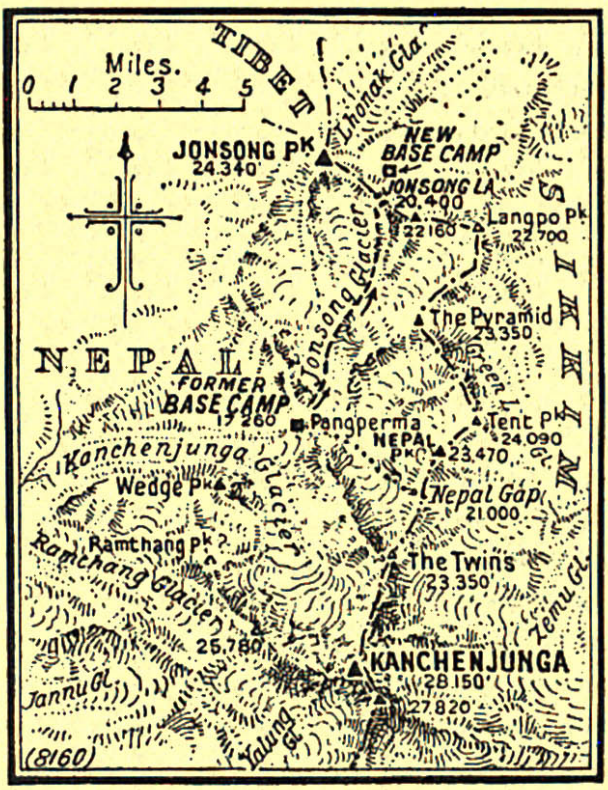
CHAPTER XV

THE JONSONG LA

On May 20 the remaining camps on Kangchenjunga were evacuated, and all members of the expedition and porters assembled at the Base Camp. Rest and reorganisation were the first essentials. The general health and condition of the party was by no means what it should be ; several members were still suffering from the relaxing effects of altitude throats and Hoerlin was weak from his chill. Our greatest anxiety was Duvanel, who was seriously ill with a chill on the lungs and severe altitude throat. It was a question whether or not he should be sent down straight away to the lower valleys, if not Darjeeling, but he was determined to carry on, if possible. Frau Dyhrenfurth had stood her trying time at the Base Camp wonderfully well. She had organised the dispatch of stores and equipment to the other camps most efficiently and her untiring efforts, and especially her unvarying cheerfulness, had been real assets to the expedition.

In order to attack the Jonsong Peak, 24,344 feet, which was now our main objective, we had to cross the Jonsong La, 20,200 feet. Though, technically speaking, an easy pass, the crossing of it was by no means an easy undertaking for two reasons, firstly, weather, and secondly, porterage. Every day was bringing the monsoon nearer, and on such a high pass heavy snowstorms and deep snow must be expected. Apart from the monsoon, purely local

storms might well prove embarrassing. The question of porterage was, however, the most serious one. We had dismissed the majority of our porters, retaining eighty of the best, and two hundred and fifty loads had to be trans-



By courtesy of *The Times*

ported. A new Nepali Subadar had come up in place of the former one, whose feet had been severely frost bitten, and he promised to enlist for the expedition all the local porters available, but we knew that we could not rely upon obtaining more than twenty or thirty at the most. There

was another factor, dissatisfaction among the porters, and this, it must be admitted, was not entirely without reason. During the expedition the porters had been worked very hard, harder, it is probably safe to say, than they had ever been worked before on any other expedition. On Everest, it was customary to give them one rest day in every four or five working days. These rest days naturally depended on circumstances, but they had been set aside whenever possible. Our porters had marched without a rest from Darjeeling to Tseram, eleven days' marching, with full loads of sixty to eighty pounds per man, which had included a total of something like 35,000 feet of uphill work, and marches in tropical heat. Since Tseram, owing to the breakdown of the transport arrangements and difficulty in obtaining sufficient local food, they had frequently been on short rations, or had to eat food to which they were not accustomed.

Furthermore, a quantity of clothes had been lost or stolen *en route*, and a number of Sherpas actually had worked on Kangchenjunga for several days before their full complement of high climbing clothes had turned up. Another grievance, confined to the Bhutias, was that clothes had been issued only to the Sherpas on the mountain, and the Bhutias, who had been told off for the donkey work of bringing up loads to the Base Camp, had not had the extra clothes that had been promised them. Naturally, we had no option but to clothe the high climbing Sherpas in preference to the Bhutias, but the latter's grievances were nevertheless easily understandable. An ugly situation that threatened to resolve itself into a strike and general desertion of the Bhutias was once more

saved by the tactfulness of Wood Johnson, and the Bhutias agreed to cross the Jonsong La on the condition that the clothes promised them should be recompensed for by a cash equivalent on our return to Darjeeling.

As regards transport, Wood Johnson told me that when he and Hannah had gone back, Hannah had arrived at Khunza first, and took what coolies he could find over the Mirgin La to Tseram. Subsequently, Wood Johnson, who had followed him to Khunza, went through that place with a fine comb, and got women, boys, and men from villages below, in fact every available coolie in the district, and sent them to Tseram. As a result of these efforts, ninety-eight loads were got from the Kang La and Tseram to the Base Camp; the remaining loads were mostly looted. Incidentally, sixty-eight Darjeeling men and twenty-three Khunza men were sent back from the Base Camp the day after we arrived there, but as they did not reach Colonel Tobin, they must all have deserted. Fortunately, while at Khunza, Wood Johnson made arrangements to send up coolie rations, meat, eggs, and vegetables to the Base Camp. The situation had been got well in hand by May 11, when Colonel Tobin left Tseram for Darjeeling, after having sent on all loads to Khunza.

Wood Johnson now suggested that in view of the limited number of coolies available, only a small and light party should cross the Jonsong La and attempt the Jonsong Peak; the remainder of the expedition should return to Darjeeling, turning aside to attempt Kabru, 24,002 feet. The snow would have melted from the Mirgin La and the Kang La, and even during the monsoon there should be no difficulty in crossing these passes, as they were not high

enough to be snowed under, while there would be little risk of the transport breaking down. The only other alternative was to get the loads over the Jonsong La by relays of porters. Such a scheme was all very well in theory, but there were grave objections to it in practice. In the event of a severe snowstorm, it was bound to break down, and we might find ourselves in the unpleasant position of having one half of the transport on one side of the pass and the other half on the other, with all intervening communication cut off. Bad weather might well result in a wholesale desertion of the porters, or at least the underclad Bhutias. In spite of these objections it was decided that this scheme should be proceeded with. That it succeeded was due entirely to luck, the greatest piece of luck the expedition was blessed with.

