CHAPTER IX

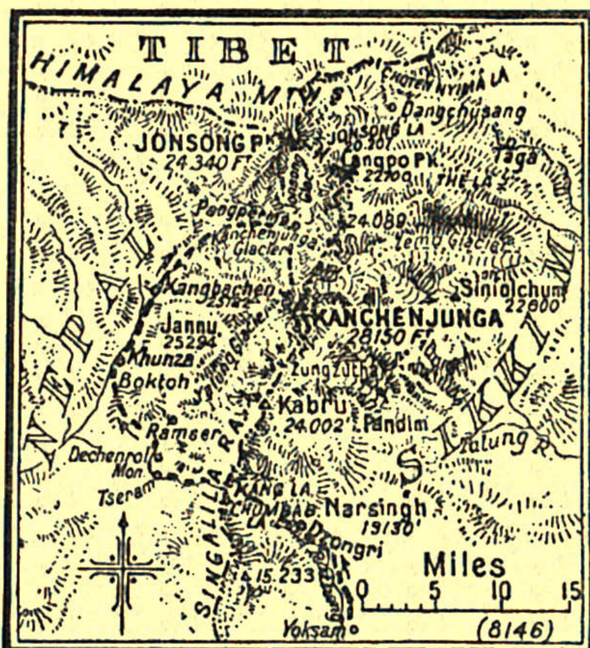
IN UNKNOWN NEPAL

We broke camp on April 22. After the enforced inaction of the past few days, it was a relief to be again on the march. It was a brilliant morning, and fragrant odours of sun-warmed firs and flowers permeated the still air as we trudged up the hillside. We emerged from the forest on to open slopes of grass and boulders. There we were greeted by Kabru, and for the first time found ourselves gazing at its eastern face. Thus early in the morning it was in deep blue shadow, but the reflected light from the snow-fields of the peaks opposite across the Yalung Valley revealed the clean-cut edges of its hanging glaciers, and lit with a greenish sheen its icy steeps and snowy mouldings.

If Kabru turns a serene and benevolent countenance towards Darjeeling, it has, like a two-headed giant, another face, and this face which overlooks the Yalung Glacier is savage and cruel. Even as I watched there came a distant roar, the snowy lips of the giant writhed back, and an avalanche was spat out from between its teeth. A mere puff of white dust it seemed at that distance, and only the thunderous roll of its falling told of the tens of thousands of tons of grinding ice blocks crashing down thousands of feet to the Yalung Glacier. As though ashamed at the meaningless ferocity of its twin brother, a cloud was detached from the warm, sunny face of the mountain, and was wafted gently over the ridge. Dispassionately, it slid

along the precipices, growing larger as it did so, and finally wrapped the mountain in a soft, grey shroud.

It was not long before we came to the snow. It was still frozen hard, and I determined to hurry on to try and obtain a glimpse, and if possible, a photograph of Everest. The mountainside which appears from Tseram a smooth,



By courtesy of *The Times*

unbroken face topped by small, rocky summits, is in reality broken up into subsidiary ridges and valleys, and rounding a shoulder, I found myself in one of these snow-filled valleys leading upwards to the first of a series of snowy cols we must cross.[1]

As I mounted the snow slopes, I saw over a low ridge to

[1] This first col is actually the highest point traversed between Tseram and Khunza and is 15,361 feet high.

the left a solitary peak rising above a sea of woolly clouds. In shape its summit was a symmetrical sugar loaf like the Zermatt Weisshorn, and to the north and south its ridges swept down in graceful parabolas to perfectly proportioned shoulders. It was Makalu, Everest's 27,790 feet high neighbour. When Everest has been climbed, Makalu may defy many generations of future mountaineers, for it is one of the most terrific peaks in the world. By the time I had reached the col, it had disappeared behind clouds welling up from the warm depths of the Arun Valley. Of Everest there was nothing to be seen.

From the col I looked across a desolate snow-clad hillside, broken into rounded shoulders and stony hollows. Here and there the snow had melted, disclosing grass and straggling patches of dwarf rhododendrons. On one of these I had my lunch. The day was sunny, and the grey rocks warm to the touch. I was alone. Some may not appreciate the charm of solitude, but the true mountaineer, even if temperamentally of a gregarious nature, realises the value of occasionally parting from his companions in order to contemplate mountains as they should be contemplated, alone. On an expedition escape from one's fellows is seldom possible, not that one often desires it, but there are times when an inexplicable and fierce desire demands temporary release from the bonds of sociability.

I sat down, ate my lunch, and afterwards inhaled a contemplative cigarette, lolling among the dwarf rhododendrons, with my back fitting comfortably into a hollow of a rock. For a while I was merely a body clogged with an excellent lunch, gazing with peaceful digestion and bovine

appreciation at the landscape. But presently and unexpectedly the dull pudding of my mind was stirred by the spoon of inspiration. I seemed to become a part of the hillside on which I was resting. I felt very old, and yet eternally young. The hills had been my companions through æons of time. I had seen them created, raised, and fashioned by the forces of the earth. I had seen vegetation clothe them, and snow cloak them, ruin overtake their more fanciful and extravagant constructions. I felt that I had always lived with the hills, and on the hills, and that the hills had treated me kindly. How else could a man be born with the love for hills? There is eternity both ways.

Men came over the col, one after another, a string of them. The silence was broken by the clatter of voices. I did not resent their presence, for I had had my hour alone on the mountain.

The snow was soft and fatiguing to march through. For some distance the path to the Mirgin La contours the mountainside. It was a long, hard day for the porters, especially for those who had had to carry loads all the way from camp. Once I came across Nemu. From somewhere he had acquired a pair of truly remarkable breeches. As there were no fifty shilling outfitters at Tseram, I was at a loss to imagine how he had got them, and Nemu himself never enlightened me on the subject. I say that they were remarkable breeches, because they did not look as if they were intended to be breeches at all. They were made of some curious balloon-like cloth, that hung down in loose folds like a collapsed parachute, and as Nemu walked, the breeches gave forth an important sort of swishing noise.

I think he experienced some mental strain in wearing them at first, for sahibs and coolies would gape at them, laugh, or make uncomplimentary remarks, but nevertheless he wore them in, as it were, until they became as much part of the expedition as Duvanel's beard, or Wieland's sun-skinned nose.

