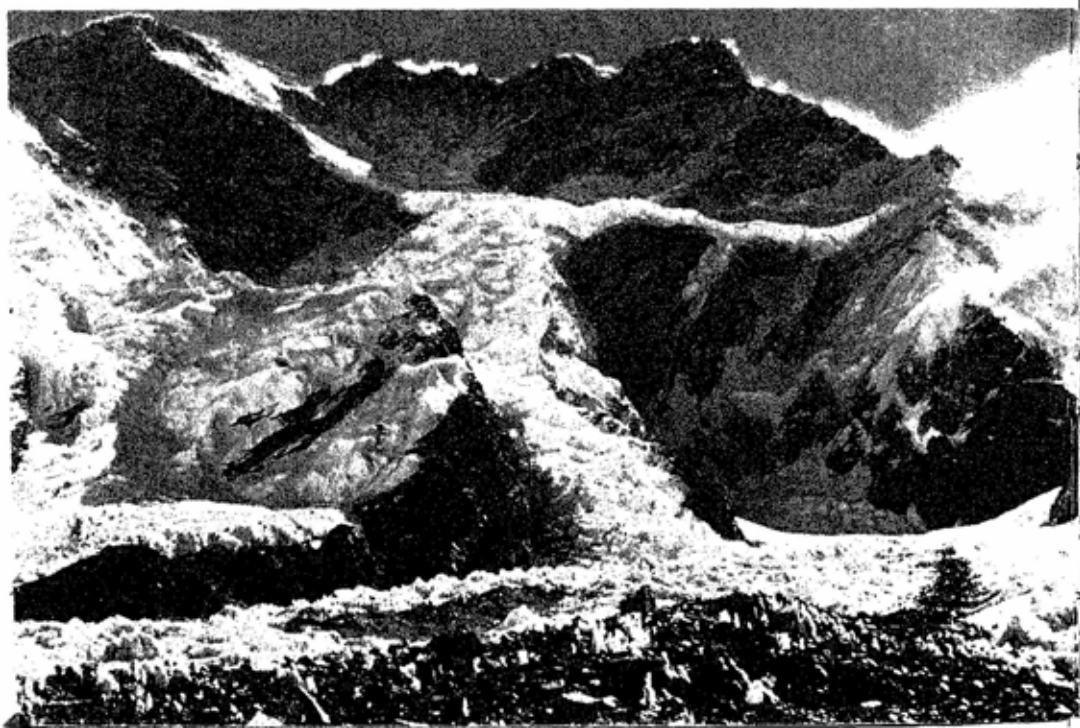


Porters moving up to Camp V



White Wave from Camp V

South West face Kanchenjunga



The Yalung Glacier

making its way to our camp from the direction of the Upper Ramser. A cheery hail announced the coming of Lewis who had left Tseram in the small hours of the morning to bring up the rest of the coolies and stores in time to join us in our move across the glacier.

The descent of the moraine was tricky in the extreme. A steep descent of some 300 ft. had to be made down a very insecure and crumbling pile of dry earth and rock. Great boulders weighing many tons threatened to hurtle down upon us at the slightest touch, and as each porter descended he was accompanied by a cloud of white dust and the rattle of numerous smaller rocks. Some of the coolies were loth to make the descent and a rope had to be put down for their assistance. With the encouragement of Ron Jackson expertly handling the rope, and spurred on by the threats and promises of Braham we eventually got these more timid porters on the move. I joined Kempe and Mathews on the glacier to take over the marshalling of the coolies and lead them through the great towering waves of ice. Kempe moved off with five or six of our men leaving me to follow with the next batch. Mathews stayed for a while filming the descent and then with a cheery wave set off in the wake of Kempe's party.

I waited a little longer collecting together some seven or eight porters whom I instructed to wait for me a few yards away in the shelter of a massive boulder, and while this operation was going ahead Ron Jackson descended to take over the next batch. I moved over to my little group, only to find to my horror they had set off in the wake of Mathews whose tail they had seen disappearing over one of the many great ice-waves which formed the surface of the glacier. I shouted to Ron that I was moving off but not understanding the need for my hurry he asked me to wait for two more coolies then on their way down. In the ensuing exchange of questions and answers my party disappeared from view. I cursed Ron, the coolies, Mathews, and even poor Trevor, sitting up on the moraine, and set off in full cry after my wandering sheep. Climbing to the top of a nearby ice-hummock I took a look round. I nearly fell off my perch with the shock of seeing the sturdy figure of our expedition doctor appear on the top of a great ice-wave slap in the middle of the glacier; and even worse, a well-spaced-out line of bent figures heavily burdened and obviously making hard work of the whole proceeding doggedly following in the same

direction. I bellowed and called and succeeded in making some of my coolies move back to the edge of the ice and on to the correct route; but the others still plodded on or waited uncertainly like small boys unable to make up their minds whether to cross the road or not. Don I saw gazing round him until he had obviously decided he was on the wrong route whereupon he disappeared over a crest to reappear some time later with the main party. For my part I had no choice but to wander about the glacier collecting my lost sheep and shepherding them back to the inhospitable fold of the right bank of the Yalung.

Kempe had said that the Yalung glacier was the worst in the world and although this may be a pretty big statement I do not blame him for describing it as such. For hours we stumbled through enormous boulders and climbed up steep waves of ice littered with rubble. We retraced our steps time and time again, destroying the little cairns we had made and building new ones to guide the parties behind us. We marched all the time under a dull and ever-darkening sky waiting for the snow to fall to give us our daily ration of dismal wetness. Every so often a rasping sound followed by a sickening plop announced the fall of another boulder into a crevasse; and more disturbing than this, we heard the crack and roar of avalanches from the twisted back of the Tso glacier. Avalanches were small and infrequent as yet, but served to remind us that Kanchenjunga was just around the corner with more formidable artillery than any of us had ever known.

By this time our party was spread over the Yalung glacier in three small convoys. My little group was flagging visibly and it was a continuous effort to keep them on the move. Usually a few jokes and a bit of leg-pulling was sufficient to keep the coolies marching, but today the men were in very low spirits. The Yalung was depressing, with trough after trough of dirty rubble-covered ice; a cold wind started to blow and wet snow began to fall chilling and disheartening. From the top of one icy crest I heard a cheerful hail and far across the glacier I could see Kempe, perching contentedly on a rock, surrounded by a small group of dark figures. As I watched I saw these figures rise and begin to make their way back the way we had come. Kempe's coolies had dropped their loads at the foot of a great moraine on the far side of the glacier and without wasting any time were on their way back to Camp I. An hour later I joined our leader and my men dropped

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their loads with thankful sighs. Some of the men had had enough and insisted on being paid off there and then. Nothing we could do would persuade them to carry on and we had no alternative but to give them their "chitties" and bid them farewell. One could hardly blame them but we were anxious lest they infect our remaining coolies with their lack of spirit and cause them to leave also.

We were now joined by Thami, Pasang Phutar and Ang Dawa and in driving wet snow we dejectedly made our way up the steep moraine to seek a level site for Camp II. We were pleasantly surprised to find a nice sheltered spot on some brown scrubby grass and in my tired and bedraggled state I remember thinking how easy a place the world would be to live in if the height of a man's ambition was merely to find a flat sheltered corner to put his bed.

Slowly and in varying degrees of dampened enthusiasm the rest of the party arrived. We were all wet, thoroughly tired, and more than glad when Pasang erected the store tent and announced that tea was ready. He and Ang Dawa had very thoughtfully carried up some wood and the sight of the cheerful blaze of Ang Dawa's fire put new heart into us.

We sat for a while sipping hot tea under a great overhanging rock and trying to dry out our wet outer garments; but we did not remain here for long. A cold wind driving wet snow before it drove us to our tents and soon tired voices bade each other good-night and the camp slept.

XV

Kabru Camp

so far, although we had experienced many set-backs, we had always been able to overcome our difficulties and one way or another to keep on the move; but now we had to face an enforced period of semi-idleness. The Sherpa food situation was very serious and our own supplies were inadequate without the additional tsampa, potatoes and meat we had expected from Ghunza. Ajeeba and Lakaya had still not put in an appearance

and Kempe was very worried. He decided to give them another day to reach us and if they still failed to turn up he was to take Braham and all but two of the Sherpas back to Tseram with the idea of sending out a foraging party. Kempe talked seriously of the possibility of Ajeeba's having been robbed, or even worse, of having deserted us. Ajeeba's record, however, was one of unimpeachable honesty, his work on the French Annapurna expedition had proved beyond doubt his courage and integrity and the latter fear was quickly dismissed. But the first possibility was well worth taking into consideration, and acting on this assumption plans went ahead to visit Ghunza and enquire as to his whereabouts. Our Sherpas were becoming rather surly and difficult about the lack of tsampa and at this stage (unfortunately we only discovered this later), began to steal food from the Europeans' rations.

It was now April 26th and we were all anxious to start serious work on the reconnaissance as soon as possible. The weather was still poor, however, and we felt that a further day or two just watching the mountain would be well spent.

By the evening of the 26th all the remaining loads and most of the personnel were gathered at Camp II and the day after we paid off all the coolies except for two Sherpanis who were to accompany Pasang Phutar on his foraging journey down the Yalung valley.

The following day we received a welcome surprise when the rest of our Sherpas arrived in camp carrying large loads of wood from Upper Ramser; but most welcome of all was the figure of Lakaya with potatoes and rice, and a coolie bearing tsampa. At the end of the caravan, trotting along contentedly in the fond care of Thami came "Octavius", a small and bony little sheep. There was great excitement and for a few moments a hitherto unknown little sheep in Nepal was more photographed and applauded than any film star. Octavius became a great favourite and very quickly made himself at home in the Sherpas' tent. Poor Octavius, little did he know that like a condemned man, the world was his for but a very short time. Meanwhile, showing a surprising lack of will-power, Sahibs and Sherpas alike quickly opened the sacks of food and a large meal was prepared on the spot.

Trevor Braham questioned Lakaya very closely about the absence of Ajeeba and slowly we extracted the dismal story. Ajeeba, in spite of the promises of the headman earlier in the

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year, had met with a major crisis on his arrival at Ghunza. There was no tsampa, no potatoes and no atta, the crops had been bad, the winter had been severe, nobody wanted to sell food; every excuse was put forward in an attempt to hide from Ajeeba the simple fact that the headman had just not bothered to reserve the supplies he had promised. Showing great resource our Sirdar and his companion had gone from house to house in the village buying up food in small quantities; but this proved a very expensive way of purchasing and only a small amount was obtained. Instructing Lakaya to rejoin the expedition with Octavius and the food, Ajeeba had then set off another two days' march beyond the valley to try his luck at the next village; it was not until May 3rd that we were to see him again.

It was now definitely fixed that the foraging parties go out, and accordingly on April 28th, Kempe, Braham and all but two Sherpas left for Tseram. Just before the party left, Pasang Phutar and Thami, dragging Ang Dawa III, "The Intellectual", between them, demanded to see the Doctor. It was explained to Mathews that our "Intellectual" was not too fit and appeared to be "swelling up". He normally had a broad and rather vacant looking face sitting on top of a very thick neck; but during the night his countenance had altered considerably. He smiled weakly at us from a face swollen to twice its normal size fitting grotesquely on top of a neck bulging with swollen glands. The Doctor diagnosed mumps. The Sherpas treated this as a great joke even though they had no idea what mumps was; they walked about jeering at the poor invalid and puffing out their cheeks in gross imitation of "The Intellectual's" inflamed features. Mathews was ruthless in his treatment and the unfortunate man was taken down to Tseram and put into "isolation". He was ordered to remain there until such time as his features returned to normal, when he was to return to Camp II. The last we saw of "The Intellectual" before he rejoined us was his pathetic figure trailing along behind Kempe's party as they disappeared over the moraine and down to the glacier below. He was conspicuous by the ever-widening distance put between him and his fellows as soon as it became known that the disease was contagious.

While the others were away Ron Jackson and I were to move up to Kempe's old Kabru base camp to take a good look at Kanchenjunga and prospect for possible camp sites. We were both very

keen to do this and lost no time in preparing for our departure—but first a gloomy task had to be performed.

Just before leaving, John Kempe suggested that Octavius be slaughtered before his return as he and Trevor had grown rather fond of the little animal and did not wish to witness the scene; I said I understood and promised to have the cook see to it without delay. When the others had gone I spoke to my companions about Octavius. In camp were Mathews, Jackson, Lewis and myself, Thami and Ang Dawa IV. Without exception, everyone started to hedge about killing the little sheep; the two Sherpas begged to be excused from the task and it dawned on me that if the deed were to be carried out at all I should have to be the one to do it. I was a bit put out about this as Octavius was by now very friendly and often followed me about for tit-bits which I threw to him from time to time. Lewis held forth at length on how simple the job was but I noticed he did not offer to do it. Ron Jackson, professing no knowledge of butchering, waited with interest to see the operation; but most infuriating of all was our Doctor, who gave me long and detailed descriptions, with actions, of how the massacre of buffaloes takes place in some annual ceremony in the Kot at Kathmandu. I never really found out whether the Kot is a place or was the actual name of the ceremony; but as far as I could gather the whole business is an orgy of decapitating young bullocks in which everyone takes part. Watching Mathews at work on us when involved in his frequent blood-letting experiments I began to wonder if he had not been at Kathmandu for his final training. However, the job had to be done and thinking of the fresh meat I was about to enjoy rather than the fate of poor Octavius, I set about the business. A very large but rather blunt kukri was produced and with Ang Dawa holding Octavius still I cut off his head. I shall never forget the look I got from my companions. I felt like a professional killer and I fancied that I was looked upon as a bit of a traitor. Mathews immediately regaled me with remarks about my inefficiency; he held forth about my poor leg action and succeeded in giving the impression that I had deliberately robbed him of the chance of showing his skill with the kukri. Jackson took a most morbid interest in the skinning and dissecting of Octavius; while Lewis, a practical man always, sat around with a knife and fork.

Our fresh meat, however, proved to be very tough and once

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the offal had been devoured I was more or less left to finish the rest on my own. For several days I carried round a sheep's leg in my rucksack nibbling it whenever I felt hungry.

After this gory interlude Ron Jackson and I set off for Kabru with Lewis, Thami and Ang Dawa to help us with our loads. We travelled quickly along the moraine, hopping from boulder to boulder until a descent had to be made on to a small but very broken glacier flowing down from Kabru to the Yalung. An hour or two of sheer purgatory stumbling over loose rubble-covered ice, and time after time having to retrace our steps, brought us to a long spur running down from the lower slopes of Kabru. The spur was reached by a steep climb up the loosest and most crumbling moraine we had ever faced. Lewis who had crossed this glacier before had raced ahead and now stood cheerfully hailing us from a position on the spur some three hundred feet above us. Jackson and I had been furious at his dashing off, and to see him perched happily up there with the worst part of the crossing behind him infuriated us even more. We hurled abuse at him and started the weary stumble up the moraine. Arriving at the top we dumped our loads and had a smoke.

Lewis directed us to try to gain the crest of the spur from a little way along the moraine and accordingly Ron and I accompanied by Thami, slowly made our way upwards. For a short time the going was reasonably easy but after we had traversed the moraine for a half mile we were prevented from going any further by a steep drop where a big landslide had occurred. We turned to the left and started to climb the side of the spur, and soon found ourselves on steep but very easy rocks. The weather was failing and it was getting late; so we increased our pace somewhat, intent on reaching our camp site to give Lewis and Thami sufficient time to return to Camp II before dark. Lewis, having observed meanwhile that we had been forced up the side of the spur, had found a better route than ours and was making good time on the lower crest of the spur. The rocks we were climbing became more difficult and it was tricky work with forty pounds on our backs. Little Thami was carrying about sixty pounds and we stopped with the intention of giving him the aid of the rope. Sherpas are reputed to be poor rock climbers but we certainly had two exceptions in our party—Pasang Phutar and Thami. On this occasion our tough little Sherpa picked his way upward with the precision of an expert and

Kanchenjunga

it was with great relief that a few minutes later we saw his grinning face appear over the edge of the rocks to join us on the spur. An hour later saw us at our camp site and Gil Lewis and Thami lost no time in hurrying down the spur and back to Moraine Camp (Camp II), where they arrived at 8.30 p.m. in the dark and a storm. Mathews had very sportingly left the comfort of his tent and met them on their return with a torch to guide them in.

Ron and I pitched our tiny tents on two flat platforms of the Kabru Camp which had been constructed by Kempe the year before and were still habitable. Snow was falling and an icy wind blew round our rocky and cheerless camp site; but we brewed some hot chocolate and were soon deep in the folds of our sleeping-bags.

April 29th dawned fair and we were both keen to climb to the top of the spur to see what lay beyond. We ate a large breakfast and wasted no time in moving off. Directly behind us lay the lower slopes of Kabru with tumbled masses of ice dotted here and there. Far below lay the small tributary glacier we had crossed the day before; while above us lay the ridge from where we hoped to see the whole of the South-West Face of Kanchenjunga. As we neared the top of the spur I felt a tremendous excitement and in my enthusiasm increased my speed until I was puffing and blowing like an old walrus. We were close on 17,500 ft. and were not properly acclimatized; both of us were feeling the effects of altitude.

As we topped the spur we sat down in a sheltered spot to regain our breath and look around. The whole of the great face of Kanchenjunga lay before us in its indescribable beauty. Running from Jannu, a great wall of cliffs extends several miles taking in its broad sweep the mighty summits of White Wave, Kangbachen and the highest peak of Kanchenjunga itself; from Kanchenjunga's main summit the South-South-East Ridge descends and climbs twice more over the second and third highest points (South Summit) of the mountain, before it drops in a beautiful white curve forming the South Ridge to the Talung Saddle, an extremely beautiful but formidable looking col right at the head of the valley. From the Saddle the ridge again climbs steeply to Talung Peak and then continues along the summit ridge of Kabru to end in a sensational upward sweep to the summit of Rathong Peak. This mighty wall of rock and ice, nowhere lower than 22,000 ft.,

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forms a great cirque, the floor of which is the Yalung glacier, itself rising to about 18,500 ft. at its head.

Jackson and I were perched some thousand feet above the Yalung at this point and about two miles from the head of the valley which lay out of our field of vision and to our right.

We commanded a view of the entire South-West Face, but it was only when we moved right up to the head of the valley a few days later that we realized how much of the detail of the face was hidden from us. It took us many days before we could grasp the immensity of the scale of the mountain, but at that moment we were the two most contented men in the world. Our hopes were high and our enthusiasm unbounded, and we sat for about an hour looking at the mountains through our binoculars, discussing first one possibility and then another.

One of our greatest concerns was the danger from avalanches and we noted very carefully how frequently and where these fell. We were surprised to find that very little appeared to be falling from Kanchenjunga and this gave us great hope for the coming attempts. The mountain must have been playing a game with us because only a week after this we experienced the full fury of the terrible avalanches which Kanchenjunga hurls with deadly force and regularity on to the glacier below.

Looking across the face there appeared to be three possible routes to the main ridge. The first was Crowley's route: to the left steep slopes sweep upwards from Pache's grave to the main ridge to the south-west and below the summit of Kangbachen. From here there would have to be a long and difficult traverse over Kangbachen to the West Col and then to the main summit. The whole of this traverse, which is approximately one and a half miles in length, would have to be undertaken exposed to the full fury of the constant high winds which never cease to blow high up on the mountain. For this reason Crowley's route seemed unattractive.

A little to the right of this route in the centre of the South-West Face lay the second route. A very steep and broken ice-fall tumbles down in two big steps from a great shelf of ice approximately a mile long and several hundred yards deep which stretches right across the main face of Kanchenjunga. The cliffs below the shelf are precipitous and any hope of scaling them is discounted both by the very great technical difficulty involved and the terrific avalanches which crash down from the edge of the great shelf.

Above the shelf rise steep and rocky slopes leading to the three main summits of the South-East Ridge; these slopes look very difficult and seem to be devoid of suitable camp sites. If the Ice-fall could be climbed an advance base might be built up on the Great Shelf from where an assault on the summit could be launched.

The third possibility lay to the extreme right of the face. A huge buttress abuts on to the end of a beautiful snow ridge running down from the southern end of the Great Shelf. If the top of this buttress could be gained and the snow ridge climbed a party would be able to utilize the broad expanse of the shelf to build up an advance base.

Later as we moved up to the head of the valley other alternatives disclosed themselves but at that moment our view of the face was limited. This proves the necessity of going close to the mountain for a final judgment as in the event none of the three obvious-looking routes proved practicable.

The immediate task in hand was to find a suitable base from where we could start our operations; it was obvious that our present position was useless and a camp site would have to be found on the Yalung glacier and as near to the face as possible.

We moved along the spur a little way with the hope of securing a better view but thick clouds were rolling up the valley and driving hail lashed at us on our breezy perch; so we decided to return to Kabru Camp and the comparative comfort of our rocky shelter.

We moved quickly down to our tents and made a large stew in the pressure cooker. Crowding into Ron's tent we discussed what we had seen with great excitement. For an hour or two we chatted about the mountain, the expedition and our comrades and gradually reached the realms of philosophy. Ron is a great believer in science but I prefer the biblical line of thought and here we sometimes skipped, sometimes floundered, now walking together, now in opposite directions. We both retired that night a little richer for the experience. We were contented in body and mind as a result of the day's activities and we had a great new adventure before us.

I had in the later part of the day felt a little deaf in my right ear and as I puffed and pushed my way into my totally inadequate sleeping-bag, I felt a twinge of pain like a hot needle stabbing into my brain. For the rest of the night I tossed and turned in the frightful agony of the worst earache I have ever experienced. I

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crawled out of my tent the next day exhausted and still suffering from terrible burning pains which split my head and jaws like a red hot wedge.

Ron made breakfast and I forced myself to eat a little but felt no better. As once more we climbed up to the ridge every step was a great effort, but now I was not alone in my suffering; Ron had started with a bad headache and like a couple of gloom clouds we moved over the ridge and made our way down steep gravel and snow to the Yalung. The weather was again bad; very little could be seen and after two or three hours we retraced our steps to camp. The climb back will stay in my mind forever. Every movement was an agony and I had difficulty in focussing my eyes as the pain in my head became worse. Ron too was obviously suffering and we must have looked a sorry pair as we made our way back to the tents.

On arrival at camp Ron immediately went to bed while I tried to get the Primus going to prepare a hot drink, a thankless task in a cold wind and driving snow. In the middle of this process I heard the sound of a voice and a few moments later Lewis strolled into the camp with a tent and food. He told us that Don Mathews had decided to come up and stay with us to act as cook and he (Gil Lewis) had acted as Don's load carrier. A half hour or so later Don himself arrived puffing and blowing away like the original Rocket. He announced the purpose of his visit and parked himself on a rock to regain his breath when he was given some potatoes to peel. By the time he had rested I had a good stew going on the Primus and Don and Gil fell to with gusto. After he had eaten, Gil bade us farewell and set off back to the more cheerful Camp II below. Observing our reluctance to eat, Mathews immediately insisted on treating us, and dished up pills and other psychological palliatives with careless abandon. I do not know to this day what treatment I underwent but a couple of hours later I felt no pain at all and that night I had a dreamless sleep.

Don not only brought us medical relief but acted as a general tonic himself. He is quite the most amusing man I have ever met and in times of stress his ready humour and personal courage are beyond price. To have him with us in our dreary camp was really wonderful and very soon the three of us were crowded into Ron's tent drinking chocolate and listening to Don's incomparable stories.

Don's account of that day is entered in his diary as follows:
30.5.54.

"Went to Kabru camp. Miserable, long climb. Found Ron in bed with headache, Jack with earache. No Sherpas so helped Jack cook a meal. Very cold and windy. I have never known a meal cooked under such arduous conditions in so remote, cheerless and sordid a spot!"

Mathews was an ardent admirer of the great Dr. Wilson who died with Captain Scott on the march back from the South Pole, and elsewhere in his diary is the entry: "Wilson however was the epitome of what an expedition doctor should be like." I think we all felt that Don had quite a share of the Wilson spirit.

On May 1st we agreed to descend to the lateral moraine of the Yalung and place a further camp (III) on some rocks we had observed the day before. This decision was obviously very popular with Don who was feeling the extreme discomfort of our Kabru Camp. We had stocked the camp for several days and therefore had rather more loads than three of us could manage. I was all for taking the lot down in one go, but Mathews and Jackson intended to make two journeys. Accordingly we packed our bags and made off. In my efforts to evacuate myself in a single journey I rather overdid things and nearly burst my lungs with the effort of moving my load. I had on my back a huge sack containing most of the food, a pressure cooker, two Primuses and all my personal kit, the whole lot weighing about seventy pounds. I carried tied on the top a tent and ropes and to complete the picture I slung a two gallon tin of kerosene round my neck. Slowly and like a small Churchill tank I waddled down the spur taking a very much easier route than we had previously followed. I had just succeeded in making my mind a complete blank, the better to ignore the agony in my shoulders and the pain of the kerosene tin banging against my legs, when a patter of running feet announced the coming of our expedition doctor. Don flashed past me at a great rate intent on reaching the comparative comfort of the moraine as soon as possible; he said he had decided to travel light and send a Sherpa up for his remaining gear. He was certainly travelling "light"; on a piece of nylon cord slung round his shoulders he had his sleeping-bag and movie camera; Ron, not quite so barefaced, was making good time below with about fifty pounds on his back.

Right at the bottom of the spur we found a delightful sheltered

The Head of the Yalung Glacier

spot where at one time a small lake had been; for a few hundred yards a brownish dusty moss covered the ground and after our camp of the last few days it was like heaven. We decided to make this Camp III and stay here a night so that we could go back for the rest of our equipment. With a great sigh of relief I sat on a rock while a very amused Jackson released me from my self-inflicted agony.

As we were erecting our tents a hail from across the glacier announced the coming of John Kempe and Trevor Braham with two or three Sherpas, and an hour later we were all sitting together drinking lemonade and exchanging views. In the meantime Mathews without turning a hair despatched two Sherpas to bring down the rest of our equipment from the Kabru Camp.

Kempe and Braham had with them most of the gear from the temporary moraine camp (II), and after erecting the tents some of the Sherpas returned to join Lewis who was to follow up the next day with the rest of our supplies. There was still no sign of Ajeeba and the Sherpas' food but Kempe told us that Pasang Phutar had gone off down the valley in an effort to purchase tsampa and kerosene at a village two days' journey away. It was nice to be together again and we made plans to move a little further up the moraine the next day and begin the reconnaissance in earnest.

For once it was a fine day and after spending some time polishing up our rock-climbing technique on a nearby boulder we lounged about smoking, drinking tea and discussing the immediate future.

XVI

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THE second of May saw us moving our camp almost to the end of the lateral moraine which runs along the left bank of the Yalung. From here we could look across at the spur which carries Pache's grave and the formidable looking slopes leading up to Kangbachen. About six hundred feet below us lay the great glacier and we were anxious to be away and explore the upper reaches of the vast snowy cwm at the end of which rises the Talung Saddle.

Kanchenjunga

After we had moved the camp to our new temporary base, which became Camp IV, we sent the Sherpas down to help Lewis move the rest of the equipment from the lower moraine camp. We ourselves decided there was no time like the present for taking a look round and with Kempe and Braham leading and Jackson and myself behind we set off. Mathews was very keen to accompany us, so Jackson and I tied him between us. Don had never climbed in his life and it was a rather hilarious party which followed Kempe and Braham. The descent down the horrible moraine was transformed from sheer drudgery (which we came to know quite well in the next few days) to what amounted to a comic act. Don had not yet got his "mountain legs" and as he slithered and scrambled down the slopes he treated us to a Rabelaisian commentary on the benefits of life in Calcutta and civilization in general. Once on the glacier we made quick time up a thin strip of rocks which ran almost unbroken for a mile or so up the centre of the ice. On either side the glacier rose and tumbled in gigantic ice-pinnacles and gaping crevasses. For an hour we plodded on until the rocks gave out into a most bewitching cascade of *séracs* and gaping chasms and here we stopped to don our crampons. With Trevor leading we carefully picked our way through the ice for a couple of hours until we emerged once more on fairly level ground. The glacier had climbed pretty steeply and we now found ourselves on a wide expanse of flat hard ice with very little to worry us in the way of crevasses but with the dangerous possibility of avalanches coming down from the slopes of Kabru and Talung Peak far above us. We pushed on steadily bearing to the left in an effort to avoid the avalanche danger, until once more the glacier climbed upwards and involved us in a repeat performance of what we had experienced an hour or so previously. At this point the ice rose up in very high ridges and exceptionally deep and wide gaps which were more like small valleys than crevasse and we had to toil up one side then carefully cut our way down the other. Occasionally we had to traverse these ice-waves and it was on one of these that Don insisted on trying his hand at step cutting. Ron and I waited patiently for Don who pecked and scratched away with the pick of his axe like an old hen. After a while we introduced him to a technique which I personally favour above all others; namely grasping the shaft of the axe firmly in both hands and giving the ice a number of good hefty blows with

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the pick to produce a nice big step one can stand in with comfort. Don's first effort swung him clean off his feet where he dangled suspended between the unsympathetic forms of Ron and myself. It is only fair to relate that Don put in a great deal of training after this episode and soon became most proficient in the use of rope, ice-axe and crampons.