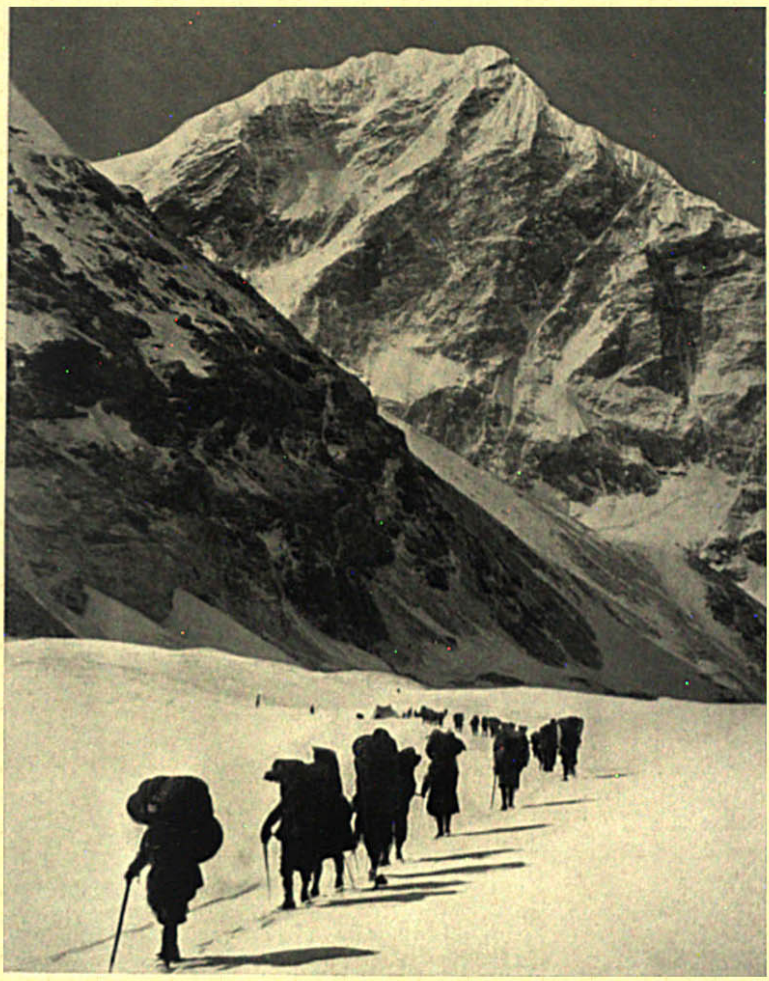
Owing to the expiration of his leave, Hannah had to return to Darjeeling, but before doing so he climbed with Wieland the 20,000 foot peak on which Wood Johnson and I had been beaten by bad weather. We parted from him with real regret. His work on behalf of the transport had been invaluable. In fact it is only fair to say that without him, Colonel Tobin, and Wood Johnson to do the spade work, the expedition would not have reached the Base Camp.

Now that the main object of the expedition had been frustrated, Professor Dyhrenfurth wisely decided to make all use of the large party under his command, and by splitting it up, explore as much new country as possible. With this end in view Schneider and Wieland were told off to explore the 21,000 feet high col known as the Nepal Gap, which forms the lowest point on the ridge separating the head of

the Zemu Glacier from the Kangchenjunga Glacier. Dr. Kellas had attempted to reach it from the Zemu Glacier no less than four times. In 1907 he made two attempts; on the first he reached 18,000 feet and was forced to retreat by a thick mist, and on the second 19,000 feet, at which height impassable crevasses again enforced retreat. His third attempt in September, 1909, was defeated by a heavy snowstorm 1,000 feet below the col, whilst on his fourth and last attempt in May, 1910, he almost reached the col, but did not climb the small rock wall just beneath the summit.

I should have liked to have accompanied Schneider and Wieland, but the claims of journalism and photography relegated me to the Base Camp. It was arranged that the Nepal Gap party should leave on May 23, and the main party for the Jonsong La the following day. Dr. Richter and Duvanel, who was now recovering from his chill, were to remain at the Base Camp until it had been cleared of all loads. Meanwhile, an urgent message had been sent to Tikeram Thapa at Khunza, telling him to collect and bring up as many local porters as possible.

The few days rest at the Base Camp had been most welcome. It had been good to feel the soft turf beneath the feet again, and to rest eyes strained from the glare of glaciers and snow-fields. The weather was now very warm, an ominous warmth, which seemed to herald the monsoon. Unfortunately, the wireless set had arrived completely shattered, and we were unable to obtain news as to when the monsoon might be expected. It was small consolation to know that every evening messages were being broadcast for our especial benefit from Calcutta. Among the loads



ON THE WAY TO THE JONSONG LA

that had arrived intact was the dark room photographic tent, a sinister looking affair, like the lair of a fortune-teller, in which we developed a number of negatives and cinematograph films. For the interest of photographers I need only remark that so brilliant was the light at 20,000 feet that an exposure of $\frac{1}{50}$ of a second at an aperture of f.22 was sufficient, save during the early morning or late afternoon.

Given good weather, no one can fail to get over the Jonsong La. Whether the passage is to be a fatiguing one, or a relatively easy one depends largely on finding the best way through the labyrinth of moraines covering the Jonsong Glacier. Mr. Freshfield found it a troublous business descending on this, the Nepal side, and camped twice between the pass and Pangperma. He was, however, much hampered by snow covering the glacier. In former times the pass was frequently used by salt traders between Khunza and Lachen, and we were astonished to learn that the Dhudwallah, who had been engaged in bringing milk up to us regularly from Kangbachen, was fully conversant with the route. We engaged him, therefore, as our guide.

In order to find a good camping place for our first camp, Hoerlin and Wood Johnson went up the Jonsong Glacier the day before the party left. They returned after having found a grassy shelf on the west bank where tents might be pitched.

The morning of May 24 was a beautiful one, and Wood Johnson and I strolled up the grassy moraines feeling at peace with the world. On the way we passed Nemu, who was laden with a miscellaneous assortment of my luggage, including my aluminium washing basin which jerked up

and down with a mournful clang at every step. For some distance we followed a well defined path which seemed to show that the Jonsong La was frequently crossed in the past, or that yaks were brought up to graze on the stony pastures of Pangperma. Possibly, it was the latter speculation that caused me to halt and sniff, and remark that there was a strong smell of yaks. Wood Johnson, however, seemed to take this as a personal reflection.