But Nemu was by no means alone as regards eccentricity of costume. One porter boasted an officer's khaki tunic, another a bandsman's jacket, then there was a villainous looking fellow with what might have been once an old Etonian tie, and two or three who sported engineers' over-alls. Everest equipment was still greatly prized, and one man possessed a pair of Everest puttees, ragged and worn, sacred relics of which he was very proud. Like ladies, they allowed their imagination to run riot in the matter of head-gear. My own impression as to the constructive principles underlying the latest shapes in ladies' hats is that you take a perfectly ordinary hat, such as a Homburg, and then proceed to knock, kick, crush, and cut it in a fit of berserk fury. After such treatment, it is styled the latest mode or shape. This is precisely the treatment meted out by our porters to their own headgear. Any fashionable Paris hat designer, desirous of obtaining new ideas, can hardly do better than go on an expedition into the Himalayas, taking with him Sherpa and Bhutia porters.

We reached the Mirgin La, 14,853 feet, under a greying sky. Hailstones were falling, and from the east came an occasional thunder growl. Below, the snow slopes fell away into a desolate valley, ribbed with ancient moraines, like the embankments of a railroad fallen into disrepair. A few tattered prayer flags fluttered on the summit of the pass.

Viewed thus under a leaden sky, with light and shadow merged into one universal monotone, black-jawed crags jutting from livid featureless snow slopes, and a chill wind sighing through the gap, it was a depressing scene.

No depressing thoughts occurred to the porters as they breasted the pass, and they grinned broadly at the prospect of descent. Among them were several women, who had been with Wieland's party. In weight-carrying powers they were the equal of a man, and their powers of endurance were prodigious. These women did much to keep up the spirits of the porters, and relieved the tedium of the march with many verbal leg pulls and jokes which, according to Wood Johnson, it was fortunate the " Memsahib " did not understand. Now, one of these women, with a load on her back, sat herself down in the snow, and commenced a glissade down the steep snow slopes. For a few yards all went well, and she slid slowly and with dignity, then suddenly a hard icy patch of snow supervened. She uttered a shrill scream as her speed suddenly increased. The next moment she spun round, something happened, and her skirt was blown up over her head. Her load went one way, and she another, both rolling over and over to the bottom of the slope. A roar of laughter followed her from the assembled porters.

It was an easy matter descending these upper slopes, but tedious work lower down. There we encountered for the first time a type of soft snow that is fortunately seldom met with in the Alps, but which is, however, all too common in the Himalayas. It is not that it is simply soft, but the direct heat of the sun appears to have the effect of shrinking the snow beneath the surface, so that holes are formed

into which the climber may sink up to the waist. For a few steps the surface crust may bear, and then, all at once, it collapses.

Walking under these conditions is extremely tiring and irritating, especially for laden porters, who sink in at almost every step. The Nepali Subadar, who was in front, was making very heavy weather of it. I came across him energetically digging in the snow with his hands to retrieve one of his shoes that had been left in a hole. Snow passes were evidently not to his liking, and the wan smile with which he greeted me was in sad contrast to his magnificent bearing on the previous day. I offered him a chocolate biscuit as solace for his woes, but he was unable to eat it owing to his religious principles, which forbade the eating of food handled by anyone outside his own particular caste. Nevertheless, he eyed it wistfully. It must have been about this time that he got severe frostbite, which resulted in his nearly losing a foot.

Perhaps, it would be as well to explain here that there are three stages of frostbite. The first is merely a temporary numbness, a loss of circulation which may be restored by rubbing or warmth. In the second stage frostbite manifests itself in blisters and swellings charged with fluid. And lastly there is the worst stage of all, in which the whole area affected, usually the extremities, becomes gangrenous. In this case, amputation may be necessary. The Subadar most likely came from one of the warm valleys or plains in Southern Nepal, and was not able to resist the cold as were our porters, with their more active circulation and thicker blood. Perhaps he had not even realised that he was being frostbitten when one foot lost sensation.

As we stood in the snow, Dr. Richter and Kurz shot by on ski. Their progress was to be envied. At the same time, someone had to make a track for the porters. To have to walk oneself at the expense of considerable effort, and to be passed by someone else travelling with but little effort rouses the worst passions. It is like trudging along one of those incredibly dull by-pass roads on the outskirts of London, and being passed by fat, opulent men in luxurious motor vehicles. Of course, if you are one of the fat, opulent ones, your viewpoint is different.

Dense, black clouds were massing as we struggled down the valley. Spiteful stilettos of lightning stabbed the peaks, and thunder crackled like a giant shelling walnuts. Once I descended into a hole up to my chest between two boulders. One foot jammed, and I was unable to extricate it for a quarter of an hour. I mention this purely as a point worthy of note among solitary climbers. I have seen a man so trapped that it took half an hour or more of hard work, plus considerable ingenuity, to get his feet out from between two boulders. Death by starvation thus would not be pleasant.

We pitched camp on a miserable spot on the north side of the valley. Had it not been for the porters, we should have continued the descent, and camped below the tree line, but the day had been a heavy one for them, and it was necessary to camp at the first available place.

From our camp we looked across the Kangbachen Valley, in which, out of sight, lay Khunza, to a range of peaks rising to 21,000 feet. They were for the most part massive mountains, with indeterminate ridges, between which flowed steep and broken glaciers. Owing to a lack

of definite ridges, and the consequent difficulty of finding a continuous route to their summits, they looked decidedly awkward of access.

The day ended wretchedly in a heavy snowstorm, whilst a miserable supper turned out by Tencheddar did little to alleviate the general gloom.

The clouds snowed themselves out during the night, and morning dawned clear and cold. With memories of Signor Sella's wonderful photograph of Jannu in Mr. Freshfield's book in our minds, we set off up to the ridge running south-east from the Sinon La, the last pass we must cross to reach Khunza. We found, however, that the ridge above the camp was only a subsidiary ridge of the main ridge. Some decided to go on, but Schneider and I favoured descent to the " flesh-pots " of Khunza.