At about 3.30 p.m. we reached a point where the glacier was broken up into flat rock-strewn sections with a number of small green lakes dotted about. We chose one of the more hospitable spots as a future site for Camp V and set off on our return journey down the glacier. Once again cloud came drifting up the valley and in a dismal hail and snow storm we retraced our steps. The moraine was as awkward to climb as it was to descend and, covered in new snow, gave us an hour of hard and miserable scrambling.

Arriving in camp we found Ang Dawa the cook, and Balu cheerfully preparing a hot meal; their grins widened perceptibly as we hungrily wolfed down the food as fast as they produced it.

While we had been having the fun of carrying out the first reconnaissance of the upper glacier, the stoical Lewis had been engaged in the thankless task of organizing the ferrying of our stores up to our present Camp IV. This involved the dreary crossing of the small tributary glacier running down from Kabru, and Lewis and his men had that day made two trips which involved four crossings. He had now gone back again to spend the night at the lower camp, II (Camp III having been permanently abandoned) having very thoughtfully left two Sherpas behind to prepare our evening meal. Lewis took on more than his fair share of these unexciting tasks and accepted them always with a ready smile which was usually followed by an apt quotation.

The party was at this stage rather split up. At our temporary base, Camp IV, were Kempe, Braham, Mathews, Jackson and myself, with the Sherpas Ang Dawa IV and Balu; at the lower camp, II, were Lewis, Thami, Pasang Dorji and Lakaya; and in solitary isolation way back in Tseram lay our sick porter, "The Intellectual", with his attack of mumps. Pasang Phutar and his two lady friends were beating around the bottom end of the Yalung valley foraging, while Ajeeba, for all we knew, was enjoying a wild spree in Kathmandu. In view of all this Kempe decided that Ron Jackson and I should have a day off on the morrow while he and

Kanchenjunga

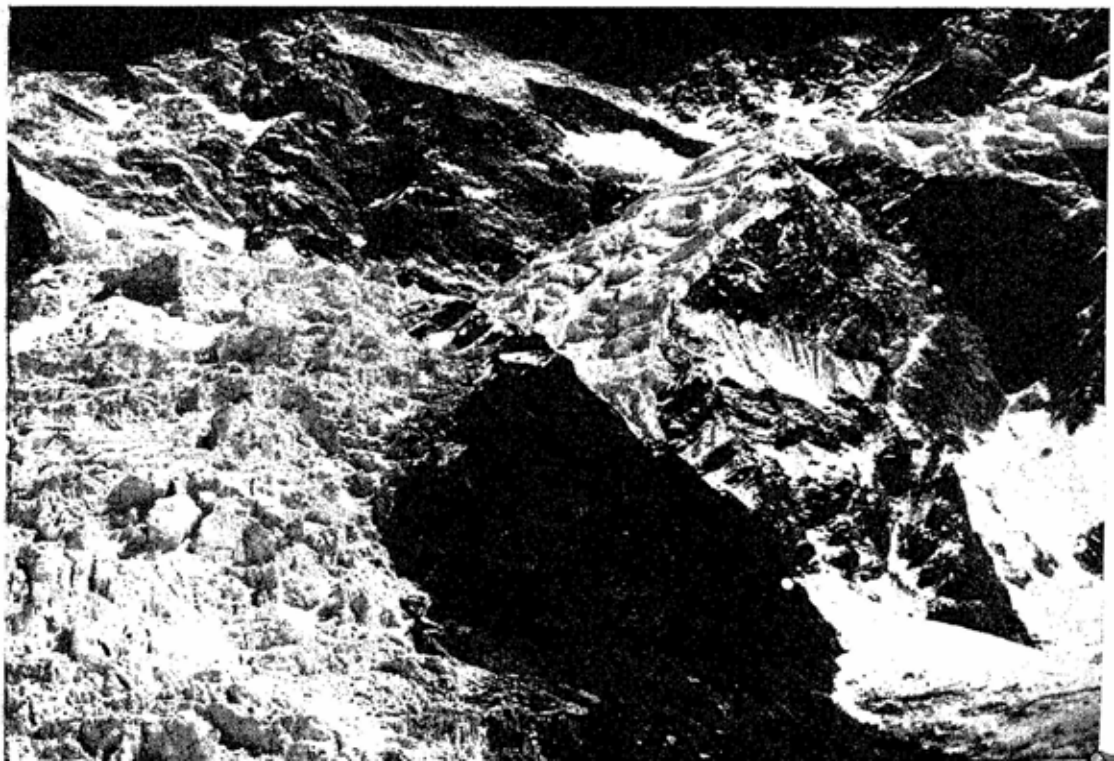
Trevor paid a visit to the other side of the glacier to examine the face from Pache's grave. This would give Lewis at least time to catch up with the main party and also give us time to consolidate our position.

The next day as Mathews played with his bottles and Jackson and I loafed about in the sunshine, Kempe and Braham set off down the side of the moraine to explore the route across to Pache's grave.

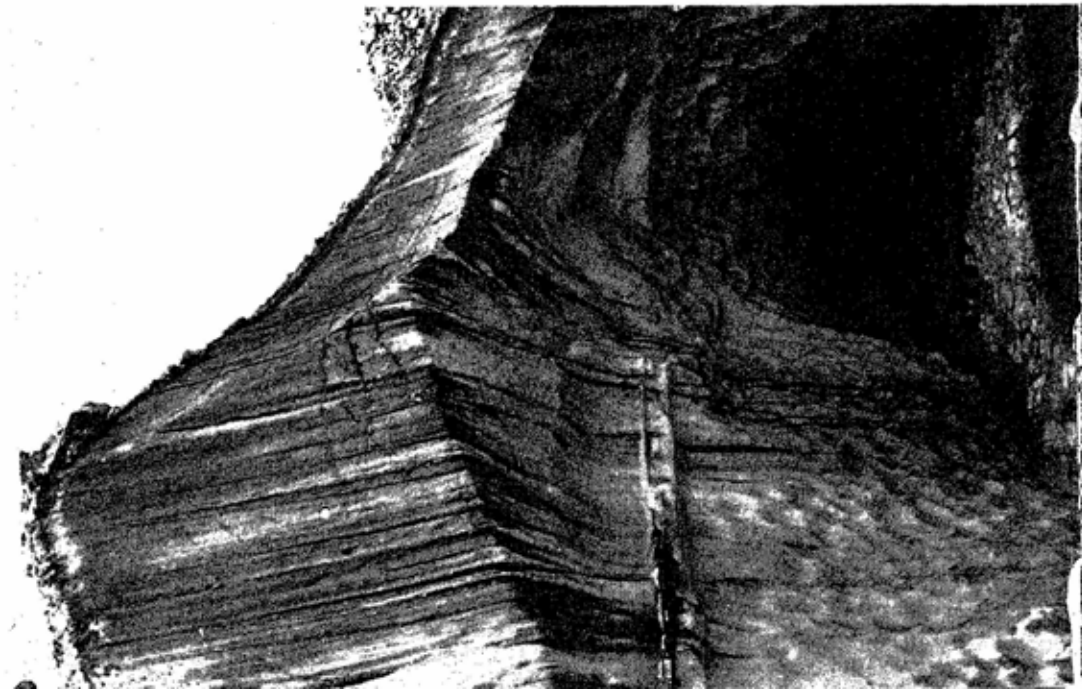
At first they found it reasonably easy going and we watched them pick their way straight across the Yalung making for the opposite (western) bank. Very soon they disappeared in the maze of fantastic pinnacles about two-thirds of the way across the glacier and we saw them no more until late that afternoon. From where we had last seen them they became involved in arduous and often difficult step cutting; they had to negotiate one of the very worst crevassed and dangerous areas of the glacier and for hours they climbed and cut their way through the tangled mass of ice below the slopes of Kangbachen. Time and time again they retraced their steps and often had to descend into the deep troughs of ice only to find no way out on the other side. Eventually, after much strenuous work they found themselves almost directly below the huge mass of rocks on which the ill-fated expedition of 1905 had camped. The next problem was how to surmount this obstacle? The whole of the side of the rocky island was very steep and loose, and from time to time falls of rock would slither down to the glacier below. The two climbers made their way along the bottom of the rocks searching for a suitable way to reach the top and eventually decided to climb a rather open section topped by some firm looking rock. As they slowly made their way upward they had to take great care not to dislodge loose rubble on to each other and kept well apart to make for greater safety. When climbing on this type of ground it is dangerous to have another member of the party directly beneath as any rock which might be dislodged would almost certainly hit the lower man and could drag all the party away; if the climbers keep well apart this danger is minimized. Bearing this in mind Kempe and Braham safely reached the solid looking rocks and prepared to mount them. To their intense disgust they found that the rocks were just as unstable as the ground they had covered. Carefully and with great patience they negotiated the difficult section and heaved sighs of



The Talung Cwm. Talung saddle is the col on the right of picture
S.W. Face and Ice fall from the Upper Yalung Glacier (The Rock Rib
used in ascent is centre of picture)



Ice cave on
Yalung Glacier



Kanchenjunga
from Talung
Peak. Note the
three figures bot-
tom left which
give some indica-
tion of the scale

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relief as they came out on to the easier ground above. Very soon they found themselves on top of the rock island and here a surprise awaited them. The top of the rock was actually fairly level and there was even a large area covered in a sort of thick black lichen. But strangest of all they found the camp site in a good state of preservation. Kempe said he experienced a most uncanny sensation as they poked about the camp. Quite distinctly they could see the sites of the tents where the rocks had been levelled, looking as if they had only recently been evacuated. All around lay old kerosene and food tins and even bits of wood from packing cases; but most pathetic of all they found a rough wooden cross lying on the site of the grave of Pache and his companions. The whole area gave the impression that the party had only just left and the two men found it hard to appreciate that they were standing at the scene of a tragedy which had been enacted fifty years ago and fifteen years before they themselves were even born.

Turning their backs on these relics of one of the most unfortunate incidents in the whole history of mountaineering, the two climbers studied the great face and the ice-studded slopes which covered it. From the rocks on which they stood a small area of crevasses had to be crossed which gave off on to steep snow slopes. A thousand feet or so above, the slopes were menaced by huge *séracs* which seemed to be stuck on to the face with only providence holding them into position; above these the snow-slopes, no less steep, continued right up to the summit ridge of the mountain. Kempe was of the opinion that this route was worth a try and from what I had seen of it from our camp (IV) I was inclined to agree. The big argument against it was not so much danger from avalanches (which is an ever-present condition on any route up Kanchenjunga) but the incredibly long traverse over Kangbachen and along the summit ridge to the main peak. If it were possible to climb from here to the top of the lower part of the Great Ice-fall and from there to the Great Shelf, then the route was well worth considering. From our position on the glacier it was impossible to ascertain if this were feasible or not.

Meanwhile back at camp Mathews put his chemistry set in order and wrote hieroglyphics on his little bottles while Jackson and I tidied up, listed equipment and looked to our personal kit. With the aid of Mathews' surgical cutting needles I also did a very good repair job on Braham's boots which were bursting at the

seams (he having borrowed a pair of Jackson's temporarily). I was rather proud of my position as uncrowned king of maintenance and was always pleased when I pulled off some little job which was admired by the others; Mathews referred to me in his diary as "Jack—of all trades". These small jobs varied from bits of sewing to mending the shutter of our large ciné-camera and, on one occasion, repairs to Kempe's crampons.

About noon Lewis and his party arrived with the remainder of our stores but there was *still* no sign of Ajeeba or Pasang Phutar. The Sherpas, with the exception of Pasang Dorji and Thami were very sulky and complained interminably. Balu was by far the worst and sulked like a spoiled child; later his conduct was so inexcusable that Kempe threatened to dismiss him on the spot if he did not change his ways; this shook him rather and for a while his attitude changed for the better. I was very disappointed in the Sherpas; they spent most of the time grumbling about the poor equipment and the rations and a dozen other irrelevant matters. They did in fact enjoy very good rations except for the few days while we were waiting for the food supplies brought by Ajeeba and Pasang Phutar; and as for their equipment most of them were better clad than the Sahibs. However, on the few occasions when we demanded their best they did rise to the occasion and it may well be that they are only in top form when they have plenty to do. Or perhaps we were just unlucky with our Sherpas.

After the brief period of sunshine we had enjoyed earlier in the day the weather deteriorated appreciably. We were now quite used to the daily snow storms and ceased to bother about them, but this particular afternoon the weather was unusually bad and being a little anxious about Kempe and Braham out on the glacier we kept a look out from the top of our moraine to watch for their return. At about 5.30 p.m. we heard shouts, and although we could see nothing through the driving snow we assumed they were quite near and prepared hot tea and chapattis for them. It was an hour later that they plodded into camp soaking wet and weary but well satisfied with their day's activities.

Now was the time to reach a decision on our future plans and that night we sat about for a long time discussing the possibilities. Ron and Trevor were very keen to have a look at the third route over the huge buttress at the southern end of the shelf, but John

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and I thought it quite out of the question. We fancied a look at Crowley's route up the slopes above Pache's grave but here Ron and Trevor thought it too menaced by avalanche danger; Lewis was all for moving right up to the head of the valley and having a really good look round before deciding on anything. Faced with Lewis's logical argument we made plans to put a couple of camps higher up the glacier and it was decided that the following day Jackson, Lewis and myself were to get as far as we could to see what lay beyond the corner where the glacier swept into the head of the valley.

That evening the snow stopped falling much earlier than usual and just before darkness overtook us we were treated to some of the most wonderful views of the mountain we had yet had. Don, always on the alert with his ciné-camera, spent some time filming while the rest of us took a few "stills".

The next day was one of the happiest that I spent on the mountain. After Mathews had shouted and railed at us until we crawled out of bed at 6.30 a.m. we had a quick breakfast and made ready to move off. Mathews was bustling around the camp like a young tornado getting us food and filling our water bottles. Don was always in great form in the morning and was invariably the first out of bed. The business of getting up in the morning never ceased to amuse me; we all had our own peculiarities and the way we turned out was as typical of each man's character as was his way of wearing his clothes. Lewis, a prodigious sleeper, was always the last to emerge. A bleary-eyed, tousled head would appear and grumpily enquire about the weather; after several minutes contemplation he would grunt his way out of the sleeve opening of the tent and standing upright would carefully flex his muscles to make sure all were in working order; satisfied thus he would shout for tea and Pasang Dorji never failed to be on hand for the occasion. Jackson usually appeared dressed in his old grey flannels and the most depressing of grey shirts. Ron always wore sombre clothes on the mountain and his rising in the morning suited his apparel. Ron appeared like a grey dawn until he had solemnly said "Good morning" all round, when a slow warm smile would steal across his face and we knew he had made his scientific approach to the new day.

Trevor invariably reversed out of his tent appearing stern first and battered "pork pie" hat last. He wasted no time on ceremony

and sometimes started the day with "Where the hell is my tea?" I always enjoyed Trevor's appearances from his tent and because I could never explain why, his oft repeated enquiry as to what the devil I was laughing at, went unanswered. Best of all was John Kempe. Kempe is one of those people who would look smart with a year's growth of beard and dressed in two old gunny sacks. I always got the impression that in some secret way unknown to the rest of us John had taken a morning bath. He was, as a matter of fact, suspected of washing. Before leaving camp that day I had a slight headache and I accepted, rather contemptuously I fear, some of the doctor's pills. I was almost sorry when later my headache cleared and I had to admit that the pills perhaps had had some effect. However, it is always better not to have a headache, and in the circumstances I was ready to try anything to be rid of it.

Very soon we were descending the horrible moraine and following the route we had taken two days previously. This time instead of bearing left in the upper part of the glacier we kept straight up the centre for as long as we could. Gradually the slope steepened until once more we found ourselves in a large area of *séracs* and wide, but often quite shallow crevasses. After we had been involved in this sort of ground for about an hour we were confronted by a steep wall of pure green ice which overhung at the top like a giant wave. This obstacle had two breaches in its defences; one a short vertical little "chimney" on the left and the other a diagonally ascending portion which led underneath the crest of the wave to a little corner from where it was possible to stride across on to level ice. With Ron Jackson in the lead we moved across to the icy wave and Lewis and I stood about while Ron set to work. There was no danger of falling any distance as the bottom of the wave eased off in a gentle slope into one of the shallow crevasses; it was merely a case of meeting a small problem which temporarily held us up. Lewis watched the rope and I sat on my rucksack and lit my pipe while six feet of Jackson started hacking away up the wave making for the little corner. We were in a rather light-hearted mood and as we watched Ron sweating and grunting his way up the ice we gave a derogatory commentary on his technique. As he got higher there was less room between his feet and the crest of the wave and gradually Ron found himself curled up like a ball as his great length came into contact with the

The Head of the Yalung Glacier

overhanging ice. After a lot of ribald remarks from below Ron's patience became exhausted and he actually swore at us; at the same time a long leg shod at the end with crampon waved around like a large eel with big teeth then suddenly clamped itself on to the icy corner. A few grunts, a lightning wriggle and Ron was standing on the crest beaming down at us. We followed in the steps he had carved and in happy mood we wandered up the glacier taking it in turns to lead and be ridiculed by our companions, or strolling along at the back waiting for the front man to fall into a crevasse. Life was good that day. The sun shone from a cloudless sky and every so often we would sit down on our 'sacks, light up our pipes and leisurely take colour photographs of the wild and beautiful peaks around us. We had been moving well and it seemed no time at all before we found ourselves at the last rise in the glacier and on the fringe of the worst avalanche area. To the right of us the whole of the glacier was covered with avalanche debris; great blocks of ice and ominous looking furrows literally covered the surface and every few minutes a loud crack and a roar would announce another fall of ice; to the left of this area the glacier rose steeply in a wild jumbled mass of ice-towers and a deep crevasse. It looked at first as if we should not get any further and now we had to concentrate in earnest. Not wishing to risk the avalanche-swept area we moved left in an effort to force a way through the crevassed portion of the glacier and after a couple of hours' hard work found we had covered about a hundred yards. As we pushed on up the glacier we became involved in the most bewildering maze of gaping chasms and towering waves of ice I have ever seen and soon it became apparent that it would take days to engineer a route through. We reluctantly turned back and retraced our steps, determined that the next day we should make a quick dash through the avalanche zone and try to force a safer way through the ice from above. However, even though we had not penetrated as far as we had hoped we were not unduly disappointed and still in high spirits we moved very quickly back to our great ice-wave. Once more we had a lot of fun at this pitch and descended by means of the little chimney. It became a point of honour to climb down facing outward and it was very amusing to watch the different approaches of each member to this problem. Ron in three great strides was down like a flash; Lewis sailed down like a high diver, while I with my short legs shot down like a

sprinter in an effort to catch myself up before I fell over. This ice-wave was hardly treated with the respect due to it and I felt that perhaps we should have polished up our ice technique on it in view of what was to follow; but today we were enjoying ourselves far too much to be serious. After leaving the wave we became more businesslike and, keeping a very wary eye open for a concealed crevasse, quickly made our way down to the lower part of the glacier. At about 5.30 p.m. we toiled up the moraine once more, and over big pots of lemonade swapped yarns with our three friends about the day's activities.

Kempe and Braham had taken Mathews out for the day on the lower slopes of Kabru, the object being to teach him the use of ice-axe and crampons. They had had a very good day and Don had proved very quick to learn, Kempe assuring us that he had never before taught such an apt pupil. Don proved his ability later when, in the most inaccessible places, he and Thami would appear as if from nowhere, calmly set up the ciné-camera and photograph the activity around them. Thami was a most intelligent little man and he and Don made a very efficient team. However, Don was not as elated as he might have been on this evening; he was suffering badly from a sore throat and very badly cracked lips. It was pathetic to see our poor doctor parting his lips in a vain endeavour to prevent himself from laughing as we each in turn recounted the amusing incidents of the day. Most of the party at some time suffered from badly cracked and blistered lips in spite of liberal applications of glacier cream. I personally escaped this discomfort thanks to the protection I received from my heavy moustache which hung low over my lips.

The morning of May 5th saw Braham and Jackson with two Sherpas, Balu and Pasang Dorji, moving off to establish Camp V by the lake we had discovered earlier. Kempe's plan was to send them off from there with three days' food in an effort to force their way right up to the head of the glacier, and if possible to probe the lower end of the Talung Cwm, the entry to our third route. Lewis with a further two porters was to follow in support and the rest of us move up with the whole of our gear a day behind them. The intention was to have a well advanced base near the lake from where it was hoped to establish a series of camps right up into the Talung Cwm, or the Great Ice-fall, depending on which offered the most feasible approach to the Great Shelf.

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I was pleased to be staying in Camp IV. For several nights I had not slept and was beginning to feel heavy-eyed and listless. Mathews urged me to take some sleeping pills but I refused in the belief that sooner or later I would be bound to sleep if it were only through sheer exhaustion—a stupid approach to the problem but which at the time seemed reasonable. I think Don was a bit angry with me and on the following night after wearily dragging myself up to the Lake Camp I allowed him to bully me into taking some of his pills; the result was a wonderful night's sleep and a new lease of energy.

As Braham and Jackson disappeared over the moraine I turned to the most urgent problem of the day. The shutter on the Paillard Bolex ciné-camera had jammed and all Don's efforts to release it had failed. Poor Don was at his wits' end and he threw the camera on one side as being of no further use until we reached civilization where repairs could be effected. In answer to a last appeal from our movie enthusiast I took a look at his expensive, but at the moment valueless, piece of machinery and after a couple of hours fiddling with surgical forceps, files and needles I succeeded in getting the mechanism going again. Don's gratitude was touching and he offered me a pair of fur-lined boots as "baksheesh".

At this late stage there was still no sign of Pasang and the extra food and we were very worried indeed at the rate at which our rations were being consumed. We were obliged to give the Sherpas full European rations instead of half and half as planned and unless Pasang was successful in his foraging it was quite likely that lack of food would force us to withdraw from the mountain. Ajeeba who was still missing and "The Intellectual", who had moved in with the yak-herd and his family, had not yet got over his attack of mumps. This was really a blessing as his isolation at Tseram meant there was one less mouth to feed.

In a not too happy frame of mind we retired to our tents determined that food or no food we should press on for as long as we were able.

XVII

The Upper Yalung

KEMPE and I were away very early on the morning of May 6th, our object being to follow up Jackson and Braham and take a look at the upper part of the glacier. Don as usual saw us off and we left him bustling around the camp checking stores, and haranguing the Sherpas about using too much paraffin. He had been put in charge of rations and was taking his responsibilities very seriously. We were by now quite familiar with the great pile of rubble of the moraine and there were actually visible signs of our route down to the glacier in the form of an erratic little path trodden out in the course of our frequent comings and goings on to the ice below.

Once on the ribbon of moraine in the centre of the lower section of the glacier we made very good time and only three quarters of an hour saw us at the first crevassed section where we sat down to don our crampons. It was a beautiful morning without a cloud in the sky, the air as still as a June morning. All around us the great wall with its glistening peaks stood pink and gold in the morning sunshine—even the granite cliffs shone with a dull yellow glow—and the glacier around us twinkled white with deep green and blue streaks as the sunlight played in and out of the twisted hummocks and long icicles which hung in abundance from the tottering pinnacles. Sometimes life becomes most uncomfortable and even miserable on these great mountains but these unpleasant memories soon fade. Only the pleasant and exhilarating experiences always remain in the memory and serve for many years to remind the mountaineer of the great days of high endeavour and inspiring comradeship between the man, his companions, and the mountain world which he has been privileged to enjoy. Such an experience was ours on this wonderful morning as we sat higher than most of our fellow men scattered throughout the world.

We lazed a long time smoking and drinking lemonade, until the shortening shadows as the sun climbed on to the shoulder of Talung Peak warned us that the day would not last forever.

The Upper Yalung

Shouldering our rucksacks, heavy with more food and supplies for the upper camp, we tied on the rope and threaded our way through the familiar tangled mass of ice until once more we found ourselves on the level portion leading to the lake.

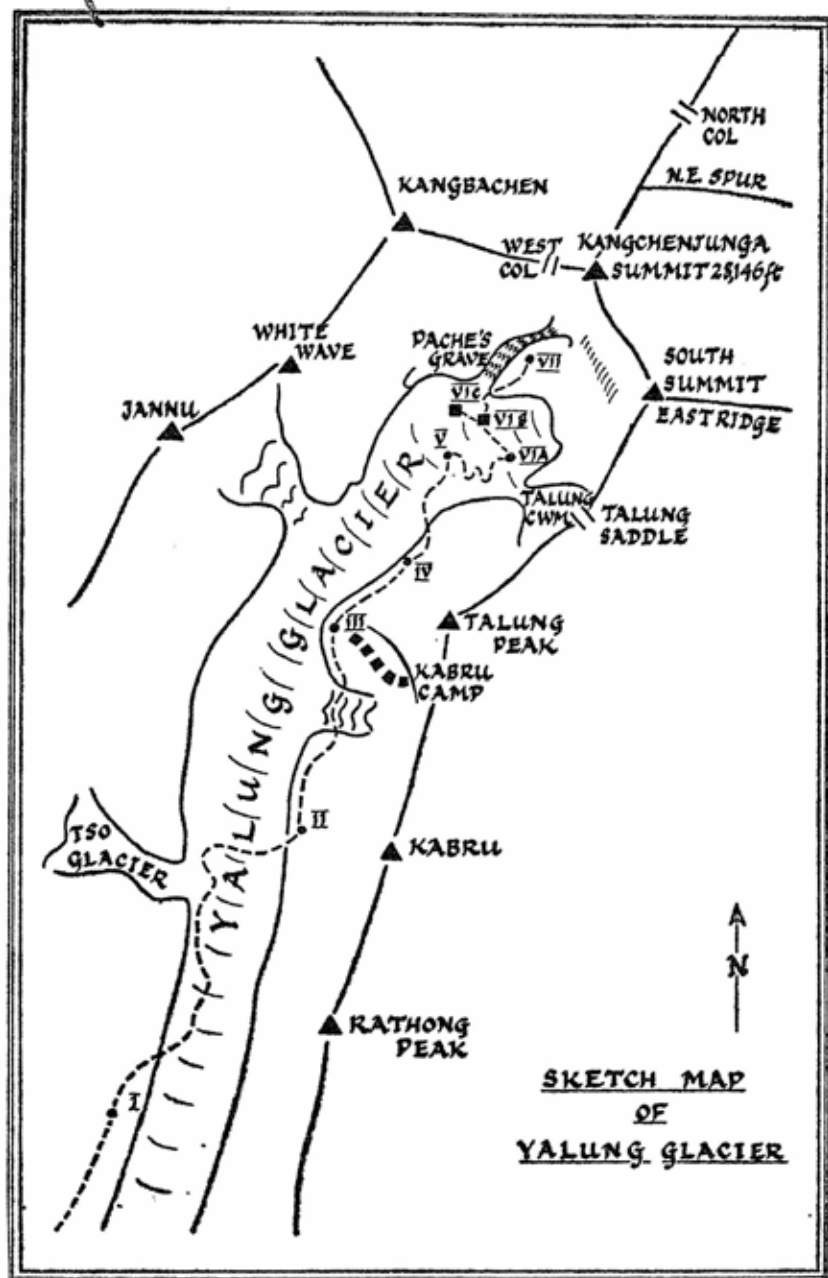
Arriving at Camp V we surprised Ron and Trevor at breakfast. I noticed how they were showing signs of having been away from civilization for some time. Their hair was long and matted, scraggy beards adorned their chins, lips were cracked and faces were showing signs of excessive exposure to the weather. With grimy hands they pushed food into their mouths looking for all the world like Sherpas themselves. They smiled at us showing their white teeth and after a polite "good morning" offered us mugs of tea and chapattis. We accepted gratefully and joined them at the huge rock which was doing service as a table.

Breakfast finished and ropes and crampons adjusted, we moved off in two parties up the glacier. Trevor and Ron had decided to risk a quick move through the avalanche area and knowing what the alternative was we followed. Taking it in turns we threaded our way through a maze of large crevasses until we reached the sudden steepening which led out on to the debris-covered ice above. From here we were on new ground; I could feel the excitement mounting within me and I sensed the quickening interest of my companions as we prodded and cut our way upwards. Reaching the first of the debris we increased our pace, and keeping as far to the left as we could, sometimes skirting the area and sometimes cutting across, we made good time in the direction of a long ribbon of rocks similar to that which we followed below our moraine camp. Well spread out and moving very quickly, all the time keeping a watchful eye on the slopes above us, we had little time to look around. Nothing moved above, but at one place in the side of Talung Peak there was a great icy groove polished smooth and looking exactly like a bobsleigh run, which extended some fifteen hundred feet in length. At the bottom of this chute debris was piled to a great height and covered many acres of ground. It was obviously the main channel through which the whole of the upper face of Talung Peak emptied its ice rubbish as the elements got to work loosening and weakening its hold on the mountain side. The whole area was very unhealthy and it was a great relief to find ourselves able to mount the ribbon of boulders well out of reach of any avalanche. We stopped here for a while,

took off our crampons and goggles, and stretched ourselves out on the warm rocks. It was heavenly to feel warm, relaxed and safe, and for several minutes each of us was content to be alone with his thoughts.