Between the moraines and the mountainside were a number of old snow-drifts, composed probably of avalanche débris. These had been resolved by the hot sun and dry atmosphere into groups of beautiful little snow pinnacles a foot or two high. These are known in the Andes of South America as *nieves penitentes*, owing to their resemblance to a penitent congregation. The most common explanation as to how they are formed is that winter and spring snow-storms form snow-drifts, which are blown into ridges. As the snow of these ridges is not of the same consistency throughout, the less dense snow tends to melt and evaporate, leaving the denser masses, which are subsequently sculptured into pinnacles by sun and evaporation. As with ice pinnacles on Himalayan glaciers, the origin of *nieves penitentes* is also influenced by temperature fluctuation. I have only once seen anything to approach them in the Alps, and that was in the exceptionally hot summer of 1928, when the snow on the surface of the glaciers became so rough and spiky in the broiling sun, that one could only assume it to be in the first stage of being formed into *nieves penitentes*.

In the corner of Pangperma where the Jonsong and Kangchenjunga glaciers unite, we sat down and rested

awhile. Are there grander or nobler peaks than those surrounding the head of the Kangchenjunga Glacier? A snowstorm was raging on Kangchenjunga, and dark slate-coloured clouds sailing up from the south were adding their quota to the snow-fields and glaciers. A few clouds detached themselves from the main masses, and sailed inquisitively up the glacier, strewing snow-flakes in their wake, before being disrupted and annihilated by the dry Thibetan winds from the Jonsong La. Other and heavier clouds pouring over the ridges from the south advanced to the attack. The Wedge Peak received their first furious assault, and became impenetrably shrouded in the murk of a snowstorm. The storm clouds advanced in a solid phalanx, but the north wind counter-attacked vigorously. A writhing mêlée took place above the glacier basins. The storm clouds were held, but now and again they sallied desperately forward, bombarding us with hasty flurries of snow. Impotent against the north wind, they retreated sullenly; the latter pressed its advantage irresistibly and, sweeping through their once proud ranks, forced them back in a confused and hopeless rout. A searchlight of sun pierced the gloom. Like the flood-lit summit of a lofty spire, the Wedge Peak stood forth from the blue veils of snow. Once through the shifting murk concealing Kangchenjunga came the deep growl of an ice avalanche. The great mountain was bidding us begone.

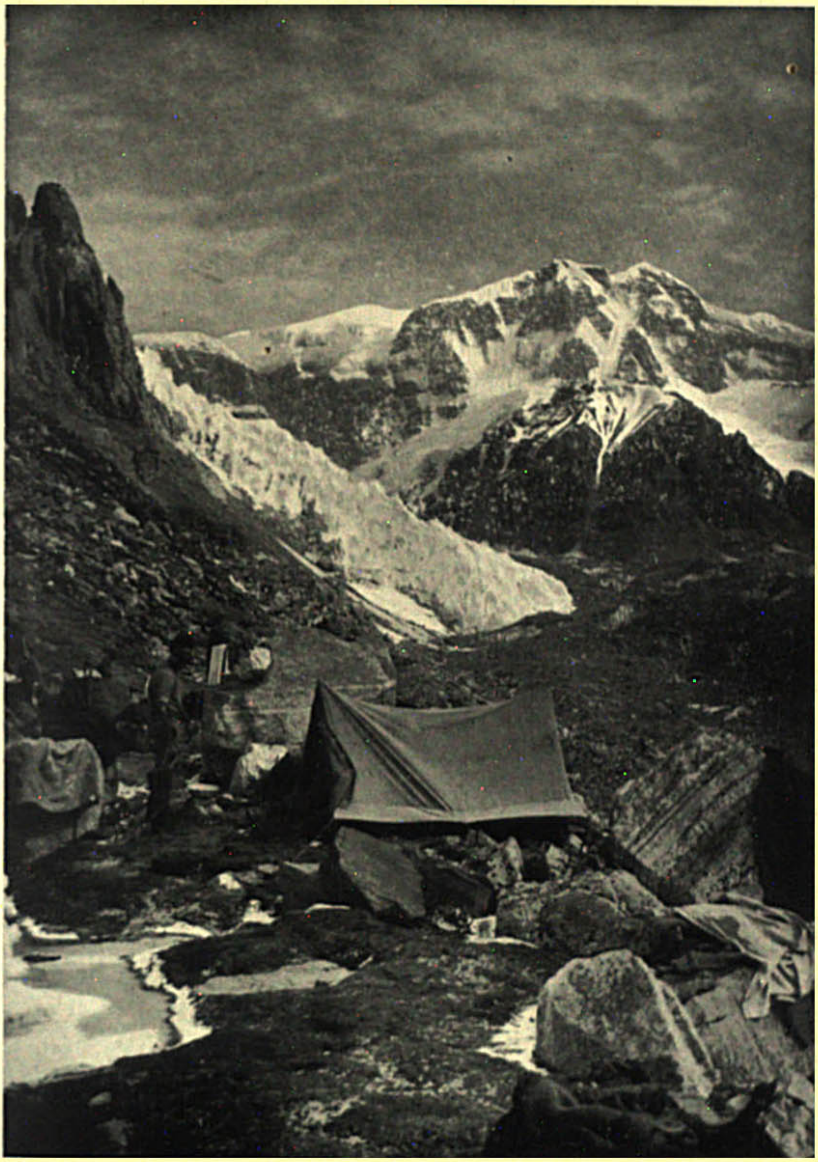
We gazed up the glacier towards the Nepal Gap, arguing as to which was the most probable route taken by Schneider and Wieland. Was it a trick of the imagination, or did we see two minute dots descending the broken glacier from the ridge north-west of the Gap? Some

porters were passing, and Wood Johnson directed their keen eyes to the place. Yes, they saw the dots too. Schneider and Wieland were evidently busy at their task of finding a way over the Gap.

Continuing on our way, we passed the corner of Pangperma and looked up the stony reaches of the Jonsong Glacier. There are many peaks hereabouts that would yield to determined assault, and some look decidedly easy. Dr. Kellas must have realised this when he crossed the Jonsong La from the Lhonak Valley to climb the Langpo Peak, 22,800 feet, at the head of the glacier.

The passage of many porters had trodden out a good path along the moraine. Turning the corner at Pangperma seemed to bring us into a different country and a different climate. Everything pointed to a much drier climate, the very ground was more dusty than at the Base Camp, whilst the defeat of the storm clouds suggested that the strong, dry winds of Thibet protect the Jonsong Glacier to a large extent from many of the snowstorms that attack Kangchenjunga. Were a number of meteorological stations to be installed between Kangchenjunga and the Jonsong La, they would most likely exhibit striking differences of precipitation and humidity.