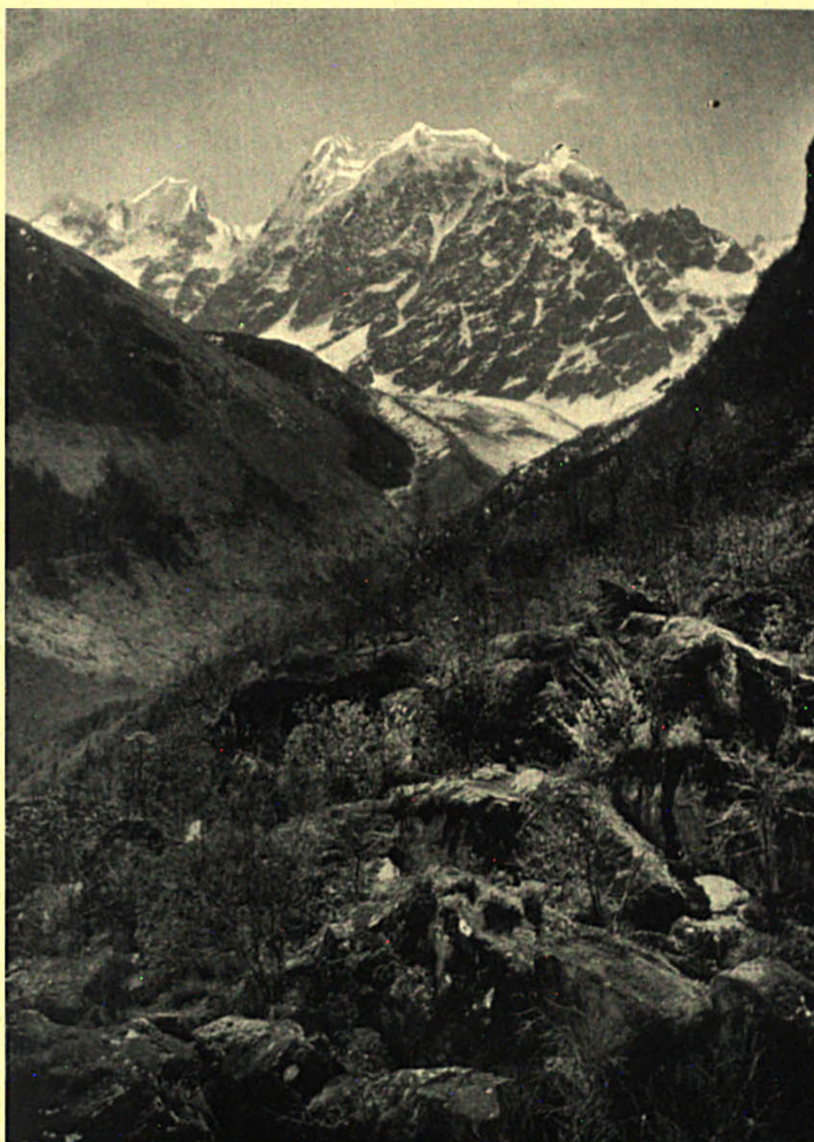
A good path led up to the Sinon La, but we found that on the north side of the pass formed the head of a long and steep couloir filled with hard snow, which must be descended some distance. It was a place where a slip might well end fatally, and we stamped secure steps for the porters. A number of other snow-filled couloirs had to be traversed, after which we found ourselves in rhododendrons. Somehow, I was irresistibly reminded of the descent to Chamonix from the Grands Mulets. Not that there was much in common between the Chamonix and Kangbachen Valleys, except a certain trench-like monotony. The Kangbachen Valley is far wilder than the Chamonix Valley, and on either side rise peaks to an altitude of 20,000 feet or more.

We strolled down sunny slopes to the crest of an indeterminate ridge from which we looked down to Khunza,

a little cluster of brown dolls' houses thousands of feet beneath, and far up the valley we must go towards the Kangchenjunga Glacier. But this view, fine though it was, had not the dramatic quality of the view up the Yamatari Valley to the east. Curving round the corner were the moraines of the glacier, which has its sources in the southernmost recesses of Jannu, and above rose a range of rock and ice peaks of terrific aspect.

One of the curses of being a mountaineer, is that an analytical mind, trained as it is in seeking routes and estimating their relative difficulty, tends to detract from æsthetic enjoyment. In other words, the humble tourist, unversed in the art of mountaineering, is sometimes more able to appreciate the beauty and magnificence of a scene than is the mountaineer with his mind clogged with technicalities. But here was a scene so magnificent as to submerge the sharp, ugly rocks of analysis and technical considerations beneath the smooth rollers of pure contemplation. The thought of how these peaks might be climbed did not intrude. I did not see couloir or ridge, did not endeavour to win a theoretical way to a summit. Even Mark Twain would have put aside his telescope and been content to gaze with unfettered eyes up that sylvan valley with its background of stupendous ice peaks.

As I lay on the flat summit of a moss-clad boulder, something of my boyhood's simple adoration of the hills returned to me, that half wild yearning for an unattainable "something." It is a yearning that becomes dulled by time and experience. But such is the magical influence of the hills that sometimes they are able to recall it at unexpected moments, and this was one of them. However much a man



AN UNEXPLORED VALLEY : THE YAMATARI VALLEY

may delude himself into thinking the contrary, he becomes as expert in his mental appreciation for the hills as he does in his physical appreciation for them. The unsophisticated moments of youth are to be prized and cherished.

We lunched and lounged in the sun, then plunged down through the rhododendrons by a steep zig-zagging path. Soon we were among the firs, strolling by the side of the torrent from the Yamatari Glacier. The path entered on to an open grassy glade, a smooth sward as flat as a cricket ground. What a cricket ground it would make too ! With the dark fir woods as a natural boundary, and snowy mountain tops as pavilions—surely more conducive to century-making than the dingy villas and gasometers of the Oval, or the sulphurous vapours of Bramall Lane.

We had found our way to this delightful spot easily enough, for the path had ended there, but we could not find any way out and down to Khunza for some time. Yet who would wish to escape from such a fairy glade? However, presently we crossed a little bridge over a stream, and found ourselves on a good track. At a turn of the path we could gaze down to the village, a trim little place, with neatly laid-out fields. It was strange to think that no European had passed through here for thirty years. It might have been a village in Switzerland or Tyrol.

Porters passed us. They were tired after two days hard marching, but they were cheerful at descending from the snows once more.