After a short rest we set off up the strip of moraine walking sometimes on the rocks and sometimes on the fringing ice, chatting and looking round. What we saw shook us considerably. The whole aspect of the South-West Face had altered and it was some time before we could grasp the great changes which had occurred in what we had come to look upon as the topography at the head of the valley.

The first surprise was the Great Ice-fall. Until now we had imagined it as rising up in two great steps with a shallow dip in the middle; what we saw was quite different. The lower part of the Ice-fall rose with incredible steepness and in a bewildering maze of *séracs* for about two thousand five hundred feet to finish in a long and slightly descending depression to the right; this depression runs along the face for about a quarter of a mile before rising once more at a slightly less acute angle into the upper part of the fall. The upper part of the ice was less broken but threatened by great ice-cliffs scattered about in abundance. The whole of the Ice-fall is overshadowed by an amazingly steep wall to the left consisting for the most part of granite cliffs but with unhealthy looking snow-slopes breaking up the face. The Ice-fall terminates beneath the crescent shaped rocks so conspicuous from Darjeeling and which lie at the northern end of the Great Shelf, now presenting itself to us as a long line of huge ice-cliffs frowning down from halfway up the mountain. Even though our view was very foreshortened we could still see the grim-looking summit of Kanchenjunga with its perpetual banner of driven snow. To the immediate right of the Ice-fall was a huge rocky rib forming the left bastion of the lower cliffs of the South-West Face. We were later to make close acquaintance with this route. All these cliffs are of forbidding steepness; they sweep round almost unbroken in a wide cirque finishing up at the extreme right in a massive buttress which dominates the scene at the lower end of the south ridge of the mountain. Further round still stands the Talung Saddle, well guarded by a tumbling mass of ice and liberally festooned with hanging ice-cliffs ready to hurl a barrage of artillery at anyone foolish enough to challenge their superiority. Sweeping southwards



and opposite the South-West Face were the steep and formidable looking slopes of Talung Peak and Kabru.

We were almost at the very end of the valley and in a mountaineer's paradise. The whole prospect which lay before us looked difficult and not a little dangerous, but tremendously exciting. The outcome of our first good look at the approaches to the shelf was that Jackson and Braham seemed determined to make a closer inspection of the approach to the Hog's Back which was prominent on the top of the great buttress near the entrance to the Talung Cwm (our third route). Ron Jackson in particular was confident that a route could be found straight up the buttress itself but it seemed to the rest of us that if the Hog's Back were to be reached it could only be by a long ascending traverse from high up under the Talung Saddle. My personal impression was that the route into the Talung Cwm if it were at all feasible, would prove exceedingly dangerous; from where we were it was not at all possible to see above the Talung Ice-fall nor could we see the approach to the Hog's Back. However, we could see a hanging glacier above the huge ice-cliffs overlooking the Talung Ice-fall and if this were gained and the top of the buttress reached from here, the route to the shelf would no doubt prove feasible and, as Trevor put it, "classic". Personally I felt that the easiest and most direct route to the summit would do for me and the "classic" routes could be left to a later generation. Ron generally was attracted to rock climbs while Trevor preferred snow and ice.

At this time when we had our first good look at the face, however, we were highly optimistic and possible routes seemed to present themselves everywhere we looked. Whether it was the altitude, the excitement, or an unconquerable faith in ourselves, I do not know, but we returned to the Lake Camp (V) (after once more traversing the avalanche area) in rare high spirits.

Kempe and I left our two friends preparing for the next day's move and set off once more back to the Moraine Camp (IV). We were beginning to know the glacier quite well now and returned at a very rapid pace. We had been on the move nine hours but were not feeling unduly tired; we were in fact rather elated at the magnificent and awe-inspiring scenes we had so recently witnessed. Such was our mood that we almost ran down the glacier and four o'clock in the afternoon saw us reclining on

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our Lelos in Camp IV excitedly describing to Mathews and Lewis the mountain and the top end of the valley.

A welcome surprise awaited us at Camp IV. Ajeeba and Pasang with the two Sherpas and coolies recruited at Ghunza greeted us with smiles and salutes; best of all they had ample supplies of tsampa and potatoes. The whole of the party was now together and morale was very high; even Ang Dawa III, "The Intellectual", his moon-like face showing no sign of his past illness, was there to greet us. It was a very happy party which sat around the packing-case table that night, and to put the finishing touch to a perfect day the Sherpas made a fire with two great bundles of wood specially carried up by Pasang and Ang Dawa to "make like home Sahib!"

The next day in dull weather Gil Lewis with four Sherpas moved off early to start the ferry up to the Lake Camp (Camp V). Those of us remaining packed up the tents, made up loads and prepared to follow. First however we had to pay off the coolies and Sherpanis brought up by Pasang and see them safely on their way. The Ghunza men were a very cheerful lot and walked around showing great interest in all we were doing; they had done very well in coming so far up the glacier and were not a bit perturbed at the prospect of returning in bad weather. Don took some amusing shots of them and then handed the ciné to me to take some pictures of them dancing. They formed up in a line looking most picturesque in their quaint clothing and high Tibetan boots. Don did a few pirouettes to get them in the mood and then the whole lot launched into the most amusing series of contortions I have ever seen. Flinging their arms about, hopping madly round, first on one foot and then the next, all the while grinning broadly and letting off wild yells, they made a great show. I was laughing so hard that I had difficulty in holding the camera steady. They were still dancing as they moved off down in the direction of our old temporary camp.

After the coolies had left us we wasted no time in getting away. Leaving just one tent with a few rations and a sleeping-bag in case Camp IV had to be used in an emergency we stacked the surplus loads and shouldering our heavy packs left for the Lake Camp (V). On this occasion we did not make such good time. New snow had already obliterated the tracks of Lewis's party and visibility was not too good; to add to this neither Mathews nor I were very fit.

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I had started with periods of laboured breathing which I could not account for and Mathews was feeling (and looked) very tired. Don told me I was still suffering from lack of sleep and I promised to take some of "Mathews Midnight Marvels" that evening; I forgot to do so however and had another sleepless night.

In the heavily crevassed area, we passed Pasang and Ajeeba with other Sherpas returning for the remaining loads; Kempe urged them to spend the night at Camp IV if the weather became worse but they assured him they were all right and would return.

We plodded rather dejectedly upward and after what seemed an age we arrived at the Lake area. We had such difficulty in recognizing landmarks, however, that it was some time before we found Camp V. Braham and Jackson had moved up to the head of the valley with all their equipment, and Lewis, arriving without any previous knowledge of the actual site, had camped a little away from the spot near a much smaller lake. Gil was fine on this occasion and had our tents pitched and tea waiting for us. It is sad to relate however that such was my state of mind and body that I decided my tent was not in sufficient shelter from the icy wind which was blowing, and before Gil's wounded and wondering eyes I moved my tent behind a huge rock which was balanced most precariously on a pinnacle of ice. I paid for my churlishness by lying awake half the night, as the glacier creaked and groaned around me, wondering if the big rock would topple down on top of me.

An interesting feature of that day's activities was the different effect the climb had on Mathews and myself. I was under the impression that we had climbed slowly and rather lamely to the Lake Camp and noted the fact in my diary. Mathews who did the journey with us made an entry for the same day which reads: "Hard work keeping up with Kempe and Tucker who move rapidly with infrequent rest halts."

A serious problem which had to be faced, if we were going to stay any length of time at higher camps, was that of keeping the upper camps supplied. Jackson and Braham had gone on ahead to set up such camps as they thought necessary, but until we joined them we had no idea how frequent would the journeys be between our Lake Camp (V) and above. It was obvious that several journeys would have to be made and in this event it was essential that a safe route be found for the porters, which would avoid the avalanche area. Accordingly the next day Lewis with Balu and

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Thamj set off to try to find a route through the steep and very broken area well out of range of the avalanches. Kempe and I moved as quickly as we could through "Forget-me-not Walk" (as I had christened the avalanche zone) in an effort to force a way down from the top of the glacier, through the broken area, to join Lewis half-way. As we emerged on to the strip of rubble where we had lazed so happily a day or two before we were surprised to see the figure of Braham wandering about at the upper end apparently taking photographs. Far away beyond the end of the moraine we could see three tiny tents pitched right up at the head of the glacier. Trevor and Ron had decided to wait for reinforcements before moving any higher and were taking it easy for a day until we arrived. I think Trevor was rather surprised to see us and after enquiring into our activities he moved off to the upper camp, VIa, which was to become our first advanced base camp, while John and I started our search for a route which would join up with Gil's party. We spent hours toiling backwards and forwards along the ruins of giant crevasses and up and down great ridges of ice; sometimes the way was blocked by great boulders lying across icy towers and frequently we had to edge our way along narrow crests of doubtful snow. At one place a narrow and very rickety looking snow bridge spanned a crevasse of abysmal blackness and very gingerly I made my way across with Kempe rather insecurely planted on the top of a thin ridge. The whole thing tottered and groaned as I inched my way forward until with a thankful sigh I reached the other side where a very doubtful stance afforded me the only reasonable place to guard John as he quickly followed. It was some time before we did finally make contact with Lewis and his party. The first we saw of him was his bulky figure appearing against the skyline followed by that of Balu; they gave us a cheery wave and Gil followed this up with a most illuminating account in exceedingly blunt terms, of the difficulties of the route. Most of that day we spent engineering this route and at the end of it all we agreed that it was far too involved and not even very safe; the Sherpas had a word or two to say about it also and moved in favour of "Forget-me-not Walk". In view of this John Kempe decided to move up enough supplies for ten days to give us time to have a good look round and decide on our route up the face when further supplies would be carried through and a series of camps set up.

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On our return to Lake Camp Gil Lewis wasted no time in getting away with some of the porters to carry the first supplies to Camp VIa which was our advance base at about 19,000 ft.¹ We had tossed up for this doubtful privilege and Gil had lost. We watched them through binoculars until they disappeared over the lower step and caught only a fleeting glimpse of them after that as they moved quickly through the upper part of "Forget-me-not Walk".

The day had been a fine one as far as the weather was concerned and it was a great pity that we had had to spend it toiling through crevasses and *séracs*. All day we had been experiencing the full glare of the glacier ice and for the first time experienced the awful glacier lassitude which the late F. S. Smythe so graphically describes in his book *Kanchenjunga Adventure*. It became an effort to move, and even to think was a disagreeable chore. On top of this I was still suffering badly from lack of sleep and that night did take a couple of Mathews' pills; the result was a perfect night and I awoke the next day really refreshed and ready for work. The night before this blessed sleep I had lain in my tent with thick frost forming rapidly inside as the condensation from my breath froze; the wind had howled and groaned around us all night and heavy snow flurries had piled up against the tents weighting them down until they threatened to collapse. I had tossed and turned in wakeful misery for ten hours without even the solace of a book and had crawled out next day into the morning sunshine with a thick head, blood-shot eyes and a surly temper. The morning of May 9th however was quite different. The others told me that it had been an even worse night and indeed when I woke up that morning thick hoar-frost again covered everything inside the tent and formed a thick layer over the inside of the canvas. I had slept in my little woolly ski-cap and Balaclava helmet pulled down over my face, and when I awakened about half an inch of ice had formed around my mouth and frozen my beard and helmet together. But such was my sleep that none of these discomforts had been noticed and as I pulled on my boots and windproofs I felt fitter than at any other time on the expedition. This was certainly a turning point for me and for the rest of the expedition I felt ready for anything,

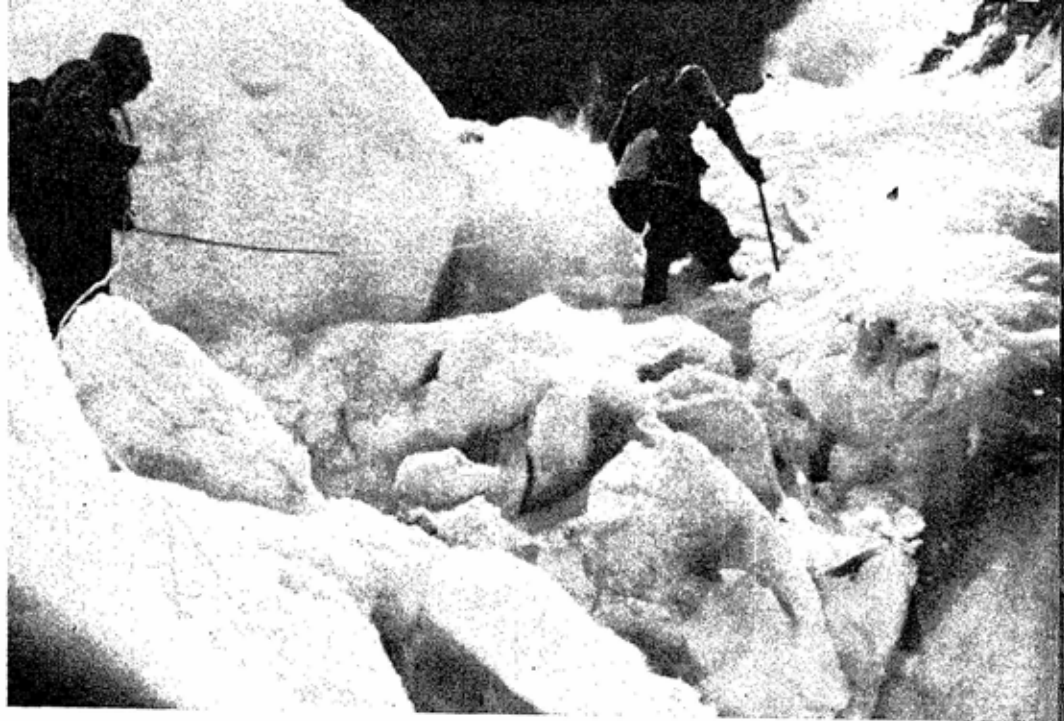
¹Both our altimeters had ceased to function and from Advanced Base VIa we could only estimate our heights in comparison with known landmarks, e.g. Pache's Grave.



Advance Base at the
entrance of Talung
Cwm



Dr. Mathews leading a
party through the
upper glacier



Braham and Lewis
making the route
through the lower sec-
tion of Talung Cwm



At the entrance to
Talung Cwm

The Upper Yalung

thoroughly enjoying the wonderful climbing which followed the establishing of our Advanced Base.

In a very cheerful frame of mind we set off with the Sherpas for Camp VIa and once more traversed the danger area in speed and safety to arrive there just in time to take leave of Lewis, Braham and Jackson as they set out for the first serious probe into the Talung Cwm. Their intention was to climb up to the great buttress via a very dangerous looking couloir flanked on the right by two small rock outcrops and on the left by the buttress itself. Directly above them rose a bank of huge ice-cliffs which looked none too stable. The whole prospect was quite daunting and a little later in the day Kempe confided in me that he was on the point of forbidding them to attempt this route; very wisely (I thought) he said nothing beyond urging them to take great care and left the decision to their own common sense and judgment. I too thought the proposition hopeless but on a reconnaissance such as ours every possibility had to be looked at and every alternative tried. It is to their credit that the party went up there, looked, tried, and returned to pronounce the route far too dangerous and too difficult for heavily laden Sherpas.

Kempe, Mathews and I erected our tents and established ourselves in Camp VIa. Braham and Jackson had chosen a site well up at the head of the main glacier basin and about three-quarters of a mile from the foot of the fantastic cliffs which plunge down from the summit of Kanchenjunga to form the South-West Face. To our left the face swept round in a magnificent amphitheatre finishing up at the Great Ice-fall while opposite and to our right rose the massive walls of Talung Peak. The Talung Cwm lay directly ahead, sandwiched between the face of Kanchenjunga and Talung Peak, and as we sat back to await breakfast which was being prepared by Ang Dawa we watched our comrades through the glasses. For some time they climbed slowly upward mounting the very steep lower slopes of the Talung Cwm until they were obscured from our view by a towering mass of ice at the foot of the couloir. A little later they reappeared, still moving upwards and, to us back in camp, appeared to be in the couloir and in the direct line of fire from any avalanche which might sweep down from the ice-cliffs some thousand feet above them. We watched them a little longer, then prepared to move away ourselves. We had chosen for our objective that day a narrow rib

of rock running almost up the centre of the face to the long dip between the lower and upper sections of the Great Ice-fall. This is not the big rock rib we eventually climbed but another smaller one about half a mile nearer the Talung Cwm. The approach to the foot of the rib which lay at about 20,000 ft. was across a gradually ascending portion of the glacier. We then had two alternatives of steep smooth snow slopes to the left of a huge flat topped tower, or more broken slopes to the right, which gave out on to a sort of terrace round the back of the flat topped tower and on to the foot of the rib. The proposition did not seem very much safer than the one facing our friends, but the absence of any avalanche debris in the area encouraged us and off we went.

In spite of the fact that we had already carried very heavy loads up from the Lake Camp (V) and had only taken a couple of hours rest for breakfast, the indefatigable Mathews, who at this stage was not too fit, insisted on accompanying us part of the way to shoot off some film. He could quite justifiably have spent the rest of the day resting in camp, but his beloved film came first and for an hour or so we did a "Stobart" until our film magnate took himself and his paraphernalia off back to camp.

Arriving at the foot of the steeper slopes we examined the two approaches to the rib. The one on the left could conceivably have been open to danger from rock falls off the tower, so we decided on the more broken route to the right. For a time we indulged in quite straightforward step-cutting up the steep slopes until we arrived at the lip of a wide crevasse running diagonally upwards to the right; it was necessary to traverse left on steep ice to the bottom of the crevasse where it was possible to stride across. A few minutes' hard work took us round the crevasse and a further stretch of step-cutting found us standing on a fairly level portion of hard snow terminating in a very narrow *Bergschrund* at the foot of the rock cliffs behind the tower. So far so good; the way was clear to the terrace behind the tower and having come so far we settled down on the snow for a short rest and lunch.

We sat there basking in the sunlight and scanning the mountain face on the opposite side of the valley through the glasses, picking out a possible route up Talung Peak. Tiring of this game we turned our attention to the Talung Cwm and after a while picked out two tiny figures spreadeagled on the rocks of the upper of two outcrops to the right of the couloir. Of the third member nothing

was to be seen and we assumed (correctly it turned out) that this would be Trevor sitting somewhere out of sight, preferring to leave the rock climbing to Lewis and Jackson. Trevor is exceptionally good at route-finding and climbing on ice; but he has a self-confessed dislike of difficult rock climbing. This is understandable when one remembers that unlike the rest of us who were brought up on our homeland crags, almost all Trevor's climbing had been done in the glacier-riddled immensity of the Himalaya where there is little time and scope for rock climbing of a very severe nature.

We watched the movements of our friends for some time and they did not seem to be getting much further; indeed it appeared that they had temporarily called off the reconnaissance and were happily indulging in a few hours quiet rock climbing as if they were having a week-end in the Lake District. Feeling a little hurt that the expedition was being taken so lightly Kempe and I turned our attention once more to the gaining of the terrace.

All that remained for us to do was to cross the *Bergschrund* and move up the rock terrace behind the tower. This looked simple enough at first; in fact it looked to me rather too simple. I noticed that a little higher up to our right the *Bergschrund* was of a tremendous width and very deep while below us it again opened its jaws in a black gaping cavern. Feeling a little bit like Jonah confronting his whale I carefully moved forward while Kempe, well belayed below and to my right paid out the rope. Reaching well forward each time, I prodded at the snow in front of me and, like a blind man tapping at the kerb, gradually moved on. Suddenly the point of my axe met no resistance and I promptly moved back a couple of steps. It was as well I did; where I had been standing a couple of seconds before a neat hole the shape of my foot appeared. I moved back another couple of steps. Carving myself a small platform I belayed and brought Kempe a little closer to me; when he was quite secure I turned my attention again to the edge of the *Bergschrund*. Taking a firm grip of the axe I began to flog at the snow in front of me; I was really enjoying myself and dealt my adversary a dozen or so lusty blows. This sort of treatment is pretty rough on anything and suddenly without any warning the whole stretch of snow before me collapsed with a despairing sigh into a great black cavern a couple of feet in front of me. So much for the crossing of the *Bergschrund*. The wide gaps above and below were now joined. Moving round to the right and

climbing a bit higher we reached a position from where we could see that the *Bergschrund* was choked with huge rocks and a crossing could be effected. To get there, however, would have taken another hour of hard work in the full glare of the sun. It was frightfully hot and round about us the ice creaked and groaned. The snow was getting softer every minute and we feared that we might start an avalanche as we descended the steep slopes below us. Reluctantly we realized that the time had come to return and we carefully made our way down. Every so often the steps we had carefully prepared earlier would slide away beneath our feet and great care was needed to prevent ourselves following their downward plunge; but quite soon we reached the easy ground below and making fast time we arrived back in camp at about five o'clock.

Two interesting points emerged from the day's activities and these decided our movements for the next few days. The first of these was a report from the party which had been up to the Cwm, that although the route they had followed proved too dangerous for carrying over, they had, from their position on the rock outcrop, seen a possible entry to the upper portion of the Cwm away to their right. The second point was that Kempe and I from our resting spot that day had got a good look right into the Cwm. Above the very broken lower part of the Cwm ice-fall the snow swept up on smooth slopes right under the Talung Saddle itself and a camp site free from avalanches could be seen right at the top end of these slopes from where a very long ascending traverse might be made up to a large snow-field supported beneath by the great ice-cliffs to the right of the buttress. The approach from this spot to the Hog's Back had not been visible but what we had seen convinced us it would be worth while paying the Cwm a visit. We decided to concentrate our energies for the next few days in gaining the upper slopes of the Cwm and taking a look at the southern approach to the Great Shelf.

Another thing which had a great psychological effect on us that day was the height we had achieved. We estimated that each party had reached a height of at least 20,000 ft. and possibly more, which compared favourably with Professor Dyhrenfurth's expedition of 1930 and indeed any other expedition to this side of the mountain.

Thus, with great expectations for the morrow, we sat chatting in our little mess tent late into the night.

XVIII

The Talung Cwm

IN the course of the next few days a combined assault was launched on the Talung Cwm.

Kempe and I left rather late on the morning of May 10th and tried to force a way through enormous *séracs* and up very steep slopes to the right of the entrance of the Cwm to reach a small gap on the Talung side; from here we believed access to the upper basin could be gained. Lewis, Braham and Jackson left about half an hour later following their tracks of the day before with the intention of climbing the broken ice to the extreme right of the rock outcrops.

All went well with Kempe and myself until we found ourselves stopped by an enormous crevasse running almost vertically upward. It was in reality a split where a great mass of ice, roughly four acres in area, had broken off from the steep lower slopes to sink like a collapsed pie-crust in a jumble of huge blocks each about the size of a large house. Our route had taken us to the left-hand edge of this strange feature and we found ourselves obliged to cut steps up ever steepening ice with a vertical drop of 80 ft, on our right-hand side. As we worked our way upward, with Kempe in the lead, the slope became steeper and steeper until poor John had to carve handholds as well as footholds to make any progress at all. We continued like this until just above us and to our left we heard the sound of voices and perceived Braham's party making good speed only about 200 yards away. It was now obvious that we should not be able to cross the deep rift on our right and to continue up our steep wall of ice would gain us only a very slight advantage over the others, so a little humiliated we made a very delicate traverse across until we reached Braham's route and followed in their tracks to where they were resting up above. Moving all together we balanced along a most delightful narrow ridge of snow which reminded me very much of the snow ridge on the Old Brenva Route of Mont Blanc. This

pleasant interlude over, we had to pick our way across a tangled mass of ice-blocks and what can only be described as "pot holes" very similar to the peculiar little holes at the top of the famous Buttertubs Pass in Yorkshire. Many of these little "tubs" were full of loose powder snow and with much struggling and blowing we made only about 200 yards in almost an hour (later we rattled through this section in about fifteen or twenty minutes). To add to the discomfort we were in the very tricky position of being exposed to danger from the great ice-cliffs above us; we were in fact threading our way through the debris of falls from this direction. This most unpleasant passage took us in a long traverse to the right under a great shining pinnacle of ice festooned with thick icicles which reached down at us like the long fingers of some hungry giant. This great pinnacle, about fifty feet high, was only a few feet thick at the base and looked as if it was about to drop on us at any minute. Behind the pinnacle was a narrow and very steep chimney with the right-hand side running along in a vertical icy wall for several yards to disappear in an impossible barricade of *séracs* and crevasses. The only breach in this obstacle was a rather broken section a few feet wide which climbed up in two rough steps. Braham and Kempe launched themselves at this gap and after a quarter of an hour's desperate struggle disappeared over the edge. The rest of us, with rather melancholy expressions, waited below hoping that they would announce the way clear, but it was not to be. Higher up and out of our range of vision they had been met by a huge crevasse which proved impassable, and bitterly disappointed they returned to us on our chilly stance.

It looked for a while as if we had reached the limit of exploration in the Cwm and we were rather depressed at such early failure. In the meantime, however, I had been studying the steep ice chimney and urged on by my keenest supporter, Pasang Phutar, decided to try the ascent. Cutting two very big steps at the base of the chimney and taking my piton hammer cum ice-axe with me to carve out a shallow recess at knee height, I stepped up about two feet. With Trevor safeguarding me I then balanced rather precariously until I managed to carve two very good handholds at the level of my eyes. Sticking my ice-axe in my belt and using the handholds to maintain my balance I managed to gain a footing for my left crampon in the little recess I had carved earlier. I now took a breather. It was very awkward working in my bulky

The Talung Cwm

windproof mitts so I took them off and continued wearing only a pair of white silk gloves. After a couple of minutes' rest to stop the pounding of the sledgehammer which was doing duty as my heart, I continued. Gradually the angle eased after what seemed an age of hacking and scratching, and with my breath coming in great gasps and my fingers almost frozen, I reached a good ledge from where I could see over the top of the ice-wall. Five minutes more spent cutting a good step behind me in which I could place my heel, gave me the key to the problem and with a last heave I stood looking out over the ice above. I was tremendously elated to find the angle eased off considerably, and although the going was similar in nature to that which we had recently encountered below the pinnacle, I felt justified in reporting to my friends below that we were in a position to press on.

We were very pleased with the day's work and as it was getting on to late afternoon we retraced our steps to camp. The slopes beneath the ice-ridge were very steep and it was tricky work descending in the soft slushy snow; however this was accomplished and shortly we found ourselves on the easy slopes leading down to the camp. It was while we were traversing these slopes that I played an innocent enough trick which very nearly went wrong. Part of the descent was made through a short stretch of hummock ice which I always thought resembled a fairy grotto; one corner in particular led under a slight overhang with long icicles hanging down in a beautiful fringe. I was descending last with Kempe immediately in front of me and Braham in the lead; as we passed under the icicles I playfully knocked one of the smaller ones intending it to drop on John who was just beneath me; to my horror it broke off taking a larger icicle with it. Before I could shout a warning this large piece of ice gave John a hefty crack on the head at the same time smashing into splinters which sprayed Trevor Braham. Both my companions were furious and gave me a good ticking off; I continued the descent very much subdued.

For the last day or two we had been having a preview of Kan-chenjunga's defences and had seen something of the standard of climbing required. The vaunted avalanches too had begun to show themselves. The mountain seemed to be actually taking up a stand to prevent its violation and plying its forces to repel us. Fortunately the weather was a little more kind but this was a doubtful blessing. During the day our camp high in the upper

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glacier suffered terribly; surrounded on all sides by great ice-covered slopes which acted as giant reflectors, we experienced intense heat. For two or three hours in the middle of the day the surface ice on which we were camped melted rapidly leaving our tents standing in pools of water which seeped through the ground-sheets and trickled through the ends. We had to dig shallow trenches around the camp to drain the water away and sometimes the surface became so soft that the tent pegs came loose and the tents just collapsed, getting soaked in the process. At about four in the afternoon the temperature would drop suddenly and anything left outside would quickly be frozen in and would have to be dug out with ice-axes, to the accompaniment of much laboured breathing. But this discomfort was nothing compared with the growing avalanche danger. So far we had been well out of reach of the numerous falls from Talung Peak and the ice-cliffs near the Talung Saddle; but now Kanchenjunga itself was taking a hand. During the day many large and frightening avalanches occurred, mainly from the edge of the Great Shelf and the huge masses of ice festooning the face; but it was at night that the worst avalanches occurred. At about nine o'clock on the night of May 9th a tremendous roar filled the night air and a thunderous crash made me offer up a quick prayer. For a few seconds the rumbling continued and suddenly a terrific gale tore at the tents which flapped and strained as if they were about to take off. Fine powder snow forced its way through the opening of my tent and when I ventured to look out into the gale I was covered by a thick layer of snow particles. The wind and blizzard continued for a minute or more before dying away leaving us all rather shaken. Later still at about 5.30 a.m. I was lying awake as the first light of day crept over the ridges when there was another loud crack and a roar louder than any bomb burst I had ever heard. I stuck my head out of the tent just in time to see Kempe shoot out of his sleeve opening like a bullet. We looked in the direction of the noise and gaped open-mouthed as great sections of ice peeled away from the edge of the Great Shelf four thousand feet above us. This mass of ice, weighing probably thousands of tons, fell a clear two thousand feet before striking the lower cliffs, to be ground to powder as the huge pieces tumbled and crashed their way to the glacier below. As this huge mass landed a great cloud billowed upwards, beautiful in its startling whiteness. Then suddenly the rushing, tearing wind

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sprang up again. Enveloped once more in a raging snow storm, we had to hang on to the supports of the tents to prevent their being ripped away. This time the wind was even stronger and quite two inches of snow covered us. Kempe, standing outside his tent was visibly shaken, and I was not by any means unmoved. Heads popped out of the other tents and as the roar of the avalanche subsided some cogent comments could be heard. Nobody was late out of bed that morning. For many days after this we experienced numerous large avalanches but the worst were always at night. I am told that this is a phenomenon peculiar to the Himalaya and so far unexplained. It could be that in the intense heat of the day the cracks and crannies in the ice fill with water, which freezes in the extremely low night temperatures and in doing so expands sufficiently to force the ice apart as if giant wedges had been driven into it.