Camp had been pitched on a charming spot—a small grassy shelf above the moraine of the glacier. The shelf ended in a spur on which a number of flat stones, obviously arranged by the hand of man, suggested a former encampment, possibly Mr. Freshfield's. Ranged along the shelf was a drift of *nieves penitentes*. They occupied most of the width of the shelf, and there was but little room in which to pitch our tents. Had we known how this icy



THE JONSONG PEAK FROM CAMP ONE, JONSONG GLACIER

congregation was to protect us, we should scarcely have resented their usurping so much space. Opposite the camp rose a fine snow peak of about 22,000 feet, which appeared climbable. On this side, it lets fall a steep glacier to the Jonsong Glacier. Were it in the Alps, this glacier would by reason of its steepness be much crevassed, yet here, so plastic is the ice, and so capable is it of accommodating itself to the irregularities and steepness of the ground down which it flows without breaking or cracking, that, though hummocked and lumpy, there was scarcely a crevasse to be seen in it.

Half a mile farther on up the glacier, another steep high glacier flowed down to join the main ice stream of the Jonsong Glacier, the pinnacles of which made a fitting foreground to the great southerly walls of the Jonsong Peak. From our position the mountain appeared to full advantage. South-westwards from the summit, smooth unbroken snow-fields descend for some distance, but like Kangchenjunga, they come to an end above precipices thousands of feet high, and like Kangchenjunga these snow-fields, which are hundreds of feet thick, are constantly breaking away at their edges in huge ice avalanches, which set the echoes grumbling round the great cirque of peaks, whence the Jonsong Glacier draws its strength.

That afternoon the sky was covered with gossamer-like clouds, floating above the mountain tops. Wood Johnson eyed them suspiciously, and gave it as his opinion that they preceded the monsoon. He added a grain of comfort, however, by declaring that we need have no immediate fears, and that we might confidently expect another week of fine weather. We could well believe in the imminence of

the monsoon, for these clouds were strongly reminiscent of those which forecast a bout of *föhn* in the Alps.

The majority of the porters were sent back the same day. Professor Dyhrenfurth's scheme was that they should leave the Base Camp early the following morning bringing up more loads, and continue with us up the glacier. Lobsang had been given instructions that this was to be done. The porters, however, not unnaturally, regarded such a procedure as being in the nature of a double march, and though they left the Base Camp early enough, they took good care not to arrive until it was too late to start another march up the glacier. This gave us no option but to postpone our advance for another day.

This attempt to double march the porters had an unfortunate effect on their morale. When at length they arrived, they gave it out as their intention to strike. Collecting in a sullen group, they declared they would not continue farther. Once more Wood Johnson was forced into the onerous position, in which he should never have been placed and over which he had no control, of having to placate our disgruntled labour. The porters were quite reasonable. They regarded the attempt to double march them as being the forerunner of other double marches and continual hard work without rests. Their experiences on the march out from Darjeeling, when they were marched for the first eleven days without rest, still rankled at the back of their minds. They were perfectly prepared to cross the Jonsong La, provided they were given one rest day in four working days. Naturally, this was agreed to, but it is a pity that such a situation should have arisen.

Late that afternoon Schneider and Wieland arrived.

Their reconnaissance of the Nepal Gap had been most successful. Not only had they been able to solve the problem of the Gap, but Schneider had made a lone ascent of the unnamed 23,470 feet peak to the north of it. Thus, if Graham's claimed ascent of Kabru is not taken into account, it was the highest actual summit yet reached, for it was slightly higher than Mount Kaufmann in the Alai Pamirs, also climbed by Schneider in 1929, or Trisul, in the Garhwal Himalayas, climbed by Dr. Longstaff in 1907.

The party had first of all ascended the tributary of the Kangchenjunga Glacier enclosed between the Twins and the 23,470 feet peak. They had made no attempt to reach the Gap directly from this glacier as the slopes are extremely steep, and consist for the most part of rotten rocks, but they had ascended a subsidiary glacier falling from the ridge between the Nepal Gap and the 23,470 feet peak. On this they had camped, and thence proceeded with little difficulty to the ridge. On the far side of this, and well to the north-west of the actual Nepal Gap, they had discovered a short, steep snow slope leading downwards towards the Zemu Glacier. They described it as being very similar to the south side of the Jungfraujoch in the Bernese Oberland. Thus, strictly speaking, the problem of the actual Gap remained unsolved, but a practicable way had been discovered over the main chain a little distance to the north-west of it, which is obviously much easier than the direct traverse of the Gap, even although the ridge traversed is a few hundred feet higher than the Gap.

Having made this important discovery, they decided to

attack the 23,470 feet peak. Wieland was unwell, but the indefatigable Schneider climbed it alone, a truly splendid effort. Low down, he had to dodge an ice-fall, that cut across the lower part of the ridge. Above this was a steep snow ridge. The snow was hard and icy, but with crampons scaling it was an easy matter, and he had to cut no steps. The summit was attained without further difficulty, whence he enjoyed a glorious view of distant Everest and Makalu. The name of the 23,470 feet peak suggests itself, and we christened it the Nepal Peak.

That evening we made merry in the camp. By some sleight of hand on the part of Frau Dyhrenfurth a small crate of champagne materialised. My mouth organ emerged from the seclusion forced upon it by cracked and sunburnt lips, and the peace of the Jonsong La was broken by the strains of "John Peel," the rousing chorus of which was rendered by Wood Johnson.

But the great peaks of the Himalayas take defeat hardly. That night I was sleeping peacefully, as a man should sleep after champagne, when I began to dream that I was involved in a railway accident. I could hear the coaches in front of mine telescoping, one after another, with a series of appalling crashes. My own was just about to smash when I awoke trembling with terror. The crashes continued, each one was nearer than the last. With an almost animal-like quickness my mind grasped the danger—boulders were rolling down the slopes on to the camp ! I struggled to get out of my sleeping bag and tent, but it was too late ; the former gripped me lovingly, the flaps of the latter had been securely laced up by Nemu. I could do nothing but lie where I was and hope for the best. Some sort of curious

sixth sense, a sense dependent entirely upon sound, told me that one boulder was coming straight for my tent. One side of the tent was occupied by my luggage, including a large tin box. Against this I rolled myself, hoping vaguely that it would break the force of the boulder. Actually, of course, it would have been crushed like an eggshell beneath the falling lump of granite. For what seemed an eternity I could hear the onrush of the boulder. It was travelling in bounds. One moment, with a crash, it would strike another rock, the next, it would fall with a dull thud into the yielding turf. There came a great thud not more than a few yards away, the next bound would assuredly bring it on top of me. It was a tense moment. Then came a mighty thudding splash, and silence. The boulder had plunged into the drift of *nieves penitentes* not three yards from my tent !