As we ran down the last part of the path, we were puzzled to see various little water-wheels revolving in the streams. They seemed to have no practical use. Then it dawned upon us that they were prayer wheels. The

inhabitants of Khunza are lazy but ingenious. Unwilling to expend time and energy in revolving prayer wheels by hand, they utilise the abundant water power of the vicinity, and had rigged up a number of water-wheels, on which are carved many prayers. Every time a wheel revolves, so many prayers are "said" for the village. Literally millions must go out every twenty-four hours, and if these prayers mean anything, the gods that dwell on the mountains round Khunza must look very favourably on its inhabitants.

Our camp was pitched on a flat field at the southern end of the village. The inhabitants eyed us with curiosity; small children stood round, sucking their thumbs in round-eyed wonder at these strange reincarnations of something or other that had come down from the mountains.

The Subadar had arrived early that morning ; he had not camped with us, but lower down in the woods. We did not then know that he was frostbitten, and it was not until later that a gangrenous sore developed. Narsang was there too, having preceded us to arrange about food. Actually, he had done nothing, and the reason was plain to see ; the hospitality of Khunza had proved too much for him. With magnificent optimism he declared that though no food had come up from lower down the valley, we could have as much food as we wanted, and unlimited coolies from Khunza. That no food had come up was a serious matter. We had hardly one day's coolie food left, and whether enough would be forthcoming from Khunza with which to carry on to the Base Camp was doubtful. The fact that there was no food or coolies available, as kindly promised us by the Maharajah of Nepal, was partly due to

the slackness of the Subadar who had been sent up to arrange for it. He was aware of our intended route, and all he had done was to collect some food in the lower valleys several marches away. It was exasperating to be confronted with such difficulties when within easy reach of our goal, and Wood Johnson told the Subadar that if coolies and food were not forthcoming, we should have no option but to report him to the Maharajah. This threat had an immediate effect on the Subadar, and he at once informed the Head Man of Khunza of our requirements. We had no wish to deplete the village of food, but the Subadar said there was plenty to spare, and that to take it would mean no hardship to the villagers. We were, of course, prepared to pay a good price for it. The Head Man was, therefore, given a day in which to collect the food.

That evening several of us decided to call upon the Head Man, the principal reason being that Wood Johnson had promised us a drink of an intoxicating liquor known as marwa. The Head Man's house was a large building constructed on the châlet principle. Built of sturdy timbers, with a wide-eaved roof weighted down with large stones, it looked fully capable of withstanding any storm. On entering, we found that half the inhabitants of the village were present. In the middle of the floor a large log fire was burning, and round this we squatted, cross-legged on rugs. Presently, a mixture of water and fermented hempseeds was brewed in a large cauldron, presided over by a withered old hag, whose wrinkled face and claw-like hands, illuminated by the ruddy glow of the fire, were positively witch-like. The atmosphere was heavy and close, and a strong reek of smoke•from burning rhododendron branches fought a

losing battle against a stronger reek of unwashed bodies.

Presently, the concoction was brewed, and was ladled out into cylindrical wooden metal-bound pots. These had a lid, in the centre of which was a metal cone, with a round hole through the top. Through this hole was thrust a bamboo stick, up which the liquor had to be sucked. I cannot pretend to describe the taste of this drink, it is enough to say that it is by no means unpleasant and, taken in sufficient quantities, is decidedly intoxicating.

Heavy rain was roaring on the roof by the time we had finished, but we splashed back along the village "High Street" to camp happily enough singing the latest music-hall airs.

Theoretically, the following day, April 24, was a rest day, but not for Wood Johnson. His was the disagreeable task of getting blood out of a stone, or in other words, food out of the Head Man. That individual, lulled doubtless into a sense of security by the patronage of his house by the sahibs the previous evening, had done nothing. Probably, this was due not so much to wilful neglect, as to native inability to appreciate the value of time. What mattered a week, or two weeks, or even a month to the sahibs? What was their hurry? Why were they so anxious to undergo hardships on the mountains when every day was bringing the summer nearer? Such was his philosophy—the same sort of philosophy in these regions that decrees that when you are invited to a wedding you find it usually more convenient to turn up two or three months after the ceremony.

We repaired to the Head Man's house to find him peacefully tilling his garden. The Subadar was furious. He saw

his reputation being destroyed, his authority set at nought, possibly even his head removed on his return to Khatmandu. After a volley of invectives, he grasped the cowering Head Man, seized some rope lying handy, and proceeded to lash him up to a post. " Produce the food, or have your head cut off"—that appeared to be the gist of the conversation for the next few minutes. Of course we interceded. We had no wish for our way through Nepal to be littered with the heads of Head Men. Nevertheless, the situation was not without its humour. Imagine a portly and worshipful mayor of some British provincial town tied to a post in his own back garden, and told to supply a party of complete strangers with food, or have his head cut off in the event of not doing so. So the Head Man was released from his bonds. The thunder clouds disappeared from the brow of the Subadar, and Khunza slumbered peacefully in the sunlight once more.

That afternoon we visited the Khunza Monastery. This is situated outside the village on the west bank of the Kangchen River. A rickety suspension bridge, the safety factor of which it would be scarcely wise to enquire into, spans the river. Entering a stone gateway, on which were carved the usual prayers, we passed through a forest of dilapidated prayer flags.

Khunza Monastery is a branch of the famous Khampa Dzong Monastery in Thibet. Normally, the Buddhistic religion imposes celibacy upon the Lamas, but so lax have conditions become at Khunza that from the Head Lama downwards, they intermarry with the villagers. There were also chortens. These are stone monuments erected in honour of some former Lama saint. On the

summit there is usually a crescent moon, sun, or lotus, whilst sacred relics, such as the ashes of Lamas, are placed in a niche.

