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KANCHENJUNGA

MOUNTAIN OF DEATH

North of the sacred Ganges and the fertile Indo-Gangetic plain, the country commences to rise until at Simla, the summer residence of the Viceroy of India, one is 7000 feet above the sea. From there the hills rise into the greatest mountain range in the whole world—the Himalayas—the Abode of Snow. The world's mightiest, grandest, most formidable mountain peaks rise from this range—Everest, 29,002 feet; Kanchenjunga, 27,815 feet; Dhaulagiri, 26,828 feet; and over 60 other peaks more than 25,000 feet high, and cry a challenge to the world.

The world has heard and accepted. Mountaineers have given their best to answer—and the mighty ranges swallow up human lives as a sacrifice to their inaccessibility. Kanchenjunga has brought death to six.

Situated in the northern corner of the little State of Nepal, about 75 miles from Everest, Mount Kanchenjunga is one of the highest peaks in the world, exceeded only by Everest and Godwin-Austen or Dapsang. From the hill-station or Darjeeling, 50 miles to the south, it presents a truly imposing picture; a grey-white giant towering above the surrounding ranges, its base embedded in tropical jungle, its giant head swathed in perpetual snow, unsullied by the foot of man, as far as human record goes.

The Mountain of Death

To reach the base of Kanchenjunga from the nearest point of civilization—Darjeeling—is in itself a colossal task. Viewed from the hill station, the path appears easy. The mountain itself rises from the midst of a series of ranges—tiny ranges they look, nestling beneath this gigantic overlord—yet in reality they are as steep and dangerous as the Swiss Alps; deeply gorged and ravined, impregnated with waterfalls, gushing torrents pouring headlong over hundreds of feet of sheer cliff; grey, tall,

unscalable walls of rock that present in parts an almost unassailable barrier—and this constitutes not the task, but the approach.

A party dare not venture into such country without native guides and carriers; men who have been born and bred to such an environment. But there is difficulty in procuring native carriers. The Indians of the vicinity have received from their forbears the legend of the Abominable Snow Men—long-haired, white-skinned, naked, demonical creatures, who seek to lure trespassers into their relentless clutches. Thus it was that the challenge of Kanchenjunga was unanswered until 1883.

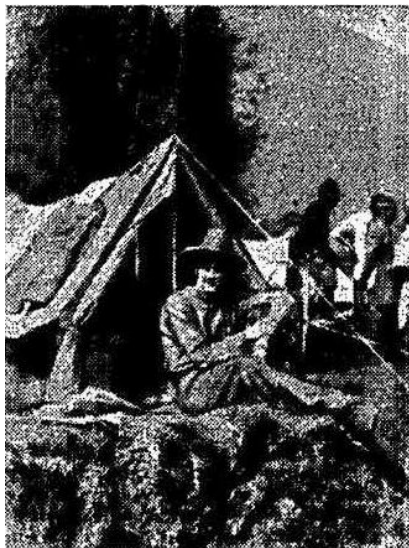
In that year W. W. Graham heard the call of the wild. He carried out a series of historical achievements at Sikkim, the neighboring State to Nepal, and reached an altitude of 21,000 feet—the peak of Jabrun. A year later, Rinsing, an educated native, succeeded in entering Nepal by the Jonsong La, at an altitude of 20,000 feet; and this and similar episodes paved the way for the Freshfield party which, in 1889, made a tour of the base of Kanchenjunga, photographing and exploring glaciers and valleys. The party completed a circuit of the mountain base, and mapped the various approaches.

Death in the Snow

No ascent, however, was attempted until, in 1905, Aleister Crowley headed a party of three Swiss and an Italian in the first direct assault on Kanchenjunga. They attained a height of 21,000 feet, but at that height they met an early monsoon, which brought death to some of the party's members, and terminated the expedition.

Until 1929 no further attempts were made on the mountain. Then Mr. E. Farmer, an American, took a party up the mountain, but the hazard was a complete failure, resulting in Mr. Farmer's death. The second attempt that year was by Dr. Bauer's Bavarian Expedition, which reached 24,600 feet, and was forced down by a snowstorm.

These tragic circumstances earned for Kanchenjunga the name "Mountain of Death"; but they did not daunt the members of the Dyhrenfurth expedition which last year attempted to climb that famous mountain, only to be repulsed by its appalling difficulties.



Mr. F. S. SMYTHE,
the English member of the Dyhrenfurth party, who has written an account of the expedition.

Mr. F. S. Smythe, who was a member of the expedition, has written a book telling of "The Kanchenjunga Adventure," which will surely be the adventure book of the year, and which shows plainly the almost insuperable difficulties of the task.

The first attempt made by the Dyhrenfurth party to climb this forbidding peak was ended by an immense avalanche, which imperiled all the party, and actually killed one of them. Mr. Smythe saw the terrible sight from a distance, and this is how he describes it:—

An enormous portion of the ice wall had collapsed. Huge masses of ice as high as cathedrals were still toppling to destruction; billowing clouds of snow spray were rushing upwards and outwards . . .

The clouds of snow swept nearer. At first they had seemed to move slowly, but now they were shooting forwards with incredible velocity. Vicious tongues of ice licked out under them . . . Behind them I caught a glimpse of a confused jumble of ice blocks, grinding together like the boulders in a stream bed caught up by the flood waters of a cloud burst.

The climbing at many points was sensational, more dangerous and difficult than that desperate scramble by which Carrell made the first Italian ascent of the Matterhorn in the days be-

fore that mountain was festooned with ropes and chains. For the scale of the work was immensely magnified, and it had to be done at a great altitude, where human energy dies down.

Kanchenjunga (says Mr. Smythe) is not merely a mountain built on a greater scale than an Alpine peak. It is a mountain that is a law unto itself. Its northern and western faces are among the most desperately dangerous mountain sides in the world. . . . I shall always remember the period spent on Kanchenjunga as the most continually nerve-racking that I have ever experienced.

Fearful Danger

The ridges by which the final approach to the summit will have to be made are of fearful danger, with gigantic pinnacles, treacherously rotten rocks, slabs sloping at angles of 60 degrees and more, coated with ice and topped by insidious cornices—worse by far than that well-known ridge on the famous Dent Blanche, where Glynn Jones and his party perished.

One fact which stands out from this stirring story of human endeavor is the splendid pluck of the native porters, who faced danger and death with their sahibs, never flinching.

Mr. Smythe has returned from the great adventure convinced that, though Kanchenjunga will one day be conquered by men, this will probably not happen in our time. And while mountaineering has a fascination for many people, Mr. Smythe, after a fall, wrote:

“As I lay, I remarked the wise words of an American friend of mine who fell into a crevasse the first time he had been escorted on to a glacier. He said, ‘Never again! I guess it’s terra firma for me in future—less terror, and more firmer.’ ”