It had been the last to fall. I scrambled out of the tent wondering whether any damage had been done by the other boulders. There were perhaps half a dozen in all. The camp was awake, all save Wood Johnson. Bawling into his tent elicited nothing more than a sleepy " Whasermarrer ? " Happy indeed the man who can sleep thus, even after champagne.

The next morning I searched for and found my potential assassin. It was a rock about a foot and a half cube. A certain piquancy was added to the situation all unconsciously by Nemu. As he packed my kit, he glanced disparagingly at my tin box and remarked, " Box, him come to pieces, Sahib, you get other box from cook." He was right ; the tin box certainly was on its last legs and on the point of collapsing from the ill usage of the past few weeks. I took

his advice and surreptitiously exchanged it for a stronger one owned by the cook.

As this camp was to remain until everything had been transported over the Jonsong La, it should have been transferred to another and less dangerous spot. This would perforce have been on the glacier, which was here rough and moraine covered. That it was not, indicated the callous—one could scarcely call it philosophical—frame of mind into which we had dropped. The result of not moving the camp was evidenced a few days later when Frau Dyhrenfurth, who had been left by Professor Dyhrenfurth in charge, was nearly killed by another and larger fall of rocks. It was curious that these falls of rock should have occurred at precisely the same spot. The slope above the camp is by no means steep, and why two falls should have come down it when there were other and far more favourable slopes for falling rocks is a mystery. It almost seemed as though they had been uprooted and aimed at the camp by some malignant hand. The porters put them down to the Snow Men, and for once I was not inclined to disagree with them.

Explorers of the great Baltoro Glacier in the Karakorams relate that it takes no less than four days to march up the moraine-covered part of the glacier, before the ice is actually trodden. The Jonsong and Kangchenjunga glaciers combined cannot rival the Baltoro in size, yet in approaching the Jonsong La from Kangbachen the traveller marches a full three days on moraine before reaching open ice.

Leaving the camp we climbed up and down over the stony moraine. There is little of beauty about the lower

portion of the Jonsong Glacier, but there is a certain impressiveness in the barren grimness of its stony reaches, it is nothing more than a gigantic refuse bin for the great peaks about it.

The Dhudwallah was a most useful acquisition to the expedition. Without him we should frequently have been at a loss as to the easiest route, and might have wasted much time in the stony labyrinth, but he picked out the way with the skill and aplomb of an Alpine guide, his leathery, wrinkled face with its deep-set hawk-like eyes frequently cracking into a broad grin of conscious importance.

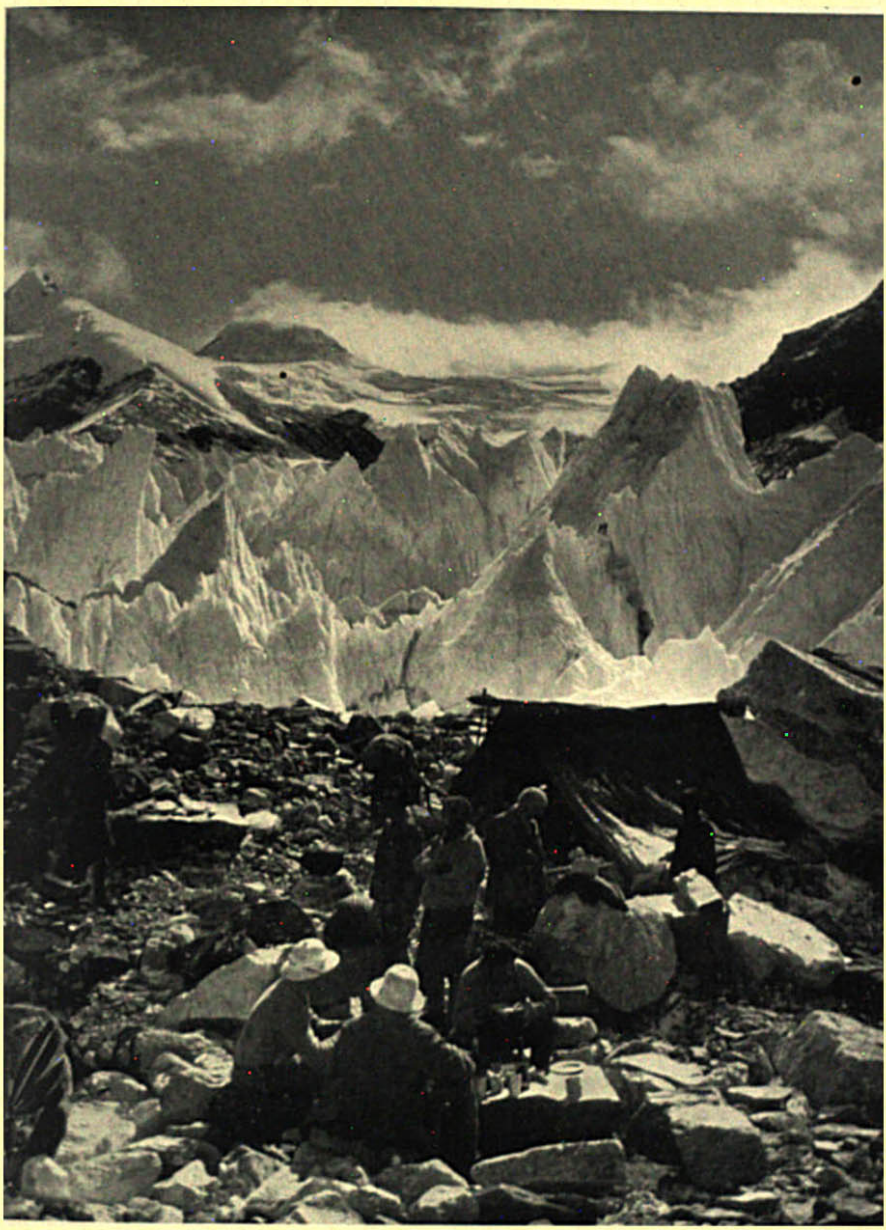
Some distance above the camp was a small glacier lake. High parapets of ice surrounded it from which a frieze of javelin-like icicles were suspended. Miniature icebergs floated on it, and its deep green depths, as placid as a Scottish loch on a calm September morning, reflected the glories of the great peaks around. Presently, as we toiled over the wearying stones, a considerable glacier opened out to the west. This was the one explored by Dr. Kellas, when prospecting the south face of the Jonsong Peak. Half a mile above its junction with the main ice stream of the Jonsong Glacier this glacier thrusts out pinnacles similar to those of the Rongbuk Glacier on Everest. These ice pinnacles are not found on the Kangchenjunga Glacier, and are common only to those parts of the Himalaya exposed to the dry airs of Thibet. There is something attractively fantastic in them; their queer constructions, their cleanly chiselled walls, minarets and spires suggest a goblin city, the queer phantoms of a cubist's dream, or maybe a halted regiment of the Mountain King.