A Thibetan monastery is more in the nature of a village than a single group of buildings. For instance, about 8,000 monks reside at the De-pung (Rice-heap) Monastery near Lhasa. Compared to the great Thibetan monasteries, Khunza Monastery is, of course, small. Its wooden buildings are primitive, and display none of the grandeur of the great Thibetan monasteries. Passing along a narrow street, bounded by primitive two-storied houses, where circulated many varied and powerful odours, we were ushered through a doorway and up a flight of wooden steps, deeply furrowed with the passage of countless feet, into the monastery temple. As our eyes became accustomed to the gloom, we found ourselves to be in a barn-like room with uneven wooden floor. At one end gleamed little Aladdin-like oil lamps on altars, lighting the enigmatical face of a carved Buddha and effigies of former lamastic saints. The decorations were of the usual garish mixture of red and yellow, the beams across the roof and the pillars supporting it red and the tapestries and friezes yellow. Dozens of little lockers filled with sacred books lined the walls. Presently, the stairs creaked beneath a heavy tread, and the Chief Lama, a very fat man with a dough-like face and crafty smile, entered the temple.

On this occasion the hospitality consisted of some conventional devil dancing by a number of Lamas, but this was only the preliminary to a religious ceremony the purport of which was difficult to understand. Possibly it was intended as a blessing upon our expedition, but this

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was doubtful in view of our unpopular demands in the matter of food and coolies.

The ceremony consisted of numerous incantations by the Head Lama, accompanied by the monastery band, and repeated by the Lamas, varied by an occasional vigorous ringing of a small bell by the Head Lama. Sometimes the band would stop, and only the low mutter and wailing of the praying Lamas would be audible, like the rise and fall of wind in the rocks of a mountain top. Put such a scene on the stage of a London music hall and it would scarcely induce anything but boredom, but here, many marches from the nearest outpost of civilisation, it produced a strange impression upon us. The crowding cares of the Twentieth Century seemed to fade away. We were back in a mediæval land caring nothing for progress, a land fiercely jealous of its ancient rights, its conservatism looking askance upon modernity and the outer world. Perhaps it is happier so.

At the conclusion of the ceremony everyone was handed small quantities of rice and seeds which were cast into the middle of the floor. Among other things, the Head Lama showed us a knotted raw-hide whip, stained with blood, with which the Lamas are accustomed to keep order among the villagers, for they have the powers of life and death over the inhabitants of the district.

Much of the power wielded by the Lamas over the destinies of Thibet, Nepal, and Sikkim is due to their preying on the superstitious beliefs of the people. While on the expedition there was related to us a story concerning a certain high dignitary. The dignitary who owned a large and scattered estate decided to visit an outlying portion

of it. There were, however, strong reasons why he should not do so. It appeared that a considerable portion of the revenue accruing from the estate had been pocketed by the Lamas of a neighbouring monastery. Therefore, he was told that there was a large and thoroughly malevolent devil who had taken possession of this portion of the estate, and that should its shadow fall upon him he would die an agonising and lingering death. Naturally the dignitary was loth to come to such an unpleasant end, and decided to postpone his visit. It was then that some ingenious person suggested that if he carried an umbrella the devil would be unable to cast its shadow over him. This idea was seized upon gladly, and the estate was visited under the devil-proof shelter of an enormous umbrella. It is to be hoped that the embezzling Lamas were brought to book.

We had with us our portable gramophone, and suggested that the Head Lama might care to hear some white man's tinned music. Thus it came about that for the first time in its history the religious gloom of the monastery was broken by Messrs. Layton and Johnstone and "Sunny Side Up." The Lamas gazed open mouthed for none of them had ever seen or heard a gramophone before, while the Head Lama forgetting his dignity squatted on the floor and gazed with great curiosity up the horn, seemingly under the impression that Messrs. Layton and Johnstone were the reincarnated voices of two holy English Lamas.

Before we departed our host insisted on our drinking large quantities of marwa. It was a more intoxicating brand than the Head Man's and the suspension bridge

seemed to sway unpleasantly to more than one member of the expedition.

It was necessary to establish a provision depot at Khunza, and we decided to leave Tikeram Thapa in charge, for he had displayed considerable aptitude in the making up and paying of accounts. Meanwhile, the Subadar would go down the valley, and arrange for food to be sent up on the backs of local coolies. Such was the procrastination of the Head Man that the porters' food did not arrive until late that night. Fortunately, its quantity exceeded our expectations, and we finally turned in happy in the knowledge that with eight maunds[1] we had sufficient food to feed our porters for at least a week, and could carry on without further delay to the Base Camp.

The majority of the party were away early the next morning *en route* to Kangbachen. It was a perfect morning ; a myriad water jewels gleamed on the pastures of Khunza ; the peaks rose serenely into a stainless blue sky, little puffs of mist eddying enquiringly from their shadowed hollows and meeting with annihilation from a brilliant sun. Wood Johnson remained behind to supervise the transport, and see that all the coolies were evacuated from the village. This last was important, because our men had not unnaturally made the most of their rest at Khunza. If the Sherpa or Bhutia has any vices, the only one I know is predilection to strong liquor at any and every opportunity. But this is not so much a vice as another indication of their childlike disposition, for, like a child, they will eat and drink more than is good for them, without a thought as to the consequences. Unfortunately, they are

[1] One maund=eighty lbs.

liable to become quarrelsome when intoxicated, and at such times, like an Irishman at a race meeting, they pick up the nearest weapon and proceed to run happily amok. Luckily, we had no serious damage done in this way, save for the porter stabbed at Tingling, and Dr. Richter was spared having to stay up all night, as did Mr. Somervell in the last Mount Everest expedition, sewing up scalp wounds.

The march promised to be a long one, but Wood Johnson had the brilliant idea that he and I would ride on yaks. Accordingly, the Head Man was summoned, and told to parade the local yaks.

A yak was produced for Wood Johnson. Never have I seen a more inoffensive looking beast, and with its long hair and mild brown eyes, it might have been a child's toy. Personally, I felt a little doubtful about it, and remarked to Wood Johnson that yak-riding was not numbered among my accomplishments. I also suggested that it would be unpleasant to be thrown over the edge of a mountain path. Wood Johnson's reply was contemptuous. He said : " Walk if you like, *I* am going to ride. No tea planter has ever been known to have been thrown by a yak." Suiting his actions to his words, he vaulted with Wild West abandon on to the back of the yak. Watching him do it, I felt that there was nothing that he did not know about yaks, and that he had ridden them since infancy.