In the small hours of May 10th we experienced the biggest avalanche of all and we began to wonder if we were camped in a safe enough place. Of late the debris from these falls had been getting steadily nearer to the tents and Kempe was beginning to feel a little anxious about the safety of the party. Kanchenjunga has a reputation equalling that of Nanga Parbat for its avalanches and we were determined at all costs to avoid a repetition of the terrible tragedy which overtook the German party of 1937 on that mountain. However, we were quite a long way from the face so we decided to stay where we were until we had successfully established a camp in the Talung Cwm or were forced to call off the attempt.

While we had been making our first attempts to reach the Talung Cwm, Don Mathews with the Sherpas had returned to the last moraine camp to bring up the whole of our supplies except for three days' food which we required for our return journey down the Yalung. This decision had been reached to allow us to concentrate on our reconnaissance of the head of the valley without the constant worry of Sherpas travelling backward and forward through the avalanche zone between Lake Camp and Advanced Base (Camp VI). By doing this we should have all our forces on hand if we found a route through to the Great Shelf and would be in a position to set our camps up quickly with full support.

The 11th of May saw Braham, Jackson and Lewis taking a rest day while Kempe and I and Pasang Phutar returned to the Cwm

Kanchenjunga

to take a look beyond the ice chimney. We made fairly good time up to the ice *arête* and once more experienced the rather spine-chilling sensation of picking our way past the ice-pinnacle which hung above us like the Sword of Damocles. Once at the chimney I repeated my effort of the day before and once over the top put in a fixed rope to help my companions. With the aid of the rope they very quickly joined me and, leaving a red marker flag to guide us back, we pushed on. Once more we found ourselves involved in a maze of avalanche debris and spent about an hour moving up to smoother ground above. We were now at about 20,500 ft. and going very well; both Kempe and I were very fit and enjoying the climbing in spite of the constant threat above us. But our enjoyment once more gave way to disappointment as we were pulled up short by an enormous crevasse which stretched right across the Cwm; standing on one side we looked across at the upper lip of the chasm which towered some fifteen feet above our heads. At our feet both sides of the crevasse plunged down into a deep rift, the bottom of which we could not see. A piece of ice which we dropped into the hole went tinkling down out of sight for several seconds before we heard it no more. Following the lip of the crevasse to the right we became involved in an absolutely impassable area of enormous tottering *séracs* and gaping chasms, while to the left, the upper lip of the crevasse rose higher and higher to overhang in a great ice-wall. Only two possibilities presented themselves. At one point a very shaky looking snow bridge spanned the hole; in another place the crevasse narrowed sufficiently to allow one to step across on to an even shakier looking platform of yellow and rotten snow which stuck like an obscene growth to the opposite lip. From there it might be possible to climb the upper rim.

As we stood about discussing the situation, a sickening crunch just below us announced the fall of a huge *sérac* immediately to the right of our route. A few minutes later the ice on our left broke away with a crack and a roar and swept the lower section of broken ground. Kanchenjunga was objecting strongly to our presence.

I wanted very much to risk the tottering snow bridge, but John was determined that we should not take an unnecessary risk which might involve us in spending valuable time getting someone out of a crevasse. We decided to retreat and come up the next day

with a stronger party. Once more the Cwm had beaten us and back to camp we went. Fresh falls of ice along our route lent speed to our heels and we were back in camp by about 1 p.m. On the return trip to camp John Kempe broke one of his crampons. One of the metal loops through which the straps pass had broken off with part of the metal frame and without it the crampon could not be fastened. Unfortunately we had no more crampons left as the two spare pairs we had brought with us had already been used to replace breakages by Sherpas. Kempe's crampon would have to be repaired; but how?

On examining the broken cleat it was obvious that the job would not be easy. It would be necessary to heat up the metal, beat it out to gain a little extra length and then bend it over to fit the ring; and we should have to trust to luck that the steel would not lose its strength in the process. Using an ice-axe driven into the snow as an anvil, a Primus stove as a forge, and Mathews' surgical forceps as pliers, I set to work with my piton hammer. An hour later I was able to give Kempe his crampon almost as good as new and I was pleased to find that it gave no more trouble for the rest of the trip. One of the best things about an expedition of this sort is the way in which the various members adapt themselves to varying conditions; this was not the only occasion when one or other of us was able to perform some small task which made a great difference to the outcome of the venture.

We spent the rest of the afternoon enjoying a few hours' rest in the glorious sunshine. By moving a little distance from the camp to a tiny hillock of ice we could put down our Li-los and avoid the worst of the pools which gathered around the camp. Here we lazed and chatted drinking large mugs of tea or lemonade. Towards late afternoon as the sun dipped behind the ridge we heard shouts and far down the glacier observed several heavily laden figures toiling up towards us. It was Mathews and the Sherpas returning from Moraine Camp and we were able to welcome them with mugs of steaming coffee. Don had done exceedingly well. He and the Sherpas had carried enormous loads and we now had sufficient food for several more days. Our immediate problem was fuel. By careful rationing and a close watch on our cook (Mathews was sleeping with the fuel in his tent) we should be able to last out until the return of Kamar Gyalson and his little party from Darjeeling, but if they were in any way

delayed we might be without hot food, and even more important, liquids.

On Wednesday, May 12th, it was decided that Braham and I, with Kempe and several Sherpas in support should make a determined effort to cross the large crevasse and place a camp in the Talung Cwm. Trevor and I were really excited at the prospect, Trevor because of his great love for the route above the Cwm and I because the lower part of the Cwm had become a personal challenge. Accordingly, carrying tents and food, we set off on our venture in high spirits; I was determined at all costs to get across the crevasse.

In a cold wind and moving slowly but steadily with heavy loads we toiled upwards resting only when the party became strung out. Crossing the little snow *arête* with loads was especially tricky as a crevasse had opened up and split it across. The upper section of the small chimney was also troublesome and we had to give each Sherpa a good heave on his rope to help him over the rim, the fixed rope doing good work and proving a great help. But at last we stood at the crevasse. I nearly wept when I found that both the snow bridge and the little platform had disappeared. There was not a hope of crossing now. We spent a long time wandering about the area hoping to find a convenient place to get over but it was no use. Frustrated, we gathered in a little group to decide what to do next. I was sick with disappointment and began to prowl up and down the crevasse again in the hope that something might present itself. It did.

At one point a very thin and rickety strip of ice descended at a steep angle about ten feet into the crevasse and where the ice petered out the gap was no wider than three feet across to the opposite vertical wall; it might be possible to make a way down and then cut up the other side. I put it to John and Trevor. They thought the idea quite crazy but admitted it was the only hope. As we discussed this latest development a good solid oath and some loud panting announced the appearance of another character on the scene. Looking down we were delighted at the spectacle of our expedition doctor and his Sherpa Thami Ang Dawa complete with camera and tripod, laboriously making their way to where we were standing. The indomitable Mathews had once more proved his enthusiasm for our venture.

I was determined to try the crevasse, and instructing Ajeeba and

Pasang Phutar to watch my rope, I proceeded to cut down into the cavern. The ice was very watery and broke off in great splinters as I drove my axe and crampons into it. It seemed that at any moment the whole lot might give way and that I would plummet down into the blackness beneath me. Fortunately I was able to hack out a small but safe stance at the narrowest part of the gap and, securely held by Pasang, I stopped for a rest. I was confronted by the vertical opposite wall; to step across was going to be hair-raising. Leaning well forward with my full weight on the rope I could just reach to cut two fair steps on the other side but there was not sufficient room to swing the axe at shoulder level to cut further steps and handholds. Instructing Pasang to let the rope go a little slack and sticking my ice-axe in my belt I drew my small piton hammer with an ice-pick at one end; planting my feet firmly I allowed myself to drop face forward until I was straddled across the gap, my feet on one side and my hands resting on the other with my body at an angle of about 45 degrees. In this position, by leaning on one hand and wielding my small axe with the other, I was able to cut several good handholds in the opposite wall. Now all was ready to stride across. Shouting to Pasang to hold on, I stepped across the gap and found myself hanging on with fingers and toes to the opposite wall. I could not hope to stay long in that position so I hurriedly hacked away at a small bulge about level with my thigh until I had cleared a good big step; next I carved a handhold for my left hand above my head and prepared to move. Holding firmly with the fingers of my left hand I managed to place my right foot on the good step and with a swing stood upright. By no means comfortable, but now with all my weight on my right foot, I felt I could stay in this position long enough to beat my hands alternately against the wall of the crevasse to restore the circulation. In this fashion I made my way slowly up the ice-wall until, half an hour after my step across, I was in a position to reach up for the very top of the lip. I was now highly excited and had to exercise a great deal of self-control to restrain myself from making a wild lunge. With a gasp of relief I reached up to get both hands on top of the lip; a last final heave and a kick took me up to the top.

I was speechless at what I saw.

I had reached the top of a narrow rib of ice and what was thought to be the opposite side of the crevasse was in fact a sort

of ice-wall running along the length of an even more formidable rift. From where I was a further gap had to be crossed without the hope of either jumping or climbing over. I was furious at being halted thus and prepared to climb along to the right to see what lay behind a large *sérac* which obstructed my view. At this moment Kempe and Braham begged me to return as it was obvious that we should not get our porters across that day even if I found a way through. I had the idea that if the crossing could be made it might be possible to engineer a rope bridge. My companions decided to withdraw back to camp and reluctantly I returned, with a great deal of trouble, the way I had come. To this day I regret not having pushed on a little further for, although none of us knew it at the time, that was as far as we were to get in the Talung Cwm.

We decided temporarily to call off the attempt on the Cwm until we had some form of bridging material to negotiate the crevasse; Ajeeba with three Sherpas was to return to Tseram to cut down some small trees and bring up the logs to make a bridge. In the meantime we were going to take a look at the Great Ice-fall.

Back down the fixed rope and under the pinnacle we went. Once more the steep slopes proved awkward, this time because of bad weather and new snow which covered the icy slope to a depth of several inches. Eventually we reached camp, rather dispirited and a little shamefaced as we told the others of our failure to get through.

Jackson and Lewis that day had gone across to take a look at the rib to the right of the Great Ice-fall that Kempe and I had inspected on the first day at the head of the valley. We always referred to this as "Ron's Rib" because Ron thought it a feasible route to the Ice-fall. It certainly led up to a very convenient spot at the foot of the upper fall and was well worth exploring. Ron and Gil had intended to carry on from where we had left off, but unfortunately they did not get very far as Ron began to feel unwell and had to return to camp. Mathews diagnosed a chill and insisted on his early retirement to bed.

On our way back to camp we found ourselves skirting new avalanche debris. All that day we had the noise of great falls in our ears and one gigantic fall in particular had crept nearer to the camp than was healthy; about 70 yards from my tent, which was at the extreme edge of the camp, lay a huge block of ice which

had gouged a great furrow in its mad slide along the glacier. This convinced us that we should move our camp lower down and although we were very tired and not a little depressed by our failure in the Cwm, we struck camp and moved another half-mile or so to the upper end of the strip of moraine which ran up the centre of the glacier. Here we felt much safer.

Kanchenjunga had won the first round. Not only had the technical difficulty tried us well but the mountain had stopped our progress with the simplest of all her defences, an impassable crevasse. To emphasize her victory she had shown us what lay in store from her great ice-cliffs if we were foolish enough to set up our tents too close to her icy feet. But crevasses can be bridged and avalanches do not always hit their marks; we were more determined than ever to pierce any possible chink in the mountain's armour and just as soon as our Sherpas arrived with the logs we would return and continue the struggle in the Cwm. In the meantime there was always the back door, and we turned our eyes to the tumbling mass of ice which cascaded in its two great steps from the northern end of the Great Shelf.

If not the Talung Cwm then the Great Ice-fall should provide the key to the ascent of the South-West Face.

XIX

The Great Ice-fall

GATHERED at the end of the moraine we considered forcing a way up the Ice-fall. From where we were we could look directly into the lower section of the fall which lay about half a mile away, across very broken but not difficult ice. To the left of the fall rose the high and forbidding looking cliffs which abutted on to the slopes above Pache's grave. These cliffs swept round to the left in a great rampart, impregnable from our side, and reached upward to the higher rock walls above the depression between the two sections of the Great Fall; they formed the true right bank of the Ice-fall. On the other side to the right of the fall, starting in a huge buttress standing several hundred feet up

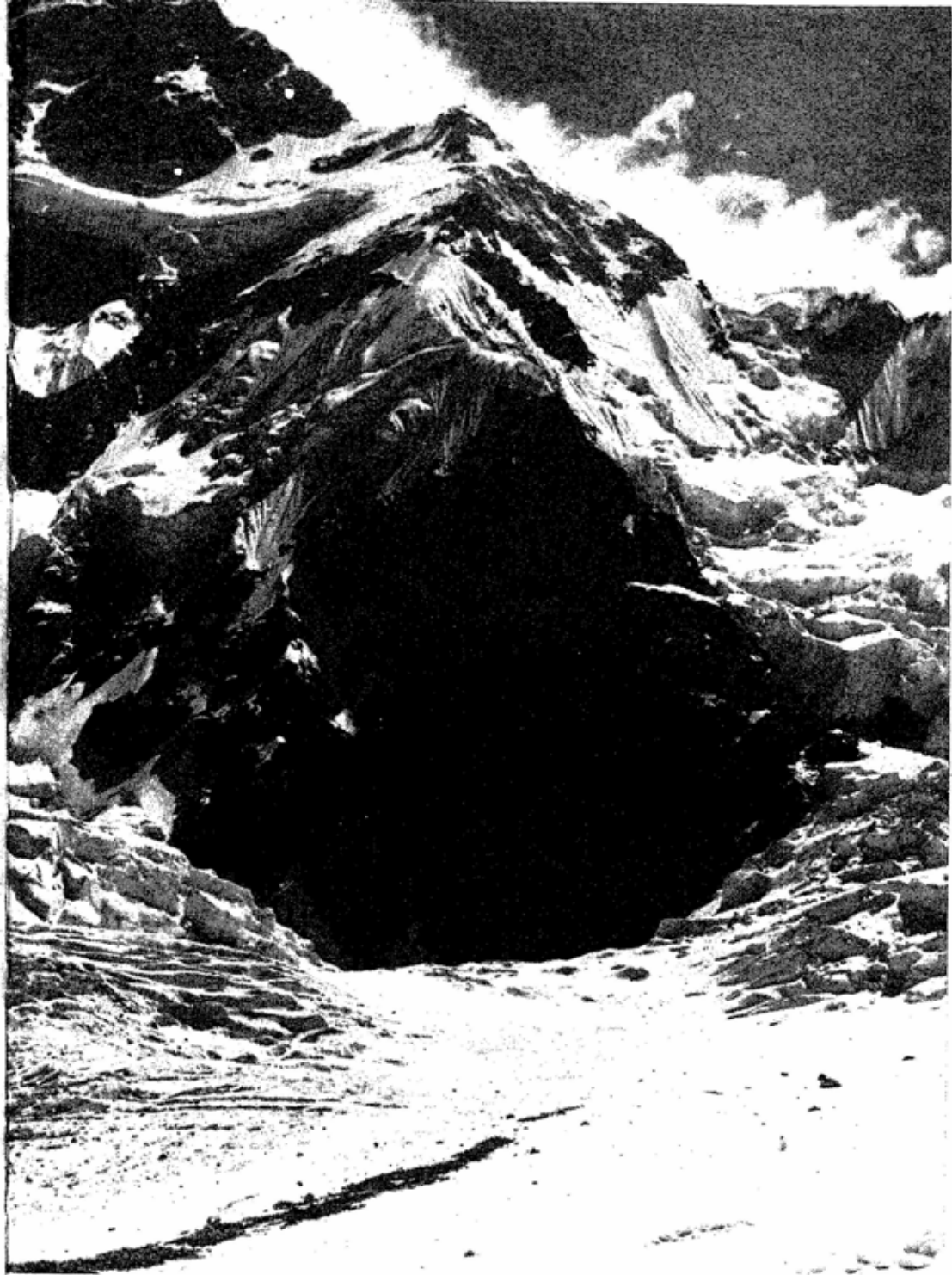
a large scree slope, a long rock rib ran up to the top of the lower fall. This rib is the one mentioned earlier which lies at the left extremity of the great sheer cliffs of the South-West Face and formed the true left bank of the Ice-fall. Between this rib and the opposite cliffs lay our proposed route: two thousand feet of jagged ice pinnacles, tumbling ice blocks and a gaping crevasse, rising upward at an incredibly steep angle to disappear into a depression at the top, where a small plateau led on to the next step of the fall which continued up to the Great Shelf.

We studied the route carefully through our glasses and were not cheered by what we saw. Our way looked difficult and very dangerous with masses of debris littering the area beneath the fall. But this, with the exception of Crowley's route, was our last chance of piercing the formidable armour of the mountain and we were determined one way or another to prove a route existed or not.

Our first trip to the Ice-fall was merely a gesture. In two parties we made our way across the glacier to the foot of the large scree slope beneath the rib on the right hand side of the ice; here we rested awhile chewing Kendal Mint Cake and drinking lemonade. It was a bright clear day and we were in no hurry. I think we secretly thought the route impracticable and were loth to have this proved. After an hour or so we shouldered our rucksacks and toiled up the scree; it was hot and thirsty work even though we moved very slowly. Reaching the start of the ice we divided into two parties, Kempe, Braham and I going round to the left of the fall, and Lewis and Jackson to the right.

For two hours we made our way upward and were surprised that we made very good time. It is possible that during the last week or two we had not only acclimatized remarkably well but were also climbing better. We wasted no energy now and had got used to the immense scale of the mountain. During our early exploration we had perhaps been a little over-confident and in too much of a hurry to get high; but Talung Cwm had tried us a little and we now realized that not only did we need our technical skill and ability but that a large proportion of our success lay in patient probing and careful examination of each move before us.

As we climbed higher and higher up the Ice-fall we became more and more elated. It was a wonderful place in spite of the constant threat of a fall from above. We were in another world;



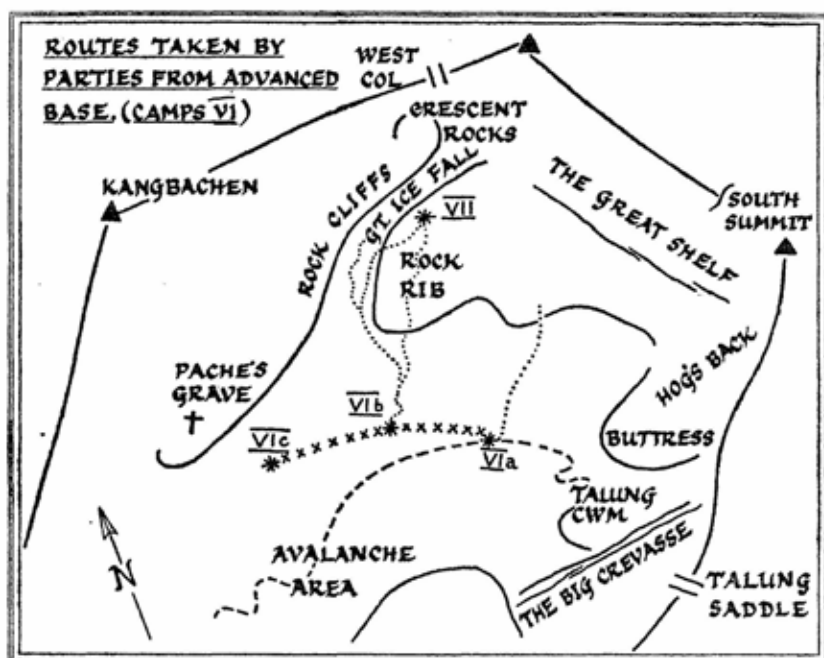
The Great Rock Buttress and Hogs Back at the entrance to Talung Cwm. The small gully in which accident occurred is at the bottom and just to the right of the buttress



The North Face of Talung Peak from advance base

The Great Ice-fall

a world of strange shapes and sounds. Every so often a quiet creak at our feet warned us not to stand too long, or a sudden crack gave notice of a *sérac* about to submit to gravity; the ice around us groaned and grumbled at our steady progress as if it



knew that we were determined to overcome the difficulties it presented to us. But on the credit side were the exquisite blues and greens as the sun slanted down upon our icy path.

Braham at work above made a perfect study in rhythm and movement as each well-timed blow of his axe sent forth a brilliant shower of ice particles, which glittered and sparkled in the sunlight, until they dropped at our feet to tinkle away in a silvery cascade. Fringes of icicles, each one with a fascinating beauty of

its own, hung down from the *séracs* and pinnacles around us, and occasionally, as I waited on the end of the rope for the signal to move up, I caught in my hands the tiny droplets of water which dripped from them and let the cool liquid run over my dried up lips and tongue. It was wonderful in the Ice-fall and each day spent there held for me a distillation of all that is best in life. In a single hour one experienced beauty and rhythm, the healthy sweat born of hard work, danger and the full exhilaration of living. All the emotions which spring from a close contact between man and his creator were crowded into a short space of time; and at the end of the day's toil ours was the perfect peace of mind born of a healthy communion with one's comrades, in a great adventure. Even now, months after it is all over, the Ice-fall still holds a tremendous fascination for me, and I can still remember in surprising detail some of the particularly striking shapes and chasms.

About midday with the ice creaking and groaning around us we turned back, confident that we should eventually find a way through to the depression high above our heads; and all too soon we were taking off our crampons and basking in the sunshine on the warm rocks of the scree slope at the base of the great rib.

Lewis and Jackson were out of sight but occasionally we could hear them chopping away at the ice above us or catch the sound of voices as they called to each other. Just to the right of the route they had taken, a shallow but steep gully curved upwards to a great mass of yellow rotting ice; above this we could not see but we knew that somewhere up there our two friends were having a great time. They had experienced similar conditions to ourselves and had decided to press on just a little further as they were not too sure how their route would develop.

While we waited for them we decided to take a walk round the bottom of the buttress with the object of finding a possible route up the rocks to the top of the great rib. The crest of the rib appeared to be inclined at an easy angle and did not seem to present any major obstacles. If an easy rock route up to it existed many days of hard work cutting through the Ice-fall would be saved. Neither Trevor nor John were very keen on rock routes but I was content to try anything which looked feasible. This cursory examination of the rock did not depress us in any way. The rock

The Great Ice-fall

for the most part was firm and sound and did not look too difficult. We scrambled up some two or three hundred feet before returning to the scree and in that time John Kempe had decided that should the Ice-fall present any great difficulty beyond the point we had reached, a party would make an attempt on the rib from the scree.

Back at the foot of the Ice-fall we waited a little longer for Lewis and Jackson whom we could hear calling to each other as they descended. We were suddenly horrified to see them quite unconcernedly descending the vicious little avalanche gully as if they were out for a stroll along the Downs. They were moving fairly quickly, however, and soon gained the upper part of the scree slope out of danger from the rotten ice above, which must surely have swept them away had any part of it fallen. Lewis wrote of this little episode in his diary: ". . . this is a very quick method of descent but rather dicy!"

A quick walk across the glacier, which developed into a high-spirited race to be first back, saw us in camp very soon. The ever-dependable Mathews met us with his familiar grin and pots of hot tea. He was agog to hear our news. Mathews' contribution to the day's activities was typical of him. After first putting the camp in order and detailing some of the Sherpas to various duties he had decided to go across to Pache's grave to film the camp site there. Unfortunately, from our position, it proved impossible to get across the glacier; we were about three-quarters of a mile above the large moraine on which the grave stands and between our camp and his destination Mathews, with the two Sherpas, Pasang Phutar and Balu, had to negotiate quite the worst part of the Yalung. For several hours they climbed up and down cutting and picking their way over and through numerous ice gullies and a crevasse until finally they had to admit defeat. The party retrace their steps to camp and Pasang and Balu were rather staggered when the Doctor Sahib indicated a desire to go across to the Ice-fall to film some of us at work. After a very one-sided discussion in which Mathews convinced them that he was serious, they all trooped across the ice to the foot of the great barrier. Don arrived there just as Lewis and Jackson were about to move up an exceptionally steep ice couloir and, begging them to wait, he set his magic box on its tripod at the foot of the obstacle. As Gil and Ron moved up Mathews filmed the operation until they were

out of sight. He then moved off with his little band back to camp.

A rather amusing sequel to this episode occurred back in England some weeks after the expedition. I was in possession of the film at the time and invited Gil to visit me at my school where I was showing the pictures to a few friends. Gil duly arrived and, while waiting for the film to start, told me about the filming. Apparently he and Ron had decided to shake their photographer by going all out to move up the couloir at breakneck speed. They had literally shot up the ice, Gil recounted gleefully, and, when out of sight of Mathews, had collapsed, gasping for air and waiting for their laboured breathing to return to a more normal rate. They were at 19,000 ft. or more and a performance such as this called for considerable determination and effort. On the screen we saw two dark figures wrapped in windproofs labouring slowly up the steep couloir like chief mourners at a funeral. Such is the impression one gets at these altitudes.

The next day was probably one of the most enjoyable and exciting for all of us; but doubly so for Gil and Ron who had their best day of the whole expedition.

From what we had seen the previous day (May 13th) it appeared that the route to the left of the Ice-fall would be the most practicable. Ron and Gil had experienced what they described as "very difficult" ice conditions, whereas we across the other side had enjoyed a reasonably straightforward route. There was of course a certain amount of danger on both routes but neither seemed better than the other in this respect. Kempe decided in view of this to split the party into three groups. He and Braham were to continue on our route of the day before, Jackson and Lewis were to press on up the right-hand side in an effort to get on to the rib, while Pasang Phutar and I were to follow a little later behind Kempe and Braham, to prepare the route for Sherpas.

With the two advance parties well away Pasang and I collected together our paraphernalia. I carried a rucksack bulging with food and pitons while Pasang shouldered a bag containing ropes and marker flags. He looked very picturesque in his little jockey cap, bright scarf and sweater, and with a whole forest of red and green flags sticking out of his bag. We took our time about reaching the Ice-fall but once there settled down to hard work. My duty was to enlarge the steps carved by Kempe and Braham and mark the

route with the coloured flags, putting in fixed ropes where necessary.

As Pasang and I worked away at our task we could hear the others up above as they slowly hacked out a route. From time to time we caught a cheery shout from Lewis and Jackson high above us on our right; they could see us working but we could not quite pick them out. Pasang, who has eyes like a hawk, suddenly spotted them among a great tangle of ice-blocks and I stopped work long enough to take a fine picture of them as they moved up. Lewis was wearing a very handsome red windproof while Jackson favoured green and they made an attractive colour slide.

One rather steep section of Kempe's route which had to have a fixed rope, provided an enjoyable piece of ice-work. To save time in the cutting of the steps I decided to climb the pitch with Pasang, fix the rope first and then, while Pasang held me from above, I was able to place my feet on the wall, lean right back on the rope and then get a good swing on the axe. Just as we reached the top of the pitch a loud grunting and an eloquent description of the heat and life in general announced the arrival of our demon of the lens; once more Mathews was up to the fore recording our trip. On this occasion, in spite of Don's pleas, I insisted that if he wanted the shot he would have to make the best of existing conditions; I was not prepared to pose, retrace my steps, or in fact do anything other than the job in hand. Don manfully set up his apparatus at the foot of the pitch while I started to fix a rope securely to a large ice piton. The rope fixed, I then began to enlarge the steps up the wall and dealt the ice such hearty blows that poor Don was showered with large chunks which battered at him like machine-gun bullets. Pasang Phutar and Ang Dawa IV, the cook (who had accompanied Don), thought this was a wonderful joke and clapped their hands delightedly. Such is the tenacity of Mathews that he stuck it out and got a fine picture, giving up only when so much fine ice enveloped him and his camera that his lens was all but obscured.

He then returned with Ang Dawa hoping to take some shots of the avalanches which were still pouring down from the face of Kanchenjunga. Bidding him farewell, Pasang and I carried on with our work. Some time later we were very disappointed to see Kempe and Braham sitting at the bottom of a very high and sheer

wall of ice. To the left of the wall I could see double tracks and to the right an enormous shattered block. I guessed immediately what had happened. Unable to surmount the wall they had moved up to the left for several hundred feet only to be forced back by an impassable crevasse; they were sitting discussing the situation when I came across them. I was quite surprised to see them thus as I had assumed the route to the top of the lower fall to be straightforward. This was an assumption born of sheer optimism.