It was hard going for the porters. The glacier rose gently, but we must have climbed an additional two or three thousand feet up and down these moraine mounds. As we walked we searched for gem stones among the multi-coloured rocks, but all we found were gneissic stones inlaid with small garnets.

At last the most turbulent part of the glacier was passed, and we pitched camp thankfully in a small hollow near the middle of the glacier.

There are really two glaciers here flowing side by side, and sharing a common valley. That on the eastern side of the valley flows from the elevated snow-fields dominated by the Langpo Peak and the Pyramid. That on the western side has its source in the snows of the Jonsong La. Though coming together high up, the two glaciers maintain their individuality for two or three miles before becoming indistinguishable from one another. The Jonsong La branch resembles any ordinary Alpine glacier, but the Langpo branch exhibits a multitude of monstrous ice pinnacles of the same pattern as those to which I have alluded. So vast is the scale of the country hereabouts, that it is not until the mountaineer approaches close to these pinnacles that he is able to appreciate their size. Some of them, as the accompanying illustration shows, are nearly a hundred feet high. Our camp was near them, and Wood Johnson and I practised cutting steps up a minor one. We found the ice hard and tenacious, and it provided Wood Johnson with an excellent first lesson in icemanship.

As the sun sank, the scene became beautiful in the extreme. The foreground was set with the ice pinnacles, the background with Kangchenjunga. During the day the



CAMP TWO, JONSONG LA

latter had sulked behind the clouds, now the clouds were absorbed into the evening and it rose serenely into a deep mauve sky. But it was plain that the bad weather had not left it unscathed, for the upper part of the mountain was powdered in new snow. It was some consolation to think that even had we been able to hack our way up to the North Ridge, and established higher camps, we should most likely have been beaten by the weather on the final push towards the top. Day died amid almost unearthly splendours. The pale ghostly pinnacles were faintly lit by the reflection of Kangchenjunga's sunset flare, and when night had at last cooled the red-hot castings of the peaks, bright-eyed stars glanced down on a world of awful desolation.

We were off early the next morning. After the irritations of the previous day, it was delightful to stroll along the nearly level crest of a medial moraine, which formed the boundary between the two ice streams.

The general condition of the party had greatly improved ; better food, and improved " nerves," had worked wonders on our health. Wood Johnson and I pelted uphill almost as though we were on the fells above Wastdale, and not 2,000 feet higher than the summit of Mont Blanc. Kurz, who had gone on a day in advance of the main party to do some surveying, had pitched his camp where Kellas had pitched his, at the junction of the Langpo and Jonsong glaciers. Passing him, we continued on up the latter glacier, accompanied by the Dhudwallah carrying my ski, building small cairns as we went for the benefit of the porters who were following.

At last, after two and a half days' marching, we trod

snow and ice, where Hoerlin joined us, having come by some mysterious short cut of his own, through the ice-fall which here occupied the centre of the glacier. He and I put on ski, and continued up a snowy corridor contained between the ice-fall and the mountainside. Wood Johnson had not skied before, and he continued on foot with the Dhudwallah. Every few yards there were undulations in the snow, suspiciously like concealed crevasses, and the suggestion was made that those on foot had better rope up. The Dhudwallah, however, greeted this with contempt, and declared there were no " holes." He was right, the undulations were merely due to the melting effects of the sun, or rivulets beneath the snow.

There is no doubt that with a little training the Dhudwallah would make a first-rate guide. As it was, the way he led us up the pass was remarkable in its mountaineering instinct and judgment ; he seemed to know the Jonsong Glacier as well as a Zermatt guide knows the Matterhorn.

Ski were much quicker than foot-slogging, and leaving Hoerlin to make some adjustment to his bindings, I went on ahead to find a suitable camping site. The corridor was the easy and obvious route, but at its upper end, where it debouched on to the unbroken glacier above the ice-fall, it was liable to be swept by ice avalanches from a hanging glacier on the mountainside above. It was only a small hanging glacier, the danger being limited to a few yards, and on ski one would have stood a sporting chance of dodging an avalanche. The dangerous area was traversed in a few seconds, and I was soon sliding over the gently sloping upper snow-field of the glacier.

Camp was pitched in a shallow snow hollow. Above it

rose a steep slope of snow about 2,000 feet high. I saw Schneider fasten his eyes on this slope with that half fanatical, half predatory gleam peculiar to ski-runners. The next instant, unable to withstand temptation, he was off. For half an hour he climbed vigorously, then, pointing his ski straight downhill, he descended like a thunderbolt on the camp.

The Jonsong La was close at hand, and I suggested to Wood Johnson that we might ascend to it on ski, and prospect the way for the morrow.

The shadows were lengthening as we started up the glacier, and the glaring arc lights of day were being dimmed by the stealthy hand of night. In another hour or two they would be switched off altogether, and tropical darkness would fall almost with the suddenness of a blow.

It was the first time that Wood Johnson had donned ski, but he made excellent progress ; surely no one has ever taken their first lesson in ski-ing at 20,000 feet. The glacier led us gently upwards to the foot of a steep little snow slope falling from the pass. Frost had already hardened the snow into a crust, and we found it easier to leave our ski, and climb the slope on foot.

A bitter wind met us on the pass, but we scarcely heeded its onslaught. We were looking down into a new world, a world of yellow, brown and gold. The mountaineer experiences many dramatic views ; there is the view from the summit of the Wetterhorn, with its fascinating and terrible glimpse down to the emerald pastures and doll-like châlets of Grindelwald ; there is that backward glance down the Brenva face of Mont Blanc to the wrinkled surface of the Brenva Glacier curving over towards the

heat-hazed meadows of Courmayeur; there is enough drama in the outlook from the Dolomite Vajolet Towers to satiate the most earnest seeker after the sensational. Yet, none of these views impressed me so much as that from the Jonsong La. We had come from a world of ice and snow, we were passing into a world of earth and rock. Our eyes, tired with the unrelenting glare of snow-fields, rested gratefully on the brown terraces and colourful scree of the Lhonak Valley. We even tried to delude ourselves into thinking that it was a warm country we were descending into, but we knew that it was not; these colourful slopes were on the edge of the bleak and inhospitable plateaux of Thibet.

Our soliloquies were cut short by the wind. Fingers and toes were numbing. Furious banners of snow were streaming from the ridges on either hand. We turned. The shadows had stolen across the smooth carpet of the glacier beneath, and were marching up the opposite slopes. Kangchenjunga was yellow and unearthly. Eastward, night's purple band was mounting the sky, sowing the first stars in its wake.