For a few moments the yak stood peacefully. It turned its head and looked at Wood Johnson in a gentle, enquiring, pleading sort of way. Wood Johnson sat nonchalantly, but then with the idea of getting the yak to move, he hit

it. The yak *did* move. From a gentle, doormat-like creature it became suddenly possessed of seven devils. It commenced to tear rapidly round and round in circles, and in the middle of one of these circles its back arched bow-like, and Wood Johnson sailed through the air, alighting heavily on his back. He got up. The yak had stopped, it was nibbling a bit of grass, its mild brown eyes contemplating Wood Johnson with a sort of gentle, pitying, reproachful look. In the background stood the Head Man, his face a mask of Eastern passivity.

A few minutes later I was walking along the path, having declined the yak that had been thrust upon me, leaving Wood Johnson swearing that he would ride a yak that day, or perish in the attempt.

It was a delightful walk. The path lay through pine woods and glades yellow with primulas. Pine tops vignetted glimpses of cathedral-like peaks. It was a morning overflowing with jollity and good humour. The little brooks hastening down the hillside towards the river gurgled and chuckled with merriment. Below in its rocky bed the river laughed more ponderously. The Pipes of Pan played softly in the treetops.

The path was so good for the first few miles that I was always half expecting to come across a Beer Garden full of fat men in shorts noisily drinking beer. Certainly, in Switzerland such a sylvan valley would have been so defiled every kilometre or so. There would have been red paint on the trees to guide the tourist from Beer Garden to Beer Garden. There would have been benches for them to rest upon ; the pine woods would have been cut down and laid bare in order that a view should be obtained from

these seats, though this would have been unnecessary, for you could have bought picture postcards of the mountains, the coloured ones costing five centimes more than the plain. But here was a Switzerland unspoilt, Alpine beauty on a loftier, nobler scale, its paths traversed only by yaks and their herds.

Presently the path descended into the torrent bed, which is here nearly a quarter of a mile wide. Great boulders, some of them as large as cottages, are piled in it, their rounded smoothness telling of terrific floods that have carried them down like pebbles, rolling them over and over. Once the path passed through a considerable stretch of forest that had been blasted by fire, indicating that long spells of dry weather sometimes occur in these parts.

Some four miles from Khunza the stream was bridged. It would have shortened the day's march to have crossed it, and continued up the western side of the river, but not unnaturally we followed the route marked in Professor Garwood's map. Judging from the stony banks of the torrent, the floor of the valley was composed of an ancient moraine, in which the present stream is busily engaged in carving out a larger and larger channel. We were given an unpleasant example of the speed at which this old moraine is being eroded when crossing a steep slope of loose stones more than one hundred feet high above the river, for boulders, large and small, were constantly falling down this slope, while some blocks of rock, weighing many tons, seemed ready to come down at any moment. It was not a place to linger in.

The path got worse and worse as we ascended, in places it was so overgrown with giant rhododendrons that it had

to be cleared with *kukris*. Once we passed an enormous boulder fifty feet high at least, under which there was a cave with a fire blackened roof, and a small patch of cultivated ground outside which suggested that it was possibly inhabited by a hermit, for there was no grazing ground handy for yaks.

Finally, the path emerged from the forest, and we found ourselves confronted by the snout of the Jannu Glacier, which pushes a huge dyke of ice and moraine almost across the valley. Should this glacier advance and dam the streams from the Kangchenjunga Glacier and those of North-eastern Nepal, the consequences might be disastrous for villages lower down the valley.

The glacier snout is fully 1,000 feet high, and it was weary work clambering up its high moraine. Curiously enough, we were all feeling the effects of altitude, though the altitude was less than 15,000 feet. Mr. Freshfield remarked the same feeling of tiredness and listlessness between 14,000 and 17,000 feet. Is it because at this altitude the body undergoes a definite physical change? Acclimatisation would appear not to be gradual, but taking place in stages, though these stages are not necessarily at the same heights for everyone. There should now be enough evidence for physicists to be able to draw some conclusions. Personally, I was in addition still suffering from the effects of my chill, and I could scarcely drag my unwilling body up the wearying slopes of loose stones.

The afternoon mists had long since gathered, and cold, clammy vapours swirled over the drab stone covered hills of the glacier. It might have been difficult in the mist to have found the way over the moraine mounds, but for

Tencheddar who had gone on ahead and built cairns every few yards. At length we reached the other side. The mists lifted, and we gazed down to the flat valley floor where stood the huddled châlets of Kangbachen. Seen thus beneath the mists, this barren and treeless valley, unrelieved by a single shaft of sunlight, appeared inexpressibly dreary. It was a scene that recalled to mind a similar evening in the Pass of Glencoe, when a low roof of mist divorced the world from its good wife the sun, and seemed to oppress me with a sense of gloom, foreboding, and death, so that I hurried through the grim defile, unwilling to linger on a spot rendered ghastly by its association with a fiendish crime.

But as I slithered down the moraine, a light pierced the gloom. A tiny window of blue sky was disclosed, and in it was thrust a summit, red hot from the furnace of the setting sun. It was Jannu, 10,000 feet above me. Even as I watched, the glow faded from it. For a few seconds, before the mists closed in again, it gleamed down palely white, like some nun, disdainful of the world, yet peering curiously upon it from some high window of an unapproachable convent.

There came a sound of yak-bells, a sound, at once homely and calling up memories of Switzerland. Gloom was replaced by cheerfulness. A small boy was driving the yaks back to Kangbachen from the neighbouring pastures. He was crooning a song to himself as he did so, a monotonous little tune of infinite repetitions. At Kangbachen, one day is but a repetition of the last, and music is but an echo of life itself. When he saw me the tune froze on his lips. I did not blame him, for what he saw was a villainous looking fellow, with a stubbly red beard, an old slouch hat, and

an aged pair of plus fours. He might have been forgiven for thinking me an apparition, a Mi-go, or some other unpleasant and undesirable character. Having, however, after a critical scrutiny, assured himself that I was in reality, perfectly harmless, he jumped on to a yak, which splashed through the torrent leaving me wondering whether the latter would have suffered Wood Johnson.

I followed, and arriving at the camping site found our servants had mostly got in before us, and my own tent already pitched. I was surprised to see Nemu washing something in the stream. On inspection, it proved to be a dishcloth with which he was wont to clean my plate, knife, and fork. As this dishcloth had already reached saturation point as regards grease and dirt, I wondered by what process of reasoning Nemu had decided to wash it at this particular hour and place, even though he had always a capacity for doing the unexpected. As one of the porters carrying some of my luggage had not arrived, and did not arrive until the next morning, it is possible that the washing of the dishcloth may have been simply to propitiate my probable wrath. The workings of the native mind are curious.