In the meantime Lewis and Jackson, after a great deal of hard work, had managed to gain a little more height on their route of the day before. They doggedly pushed on and eventually found themselves in a vast area of a strange crevasse. Ron described the place as being rather like a huge grating; the deep crevasse was separated by long flat-topped ice ribs along which they had to thread their way. Sometimes these ribs were so narrow that they had to balance across, safeguarding each other in turn. From this point they moved to the left to avoid some very rickety-looking *séracs* and shortly found themselves within talking distance of our party at the foot of the ice-wall. We called across to ask if they could reach us but although both parties were quite close together neither could help the other. Encouraging them to push on we turned our attention once more to the ice-wall. To climb it and put fixed ropes in would have taken several hours and after cutting two or three small steps to reach a sort of bollard at the near end of the wall I hacked away in a rather desultory fashion for several minutes. While I was thus engaged Trevor and John had been examining a possible route between two huge tottering ice pinnacles and Trevor shortly announced that he had cut some beautiful steps for anyone who cared to climb them. He did not care to himself as the ice on which the steps ascended was almost vertical and rotten at the same time. Believing that anything is worth trying once I scrambled up, squeezed myself between the two pinnacles like a nut in a cracker and had a look beyond. It was hopeless and telling Pasang to watch my rope I returned down the crumbly steps.

After a short consultation and with the time standing at 11.30 a.m. we decided to retreat and come back early the next day to cut a way up the wall. Leaving a marker flag behind us we retraced our steps, the descent being made in record time by using the fixed

The Great Ice-fall

ropes. We were soon sitting on the moraine scanning the Ice-fall for traces of Ron and Gil.

We covered every inch of the Ice-fall through our glasses but could see no one and we were rather excited to think that they had perhaps managed to force a way right through to the top of the ice. This we subsequently found was not the case.

After resting on the warm rocks for a few minutes we leisurely made our way back to camp, and once there lay on our Li-los with glasses fixed on the Ice-fall. We searched every nook and cranny but could see no sign of Gil and Ron. We were more than ever convinced that they had succeeded in reaching the top of the lower section.

Suddenly a shout from Pasang, followed by an exchange of words between Trevor and our Sherpa, who was explaining where to look, had us all gazing up at two tiny figures scaling the Ice-fall side of the rock rib. As we watched them slowly inch their way up the steep rocks excitement mounted. We could see Ron in his green windproof sitting well up the rocks, while a tiny red dot slowly moved up to join him. After watching them sitting motionless for several minutes they stood up and before our unbelieving eyes began to walk with apparent ease to the top of the rib.

Back in camp we were all tremendously excited. Everyone wanted to use the glasses at once and Don rushed around frantically trying to load his ciné-camera to get some telephoto shots before our friends disappeared from view. Higher up the rib stood a huge rock step with a large patch of snow at its foot, and there was much speculation whether this tower would turn the two men back. As we saw them begin to move across the snow to the foot of this obstacle conversation died down and a tense silence fell on the camp. I watched John Kempe sitting with his glasses glued to his eyes. What he was thinking I could only guess, but I sensed that he was worried lest Ron and Gil in their enthusiasm should take some unjustifiable risk. Slowly the two men moved across the patch of snow and stopped near the rock. To our surprise they paused for only a few minutes, then, still moving together, traversed under the rock and round the step to disappear from our sight. John was obviously relieved; he quietly put his glasses down beside him and asked Pasang for more tea.

The safety of the party was a constant worry to John who felt

personally responsible for us all. I am sure that he would, on several occasions, have preferred not to let us attempt some of the things we did, but he allowed each of us to pursue his pet theories and relied on each man's common sense and experience to restrain him from any rashness which might endanger the party. Only once, a little later in the expedition, did John allow us this freedom very much against his better judgment, and we paid for it with an accident which might have been serious. We all had a very high regard for John's capabilities and fair-mindedness and this, coupled with our respect for his wide Himalayan experience, placed him naturally in the position of leader. But even so, it was no easy job, and his diary gives an insight into the many hours he must have spent deciding whether a risk was justifiable or not and trying to reach a decision which was for the mutual benefit of climbers and Sherpas alike. It is one thing to lead an expedition when the members are chosen by the leader and where the party is equipped and transported by a sponsoring body. In those circumstances it is natural for the team to feel that their first duty is to the leader and party and to be ready to sacrifice their own ambitions for the common good. In the case of a privately organized party, each man has probably spent his life's savings to realize an ambition and the leader may well be called upon to exercise a very high degree of understanding and tolerance.

Chatting to John now, with our two friends still out of sight, he did not seem to be unduly worried. Ron was the best rock climber in the party and the speed at which he and Gil moved up the rib indicated that the standard was well within their capabilities. Personally, I was very excited at the prospect of getting higher on the mountain and was quite happy about whatever route we took. Trevor was against rock routes on these big mountains and thought that even if we found the rock reasonable we might experience considerable difficulty in getting our Sherpas with loads over anything but very easy scrambling.

By this time the afternoon was wearing on and we once more became a little anxious about the party up on the rib. We kept a constant watch on the top of the rock where we had last seen them and it was with some relief that we saw at last two small specks moving downwards and making good time. Gil and Ron were eager to be down with their good news and pressed on as quickly as they could. Gradually they descended until it was

necessary for them to climb down the rock to regain the Ice-fall, and here the situation changed. At first they seemed fairly happy and we could see them picking their way with great care until the last move across the gap between ice and rock had to be made. Here first one and then the other made an attempt to cross. We watched them for a full hour, at the end of which they were still in the same spot. John was now quite sure that we ought to go to their assistance and accordingly he and I with Pasang Phutar prepared to leave and climb up to offer any help necessary. Packing rucksacks with ropes, pitons, flasks of tea, and spare clothing, we moved across the glacier and for the second time that day started to move up through the Ice-fall. This time we had to find a new way up to the rock rib as Jackson and Lewis had descended to a position lower than where they had first gained the rock. For an hour or so we cut a way upward, working steadily towards the rock. Stopping for a brief rest we heard the sound of voices and gave a shout. We received a cheery hail in exchange and then heard a rattle as one of the hidden pair hacked away at the ice. Gaining a small boss of ice we mounted it and found ourselves looking down into the little avalanche gully which Jackson and Lewis had used the day before; there below us were our two companions moving very quickly across up the scree slopes below the rock rib. We were delighted to see them safe and obviously in great heart. Quickly retracing our steps we joined them. Pasang dished out the tea and Kendal Mint Cake, and we sat for several minutes explaining our presence. Ron and Gil were indignant that we should have thought they were in difficulty, but I noticed that they did not refuse the food and drink. A short entry in Lewis's diary describing the last part of the descent we had witnessed and which had decided us to go to their assistance reads as follows:

"We attempted to cross from rock to ice as low down as possible. The snow higher up was now in shocking condition. A nasty slab, then Ron leads down a 25 ft. wall and carefully balances across on a rickety bridge of rotten ice. Once over he goes up for about 20 ft. to a stance and I follow. Very dicy. Route down to join our avalanche route of yesterday. One terrifying jump downwards across a crevasse, having to duck our heads to avoid a curtain of thick icicles suspended from an overhanging block. One small avalanche while we were in the chute and luckily down

the right-hand branch, not ours. Very glad to be off. The stretch off the rock and down to the bottom of the chute was first technically hard and dangerous, and lower down just dangerous.

"The boys were quite pleased to see us and indeed we to see them!"

Together we made our way back to camp and as we approached the tents Trevor came out to meet us and congratulate Ron and Gil on a very fine effort. Don had the cook prepare extra rations in their honour and we all sat about excitedly firing questions at them. What was above the rib? How difficult was the route to the rock? Was it feasible for porters? Would it be worth while trying to find an easier route to the top of the rib? Ron and Gil tried to answer all our questions at once, then gradually the conversation became more orderly and we sat back to let Ron tell his story.

After leaving us in the Ice-fall he and Gil had steadily forced a way up the tottering ice ruin above them. The route had become more and more difficult and from time to time they had had to leap a crevasse which would have proved very difficult to recross if they had been stopped in their ascent and had had to retreat. Changing tactics the pair had decided to make for the rocky rib which Ron had estimated as being of a reasonable standard of difficulty but by no means impassable. Intent on making the rib they had doggedly pushed on until they had found themselves at the *Bergschrund*. Here they had been lucky enough to find a way across on the rock. With Ron in the lead the steep and difficult rock was climbed to easier ground above and from here (unaware that several pairs of eyes were gazing at them from below) they had moved together along the crest of the rib, Ron describing it as "... a really enjoyable walk over easy rocks". They had carried on along the top of the rib until once again they had found the way blocked by the top of the Ice-fall. The rib had petered out into the face a few hundred feet below the flat section joining the lower and upper Ice-fall, but Ron was sure that a crossing could be made into the ice. A very important feature of the rib was the abundance of camp sites and Ron announced that at the top of the rib there was room for half a dozen tents. This was indeed very good news and we were very pleased with the efforts of our two companions. I can never describe the pleasure of Ron and Gil after their magnificent effort. They had enjoyed a day's climbing

such as they had never experienced before and Gil announced that he would have written it up in poetry if he could.

The gaining of the rock rib now put a very different light on the reconnaissance of the Ice-fall, and we all agreed that if possible the route should utilize this rib. Apart from Ron's report of the easy rocks the rib was entirely free from avalanches and neither Ron nor Gil had seen rocks falling. Naturally a few stones might well come down, but this is a normal hazard on almost any mountain. Ron and Gil were so enthusiastic about the rib and had put up such a wonderful show that we all felt it was only fair that a determined effort should be made to get the party up to the top of the rock and see what possibilities existed beyond there. Ron felt that the route they had taken through the ice was far too difficult for the Sherpas with loads and suggested an alternative approach from the point where John and I had seen them that afternoon. If it were possible to put in some fixed ropes on the bottom part of the rock, which was of quite a difficult standard of climbing, we might be able to get our Sherpas up to the easy rock above from which point it would be merely a matter of showing them the way. The situation, as John and I saw it, however, was not too pleasant; Ron and Gil had had a difficult time crossing the gap and Ron himself was not too certain that this particular section could be made safe enough or easy enough to be practicable. However, we decided to take a good look at the crossing the following day.

That night we were in high spirits. For the first time luck seemed to be with us. The fine effort of Jackson and Lewis that day had done a great deal to restore our confidence in the route. They had reached a height which we assessed at 21,000 ft., the highest point the expedition had attained up to this date, and they had good reason to be proud of their efforts. If on the following day we could not force an easier way on to the rock rib it was decided that Jackson and Lewis should continue their explorations from the other side where we had been ourselves that day, while Kempe, Braham and I would have a last look at the Talung Cwm and try to bridge the great crevasses with the logs which had been brought up from Tseram.

May 14th was not only memorable because of the turn of events on the mountain; this day was the one and only day when we received any mail. Kamar Gyalson and Gyaljen Sonja, two very

young Sherpas, appeared at about 4.30 p.m. as two dots making their way through the avalanche zone below our camp. We watched them excitedly through our glasses, some of our Sherpas going out to meet them.

There was great excitement in the camp as we literally tore their packs from them and fished for our mail. The good Mr. Singh of Rungneet Tea Estate had forwarded all our letters on to us and very soon each of us was in his own private world eagerly lapping up news from home. We could not afford runners to keep up a regular flow of mail to us and we greatly missed news from home. To read letter after letter of good will and kind thoughts from our families and friends was wonderful, and for a time we were miles from the stark and terrifying beauty of Kanchenjunga and once more at home.

My mother cautioned me to "be careful". All sorts of people wrote all sorts of pleasant things and many of these messages came from my own pupils at Hunters Hill School near Bromsgrove. My old school at Blackpool (motto: *Per Ardua at Alta*) sent me a copy of the magazine, which was passed round the camp. The school has recently become a co-educational establishment, and a picture of the senior girls' netball teams caused quite a stir among our Sherpas. They got the idea that the girls were my daughters and my stock rose considerably.

So May 14th gave us our greatest day on the mountain. The reconnaissance was going well, the party was in good spirits, hope was high and above all the world outside with those dearest to us was ours for a moment. All the heartbreak of the march and the disappointments in the Talung Cwm were as nothing and it was a very peaceful night which enveloped the camp as each of us put out his light after reading his mail again and yet again.

XX

The Great Rock Rib

EARLY on the morning of May 15th Kempe and Braham followed by Pasang and myself left for the Ice-fall to look at the possibility of making a safe route on to the rib. We covered the familiar ground to the scree very quickly and rested a short time to put on rope and crampons.

Moving upwards through the ice in our tracks of the day before, the going was steep but of no great difficulty. Many new falls had occurred during the night and the ice showed evidence of being in a considerable state of movement, while the *séracs* and pinnacles around us, even at such an early hour, creaked and groaned as we made our way across to the top of the little gully and the foot of the rock. The last few hundred feet to the rock were very dangerous and what we saw of the first bit did not have to be discussed. To run a risk for a few minutes is often justifiable but to subject the porters to such danger for a long time would have been nothing short of idiocy. The start of the rock at this point was menaced by a horrible overhanging mass of dirty yellow ice and it was obvious that before long the whole lot would come toppling down into the little gully. Any ropes we fixed to this section were bound to be whisked away carrying anyone who happened to be there at the time with them. We retraced our steps yet again, not sure how Ron and Gil would view our decision. I was indeed very sorry to leave the route after such a brief glance; but it was the only possible decision. If the route followed the day before by Ron and Gil was out of the question and the suggested alternative route, then a new approach to the rib would have to be found.

We arrived at the scree slope to find Ron and Gil putting on their crampons. They had left camp quite a while after us and had taken their time in crossing the glacier. It must have been a bitter blow to them to hear our report but they accepted John's decision without question and took off their crampons ready to move round the bottom of the rib in search of another route.

To cut our losses and while Ron and Gil were exploring a new approach to the rock, John Kempe decided that he, Braham and I, with some Sherpas, should take up the tree trunks brought from Tseram and once more try to bridge the great crevasse in the Talung Cwm. I was not too happy at the thought as I had already decided in my own mind that the route to the summit was more likely to lie up the Ice-fall or over the slopes above Pache's grave than through the Talung Cwm. However, I kept my thoughts to myself and prepared for the dreary trudge back up the glacier to the Cwm.

We waited on the scree until our porters returned to camp for the logs and when we saw them moving back along the glacier we set off up the ice. It seemed hours to me before we reached the first slopes of the Cwm and the slogging climb up to the little snow *arête* was interminable. I took comfort from the fact that the Sherpas were carrying the large poles while I had only a small rucksack. It was a tricky business seeing the Sherpas over the crevasse which split the snow-ridge; some of the men actually leaped across balancing their poles like circus jugglers. After this we picked our way across masses of new avalanche debris, a timely reminder that the route was still threatened from above. The little ice pitch provided some light relief, especially when "The Intellectual", Pasang and I were at the top of the pitch heaving up the cumbersome poles. One of these was proving terribly difficult; I was a little irritable and, telling Pasang to heave, we gave a terrific jerk. The pole shot over the edge of the ice like a cork out of a bottle—with "The Intellectual", still attached to it. The startled look on the poor man's face made us both shout with laughter. Happily our victim saw the joke too and we continued upward in a rather happier frame of mind.

I think the three of us knew that the return to the crevasse would be hopeless, but we were determined to be quite sure that no road existed before turning back anywhere. My sentiments about the Cwm I have already expressed and I am quite sure that John Kempe was heartily sick of the place. Trevor, however, was still convinced that in the Talung Cwm lay the key to our search and that his beloved "classic" route over the Hog's Back was the surest way to the summit. But alas for Trevor the crevasse was still impassable. The whole area had changed alarmingly. Masses

of new debris covered the place; not a sign of the flimsy descent into the chasm remained. And to crown everything the crevasse had widened about three feet. One glance was sufficient to tell us two things; first, that our poles would never bridge the gap, and secondly, that to stay there for any length of time was asking for trouble. In spite of the hopelessness of the situation we did try the poles over the gap. One end of the poles we rested at our feet at the narrowest part of the crevasse and slid them across until the other ends barely rested against the merest suspicion of an ice-bulge on the opposite side; the whole thing looked absolutely crazy to me and as we heaved and jockeyed the poles into position I could not help laughing at the comic picture we made. Once the poles were across and resting in a most precarious fashion over the horrible black opening at our feet, we all stood back to view our handiwork. The little bulge on which the poles rested on the opposite side was about fifteen feet from the top of the lip of the crevasse and it was perfectly obvious that as soon as any weight was brought to bear on our flimsy bridge the whole lot, poles, bulge and climber would shoot down to the bottom of the crevasse. We stood about in silence for a few moments until, with a cheerful smile, Pasang cordially invited the "Barra Sahib" to lead the way. To give John a little more confidence he reassuringly planted himself firmly on the near end of the poles as a sort of ballast. At that moment I really felt for John; I would not have stood on that bridge for a gold clock. All eyes were focused on our poor leader as he looked wildly round for a way of escape. He looked at the poles, looked at us, then taking his courage in both hands announced quite flatly that the whole idea was idiotic. I could not have agreed more. An entry in John's diary describing the incident is typically restrained:

"... The crevasse which we hoped to cross had widened by two feet. The dangerous bridge was no more and Jack's route had completely vanished. The poles would only just reach across and we could not fix them on the other side. There seemed a danger that if I put my weight on them they would shoot down to the left. I certainly had not the courage to risk the fall into a hundred feet deep crevasse, and we gave up once again."

This is a princely understatement; there was no *risk* of falling into the crevasse; it was an absolute certainty.

Once again Talung Cwm had won the day; but this time as we

retreated I felt much more justified in withdrawing. It was obvious now that that section of the route was quite unjustifiable. The new debris around us proved that the huge ice-cliffs above the Cwm were anything but inactive; and even as we made our descent a sickening crash from somewhere below us, followed by an ominous rumble brought home the fact that we were none too safe in our present position. We moved down quickly leaving our poles behind us but retrieving our two fixed ropes. Even though we were anxious to be away from the avalanche menace I still found time to enjoy the descent of the little ice-pitch without the help of the fixed rope and Pasang too was loud in his praise of the pitch as he shot down before me. It is unfortunate that Pasang is not a more congenial character. He has succeeded in getting himself a very bad name among British mountaineers, but I must in all honesty say that I really enjoyed climbing with him and always found him to be one hundred per cent reliable when actually engaged in climbing. Pasang did like climbing for its own sake and it is to his credit that when Braham and Mathews returned to Darjeeling several days before the main party, he chose to stay on with us to climb on Kabru, even at the expense of missing part of the Labong race meeting in which he was to have ridden as a jockey.

The steep slopes at the foot of the Talung Cwm gave us considerable trouble. It was late when we moved down and extreme care had to be taken to prevent the slope from avalanching. The walk back to camp was dreary and wearying, and we were more than pleased to see Don Mathews doling out large mugs of lemonade ready for us to drink immediately on arrival. Pasang ran on ahead to be able to meet me with my drink and I was reminded of the day on the march when he fetched me my tea as I gave out the coolie rations.

As compensation for our failure in the Cwm, things were going well on the rock rib. Ron Jackson and Gil Lewis had had another great day and all the honours fell to them as with thoroughness and tenacity they searched the rib for a chink in the mountain's armour.

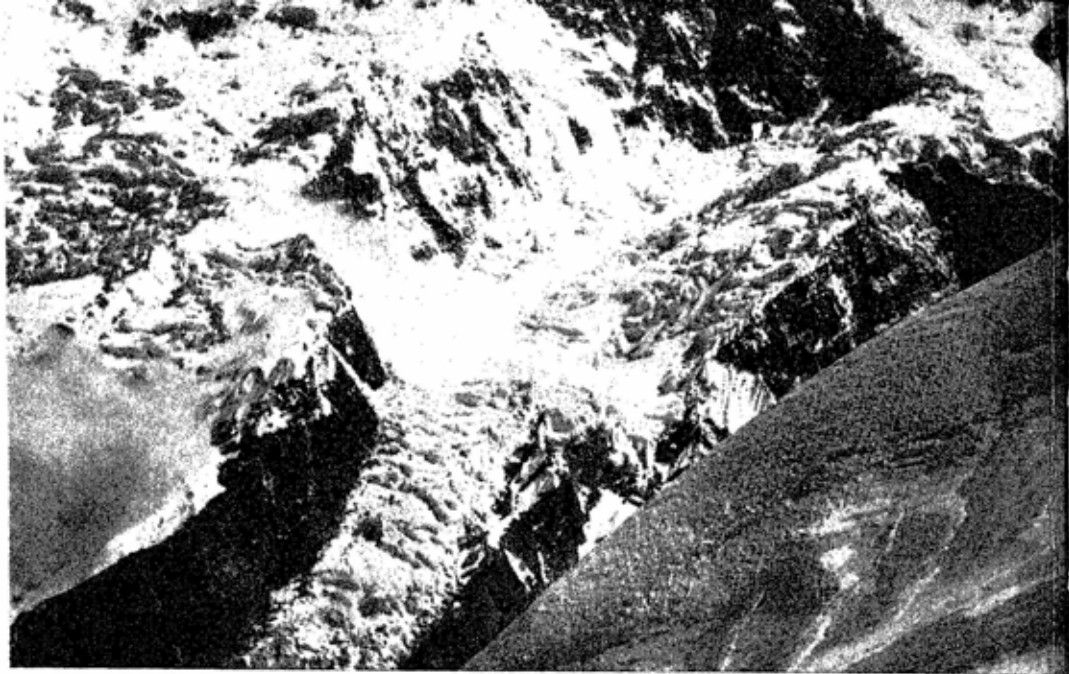
After we had left them they had moved up to the foot of the rock until they had come to a great scree chute plunging down from a steep right-angled corner of smooth rock. A closer examination of the rock revealed that to the right-hand side of the chute



Avalanche falling from the Great Ice Shelf S.W. Face Kanchenjunga

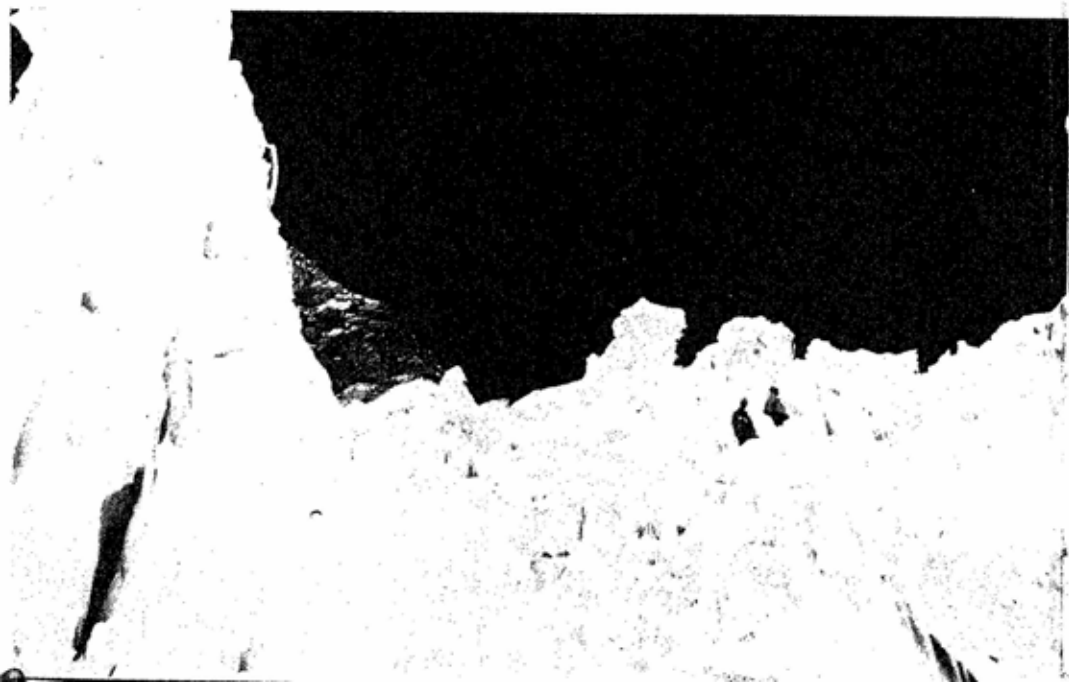
Camp VI at the foot of the Great Ice Fall





The Great Ice Fall from Talung Peak. The crest of Rock Rib is just showing on the right of the lower section

Lewis and Jackson in the Ice Fall



the angle eased off a little and after a short discussion they had decided to try their luck and skill in that direction. They had with them Lakaya, the quietest of our Sherpas, who climbed a hundred feet or so before it became obvious that he was by no means happy. Taking pity on the poor man Lewis and Jackson had escorted him off the rock and then returned to the attack. As Jackson made off on a low-level traverse Lewis tried his luck up an easy rock chimney. Reaching the top of the chimney he then moved across right, traversing a scoop in the rock before once more gaining height up an open and very airy corner. In the meantime Jackson was having a wonderful time up steep but not too difficult rocks to the right of Lewis. After about five hundred feet of climbing the two routes crossed and here the climbers had sat down for a short rest. As they basked in the sunshine on the warm rocks they had decided that the sensible thing to do was to put on the rope and settle down in real earnest to scale the rib. Until then they had been making their separate ways upward hardly daring to believe that a route existed; but so far they had met no real difficulties and from above often saw easier alternatives to the ground they had traversed.

With Ron Jackson leading confidently and soundly the party had steadily gained height. A long traverse to the right over sound rock gave off into a very awkward little chimney which Ron mastered in fine style. With Gil quickly following up behind, Ron left the chimney for a steep broken scree slope which led upwards for several hundred feet to easy rocks. Looking down, the two men had been able to pick out an easier route than the one they had actually taken and made a mental note of familiar landmarks in case the almost inevitable afternoon snow began to fall before they made their way down again. For several hundred feet they climbed steadily upward until quite suddenly they found themselves on the top of the rib.

It must have been a wonderful feeling to know that their route could now be followed. After our many disappointments it seemed that at last Kanchenjunga was going to be kind and let our expedition approach nearer to her lofty throne. But Jackson and Lewis were mountaineers enough to know that much of the rock on which they had made their fine ascent was too difficult for our Sherpas and so without wasting any time, they started the descent keeping a keen eye open for easier alternatives to the

original route. To the right of the awkward chimney a much easier descent was found and again a longer traverse from their resting-place facilitated a very much easier access to the rocks higher up.

Arriving once more on the scree chute at the foot of the rib the two jubilant climbers had raced across the glacier and back into camp with the news.

They were greeted with some misgivings. Our party had had a hard and depressing day and spirits were low. Don and Trevor were of the opinion that what was easy rock for Ron would prove absolutely insurmountable for the average rock climber. Ron and Gil were enthusiastic and keen that the party should make a serious attempt on the following day to put a camp on top of the rib. And so the discussion went backwards and forwards. When Ron assured Kempe that with sufficient fixed ropes it would be a comparatively simple matter to get our Sherpas, with loads, up to the camp site on the rib, Kempe agreed that an effort should be made.

It was accordingly decided that on the following day Ron Jackson would lead the way up the rock rib. I was to follow with Pasang Phutar to engineer the route with handrails and fixed ropes. Behind us would come Braham, Kempe and Lewis with the Sherpas. Mathews wanted to come part of the way to film our activities. We intended to put a camp at the top of the rib and from there to try to get into the small plateau between the upper and lower section of the Great Ice-fall.

We sat a little longer in our mess tent discussing the project, then each of us retired to bed with his private thoughts. I was delighted to be entrusted with the "engineering". I like using pitons and I looked forward with keen anticipation to the morrow.

On the morning of May 16th our camp hummed with activity. The Sherpas were busy packing up loads with tents and food while we looked to our ropes, boots and climbing gear. Pasang and I packed our rucksacks with pitons, extra ropes and snap links. I fastened an extra long length of thin nylon line round my waist and making sure my piton hammer was in its place on the side of my bag I announced to Ron that we were ready to move. The rest of the party followed suit and very soon we all moved across the glacier bound for the scree chute and the rocks above. Owing to various minor hitches we reached the scree slope fairly

well strung out and as I sat with Pasang taking off my crampons I looked up at the scree to see how the party was moving. Well up and to the right were Ron and John taking things steadily; below them and a little apart were Gil and Trevor, while below them again and about three hundred feet above us were Don and Thami with the ciné-camera. Don had moved up pretty rapidly and wanted to follow on Ron's rope to film the business of preparing the route. In his eagerness he was moving just a little too quickly and was beginning to tire.

Pasang and I shouldered our rucksacks and moved off in the wake of the party. As we climbed the scree taking care to keep close together and not dislodge any rocks, a shout suddenly rang through the air. I looked up just in time to see a number of big stones hurtle down in great bounds, leaving little puffs of dust as they bounced about on the scree. Everything happened in a few seconds and there was nothing we could do but shout a warning. Our Doctor was right in the path of the rocks and although he moved quickly he did not move quickly enough. With a horrible thud one of the rocks hit him a smashing blow on his hand squashing it like a rotten apple. Trevor, Pasang and I all reached him about the same time and we were a little worried by Don's condition. His hand looked an awful mess and blood liberally splattered the rocks all round; the wound was ugly and bled profusely but most distressing of all was the fearful state of shock Mathews was in. He continually expressed the fear that he might lose the use of his hand. We reassured him that the wound was not as bad as it looked and gave him a cigarette to draw on whilst we dressed the wound. Fortunately I had with me an emergency ambulance pack and once we had Mathews bandaged up and sitting quietly we took stock of the situation. It was obvious that he could not go on in his present condition and someone had to help him down. By this time Lewis had joined us and after a short discussion it was decided that he and Braham should escort Don to camp while Pasang and I carried on with the all important task of putting in the fixed ropes. Don by this time was much recovered and bidding him farewell I carried on up to the start of the rock where Ron Jackson and John Kempe were waiting. I put John's mind at rest about Mathews' injury and with Ron leading the way started my day's work.

