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Scaling Kanchenjunga

Near the eastern end of the Karakoram Range, in Sikkim, towers aloft Kanchenjunga, the second loftiest peak in the world. Kanchenjunga is a Tibetan word and signifies "the five repositories of the great glacier." The more poetic name for this mountain titan, Kong-lo-chu, is in the Lepcha tongue, which means "the highest screen of curtain of snows." Kanchenjunga is not a single towering eminence, like Everest, but a mighty mountain mass, with two overtopping eminences.

"As seen from Darjeeling," says L. H. Robbins, "50 miles away, across the misty intervening valleys, it seems to hang in the sky like a celestial vision, something apart from the earth. And apart from earth, in a sense, it is, for no man has trod its snowy cap, very few men have seen it in its full glory, and only a handful have set foot on its snowy slopes. Cold and terrible in age-old majesty, it stands waiting for those who dare its wrath."

The natives, who have a superstitious dread of this great massif, believe that it is guarded by the Mio-go, the "Abominable Snowmen," who dwell upon its summit. It is difficult for the natives to understand why the white strangers are so eager to climb these awful summits. Perhaps the best answer was given by General Bruce, in answer to the inquiry of a lama at Rongbuk monastery, why the strangers wished to brave the dangers of frost and snow, of tempest and blizzard, in the effort to climb Mount Everest. Bruce explained: "We are on a pilgrimage. In my country there is a sect that worships mountains. We have come a far journey over land and sea to worship the highest mountain."

Various attempts have been made during the past century to scale this gigantic peak. The attempts of W. W. Graham, in 1883, are recognized as brilliant exhibitions of skillful mountain climbing. Several lofty peaks were scaled, and it is claimed, though the claim is disputed, that Graham attained to summit of Kabru itself. Kabru is the southern outpost of Kanchenjunga, and towers to the dizzy altitude of 24,000 feet. A native

surveyor named Rinsing traversed the Jonsong La, a snowy pass north of Kanchenjunga, in 1884.

Another native, Sarat Chandra Das, claimed to have traversed a lofty pass north of Kanchenjunga. And Sir Claude White, with a single companion, in 1891, discovered the beautiful peak of Siniolchum, which has been called the “embodiment of inaccessibility.” They even attained the Zemu Glacier, which lies to the east of Kanchenjunga itself.

A genuinely scientific expedition of exploration was led by Douglas Freshfield in 1899. Although adverse weather prevented an attempt to scale Kanchenjunga, Freshfield and his party made a thorough analysis of the terrain and laid down the best modes for attacking the problem in the future.

In 1905 a persistent attempt to scale Kanchenjunga was made by a party of three Swiss, Dr. Jacot-Guillarmod, M. Reymond and Lieutenant Pache, and an Italian named de Righi—all under the leadership of Aleister Crowley. They pitched their highest camp at 20,343 feet, and some members of the party climbed 1,000 feet higher. They were still almost 7,000 feet from the summit.