A number of the porters did not get into camp that night. This was largely due to the carousals at Khunza, and their inevitable aftermath of headaches. However, they were quite happy bivouacking out in the woods around fires. Wood Johnson arrived proud and happy, having with characteristic bull-dog determination succeeded in mastering the yak and actually ridden it for the first few miles.

We awoke next morning, April 26, to see Jannu, and its attendant peaks, in all their magnificence. From this side

there is no possibility of climbing Jannu, and nothing I have seen is more hopelessly unassailable than the terrific sweep of its northern precipices. The peaks to the south of the Jannu Glacier and to the west of Jannu, though considerably lower, look equally hopeless. They are but acute wedges of rock, the ribs and ridges of which are plastered in ice that has been fashioned by time and weather into mere blades and biscuits. These peaks possess no main ridges, they are upflung indeterminate wedges of extraordinary steepness and complexity, and their ribs and ridges usually end in complete cut-offs, consisting of rock precipices, or hanging glaciers. Looking at such peaks, one is forcibly reminded of the geological newness of the Himalayas as compared to the Alps and other mountain ranges. They have not weathered sufficiently to present the mountaineer with feasible routes. They are still elemental and savage masses spat out by fire and eruption. Time has had little softening influence on them. Restless looking, inhospitable peaks they are, grand to look upon but evil to climb.

Kangbachen is situated at the junction of the Kangchenjunga and Thangchen rivers. The last named flows down a valley, which was formerly traversed by traders between Thibet and Nepal, but owing to political friction between these two countries, it would appear to have fallen into disuse. During what must have been more profitable days, Kangbachen must have flourished, and its inhabitants were most likely of good physique, but with the closing of this trade route, it was cut off from the world. Among so small a population, the evils of intermarriage soon manifested themselves, and at the present time a number of its

NEPALI DWARFS AT KANGBACHEN: THE EVIL EFFECTS OF INTERMARRIAGE—NOTE THE BABY ON THE WOMAN'S BACK

inhabitants are crétins, not quite the ghastly type as depicted and described in Whymper's *Scrambles Among the Alps*, but nevertheless stunted, dwarf-like and seemingly possessed of but little intelligence. Several of them collected round our camp, and eyed it with curiosity. Two, a man and his wife, were but three feet high, and the woman carried on her back a baby almost as large as herself, which seems to show that physical development is arrested at an early age, judging from this couple, at the age of five or six. By no means all the inhabitants were thus stunted, and several of the children appeared quite normal and healthy.

It was desirable, if possible, to replenish our larder. Wild sheep were known to be in the vicinity, and as local knowledge might be helpful, we engaged an old gentleman, who styled himself the village Shikari.

Before breaking camp, I went a short way up the valley for some photographs. I had not walked more than two hundred yards from the village when, on turning a corner, I found myself face to face with a wild sheep. He was a fine specimen, with a splendid head, and had I taken with me a rifle, I could have shot him easily, as he stood staring at me without moving for more than a minute. But soon fear overcame his astonishment and curiosity. With a tremendous and agile leap he was away up the hillside, and in a few seconds was lost to sight among the grey boulders.

It was impossible to leave Kangbachen early that morning, owing to many of the bivouacking porters not having arrived. The march from Khunza to Kangbachen had been a hard one for them, and it was necessary to give them an off-day, or at least a very short and easy

march. At Wood Johnson's suggestion, therefore, it was agreed that they should have no more than three hours marching. This does not sound much, but with full loads of sixty to eighty pounds carried at a height of 15,000 feet, it was enough for tired men. The porters, having been told of this through Lobsang, were perfectly willing to go on.

Passing through the evil-smelling, refuse strewn main street of Kangbachen, we found ourselves on an excellent path running along the western side of the valley. As yet, we had had no glimpse of Kangchenjunga, but some of its snow-clad neighbours were now visible far ahead up the valley. The snow-fields of one peak in particular aroused our ski-ing enthusiasm. The path, in keeping with the usual evil habit of paths in this part of the world, presently petered out into a stony waste formed by the terminal moraine of the Kangchenjunga Glacier. In order to save time we had engaged several locals from Kangbachen who knew every inch of the way to the upper pastures by the side of the glacier where they are accustomed to graze their yak herds. Among these was the local milkman, or Dhudwallah, of Kangbachen whom we had engaged to bring up fresh milk to the Base Camp at regular intervals. This old man, who was to prove distinctly useful to us later on, was a picturesque figure. With his lined, seamed and weather-beaten face, he might have been any age, but his bright eye, and the speed with which he walked up the hillside on broken ground betokened the born hillman. He was *exceptionally* dirty, and exuded a strong odour of yaks and other things, and more than one of us had qualms in entrusting the milk to his care. Also, he expectorated, a vice not common among natives, and expectorated with an

accuracy of range which I have seldom seen surpassed. This accuracy we hoped would save the milk.

As in the valley lower down, denudation had worn a deep rift in the old valley floor, but here the slopes of loose, insecure boulders were much larger—in places over a hundred feet high—and the danger of traversing beneath them was proportionately greater. Above these slopes, the mountainside at one place appeared dangerously unstable, owing to an outward dipping strata of rock. Rock falls were obviously not uncommon, and one of many tens of thousands of tons had only recently taken place. For more than a hundred yards we scrambled as quickly as possible over masses of scarred boulders. It was a relief to leave the vicinity, for though the risk of crossing such a place is small, it exists, nevertheless. In view of the communications that must be maintained and constant passage of porters up and down between the Base Camp and Kangbachen, it would perhaps have been better to have gone a longer if more fatiguing way round.

Wood Johnson and I were last, and with such an easy march in prospect, we sat ourselves down on every convenient grassy patch, and lounged in the sun.

In its lower portion, the Kangchenjunga Glacier is so moraine covered that the inexperienced might be forgiven for thinking that there was no glacier there at all. This stony camouflage has, indeed, often led travellers, and even surveyors, into the mistake of thinking that Himalayan Glaciers are much shorter than they actually are. These moraines tell a tale of destruction, and their size alone is eloquent of nature's forces that are ever engaged in pulling down the proud peaks of the Himalayas.