In the meantime, Gil, Trevor and the faithful Thami escorted

poor Mathews back to camp. Once there he assured them that he was perfectly all right and after he was installed in his tent with the medicine chest close at hand he begged the two men to return to the rock rib. Leaving Thami and Pasang Dorji to fend for Don they once more moved back to rejoin the party.

Mathews was wonderful. He insisted that he must not be a burden to us but the accident had been a severe shock to him and he was constantly worried because he could not carry out the numerous tasks he always handled about the camp. Poor Don, he tried to hide the fact that he feared all the time that he would lose the use of his hand, a frightful thought for a surgeon as keen on his profession as he was. Fortunately he made a wonderful recovery and although he has lost the use of the little finger of his right hand he still practises, I am told, with as much skill as ever.

By the time Lewis and Braham had returned to the rib, Pasang and I were happily engaged on our engineering. The first twenty-five feet or so of the route lay up an open sort of chimney of fairly difficult standard and our first job was to fix a rope on this pitch. It was really marvellous to be standing on warm sun-drenched rock hammering in pitons and fixing ropes with the full approval of everyone in the vicinity. The business of piton technique is still taboo in some mountaineering circles although the modern school of climbers accepts the technique as an established means (and indeed on some climbs the only means) of making a route practicable and safe. As I merrily banged away and the music of my little hammer resounded round the rocks, I chuckled at the memory of a very wet afternoon some years ago spent on a frightful overhanging crag in the Lake District in the company of my great friend and teacher Alf Gregory. On this occasion we had spent a very strenuous, but immensely satisfying, afternoon not very far from a hut of the Fell and Rock Climbing Club dabbling in the black art of pegging and double roping. Later while staying at the hut we were taken to task on our folly in a very fatherly manner, by one of the Club's O.M.s.¹ On our drive home that night we were in an agony of doubt as to whether we ought to resign from the Club or put a brave face on things and bear our stained reputations bravely.

Today there was no rebuke from anyone, and I was being openly and unashamedly spurred on to greater efforts. I enjoyed

¹ Original Member

myself immensely and must have shown my pleasure as most of the party commented on the performance in their diaries. Lewis was particularly amused and wrote:

"Jack had a field day with his pitons and fixed ropes. A wicked light in his eyes—you could almost hear him say 'And I believe in oxygen as well!'"

Gradually I got all my ropes fixed. After the starting chimney another longer rope was fixed to cover the passage over an exposed but fairly easily angled slab. After this a long traverse occasioned the fitting of a double handrail to be really safe; and then up a steep exposed chimney where two large pitons securely anchored a fine piece of Kenyon's line. I had a wonderful day on a really wonderful climb and Ron and Gil were entitled to be proud of their route-finding efforts. After the last of the fixed ropes the angle eased off, the climbing gave way to very easy and pleasant scrambling, and this in turn, as anti-climax, to a long exhausting climb up slopes covered in scree.

By this time Ron, Pasang and I were taking life easy, and looking down we occasionally caught a glimpse of our three friends helping the Sherpas up the ropes and reassuring them on this unfamiliar mode of climbing. The Sherpas at first were not too happy but soon realized the potential value of the ropes as a source of amusement. On the way down they frightened us all to death by treating the ropes as a sort of super fairground, hurtling down them at breakneck speed.

It was not very long before the whole party was gathered at the top of the rock rib. We spent no time in further exploration and devoted our remaining energy to levelling out our tent platforms. We were fortunate in that we had a safer camp site than we had enjoyed for many nights and the tents were quickly erected. Two Sherpas, Pasang Phutar and Ang Dawa IV, shared a tent, Lewis and Jackson shared, likewise Kempe and I. Trevor, as a mark of respect for his status as Himalayan Club Secretary, had a tent to himself. We sent the remainder of the Sherpas back to camp and Kempe decided quite rightly that one of us should accompany them to the scree. This unlucky member was to have the option of returning all the way to the glacier camp if he chose to do so. We were delighted when Gil lost the toss (which meant we could stay in camp) and giving him a cup of tea as compensation we packed him off. Such was his enthusiasm that he took the

porters right down to the glacier and then climbed all the way back to spend the night with us.

Our two Sherpas made us a first-rate meal and all five of us crept into one small mountain tent to enjoy it. The conversation, our appetites, and the smoke screen from our pipes and cigarettes, made a setting for all the world like an Annual Dinner. All that was missing was the wine.

As near as we could estimate we were at about 21,000 ft. but as our two altimeters were both unserviceable this figure can only be approximate. However, we were high enough to feel the effects of the altitude and climbing into a sleeping-bag was a little trying. On this occasion John and I were as cosy as two kittens in a basket and we lay head to feet chatting contentedly until late into the night. John was still worried about Don and his injured hand but took consolation from the fact that he had six Sherpas with him; and after all he was the doctor and could do more for himself than we could do for him. After a while we fell asleep and for the first time in weeks I was warm during the night. My sleeping-bag was very old and dilapidated with hardly any down left in it. I had used it regularly for many years and it was practically useless in the extremely low temperatures we were experiencing. I had an ex-R.A.F. down bag with arms and a hood to supplement my bedding, but this was not very much use as it fitted too tightly and I could only get into it with comfort when wearing no clothes at all, and the bag was not warm enough by itself. Night after night I would put on nearly all my clothes and creep into my bag; for the first hour or two I would be quite snug, then as the temperature fell and frost formed inside the tent and round my beard I would begin to shiver a little and move my limbs about to keep warm. Thus the night would often be spent in a series of short naps and vigorous shivers. But now, with John as a "room mate" and the tent flaps tied up I spent a lovely calm night letting the delicious warmth creep over me until I slept.

The next morning we were up quite early, full of hope and expectation. We had all spent a comfortable night and were feeling fit and anxious to be moving on. The very important ceremony of eating breakfast was performed (I always detested this meal, preferring to eat about mid-day when I was usually very hungry) and in three pairs we wandered about the top of the rib looking for a suitable place to continue the climb.

The Great Rock Rib

We had camped right at the top of the rib in a little place which with startling originality we called the Eagle's Eyrie. Above us the very last rocks of the rib gave us a protecting roof which would have diverted any ice which happened to fall directly downwards, although this was an unlikely possibility as the tottering pinnacles of the Ice-fall immediately above fell into two natural lines of descent, either into the *Bergschrund* by the rib, or down a steep snow gully to the right. Ron Jackson and Gil Lewis explored the point where, on their previous ascent, they had seen a possible way on to the ice, but after several unsuccessful attempts returned to camp. Short of climbing right back to where they had gained the rib on their first visit, which of course would have been no gain at all, there was no way across. They both remarked how the rim of the Ice-fall had changed and this suggested that the frightful looking mass of rotten ice above us was very active.

The weather was poor and we were most of the time enveloped in cloud with occasional snow falls. In the gloomy atmosphere the ice-cliffs immediately above us looked forbidding and inhospitable but it seemed that up these cliffs lay our only hope of getting into the top of the Ice-fall. We probed and searched but without success. For the most part the way was blocked by the *Bergschrund* which was very wide and without a bridge anywhere; only at one place did there appear to be a possibility of getting into the ice and this was from the top of the snow gully to the right of the rib. To have stayed in that gully for any length of time would have been suicide and to entertain this approach as a route in daily use was out of the question. A faint possibility did, however, exist on the far side of the gully. There, a very steep snow tongue ran up the rocks for about five hundred feet before finishing in a very fine *arête* which appeared to run behind more rock which obstructed our vision from where we stood on our rib. It was our last chance of gaining the little plateau between the upper and lower parts of the Great Ice-fall, and it was decided that a party of three should make the very dangerous crossing of the gully to climb the snow tongue and see what lay round the corner. The task fell to Kempe, Jackson and Braham, and as the weather had not improved, they decided to set off right away. Lewis and I watched them descend to the left-hand edge of the gully, where they stopped to don crampons and put on the rope. While they were engaged with this task we moved to a more advantageous position so that we could

take photographs of them on the tongue. Sitting thus we heard voices and were rather surprised to see the figures of Balu, Lakaya and Thami Ang Dawa toiling up the scree slope below the camp; Balu was carrying the bulky ciné-camera and tripod but apart from this they were travelling light. As they approached Balu shouted that he had a message from Don who wanted us to return to camp. The message was very confused and not until the three Sherpas were sitting beside us did we comprehend their story. Apparently during the previous night, an avalanche of terrifying size had hurtled down from the mountain. The noise had brought Mathews and the Sherpas from their tents and so close was the huge mass that, stumbling and falling in the dark, they raced for the cover of some large boulders on the opposite side of the camp. For minutes the avalanche had continued driving before it a dense bank of fine snow particles which covered the area to a depth of several inches. The preceding wind tore through our camp like a hurricane, flattening tents and tossing equipment and our belongings about like corks. The men in camp had been certain that their last day had come and while the porters crouched in fear, muttering prayers, the sick Mathews, dazed by the noise and confusion in the camp, tried to rally them to find safer cover.

After a while the wind and noise ceased but although the party was safe they had been badly shaken. The camp was a shambles and after locating a Primus and some tea they spent the night together in the Sherpa tent which was still intact. The thousands of tons of ice-blocks and debris had stopped short of the camp thanks to our foresight in putting the tents on the slight mound of rocks; but another avalanche of similar proportion might not be so accommodating and it was obvious that we ought to move yet again. Mathews had sent a message up to Kempe asking for help to shift the camp and we called down to John to wait a moment before setting off up the snow tongue. Unfortunately the little party below us had left and were in the middle of the snow gully right in the path of any missile which might at any time hurtle down the chute. Obviously this was not a good time to hold a yelling contest, so Lewis and I sat quiet waiting anxiously for the party to gain the safety of the opposite bank of the gully.

The speed at which the party moved across was amazing; they were obviously intent on spending as little time as possible in that

The Great Rock Rib

most unpleasant situation, and showing remarkable sure-footedness and a very high degree of icemanship were quickly ensconced on the rocks opposite where they relaxed for a rest and a smoke. We now called across to tell John about Mathews' message and it was decided that someone would have to go down; but if there was still a way into the Ice-fall from the rocks opposite us then two people should push on leaving two others in support at our present camp. Closely questioning the Sherpas we decided that there was no immediate hurry; the men below were still sorting out the chaos in the camp and a move could not be made for an hour or two. If there was no way of gaining the ice above us then the whole party might as well retreat; the outcome of the ascent of the snow tongue would be known in about half an hour when our party would be in a position to see round the rocks opposite.

We watched the three men slowly but surely make their way up the steep snow until they were standing on the very crest above the tongue. Their position was most exposed and grey cloud kept swirling about them, occasionally hiding them from our sight. They moved round the corner out of our field of view and for ten minutes or so Lewis and I twiddled our thumbs in exasperation. After what seemed an age we made out the three small figures moving slowly down through the mist and wondered what they had to report. The descent of the steep tongue took very little time and once more our comrades were running the gauntlet in the gully; but they crossed without incident, and as they slowly made their way up to us we could see by their faces that they had met with little success.

Once more lack of bridging material had beaten us. With the proper equipment we could no doubt have crossed the *Bergschrund* and been in a position to explore the vital area between the upper and lower Ice-falls; without it we had no option but to admit defeat and once more withdraw to our glacier base.

Sadly and in an agony of frustration we struck camp and started the climb down the rock rib. I descended first with Pasang Phutar to film the party as they came down the fixed ropes and I had a great deal of fun watching their antics as they slid or clambered down each pitch. It says a great deal for the climbing on the rib that by the time we had reached the bottom of the rock we were all in a happier frame of mind. The descent had been immensely enjoyable.

Once down we left the Sherpas to follow at their own speed, eager to see how Don was faring back in camp. We arrived there to find he had everything under control but demanding loudly that a safer spot be found to rest our heads. Again we packed up our bags and moved another half mile down the glacier.

XXI

The Last of the Face

ONCE more we were sitting in a glacier camp, and once more we discussed the possibilities left open to us. By now we were a scarecrow-looking lot with unkempt beards, matted hair and faces burned almost black; our hands had pieces of flesh knocked off them and our finger-nails were cracked and broken. Our clothing too was showing signs of wear and my climbing breeches, which I had purchased in Switzerland three years before, were worn thin and sported a great tear at one side. The mountain so far had won every round and there seemed nowhere else to try. Everyone but Kempe and I was against trying Pache's (Crowley's) route and Trevor even wanted to have another go at Talung Cwm. He and Ron were sure that if they used the rather nasty little gully by the big rock buttress which supported the Hog's Back, they would be able to get into the Cwm. The project looked very dangerous and some of the party considered it absolutely unjustifiable. But we were in the closing stages of our expedition; all possibilities had been tried excepting this one, and very much against his better judgment John Kempe agreed to a last attempt by Jackson and Braham to reach the Cwm.

The division of the party for the following day's activities was agreed upon and May 18th saw Trevor and Ron with Balu setting off once more for the Talung Cwm. Pasang and I returned to the rock rib to take out our pitons (which are an expensive item). Lewis stayed in camp with Mathews who was much recovered but still not wholly fit. We had rigged Don up with a splint for his finger and his hand was practically useless; he could never be idle however and kept pottering about doing odd jobs. Kempe with

The Last of the Face

two Sherpas went down to our small food store at the old moraine camp to fetch up some supplies to keep us going in the event of Ron and Trevor being successful in the Cwm.

John did not appear too happy about returning to the Cwm but beyond urging Ron and Trevor to be careful he showed no signs of being worried. He was actually most anxious about the ascent via the gully and his diary shows that he wrestled with the problem for most of the night. In the circumstances I think John did the right thing in letting the party go to the gully; undoubtedly they ran a grave risk but greater risks have been taken in the interests of exploration and had this attempt not been made there might always have been a lingering suspicion in the minds of the party that every possible route was not really tried before being rejected.

John and his group waved good-bye and struck off down the glacier. Ron, Trevor and Balu, three small specks in the distance, made the long dismal plod to the Talung Cwm. Gil and Don were "tidying up" (a favourite pastime in camp), while Pasang and I went off to the rock rib armed with piton hammers, a couple of empty rucksacks and a very large drinking bottle of lemonade. I was looking forward to doing the rock climb again and with Pasang as a companion thoroughly enjoyed a very speedy ascent of the rib to the top ropes. We sat for a time watching the progress of the party in the Cwm; they seemed to be in a frightfully exposed position and I kept my fingers tightly crossed for them. After a time they became obscured by cloud and as the morning was wearing on we decided to get to work. We had a great deal of fun taking out the pitons and climbing down the rib without the aid of the fixed ropes. Pasang was obviously out to impress me, and impressed I was; he rock-climbed extremely well and I never had to assist him at any point. Sometimes as I worked away at a particularly stubborn piton he would take a firm hold of my rope and belay himself in a very unorthodox but quite efficient manner so that I was able to lean right back off the rock and give all my attention to the dismantling of the ropes and pitons. It was very hard work at high altitude and every few minutes I had to stop for a short rest, but in comparatively quick time we had taken out the last rope and were sitting at the top of the scree on a large flat rock sorting and packing our paraphernalia. While we were sitting like this Pasang drew my attention to three tiny specks moving slowly

down the gully at the entrance to the Talung Cwm; it was our party in retreat. Once more, I thought, the way was closed.

Pasang and I shouldered our packs and set off at a rattling good pace for the camp. The rucksacks were very heavy with ropes and ironmongery, but Pasang was determined to beat me back to the tents. The ensuing race down the now all too familiar glacier cost me a great deal of energy; but my reputation was unimpaired as neck and neck, with wild yells to announce our arrival, we gasped our perspiring way into camp.

Ang Dawa IV, the cook, gave us tea and we lay about on the rocks to await the arrival of Ron and Trevor. We scanned the top end of the glacier through our glasses and Lewis suddenly expressed some concern about the way the party was moving. As we watched, one of the figures broke away from the others, who were moving very slowly, and headed for the camp at great speed. Something was obviously wrong. By now we could make out that the solitary figure was Balu. He was travelling very fast towards us and one of the Sherpas set out to meet him. We put some tea on to boil and Mathews opened his medicine chest just in case. A half hour later Balu arrived in camp and told us that there had been an accident in the gully and Braham was hurt. Pasang immediately set off to meet the two men, taking with him a kettle full of tea. A moment or two later Lewis and I followed to see if we could be of any assistance. We noticed with relief that Trevor was still walking, which indicated that whatever had happened to him he was at least not very seriously hurt. But it was bad enough. He looked ghastly, his face had a nasty greenish tinge under his tan, blood matted his hair and his speech was a little garbled. He refused to let us help him into camp and once there we had considerable difficulty in getting him to sit down; he was suffering badly from shock and was consequently a little irritable at the fuss we were making. Don took over and adopted a firm line. It was a case of the blind leading the blind as poor Don was still very groggy himself and his hand continually ached and throbbed with pain in its mass of bandages. Under Mathews' direction I took off Trevor's Balaclava helmet and bathed his head. It was fortunate that at the time of the accident he had been wearing a thick Balaclava and his stout felt hat, otherwise he might have sustained a very severe injury. As it was a very nasty gash showed itself as I washed away the clotted blood. Under terrific protests from

The Last of the Face

Trevor, Don instructed me to cut away the hair around the wound. Once this operation was finished we had to sew up the wound and with Don as surgeon in charge, myself as Theatre Sister, and Lewis and Jackson as washer-up and passer-of-things respectively a very neat job of stitching was done on Trevor's scalp. Trevor was magnificent and apart from proving rather difficult when ordered to bed, bore his misfortune with great courage.

While the operation was going on John Kempe arrived back in camp. He was terribly worried about Trevor; I am sure he blamed himself for the accident, but Don assured him that there was nothing very serious and that Trevor would be quite fit in a few days' time. Nevertheless this was the second accident in a matter of days and John was not prepared to risk further casualties. He called a conference and we chatted late into the evening.

It was not until we had succeeded in getting Trevor to go to his bed that we heard Ron's story of what had happened. Everything had gone smoothly until they had almost reached the top of the gully and were in fact on the point of reaching the ice beyond the great crevasse. They were moving as quickly as they could and another ten minutes would have seen them safely into the Cwm. Suddenly they heard a loud crack and a roar followed by a rattle of boulders down the rocks above them. They crouched close to the rocks in an effort to take cover but the party was in a very exposed position. Instinctively they covered their heads with their arms as the stones rushed down upon them but a cry from Trevor told its own story. Ron at first glance thought the accident was more serious than proved to be the case but was immensely relieved to find that Trevor was able to continue under his own power. With Balu going first and Ron keeping a tight rope on Trevor from the rear they managed to make their way down to the glacier below and once on safe ground Ron sent Balu off at full speed to tell us what had happened. Braham in making that descent showed remarkable tenacity and powers of endurance; his fine spirit in carrying on when he must have been suffering badly from shock and in considerable pain saved the rest of us from having to carry out a rescue under what could only have been very dangerous conditions and might possibly have involved the expedition in a major accident. He put up a splendid show in the best tradition of mountaineering.

The direct result of the accident was a flat refusal by John to support any further attempts to reach the Cwm. It was a dangerous proposition and we had been very fortunate in not being involved in a more serious catastrophe; to push our luck too far was asking for trouble. The next move was obviously to return to our moraine camp and take stock. We had two injured members in the party, food was very low, and we were a little worn and weary of the continuous worry about the huge avalanches which now fell with monotonous but frightening regularity from Kanchenjunga. The sum total of our success was not encouraging. So far we had really achieved nothing beyond proving that a party could reach the top of the lower section of the Great Ice-fall, but in this instance this discovery was only of value if a camp site existed there, and more important still a route up the upper section of the Ice-fall presented itself. We took comfort from the fact that by any standards our route up the rock rib was practicable, and most important of all, safe. There was a fine camp site at the top of the rock in a first rate situation for forcing the last two or three hundred feet up to the level section of the depression dividing the two portions of the Ice-fall. It now remained for us, by some means, to gain a position from where we could look into the Ice-fall and if possible secure some pictures of the depression and the upper portion of the fall. There was of course still a possible approach to the summit from Pache's grave, but we hardly had enough food for a serious attempt on this route. We finally retired to bed resolved that the next day we should return to moraine camp and then try to climb Talung Peak from the slopes of which we hoped to obtain pictures of the whole Ice-fall and take a look into the little hollow at the top of the lower section of the fall. This latter aim was to be the main object of the attempt on Talung, the summit being attempted only if conditions proved favourable. It was imperative to the success of the expedition to prove that the Ice-fall route was practicable above where we had left it and an examination of the route from the opposite side of the valley would be of great value if we could get high enough to look down in the level section of the depression. As will be recorded later we just about succeeded in doing so and so wrested success from near-failure. From our higher position on Talung Peak we could overlook the entire route to the summit; we saw the Ice-fall climb like a giant staircase from the Yalung glacier up to the Great Shelf running across the

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South-West Face. What was more important, we could see the depression in the level portion between the lower and upper section where the continuation of our route was to be found, and what we saw was exciting. From our camp site at the top of the Great Rib it was only a matter of a few hundred feet into the depression. The area appeared quite free of crevasses from the top of the lower section of the Ice-fall to the start of the upper part, and best of all a very reasonable looking camp site presented itself. This camp site was in the nature of a small snow-field nestling against the great cliffs on the left bank of the fall that led up to Kangbachen itself, one of the Kanchenjunga summits. After a long look at it through our glasses we concluded that there was not a great deal of danger from avalanches; we could see no sign of debris and certainly nothing fell in the region for the short time we had it under observation. There was of course the possibility of stones falling from the great cliffs above but the snow-field looked big enough to allow a party to camp well clear of any such threat. From the depression the snow-field leading to the upper Ice-fall appeared fairly straightforward but the top section of the fall itself looked forbidding. For about another 2,000 to 2,500 ft. the Ice-fall rose to the northern end of the Great Shelf running across the South-West Face of the mountain; it rose steeply and was well covered with great hanging masses of ice, any of which might break away.

At first this section looked hopeless but closer scrutiny showed a breach in these icy defences. Running close by the rock-cliffs on the left (true right) side of the ice-fall a wide smooth snow-passage climbs almost to the top of the ice. Again we studied the fall very closely and our observations disclosed that apart from the usual risk of falling stones the snow-passage looked free of any avalanche debris from the cliffs above. The angle of the fall in its upper part is such that any avalanche falling from there would seem to fall away from the smooth snow under the cliffs and plunge down either the broken part of the fall or over the edge to hurtle down the great cliffs below the massive ice-shelf, and on to the Yalung glacier. It did look as if the route to the Great Shelf lay up the Ice-fall. The only real doubts we had were aroused by the rather difficult looking crossing from the top of the smooth snow into the main fall and the exit out of the Ice-fall on to the shelf. The first of these two factors lies in the purely technical aspect of forcing a route, but the second obstacle is of a more

Kanchenjunga

formidable nature. Right at the top of the Ice-fall where it plunged down from the Great Shelf there was a line of big crevasses; even from our viewpoint on Talung Peak these great chasms were obvious. But there were places where the uneven surface of the fall hid these crevasses from view so that we had no way of telling whether or not the exit from the fall was feasible.

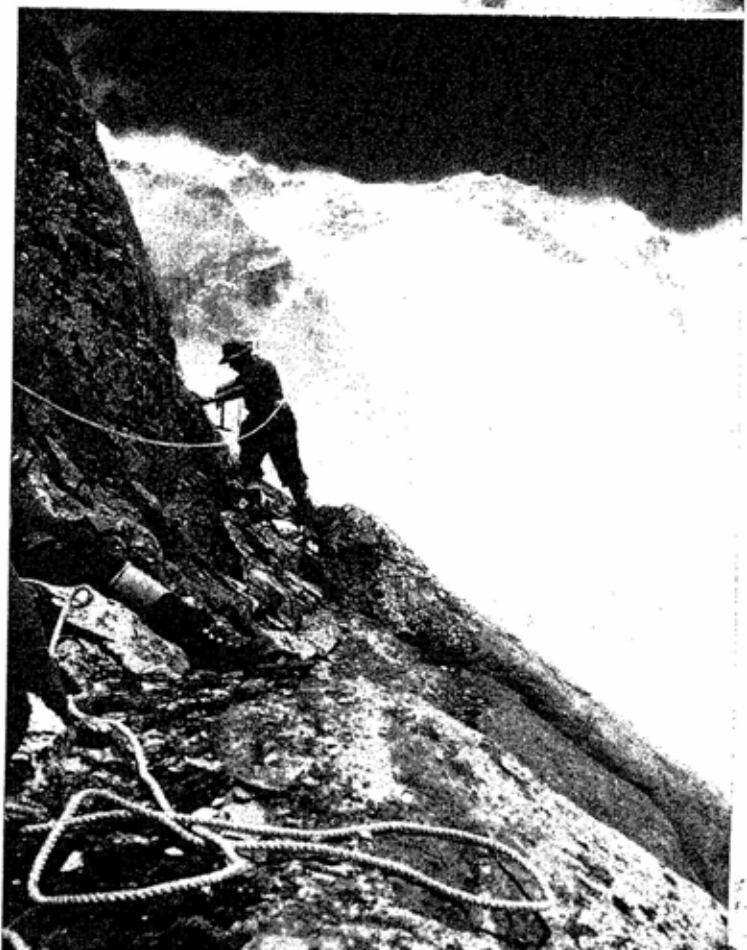
Certainly from what we saw an attempt on the summit of Kanchenjunga was a feasible proposition by this route. Once the difficulty of gaining the shelf from the top of the Ice-fall is overcome there is no shortage of camp sites. The Great Shelf is so large that a good advanced base consisting of as many tents as one cares to transport can be easily sited. Also the shelf at this point does not appear to be threatened at all from above, the upper face consisting mainly of rock; further it is sheltered from the terrible west winds which ravage the upper slopes. From the camp on the Great Shelf it should be possible to gain the West Col between the main summit and Kangbachen by climbing up a shallow snow couloir on the right of the crescent or horse-shoe shaped rock-cliff, which are so prominent a feature of the mountain seen from Darjeeling. Once on the West Col a not too long traverse will bring the climber on to the summit. This section of the route from the Great Shelf looks free from objective dangers but appears to be steep, exposed and difficult, which may call for rock climbing of a very high standard. However one expects difficulties on a peak such as this and with the right equipment, the right weather and, most important of all, the right team, these difficulties can be overcome.

To sum up, one can say that a route most certainly exists and this route can be said to present a certain amount of danger in its lower portion and what promises to be considerable technical difficulty in its upper parts. On the other hand it has the merits of being direct, sheltered for a greater part of its length from the wind, and provides a very large natural site for a well-equipped advanced base only 3,000 feet from the summit.

But at the time when we discussed the results of our many probings up the South-West Face in our glacier camp we did not yet know the continuation of our route up the Great Rib. We had not looked into the depression between the lower and upper Ice-fall, nor could we form an opinion about the upper section of the Great Ice-fall. We were, in fact, feeling depressed at our many



The Hogs Back seen
from the Great Ice
Fall

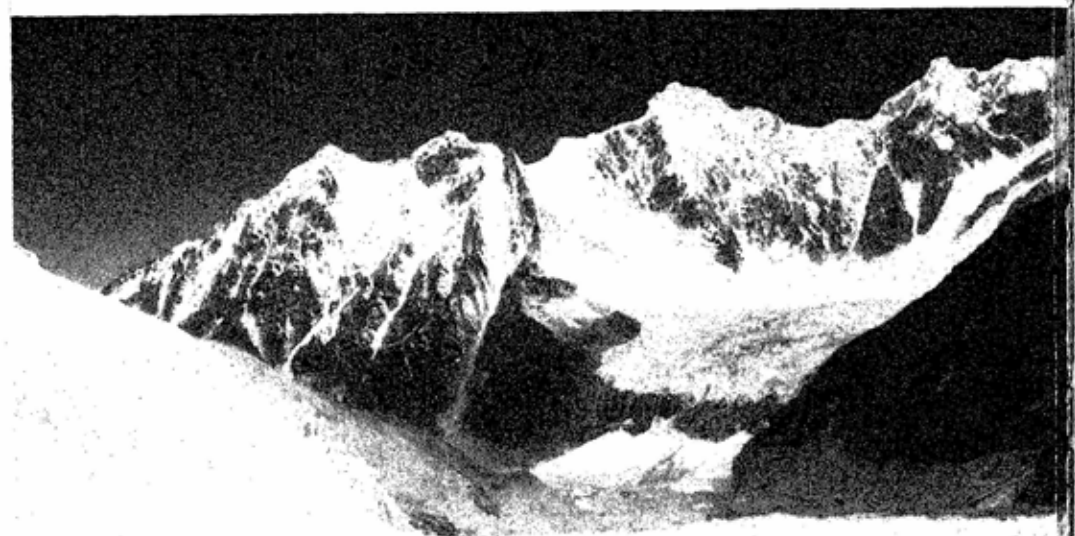


Putting in fixed
ropes on the Rock
Rib



The upper part of the S.W. Face from Kabru. The Upper Ice Fall and snow corridor along the far side can be plainly seen

Porters descending to Camp IV, Jannu in the background



The Last of the Face

failures and felt we had little to show for our efforts. Time was running desperately short.