Beating gloved hands together, we ran down the slope to our ski. I wish Wood Johnson could have enjoyed the run down as much as I. Perhaps he did, for ski-ing can be enjoyed equally well by the complete novice or the expert of experts, that is not the least of its charms.

Wood Johnson responded readily to tuition, and some distance down executed a manœuvre which he triumphantly described as a Stemming turn. When the camp was in view I regret to say I left him to his own devices. Perhaps it was selfish, but who could resist the long unbroken

slopes, so hard, and yet with their crystalline surface so perfect for ski-ing. I took them straight. The wind roared at me ; a fierce exultation gripped me. I felt as I did on my first solo flight when, with the engine shut off, and the wind crooning in the rigging wires, the old 'bus dived swiftly towards the little row of hangars that came rushing up to meet me. All was the same, only here, in place of hangars, the camp. An aerial dive, a perfect ski-run, there is a close affinity. And so with a long, almost lingering Christiania to a standstill.

The weather was again good next morning. For photography's sake I started before the others, and from the pass was able to snap the party as it crawled wormlike up the glacier beneath. It is only by views containing figures that one is able to give to others any idea of the vast scale of mountain country. My thumb at arm's length before me sufficed to conceal the whole party from view.

A strong cold wind was blowing across the pass, this time from the south. About fifty feet down on the Sikkim side an outcrop of rocks formed a sheltered place. There I remained for nearly two hours basking in the sun, while awaiting the remainder of the party. Below this outcrop the slopes dropped steeply for five hundred feet, with rocks jagging from them here and there. Only in one place, immediately to the right of the outcrop, was there an unbroken run out. As the snow was hard and icy in places, and it was not certain whether a slip or slide might not be attended with unpleasant consequences, it seemed safest to fix a long rope down the steep upper portion for the porters. These seemed to think the descent a huge joke, and when they saw that there was no danger, many let themselves glissade before

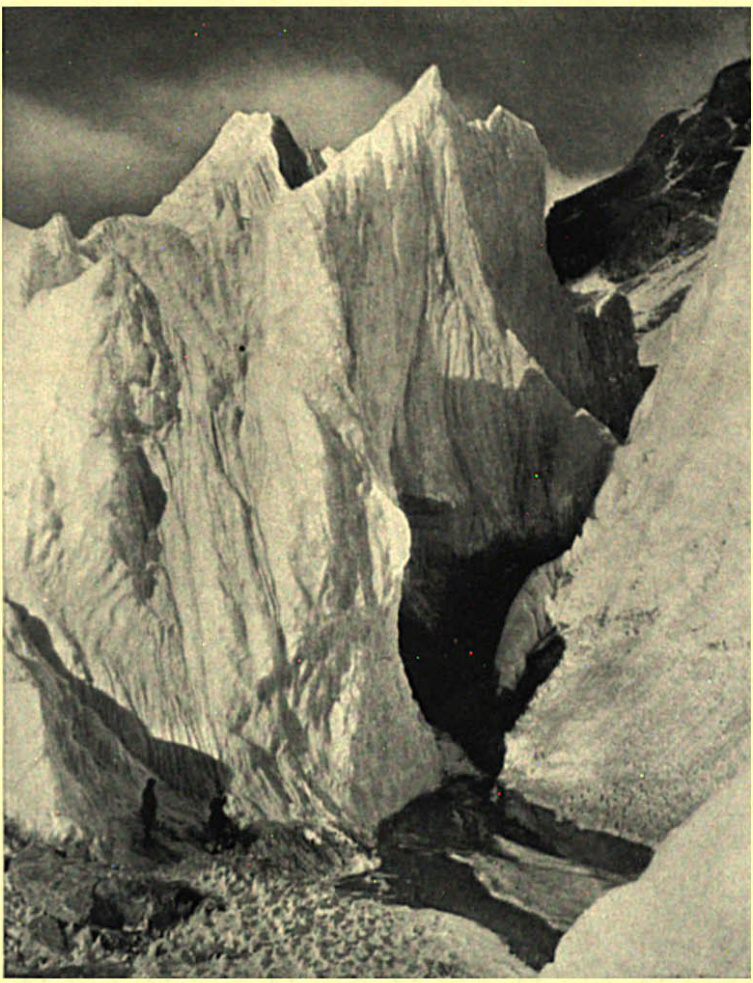
they had reached the end of the rope, and shot down, loads and all, to the glacier.

The angle of the upper part of the slopes was at least fifty degrees, but apparently only the perpendicular can deter Schneider on ski. The only compliment he paid the slope was by not taking all of it straight, and he descended the first part in a series of miraculous swings before pointing his ski straight at the glacier. Other and less venturesome mortals preferred to put on their ski at the level where Schneider had disdained to make any more swings. It was a glorious run down the glacier, for the snow was of that delightful crystalline consistency commonly found in the Alps in spring. As we descended we slanted across to the left, taking care to give a wide berth to a hanging glacier on a subsidiary ridge of the Jonsong Peak, which is liable to discharge ice avalanches.

The difference of snow level between this, the Sikkim side of the Jonsong La, and the Nepal side is striking. Even taking into account the steepness with which the glacier falls, the snow line is much higher than on the Nepal side and only a few minutes' running was necessary to bring us from snow to a stony waste of moraines.

As usual Nature, which obviously favours ski-runners in this part of the world, had provided a snow-filled corridor between the moraine and the mountainside to the west of the glacier. Down this we loitered, stopping every few minutes on the stones at the side for a siesta in the sun.

Far away now, was the pass with the descending porters strung up on it like a row of pendent black beads. I was reminded strongly of the opening scene in Charlie Chaplin's



PINNACLES OF SOLID ICE—ON THE WAY TO THE JONSONG LA

film *The Gold Rush*, which shows the seekers after wealth toiling in single file up the Chilkoot Pass.

Eastwards of the Jonsong La is a nameless peak of 22,160 feet, and the Langpo Peak, 22,700 feet, which was climbed by Dr. Kellas. It was but one of many great ascents that he made in this district. Looking at it, and later at other peaks that he climbed, one could not but be impressed by his mountaineering judgment and route-finding abilities. Climbing with only native porters as companions, he had to rely solely on an instinct and judgment that seldom, if ever, failed him. When the history of the Golden Age of Himalayan exploration comes to be written, Dr. Kellas's name will take a high place in the select little list of early mountaineers.

The snowy corridor petered out into a stony waste. To the west was a subsidiary glacier, and we traversed across to it, floundering through bog-like patches of snow between the rocks. The snow of this glacier was abominable, whole masses of it frequently collapsing beneath our ski, letting them sink into water-undermined cavities.