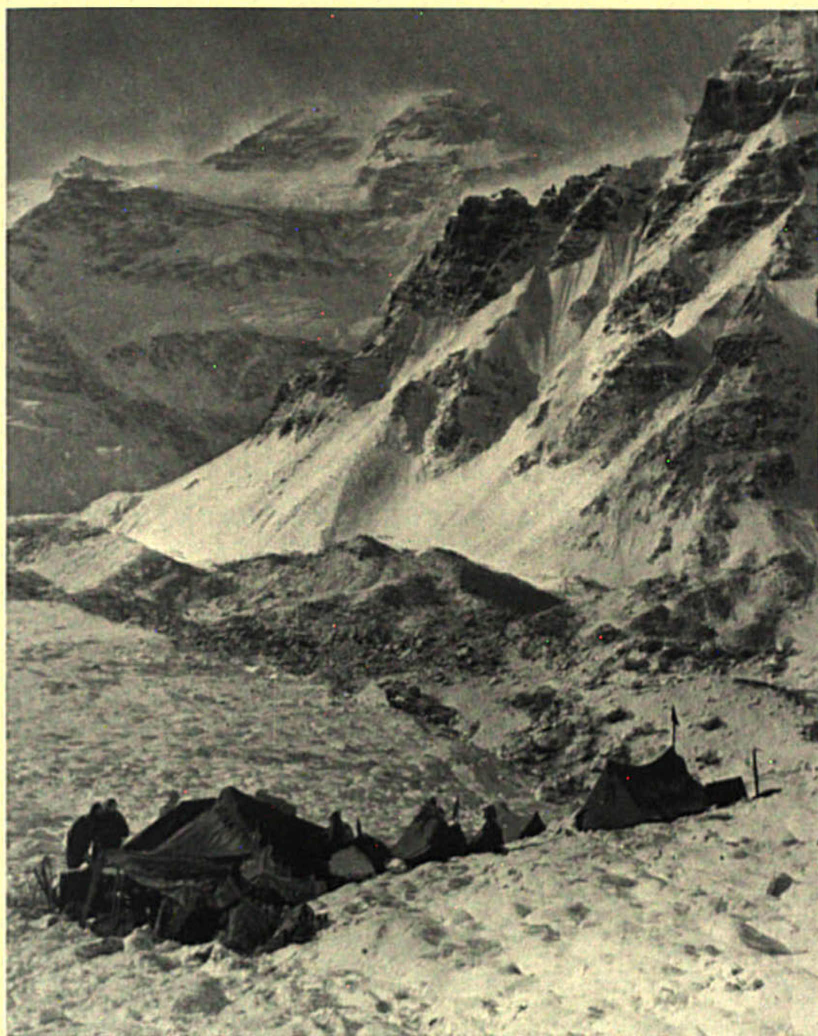
As we ascended the valley, the scenery became wilder and the ridges on either side rose in height. Farther up the valley we caught a glimpse of the Wedge Peak, with its amazing rock and ice precipices. Heavy clouds began to gather, the sun was obscured, the temperature dropped, and a bitter wind charged with snowflakes smote down from the snows.

The porters, believing that the march was to be a short one, had taken things easily, and Wood Johnson and I hurried anxiously on. But there was no sign of the others having stopped to camp. The weather worsened, it began to snow heavily. Evening was drawing on apace as we reached a little group of huts marked in the map as Ramthang, 15,431 feet. There camp had been made. The actual marching time for unladen Europeans had been about five hours.

The day ended with a heavy blizzard. Less than half the porters arrived, the remainder spending the night in the blizzard, many of them without shelter.

The snow lay over six inches deep next morning. Above the huts of Ramthang, the way lay over flat, stony pastures. With the new snow covering the ground, plus the hot sun piercing the dissolving mists, our faces were threatened once again with disaster. In a desperate attempt to save mine from further destruction, I donned a white cotton veil. I found little to recommend in it. It tended to produce a feeling of breathlessness, whilst it was apt to strain the eyes, thereby producing a headache. The latter disadvantage was, however, overcome by cutting holes for the goggles.

Presently, the mountainside became so steep that it



KANGCHENJUNGA FROM THE BASE CAMP

forced us down to the Kangchenjunga Glacier. Himalayan glaciers have usually a convenient trough between the ice and the mountainside. Were it not for this trough, the ascent of most of them would be very tiring as they are usually very bumpy. To give some idea of the moraine covered portion of the Kangchenjunga Glacier, I can only say that it resembles a road-mender's paradise, or a London thoroughfare that has been erupted by pneumatic drills.

It was curious how badly we were going at this moderate altitude. Kurz and I had our lunch together, and we both agreed that though we were only about equal in height to the summit of Mont Blanc, we were feeling the altitude more than we had ever done on that mountain. Possibly, it was because glacier lassitude is at its maximum in a glacier trough. Members of the Everest expeditions remarked the same thing in the trough of the East Rongbuk Glacier.

After lunch we toiled on again. The trough was lost in a maze of moraine mounds, and we toiled over miniature summits, and along stony valleys. Once more, with the coming of afternoon, the sky had clouded. It grew leaden, and a strong, biting wind hinted at another blizzard as we ground up a stony slope. Above was a flat shelf of coarse grass. Here we decided to make the Base Camp.

Wind and snow harassed us as we pitched our tents on the leeward side of a little knoll. It was a dreary welcome. All the porters got in that evening but they exhibited little enthusiasm at so doing, they were too tired. We crept into our sleeping bags with a flurry of snow beating on the tents. As I lay in mine, I thought over the events of the past three

weeks. We had met and overcome certain transport difficulties, but these were by no means at an end. Difficulties of the route, and lack of time, had meant working the porters very hard indeed. On the last Everest Expedition they had been given one rest day in every four or five working days, whenever possible or circumstances justified it. Our porters had been marched for the first eleven days without a rest day, including a double march over the Kang La, a march which must have stressed the physique of the fittest of them. The march from Khunza had also been a tiring one, whilst the march from Kangbachen to Ramthang is better forgotten. Would even our best men, the "Tigers," on whom so much depended stand up to the strains and hardships of Kangchenjunga?