The following day Kempe, Lewis and I left with the bulk of the loads for Moraine Camp IV. We travelled as quickly as we could through the lower avalanche area which was now a shambles; in the past three weeks millions of tons of ice must have found its way on to the glacier and the debris lay everywhere. As we moved out of the zone and into the more broken but safer area a large mass of ice broke away from the mountain and hurtled with the speed of an express train down the great smooth chute on the lower slopes of Talung Peak. It was as if the mountain wanted us to be gone and like an angry landowner chasing trespassers from his estate gave us a blast over our heads to speed us on our way. We responded willingly and, threading our way through the great pinnacles around us, speedily made our way to our old friend the thin strip of rocks which gave us a safe and easy passage down the centre of the glacier to our moraine. I was amazed at the great change in the route through the crevassed portion of the glacier and in the lower ice. On the way up to our Advanced Base the ice on either side of the strip of rocks had been more or less uniform in its waves and pinnacles but now one side was compressed into great rolling billows, while on the other side many new and large crevasse had opened up; even the rock strip had changed considerably from its original form. Eventually and without incident we reached the foot of the moraine and for once it was a relief to toil up the soft and crumbling earth to the blessed scrubby brown moss on which our battered little tent stood in proud possession. It was truly wonderful to stand looking out over the glacier knowing that at last we could go to bed, safe in the knowledge that no avalanche could reach us. I felt a little sorry for the rest of the party still up at the Advanced Base. Although the site was perfectly safe it was horribly uncomfortable and the noise of the falling ice and the creaking and groaning of the glacier around the camp was disturbing and did not make for an easy mind. Mathews and Jackson had chosen to stay on at the camp for another day to give Trevor Braham a chance to rest up and regain his strength for the move down to the lower camp. On the day following our arrival at Moraine Camp we sent our Sherpas back up to the Advanced Base to carry the few remaining loads so that Braham and Mathews could travel light.

While our Sherpas returned to help with the evacuation of the top "rib" camp we three carried out a preliminary reconnaissance of the lower slopes of Kabru on a similar route to that which Kempe had followed the year before when he reached the summit. From our Moraine Camp we climbed up to the top of the great spur which led up to the old Kabru Base and where Jackson and I had spent such a dreary time only a week or two before. This time however I was feeling exceptionally fit and as we passed the little platform on which my tent had lain, I felt no regrets that that part of the expedition was done with. We slowly made our way up the rocks above the old camp site until we reached the steep lower ice slopes of Kabru. Here we stopped to put on the rope and our crampons. After a rest of half an hour we moved off with John in the lead and myself bringing up the rear and for several hours we made our way up the ice above. The climbing was exhausting in the heat of a still calm day, but we took things easily and actually enjoyed the delightful route which took us over steep smooth ice. This necessitated cutting a few steps on to a really wonderful hard snow surface up which we cramponed with a nice easy pace, the soothing crunch of the snow under our spikes almost having the effect of a lullaby. The sheer joy of climbing on a good firm snow, without the awful threat of avalanches to sweep one away at any moment, was intoxicating. We spent three days in this region and although at times the altitude was hard on us we all agreed that it was three days of great fun. Personally I enjoyed the most wonderful climbing I have ever experienced.

In glorious sunshine we wound our way in and out of a most beautiful area of large gaping crevasses. It was delightfully safe as all the gaps were wide open for us to see and the careful prodding of the ground we trod proved to be a mere formality. One terrific crevasse barred our way with a gap of at least twenty feet which curved away to our right up a very steep snow slope where it became narrower, making it possible to cross. We cut our way up the steep snow, the front man puffing and panting with his exertions while we behind stood basking in the warm sunshine.

This particular moment gave me the most wonderful mental picture of mountain scenery I have ever retained. Even as I write I can still recapture the warmth of the sun and the glint of light on flashing steel as Kempe hacked his laborious way up the slope. Little splinters of ice, making a kaleidoscope of colour as the sun's

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rays caught them, whispered past me in their capricious descent to the slopes below. The solid form of Lewis standing alert and ready should Kempe slip, and John's easily balanced figure as he worked with a steady rhythm above me, made me feel very close to my companions. Far above us the steep virgin white snows shone in celestial brilliance finishing in a sharp gleaming line against the deep blue of the sky. Across the valley, glistening and proud, Jannu, White Wave and even Kanchenjunga itself seemed to smile over us as we crawled like tiny insects up the white slopes of the sister peak. The whole scene was lovely—the deep blues and purples, the flimsy white clouds floating lightly over the mighty ridges, and far beyond our valley the great billowing cumulonimbus clouds piled greyly on top of one another as they slowly spread over Nepal and the great plains beyond. This was indeed a mountaineer's world of beauty and silence and we were acutely conscious of our great fortune.

As we neared the top of the steep slope we crossed the crevasse but found that further progress in that direction was obstructed by a large area of tottering *séracs*. To descend along the opposite lip of the crevasse to an alternative route, following the easier and more open ground beyond, would take an extra hour or so but it was safe and looked pleasant. Naturally we chose this route.

By now we were at about 22,000 ft. and, reaching the top of a small rise, the full length of the Great Kanchenjunga Ice-fall on the opposite side of the valley became visible to us. We were tremendously excited but our thrill was short-lived. The most interesting part of the fall and the little plateau dividing the upper and lower sections in which we were so interested was obscured by a fluffy little cloud which covered in a most tantalizing fashion this centre portion as if it had grown tired of floating along and had chosen this as the most convenient spot for a rest. We settled ourselves down in the snow and, refreshing ourselves with chocolate and lemonade, waited for the little cloud to pass on. But it was a rather determined bank of vapour and three-quarters of an hour later it was still in the same position. We decided to descend before the steep slopes below became too soft and dangerous and once more shouldered our packs and moved off. The descent, as usual, was very much quicker than the climb and an hour or two later we were back at the old Kabru Base vainly trying to catch a few drops of water which trickled down from a fringe of big

icicles hanging over the lip of the *Bergschrund*.¹ Convincing ourselves that we were greatly refreshed by this trickle of earthy water we raced off down the spur back to Moraine Camp. As we clattered down the boulder-strewn slopes to the tents we were hailed by our companions who had installed themselves in newly erected tents and were sitting about drinking tea. They had been watching us through binoculars and amazed us by saying that they thought we had been in a frightfully dangerous place, exposed to the risk of avalanches from a series of broken ice-cliffs high on the face. A close study of the spot on our part revealed that owing to a great deal of foreshortening it did seem that where we had rested was in a direct line with the very *séracs* we had so arduously avoided. We laughed away the doubts of our friends and turned to the meal our cook Ang Dawa had prepared for us.

Now came a rather sorrowful decision on the part of Don and Trevor. Both were injured and in rather poor shape, and as they were supposed to be back in Calcutta by June 8th they had decided that it would be better for all concerned if they left immediately for Darjeeling; they intended to travel home via the Chumbab La and Pamionche in Sikkim and could take the journey slowly. We were very sad to think of the party splitting up, but there was no point in their hanging about for no purpose. We accordingly divided the rations, detailed Thami Ang Dawa and Balu to accompany our two companions and helped them pack ready for the journey.

We all felt it was a great pity that now the difficult part of the expedition was behind us and there was the prospect of a fine climb in good conditions, poor Braham and Mathews, who had done so much and proved such fine companions, were not able to share the experience. We appreciated the wisdom of their decision but the happy hours we spent together in the tent that evening were overlaid with feelings of sadness at the imminent parting.

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BEFORE Don and Trevor left us to start their march back to Darjeeling we had a little farewell ceremony. Our one bottle of rum was opened and we had rum and lemonade all round; this was followed by a group photograph taken very badly by Balu, and then, with true devotion to duty, Don extracted a last collection of blood samples and carried out further biological experiments. This task finished, we waved a sorrowful good-bye to our friends and watched them until they were out of sight, obscured from our eyes by the huge bulk of the moraine.

We missed them very much and particularly did I miss Donald Mathews. I had become very attached to this cheery hardworking character and it was sad not to know when we should meet again. Trevor was waiting for us at his home in Calcutta where he entertained us royally on our return. Don was to fly to England, then to the United States, and although we had arranged to meet in London our timing did not work out as planned, and I have not yet set eyes on him since his broad back disappeared from view as he left Moraine Camp.

Once the little party had left us we turned our attentions to the assault on Talung Peak. We were very badly off for food at this stage and it was obvious that we should very soon have to make our way down to Tseram where we had arranged that the Ghunza coolie contractor should meet us with coolies for the return march and further supplies. However, we considered that we could afford three days for the assault on Talung Peak, after which we should be on short rations until our supplies arrived from Ghunza.

We had with us some army ration packs which we had been saving for such a special occasion as this, and with these as our main food supply we set off for the Peak.

Kempe and I left ahead of the main party at about 7.30 a.m. on May 21st. We were to prepare the camp site and if possible reconnoitre a little further than we had been the day before.

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Jackson and Lewis with Pasang Phutar and Ang¹ Dawa III, "The Intellectual", followed on with the main portion of the loads.

It was swelteringly hot; there was not a breath of wind and the glare from the ice was a great strain on the eyes even with dark glasses. We toiled upward following our tracks of the day before but in nothing like the same conditions. Whereas yesterday we had enjoyed a good hard surface up which we could crampon, today with the great heat, the snow was soft and wet, even at the early hour of 9 a.m. By midday it would be very soft indeed and to move about on the steep slopes of the mountain after 2 p.m. would have been courting disaster from self-made avalanches. Consequently we were anxious to reach the camp site before the sun did its work and we kept up a steady but frightfully tiring pace to the point where we had turned back the day before.

Up above our highest point, gained on the 20th, was a very steep slope of snow-covered ice; on reaching this point, we sat on our rucksacks and took a drink of lemonade. I was feeling absolutely exhausted and John confirmed that he too would be glad when we reached camp. It was as much as I could do to stop myself from drinking all my lemonade there and then. In an effort to boost my flagging energies I took out a packet of glucose tablets. I had read of the magical effect of glucose; all one had to do was to eat a couple of tablets and a new lease of energy refreshed and invigorated the body; barley sugar was reputed to have the same effect. What then could be more invigorating than a good helping of glucose followed by a barley sugar toffee? To make a good job, I ate the whole packet of glucose and instantly followed it with three barley sugars popped into my mouth at once. I sat back and waited for the surge of energy which was going to carry me up and beyond the steep slopes above to the heavenly resting place of my little tent, where I could get out of the scaring light and heat of the sun. But the surge of energy never came. I did not feel in the least refreshed. The toil up the slope was only accomplished by a heartbreaking grind with sweat running into my eyes, making them sting and drawing forth large tears, while my back ached and my pants stuck to my legs like hot poultices. The only part of me which remained cool was my chest and back and this was because of the truly wonderful open weave vest I was wearing. Until I had eaten the glucose I had succeeded in making my mind a blank to avoid thinking about the intolerable

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heat; but now I could think of only one thing—how nice it would be to be able to eat large, thick meaty sausages! This craving for meat had occasionally been with me before but now it became an obsession and stayed with me until I returned to Darjeeling where I horrified Mr. and Mrs. Roy Henderson, who very kindly looked after us during our stay there, by eating every scrap of cooked flesh which was put before me.

By midday we had reached a height of approximately 20,000 ft. and found ourselves in the area of large crevasse. This was nothing like the terrain we had experienced on the Yalung glacier or in the Talung Cwm, consisting, as it did, of two or three very wide gaps connected by several little snow-fields. We chose the most suitable spot and started to level out three small platforms with our ice-axes. It was very hot work but we drew comfort from the fact that very soon we should be able to escape from the heat of the sun. As we worked away we heard the sound of voices and could make out Lewis and Jackson with five Sherpas toiling up the slopes below. They had brought the three extra Sherpas to carry the loads so that they and the two men who were to stay with us on the mountains could travel light and save their energy. By 1.30 p.m. they had joined us and we immediately sent the spare Sherpas down with Ang Dawa IV in charge. We saw them down the steep slopes and then watched them going at high speed until they moved across to the rocks above the old Kabru Camp.

We lost no time in erecting our tents and thankfully crawled inside; but it was stifling and it was a case of sitting outside and roasting, or sitting inside and suffocating. Mercifully at about 2.30 p.m. we were enveloped in cloud and with the sun obscured the temperature dropped.

We had pitched our tents so that the two sleeve openings could if necessary be tied together to form a tunnel between the two. We could see Jackson and Lewis lying like two great bears puffing out dense clouds of smoke from rank cigarettes, while Kempe and I in our own "bed-sitter" across the way blew out equally dense clouds of smoke from equally rank pipes.

John had dished out each man with his ration pack (there was only enough for one each) and for several minutes we were like children on Christmas morning. Mine had a wonderful looking tin with the magic words "Steak and Kidney Pudding" printed

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on in big black letters; there were also hard but delicious biscuits and packets of tea, sugar and cheese. We pooled our puddings and that evening we enjoyed a meal such as we had not eaten since we left the Dak bungalow at Phalut. It was not a big meal but oh! what a welcome change from chapatties and jam and tinned carrots which had been our staple diet for the last few days! I can still taste that wonderful meal.

We chatted for an hour or two until darkness fell and it became very cold. Saying goodnight to Lewis and Jackson we tied up our tent sleeve, snuggled into our bags, and lit our pipes to help get up a good fug. Very soon we were warm and snug, John reading from *Henry V* and myself delving into the *Spirit of Man*. It was wonderful to be comfortable, warm, and above all else, camped in a really safe place with no fear of avalanches or anything else which might drop down on us.

The morning of May 22nd dawned fine but very cold and we were up early. John and I with Pasang left camp at 6 a.m. I had a terrible struggle to get my boots on as they were frozen, and we were chilled to the bone. We warmed up, however, after we had been going for half an hour or so and made good progress through a little area of very stable looking *séracs* just beyond the camp.

We had decided that we should try to reach the summit of Talung Peak that day and return to our camp for the night. The route we were following was approximately the route followed by Kempe the year before on his ascent of Kabru. John was of the opinion that we could traverse across the upper slopes of Kabru to the summit ridge of Talung and attain the summit from the south. Accordingly we continued up the Kabru slopes to a height of approximately 23,000 ft. when the summit of Talung Peak looked quite near and almost level with us.

The first part of the climb through the *séracs* was, after the first half hour, most enjoyable. John was leading with Pasang second; I was bringing up the rear. Pasang was obviously enjoying himself and sang little songs to himself as he plodded up before me. We followed a twisting course round hummocks of ice and over steep slopes with magnificent views of Jannu and Kanchenjunga on the opposite side of the valley. The cloudless sky was a very deep blue and the snow sparkled and glistened in the early morning sunlight.

As we climbed higher the slopes became steeper and it was necessary to cut steps in the frozen snow. We passed under some

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great ice formations which curved upward gracefully in strange shapes showing wonderful examples of snow stratification; but as we left these formations below, the condition of the surface changed. Up to this point we had mounted steadily on hard smooth snow in which we could carve firm steps; but now the snow deteriorated. We experienced a very thin crust which broke through as soon as we put our weight on it; under this crust was fine granulated snow which afforded no secure footing. We floundered at every step and it was heartbreaking work lifting first one leg and then the other out of deep holes. We pushed on gaining height slowly and after an hour or so we found that the thin crust was no more; instead we had the same loose snow to a depth of several inches lying on hard rubbery ice and now we had to clear away the snow before chopping a step. We stopped for a rest and leaned on our axes to regain our breath. About 500 feet below us we could see Lewis and Jackson toiling upward in our steps; further down three little tents stood out against the white glare of the snow, and beyond this the misshapen back of the Yalung glacier snaked its way down the valley. On the opposite side of the valley the great unbroken line of cliffs stretching from Jannu over White Wave and Kanchenjunga glistened in the sunlight. From our position the descending south ridge of Kanchenjunga which swept down from the summit looked less formidable and the Talung Cwm and Saddle seemed very far beneath us.

After a few minutes we set off again and when close on 23,000 ft. we veered off to the left aiming for the summit ridge of Kabru where it took a downward sweep in the direction of Talung Peak and the Talung Saddle. The going was now very tricky as the soft surface snow had been swept clear of the slope by the wind, leaving bare ice which in parts was hard and took many blows of the axe before a step could be fashioned; but in other parts the ice was merely a thin sort of crust over a series of shallow depressions. This was most disconcerting and irritating but gradually we moved across keeping well below the ridge to avoid the wind which was beginning to whip fine snow away from the crest of the mountain in long wispy clouds. As we moved round and across the ice slope Talung Peak became clearly visible. We were about level with it and it looked just a walk to the summit once we could move down to the Talung Ridge which was now below us; but we found the way blocked. The slope we were on was getting steadily

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steeper and as we moved round to gain the crest of the ridge the ice-slope gave way to smooth rocks well plastered with ice. It was obvious that at the last fence we should tumble and reluctantly we had to return the way we had come.

We were not, however, unduly disappointed. We had had a fine climb and reached a good height. Most important of all we were at last in a really good position to look into the Great Ice-fall up the South-West Face of Kanchenjunga. We could overlook the entire route from the Yalung glacier over the Great Rib, the Depression, the upper ice-fall, the Great Shelf and the West Col to the summit. And a happy sight it was, giving us assurance at last, that all our endeavour, our tireless probings, speculation and testing had not ended in failure.

A second observation, which did not concern the ice-fall route but which is of paramount importance, was of the slopes leading out of the Talung Cwm up to the Hog's Back, which was our objective in our attempts to get into the Cwm before abandoning the reconnaissance at the great crevasse. From the *névé* above the huge ice-cliffs overhanging the entrance of the Cwm (which would have to be gained before the Hog's Back could be reached) the snow slopes rise very steeply indeed up to an almost vertical ice-cliff of great height abutting on to the Hog's Back. The angle and size of this ice-cliff is such that I doubt if it would be climbed even if it were at sea-level; but at 22,000 ft. without oxygen or even laden with the cumbersome equipment of an oxygen ascent, I think it would be out of the question. Thus was a last hope of the ascent of Kanchenjunga via the Talung Cwm dispelled.

We spent a long time studying the face from our lofty perch on Kabru. The sun was climbing high into the heavens, and as our route to Talung Peak was barred we decided to get down as soon as possible and make off across the steep ice. Still a good way below us we could see Jackson and Lewis resting, obviously waiting to see what our next move would be; as they saw us descend they took off their rucksacks and made themselves more comfortable. The slopes below us had deteriorated abominably and we had to exercise great care as we slowly picked our way down the soft snow which threatened to avalanche at any moment. It seemed ages before we reached our two friends and after a brief account of what we had seen we left them smoking cigarettes and studying the great face of Kanchenjunga through their glasses.

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Eventually we reached the safer ground near the great *séracs* and here we decided to rest. Very thankfully we settled in the snow and after a frightful struggle with a box of Indian matches I managed to kindle a light in the bowl of my pipe. I was surprised to find that apart from the continual puffing necessary to keep my pipe going I really enjoyed my smoke and sat contented for a quarter of an hour or so. We watched Ron and Gil above us descending carefully in what by now must have been terribly crumbled steps and we found enough breath to give them a half-hearted yodel before we continued our own way down. About six hundred feet above our camp we decided to make a very long traverse to the north in an effort to look up the actual slopes of Talung Peak. For quite a long time we traversed and in the lead it was exhausting work as every now and then one would sink in to the thigh in soft clinging snow. Eventually we emerged from the *séracs* on to a wide and almost level snow-field, above which rose smooth steep slopes going straight up to the summit ridge of Talung. I could not help feeling disappointed; if we had chosen this route instead of Kabru there is little doubt that we should have reached the summit. However, we could see the way open and concluded that the ascent of Talung Peak can undoubtedly be made from that spot. We retraced our steps with as much hard work as we had experienced previously, but eventually found ourselves back on our old route; another three-quarters of an hour of painstaking care on shocking snow brought us back to camp and the all-embracing if eccentric care of "The Intellectual". A little while later we were joined by Jackson and Lewis and we sat around drinking lemonade and eating up the remains of our food packs.

We now had a rather difficult situation to resolve. Should we continue our attempts to climb Talung Peak or not? After a great deal of discussion two conclusions were reached; the first was that to do the climb safely we should need to take a camp higher up the mountain so that we could reach the summit and return to the tents before the snow became too dangerous; the second was that if we did this we should have to do it on very little food. Ron was quite emphatic that he was not prepared to make the attempt without putting up another camp properly stocked. John was prepared to stay on if anyone felt very strongly about it but thought we should retire and withdraw from the valley to Tseram.

Lewis was all for trying for the top in a single day from our present site, which was feasible if all went well and we were prepared to risk a descent in the late afternoon on very bad snow. I nearly stayed on with Lewis but I had a peculiar feeling that it would be better to go down. If we had not seen the route up the ice-fall across the valley we might have stayed on to do the summit as a means of cutting our losses and extracting compensation from the mountain, but as it was, we had seen the justification of our expedition in the route we had discovered and somehow the ascent of Talung Peak did not seem important. The deciding factor, however, was the lack of supplies. To have stayed on would have meant another two days, one to reach the summit, and one to get back to the Moraine Camp. We were almost completely without food and were relying on the supplies from Ghunza to get us back to Darjeeling. If these supplies did not arrive we should have to march to Ghunza to obtain what food we could. After much discussion we decided to withdraw and once we had made the decision we lost no time in getting away. Striking camp we descended the slopes below us to the rocks above Kabru Camp. The descent was slow and needed very great care in bad snow conditions, but we accomplished it without mishap and lay about on the rocks wallowing in the warmth of the afternoon. The sun had been so hot that, where two days before we had only been able to get a few drops of water, we were now able to make lemonade from a pleasant sparkling little stream which bubbled down the rocks beside us. It was delightful sitting in shirt sleeves with nothing to do but walk down to camp; there was no more puffing up glaring snow, no more danger from avalanches, no need now to probe laboriously for hidden crevasses or flog away with an ice-axe at tough ice; all we had to do was to make our leisurely way down the Yalung glacier to the delightful green meadows at Tseram. But for all these pleasant thoughts there was no escaping the fact that the adventure was ending and I felt a little sad.

One by one we picked up our rucksacks and made our various ways down the spur to Moraine Camp. The Sherpas were busy making tea and chapatties and very soon we were sitting round eating a frugal meal. For a long time we discussed the ice-fall and what we had seen and the more we talked it over the more satisfied we were that a feasible route existed. We were early to bed and the next day early to rise.

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With all our equipment and what food we had left there were about sixteen loads plus personal effects to clear. We had six Sherpas. Ajeeba and his men were to carry the loads in two trips to Upper Ramser leaving us with only our own personal luggage to carry. We set off along the moraine and in half an hour were toiling across the little glacier which flows westward from Kabru and which in spite of being small provides an hour of sheer drudgery. We eventually reached the south side and perspired our way up the moraine. Sitting at the top Ron suddenly remembered that he had left his watch behind on a rock near the camp. I really felt for him and I think I might have been tempted to leave the thing where it was, had it been mine. However, Gil very sportingly offered to go back with him and as they set off John and I continued our way down the moraine to the site of our first camp, where poor Octavius had met his end.

As we neared our old camp site we came upon a very small patch of green moss which actually had dew on it, and at the same time and with something of a shock we heard a lark singing. I have never known such exquisite softness and never again shall I hear so sweet a song. We lay on the soft moss for a while waiting for Ron and Gil to catch us up but after half an hour we moved on. Past the old camp site we scrambled down the huge lateral moraine on to the Yalung for the last time. It was unbearably hot and we sweated and cursed our way up and down the boulder-strewn waves of ice heading for the opposite bank of the glacier and the lateral moraine, beyond which lay Upper Ramser and grass on which to camp. It was terrible stumbling and toiling across the Yalung, and I found myself getting a fierce thrill of satisfaction every time John, who was just in front of me, put his foot on a boulder which threw him or slipped on the gravel-strewn ice. He later admitted that he was just as comforted every time I had any comment to make on the rough going. At last we reached the high lateral moraine on the right bank of the Yalung and never was I so pleased to see a moraine in my life. In another twenty minutes or so we were at the top and walking on brown scrubby grass, and it was heavenly to feel the spring of turf beneath our feet. We pottered slowly along to Upper Ramser with its old yak-herd's hut; to hear the stream as it chuckled its silver way over the stones through the dwarf rhododendrons was sheer magic, and the shrill song of many skylarks, with hundreds of

choughs providing a rather harsh descant, was heavenly music indeed.

Just after reaching camp the mist enveloped us and it began to rain a cold drizzle. John and I sat in the yak-herd's shelter with its broken roof and I made a fire from old bits of wood which were lying about. As we sat there waiting for the Sherpas to arrive with the tents I felt satisfied and contented, we chatted about many inconsequential things and did not mind when the rain began to stream down the gnarled beams to drip on to us; the hiss of water droplets in the flames enhanced the romance of the first fire we had seen in weeks and if I had had my sleeping-bag with me I should have camped there and then.

Later, Ang Dawa IV arrived and, like a good cook should, built up the fire and put on the kettle for tea. Soon Pasang Phutar followed with the tents and together in the rain we erected them.

Gradually the remainder of the party trickled in (almost literally, they were so wet) and as the cold night with its shroud of clammy mist crept into the camp we all gathered round the big fire which was crackling merrily in the hut. There was only half a roof on the hut and showers of sparks as Ang Dawa poked about the fire shot up through the gap into the murky night air. We drank thick hot soup laced with tsampa and chillies which stung our cracked lips and brought tears to our eyes, but it tasted good to us. Outside the rain poured down and the grey blanket of cloud swirled round our battered little house; but within all was warmth and good cheer. Supper finished, the Sherpas joined us in a not very musical rendering of "Clementine" and as the night crept on we sang song after song or just listened to the Sherpas, accompanied by Pasang on his flute, as they chanted their own queer music.

One by one we slipped away to our tents to fall into a deep and welcome sleep.

For two and a half days we lingered at Upper Ramser while the Sherpas returned up the glacier to ferry down our loads. We were in no great hurry to be away in spite of having only very little food; we had in fact just sufficient for soup thickened with tsampa once a day; but it was a wonderful period of idleness and lethargy punctuated by long discussions on every topic under the sun. The weather had broken completely but at this stage we did not care when it rained all day and night. Even though our tents

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did leak abominably, we could always dry out by the fire, which we kept burning with dwarf rhododendron. This gave off a wonderful incense which fuddled the brain and conjured up the most exotic fancies. But a move had to be made, and on May 27th we marched past Dachenrol monastery over green meadows covered with primula and Himalayan blue poppies. We crossed the big stream which carves its way through the woods, and a delightful hour spent threading our way through the pine trees and rhododendrons, with a bright yellow carpet of primula for our feet, brought us out to our old base at Tseram.

Our friends the yak-herds and the "Mayor" had gone and the green meadow was deserted of yaks. We sat about on the rock waiting for the Sherpas to arrive with our loads; but after a half hour of this I decided to provide a little warmth. Everywhere and everything was wet but eventually I managed to find some kindling with which to start my fire. After I had used a full box of matches (Indian) and there was not even so much as a wisp of smoke rising, the Sherpas arrived and lit us a proper fire round which we sat watching a couple of lammergier hovering and gliding about high up above our heads. These birds are a type of vulture and although they are not the prettiest of birds when at rest, they are wonderful to watch as they fly about hunting for food.

In between times we consumed gallons of tea, of which we had plenty left, milkless but with plenty of sugar. We were now practically without food and our supplies from Ghunza were not due until the following day, so again we had the most frugal of meals consisting of a couple of chapatties and the last of our jam. If the coolies did not arrive the next day we should have to go out on a foraging party. We were beginning to get interested in food again.

XXIII

The Last Lap

ON May 28th we were in an agony of uncertainty waiting for the coolies to arrive from Ghunza, but we need not have worried. At about 8 a.m. some coolies arrived in the company of our Sherpas from the direction of Upper Ramser. They told us a

garbled yarn about Jackson Sahib coming over from Ghunza and we were completely fogged. Eventually we straightened the story out and were delighted by what we heard.

The day before, John Jackson, the brother of Ron Jackson and a member of the triumphant 1955 expedition whom we had hoped would join our expedition, had arrived with a score of Sherpas and coolies in Ghunza. He had been four months with the *Daily Mail* Yeti Expedition and as they had finished their explorations and were winding up their investigations into the whereabouts of the Abominable Snowman, John had decided to take a walk across to meet us. He was, according to the new arrivals, at that very moment on his way over from Ghunza.

Ron, of course, was delighted and I was immensely pleased. I have climbed in many places at home and in the Alps with John and to meet him like this in the Himalayas was quite exciting. Ron and I went off in the direction of Upper Ramser hoping to meet John, but he arrived in camp while we were away. He had been "guided" across from Ghunza by the coolie factor from there who was bringing our men across and was himself paying us a visit to collect an advance of agent's fees on their behalf. We strongly suspected that this fee went into his pocket for good, but the coolies seemed happy about it so we said nothing. This Ghunza character had been most successful in losing John Jackson and his party at night on the Mirgin La, a steep pass between Tseram and Ghunza, and poor John had had the responsibility of not only seeing his own party safely over in very bad conditions but the factor's as well. They arrived in camp utterly worn out and very wet having been on their feet for twenty-nine hours.

However, all discomfort was forgotten in the thrill and excitement of the reunion of the Jackson brothers and this excitement mounted to fever pitch when John Jackson announced that the *Daily Mail* Expedition had sent us their salaams and a present of food and tobacco. We fell on John and urged him to stop wasting time and produce something to eat, whereupon he delved into a great sack and produced a huge tin of tongue. We hurriedly opened up the tin and called for tea and chapatties. While these were coming Jackson produced a large tin of butter and very soon we were sitting back wiping our mouths and showing our appreciation of the gifts in true Eastern fashion. John swore afterwards that we had eaten the tin as well.

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The night John Jackson, with the aid of Mingma¹, his cook, and Ang Dawa, our cook, produced a meal of such proportions and delicacy and served with such finesse that we might have been on a certain Everest Expedition of the thirties. We gorged on such delicacies as anchovy and mushrooms, we encored a second tin of rare meat with heaps of vegetables and we finished off with fruit and clotted cream followed by a fragrant cheese. Never have lips smacked so and never before did men ply themselves so doughtily to their task. John Jackson was a little disgusted with us; but his Sherpas were loud in their praise of our appetites.

There was very little sleep that night and we built a huge fire round which we all gathered; it was something of a reunion for the Sherpas too who greeted old friends and relatives. I talked for a long time with Ang Nyima who had accompanied George Lowe and Alf Gregory to the top camp on Everest and Ang Nyima asked me about Blackpool and its Tower; was it as high as Everest?

As the evening wore on to early morning the songs of the Sherpas filled the night air. They had some "chang" which was passed round and the tempo of the evening increased somewhat; but eventually we crept off to our tents to get a little sleep before moving off on our return march to Darjeeling.

May 29th saw us taking leave of Tseram and the Yalung valley. Lewis wanted to satisfy himself that the low level route from Phalut to Tseram was as hopeless as Ajeeba had reported on his reconnaissance of January; so with Ang Dawa IV, the cook, and one coolie he bade us good-bye at the bridge below the camp site and struck off down the valley. The Jackson brothers, John Kempe and I, climbed the track to Namga Tsal and on to the Semo La.

It is not necessary to dwell on the return journey which followed the same route as we had taken several weeks earlier; but one or two incidents are worth recording. The Semo La was quite different now; only very small patches of snow still lay in the hollows on the mountain side and everywhere birds flitted and sang and flowers showed their heads in a gay rhapsody of colour. The only thing to spoil the march home was the bad weather we experienced every day. We did have bright spells however and made the most of them to take photographs and sun bathe; but for the most part rain fell steadily so that we usually arrived in

¹ Mingma had been with Kempe on Kabru the year before and had accompanied him to the summit.

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camp very wet and spent the nights in soppiag sleeping-bags. However, it was no worse than a good summer day in the Lake District at home, and indeed without the snow the countryside was very similar in places.

After a very damp march over the Semo La we put up our tents on our old camp site on the south side of the pass and as I was sitting down to enjoy a cup of tea prepared by Mingma I suddenly remembered that I had left my camera on the far side of the La where we had stopped for lunch. I was furious and with faint hope asked Pasang if by any chance he had picked it up; he hadn't, but he straightway put on his boots and offered to go back for it. I declined his offer because I knew he would not know where to look; so I put my boots on and started the weary and long trip back over the pass. Pasang very kindly insisted on coming with me and together we spent the next four hours crossing and recrossing the La. We found the camera, but a triple crossing of the Semo La in one day is a very heavy price to pay for carelessness and I was most particular after that where I placed things.

We made our way leisurely along the ridges which had given us so much worry and hard work on the way to the Yalung; but how changed everything was! Flowers were everywhere and the soft turf under our feet or the occasional stony track was heavenly to walk along. We basked in the sunshine during the bright periods and when it rained walked along not minding in the least. I put up my big umbrella which I had carried all the way to Kanchenjunga and back and which was now a blessing. I probably looked odd beneath it, clad as I was in filthy white shorts, long-sleeved vest, and brightly coloured neckerchief, but I did not care and I was supremely happy.

Day after day we strolled along thus. The Chumbab La which had been so fierce on the way out was now nothing more than a high pass entailing a normal amount of hard work to cross it; the only real worry we had on the pass was an almost overpowering smell of cats which we thought must come from a snow leopard in the vicinity. After the Chumbab we made the descent to Gombotang through the woods which were truly beautiful with masses of rhododendrons in flower and many varieties of orchids and poppies.

As we descended to the lovely valley in which Gombotang lies, Ajeeba pointed out all the things which one could eat and

which grew in profusion around us. The yellow poppy stripped of its leaves and flowers provides a deliciously refreshing tit-bit for the march; in camp, cooked like celery, it does excellent service as a vegetable. Wild onions grew in abundance and wild rhubarb was there for the picking. A little later we came across beds of wild strawberry and many a pleasant half-hour was spent sitting by the track enjoying this delicious fruit.

We decided to spend a day at Gombotang just lazing about enjoying the trees and flowers. We photographed each other, the Sherpas, the coolies, flowers, birds and anything else which happened to take our fancy. We ate mountains of wild rhubarb but unfortunately the Sherpas always cooked it until the whole lot turned into a fine stringy liquid. At night we built a huge bonfire and gathered round it chatting and singing until far into the night. It was at this camp that Ang Dawa III, "The Intellectual", emptied John Kempe's tent while it was raining; poor John could do nothing but sit watching him with a long-suffering expression on his face.

After our pleasant rest we continued our leisurely way along the Singalila Ridge and as we reached the lower parts we had the most magnificent views into Nepal on the west side and Sikkim on the east. The monsoon clouds were building up on the plains and in the valleys, and more often than not we would find ourselves walking along a fine ridge above a sea of glistening white cloud. For the last few days of the march we had a delightful passage through forests and meadows with only the danger of leeches to threaten us.

When we reached our old camp site at Nyathang where we had experienced the dreadful storm on the way to the mountain we found a completely different scene. The little water-hole was still there and also the small hut, but the weather was fine and everything appeared peaceful. The Sherpas decided that there we should spend the night.

As we sat about this spot waiting for our tea, a rather seedy character turned up carrying half of what we thought, at first, to be a cow. We immediately made offers for the meat. It turned out, however, to be a water-buffalo and crawling with maggots at that, so we hurriedly withdrew our offer. The owner of the carcass declared that we were in his house and wanted us out, but by this time all the Sherpas and coolies were well settled in the hut and

provided a pleasant picture of a large and dirty family at home. After a flat refusal to move on the part of our men, the new arrival and his wife, who had just arrived on the scene, made the best of a bad job and stayed for supper.

Just after this little episode I wandered off to photograph some flowers and was focusing on a particularly pretty clump of primula when Ajeeba shouted across for me to be very careful and stay in camp. I asked why and was horrified to hear that I was wandering about among some vicious tiger traps. On pressing the point further I learned that the seedy looking character with the buffalo was not in too good a temper and that the carcass he was carrying was the remains of a tiger's supper from the night before. This particular buffalo was one of his herd which had been attacked near the camp and, quite rightly, the owner was all for taking his revenge; hence the traps and also no doubt the reason for his rather testy attitude when he found us all in his house. On pursuing the topic of tigers I found that it is customary for this striped gentleman to return to the scene of his kill; going still further into the matter I discovered that our tents had been pitched the fantastic distance of ten yards from the very spot where the buffalo had been ripped to pieces. Quite suddenly the camp site lost all its beauty and I rather nervously suggested that we move a little way, say twenty miles, down the ridge. I was laughed to scorn by the Jackson brothers and John Kempe, but I thought the laughter sounded a little hysterical. However, not wishing to appear a coward I made the best of it, and spent a sleepless eight hours with millions of green eyes watching me and hundreds of striped forms scratching and sniffing around.

After "Tiger Camp" there was no untoward incident to spoil the march and a day or so later we were being welcomed at Phalut by our old friend the Chaukidar.

It was wonderful to be in a house again and we lost no time in making full use of easy chairs and a large fireplace. In the evening we were joined by a party of Jesuit Fathers who were taking a well-earned rest from the plains to enjoy the peace and solitude of the beautiful Singalila Ridge. They had walked from Darjeeling, staying each night at one of the Dak Bungalows. In the days of the British Raj this short but beautiful excursion was enjoyed by many a weary planter and his family, or serviceman on leave, and the visitors' books at the bungalows carry many famous

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names. Today the Chaukidar is not kept quite so busy as he used to be and he talked to us of the many friends who at one time had been regular callers at this beautiful spot.

After we had eaten and all our men were bedded down, the Jesuit Fathers took over the small dining room (with the burnt hole in the floor as silent witness of our last visit) and sat down to an enormous stew. This gargantuan meal proved too much for our kindly neighbours who came into our room and begged us to join them at supper; we did our best to respond but we had eaten too well and although a valiant effort was made there was still a large proportion of the excellent meal left over. We were all very sad that such good food should be wasted but a sudden new arrival saved the situation. A loud clatter on the veranda outside announced the arrival of Gilmour Lewis. He had made his trip back and had reached Phalut only a few hours after us. It was grand to see him and he and Ang Dawa were in good heart. Without any preliminaries our Jesuit friends sat them down at the table and in a matter of minutes the stew had disappeared. After the meal introductions were effected over a potent and, to me, vile-tasting brew known as rakshee. It put the finishing touch to a grand evening and after Lewis had recounted his adventures we tottered off to bed. My last recollections were of hoarse Sherpa voices raised in mournful song and a peculiar rosy tint over everything which I could not properly account for.

The next night, after a delightful march, we arrived at Sandakphu. Two little incidents made this a remarkable occasion. The first was a complaint by Ang Dawa IV, the cook (who had accompanied Gil Lewis), that he was unwell. Gil told us that for four days Ang Dawa had been complaining about his stomach and, assuming he was suffering from diarrhoea, Gil had taken the necessary action. Hearing that he was still in a bad way, Ron Jackson and Gil once more dosed the poor little man with large spoonfuls of chloradine, the wretched fellow being in such a state that he could hardly stand. It suddenly occurred to me that Ang Dawa might be suffering from the reverse of the malady for which he was being treated. Ron and Gil, seeing that this might be a possibility, immediately changed their tactics and made the suffering Sherpa swallow a few cascara tablets. For days after, his fellow Sherpas talked of nothing but Ang Dawa's wanderings that night. He had sped back and forth until the small hours of

the morning, eventually to return no more until the sun was high over the horizon and the party was ready to move off. The treatment, although drastic, apparently did the trick and by the time we were reaching civilization Ang Dawa was able to muster up a weak salaam.

The other incident concerned ourselves. Four of us were sleeping in a small room with only two beds which were occupied by Gil Lewis and myself, the Jackson brothers enjoying a far greater measure of comfort on the floor. The floor was of an even hardness whereas the beds were hard in great bumps. Kempe was sleeping on a table in the dining room. After we had been in bed some time we became aware that swarms of earwigs of prodigious size were crawling all over the walls, the floor and ourselves. This was unpleasant enough, but when they began to drop on to us from the ceiling with sickly plops we felt we had had enough. War was declared and the battle raged for about an hour. Then, spotting the king of all earwigs marching stoically up the wall intent on reaching Lewis's left ear, I gave a yell to Gil to take cover or act. He leaned over and with his ice-axe made a terrific clout at the earwig King and knocked him writhing and obviously seriously injured to the floor. We both leaned over together to survey the damage and as we came into close contact I was aware of the fact that Lewis had not washed for many weeks. The man stank! I told him as politely as I could but without mincing my words that I objected to his unwashed state. As Gil prepared to take serious umbrage we all started sniffing at the peculiar smell in the room. A most revolting stench clung to our nostrils and gradually became so overpowering and disgusting that we forgot our manners and fought for the door and the window. Close examination revealed that the source of the ghastly fumes was our friend the earwig which we discovered, was not an earwig at all but a strange-looking beetle. We scooped him up into a matchbox and flung him far into the night but it was an hour or two before the smell was clear of the room.

After this little interlude we managed to get some sleep and the next day we rose early and were soon on our way. For the last few miles along the ridge the weather favoured us in the mornings, the afternoons sending torrential rains to cool our feet and our ardour. But life was still good.

We marched on through beautiful woods and long heavenly

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paths stopping now and again to drink chang with friendly villagers, or to take photographs of dirty but delightful children. In pouring rain we adopted various garbs ranging from full windproof kit to just a pair of shorts and at one turn in the path so alarmed an unsuspecting coolie that the poor chap nearly dropped his load.

Thus we made our way back to civilization. We ran down the steep path into Mani Bandjien in time to stop a jeep which whisked us at breakneck speed to Darjeeling. We sent off buses from here to pick up our men and loads which were being mustered by Ajeeba to follow up the next day. This job done, we paid a call at Lobos, a first-class patisserie in the centre of the town, where we drank several bottles of beer and wolfed down forty-six rupees' worth of cream cakes and delicious meat pasties while the proprietor played us the latest "hit" tunes on his gramophone. He did not mind in the least that we were bearded, unkempt and dirty, but I noticed he did not stand too close to us.

The welcome we received from Roy Henderson and his charming wife was wonderful and after a hot bath which defies description we drank delicious tea out of dainty cups. I think I disgraced myself by eating everything in sight whenever we dined and on one or two occasions forgot to use my knife and fork at meals; but the Hendersons were kindness itself and showed great forbearance.

Gradually we were rehabilitated and became civilized once more. We visited the Planter's Club where for at least an hour I sat through the luxury of a shave and a haircut, the barber demanding heavy baksheesh for the extraordinary work involved. We dined with Mr. Leslie Goddard, the Headmaster of St. Paul's School, right at the top of the hill on which Darjeeling stands. Labong races drew us, where Pasang Phutar, my Sherpa, resplendent in his jockey's colours, rode with such skill that he cost Lewis and me ten rupees. We had the pleasure of seeing our Sherpas walking out with their various lady friends, gay and kittenish in colourful dress, the Sherpas themselves resplendent in ill-fitting suits topped by their beloved woollen Balaclava helmets and large coloured umbrellas.

We were back in the world of people, motor-cars, shops and traders, and Kanchenjunga seemed a long, long way off. But after tasting the fleshpots again I felt a little homesick for my tent and

Kanchenjunga

the camp fires, and in the early morning, from the terrace of Rungneet Tea Estate the silver beauty of Kanchenjunga called me back.

XXIV

Epilogue

WHILE we were resting at Rungneet Tea Estate after our return from the Yalung valley a communication arrived from Sir John Hunt asking Kempe to send a full report on our findings, as soon as possible, to the Himalayan Committee in London. Kempe wasted no time in doing this and very soon his report was being closely studied by the small sub-committee which had been set up in London to decide whether to send a further expedition to attempt the summit by our route.

On our return to the United Kingdom, Ron Jackson and I attended a meeting at Camberley where we placed before the sub-committee all the information we had at our disposal. We were intensely pleased when as a result of our findings the decision was made to send a further party to the South-West Face.

Dr. Charles Evans (who with Mr. Tom Bourdillon had so nearly reached the summit of Everest in 1953) was invited to lead the party and accepted. It was decided that our Ice-fall route via the Great Rib and the West Col should be subjected to a large-scale reconnaissance, the object being to push a step further on to the Great Shelf and if possible the upper face of the mountain.

At the time of going to press news reached us of the brilliant and successful ascent of Kanchenjunga by Dr. Evans's party, carrying the latest equipment.

With only one slight alteration in the lower part of the climb the ascent was carried out by the route recommended by the 1954 reconnaissance; a gratifying acknowledgment of the value of our exploration of the Upper Yalung glacier.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EVERY expedition whatever its objectives never leaves without a great deal of work on the part of people who do not share in the fun and adventure of the project; theirs is only the hard work and to them many thanks are due. On behalf of the expedition I express our thanks to those people who gave their time so generously.

Further I should like to express our gratitude to the numerous firms who responded so kindly to our appeals for assistance and without whose help the venture would not have been possible. Our thanks are also due to Sir John Hunt who gave us his full support when many doubted the practicability of our scheme; and to Mr. Eric Shipton who offered his invaluable advice to Lewis when he was desperately searching for assistance.

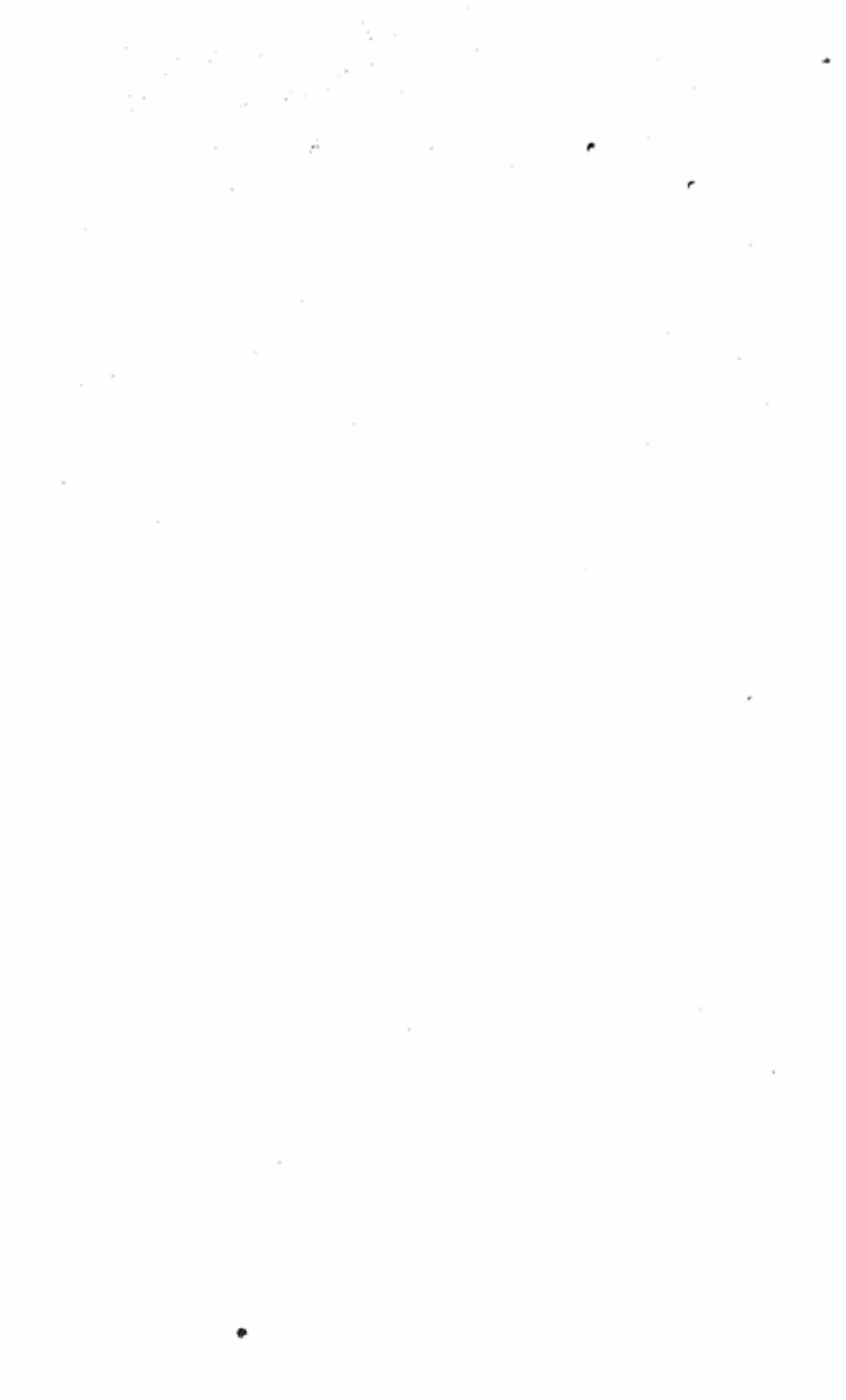
The Expedition also thanks the Joint Committee of the Royal Geographical Society and The Alpine Club for their financial support; my publisher Paul Elek for putting at our disposal his sales manager, Mr. Allum, who was responsible for obtaining for us several items of valuable equipment; and also the Himalayan Club for their invaluable assistance in India.

Permissions have been given to quote and acknowledgements are due to the Editors of "The Alpine Journal", "The Himalayan Journal"; and Victor Gollancz Ltd., the publishers of "Kanchenjunga Adventure" by F. S. Smythe; References to Dr. Paul Bauer's Expeditions were based on his accounts from the "Himalayan Journal" and his book "Himalayan Campaign" published in 1937 by Basil Blackwell (Oxford); and those to Douglas Freshfield's journeys from his book "Round Kanchenjunga" unfortunately many years out of print.

In producing the manuscript I am indebted to Mrs. Eleanor Brockett and Mr. Anton Ehrenzweig for their valuable help and advice; also to Gilmour Lewis for his patient burrowing through old files and accounts.

Thanks are also due to Miss Dorothy Lacey and Miss Eileen Harrison of Bromsgrove for typing much of the early manuscript in their own time; and in particular to Miss Margaret Mossop of The Outward Bound Mountain School who typed the whole of the manuscript of Part II from my most illegible handwriting. Lastly I thank the other members of the party for supplying me with their diaries and photographs.

J. W. T.



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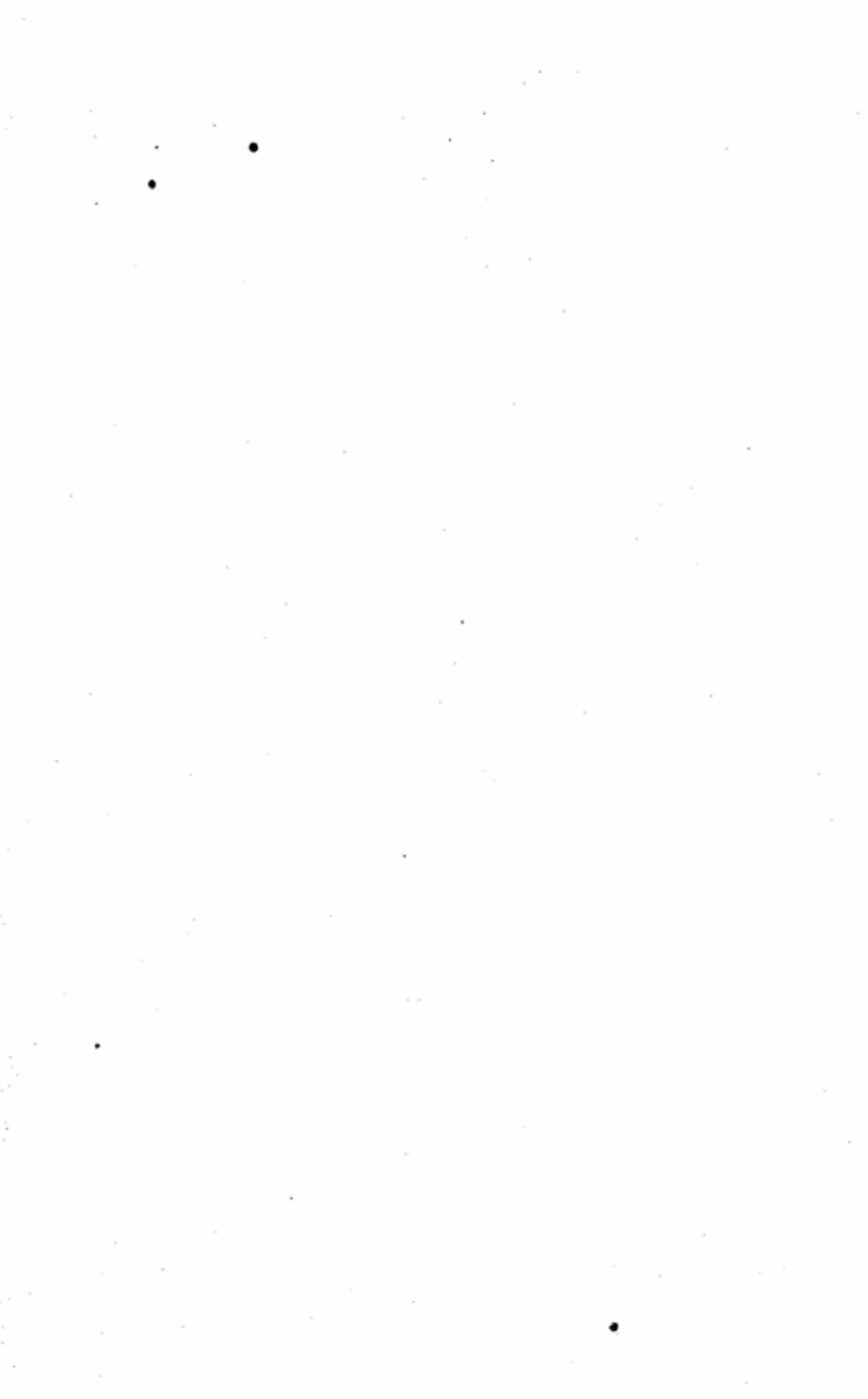
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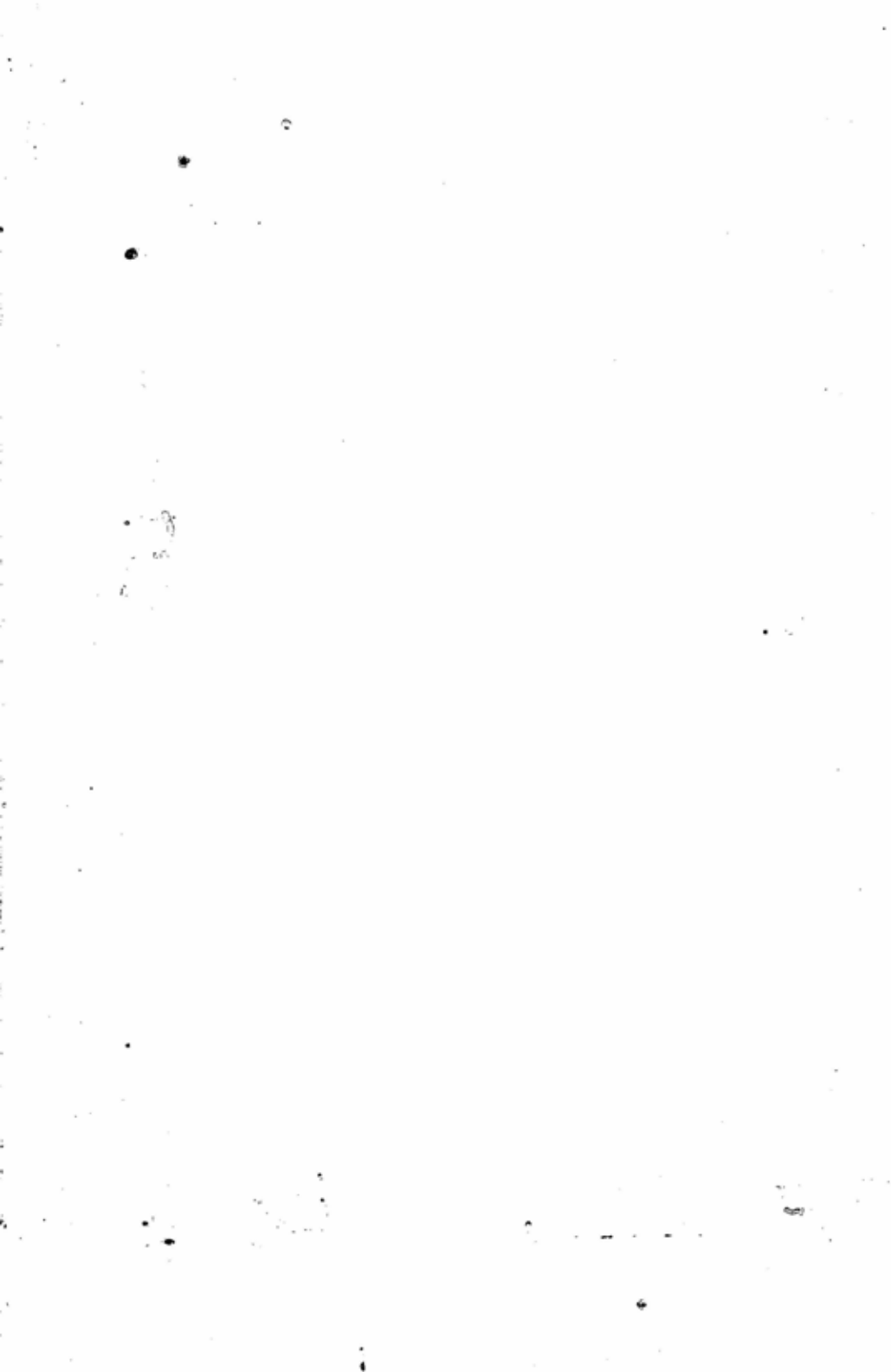
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Issue Record.

Catalogue No. 796.520954/Tuc.-3623.

Author—Tucker, John.

Title—Kanchenjunga.

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