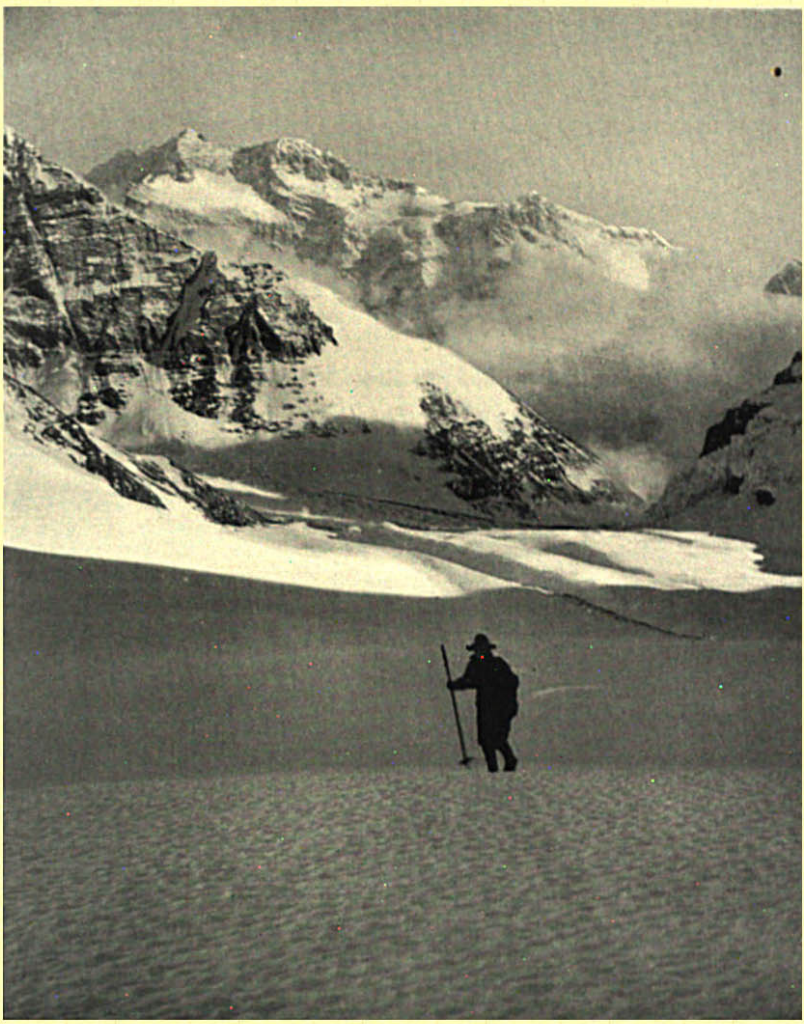
The glacier ended in an abrupt nose of ice. Beneath was a little lake, a blue-green gem in a sombre setting. It was an ideal spot for a camp, and Kurz and I returned with the welcome news to the porters who were finding it heavy going in the soft snow.

Our camping place was Arctic in its solitude and beauty. Above us towered the ice nose festooned with giant icicles, and sculptured into all manner of forms. There was the wrinkled face of an old witch, peering sardonically down upon us, and, in bas-relief, three classical figures linked hand in hand. Beneath was a hermit's cave, and above, a

little balcony from which the fair-haired snow maidens could gaze rapturously, if not enviously, down upon us, as we munched our dinner of sardines and gherkins. All these things were reflected with faultless accuracy in the green blue depths of the little lake beneath. That evening, when frost stalked out with the shadows, freezing the surface of the lake into a smooth, white floor, the elves and fairies held a midnight ball, while we sophisticated mortals snored in our tents.

We were short of fuel, and it was essential to secure some without delay. The porters had had a trying day traversing the Jonsong La, and were entitled to a rest. We called, therefore, for volunteers, who, for an extra day's pay, would descend the Lhonak Valley and bring up rhododendron wood. Fortunately, sufficient were forthcoming. Also, we had none too much coolie food left, and runners were dispatched with notes to the Maharajah of Sikkim at Gangtok, and the Headman of Lachen, requesting immediate assistance.

Above the camp was a low ridge pushed into the Lhonak Valley by the Jonsong Massif. This rose to a little knob, which formed an ideal belvedere for viewing the head of the Lhonak Valley, its glaciers and surrounding peaks. Seated on the gaunt, granite slabs piled up like a ruined Stonehenge on the summit, we drank in the glories of this new country. There was much to interest and impress us ; the brown upland valley ; the lateral terraces 1,000 feet above the floor of the Lhonak Valley telling of a former Ice Age when a great glacier extended many miles down towards the plains ; the rugged limestone peaks of the Dodang Nyima Range, governed by the graceful summit of the



KANGCHENJUNGA FROM THE JONSONG LA

Dodang Peak, 22,700 feet high; a sea of peaks to the north-west, above which projected two great combers, Chomiomo, 22,430 feet, and Kangchenjau, 22,700 feet, ascended by Dr. Kellas, in 1910 and 1912 respectively. But it was not these distant peaks that delighted our eyes so much as a beautiful snow peak which stands watch and ward over the head of the Lhonak Valley. It is the Weisshorn of the district, possessing as it does all the gracefulness and elegance of the Zermatt peak. The superb sweep of its ridges culminates with mathematical preciseness in a slender spire of snow, and so well designed is it that it deceived us utterly as to its height, and we began to believe that it was actually higher than the Jonsong Peak. Only the upper part of the last named was visible. Its south-east ridge immediately below the summit appeared easy, but could it be reached? Kellas, we knew, had attacked it from the north-west, and we had already learnt enough about him to realise that his judgment was likely to be sound. This problem must wait until the morrow, when we hoped to set off on our attempt.

Below us, two main tributaries of the Lhonak Glacier united to form a great ice stream which stretched far down the valley. This ice stream was, for a mile or two, broken up into similar pinnacles to those met with on the way to the Jonsong La. A weird procession they were, contrasting oddly with the browns and yellows of the scree slopes on either side of the valley.

That denudation as well as glacier ice plays an important part in shaping these valleys was evidenced by a collection of earth pyramids on the northern side of the valley resembling in general characteristics the well-known ones above

Bozen (now called Bolzano) in South Tyrol. They are due to water forming deep runnels in the soft earth of the hillside. As these runnels become deeper, so do the ridges between them become sharper. Some parts of these ridges are more knit together by stones and harder than others. The soft parts fall, or are worn away, the hard parts remain, forming eventually these quaint pinnacles of earth and stones.

The Jonsong Peak was now within our grasp. But would the weather hold, could we snatch it from the teeth of the monsoon? Westwards, battalions of cumuli cloud were flooding up from the Teesta Valley. Were they the advance guard of the monsoon? Wood Johnson thought they were, and pointed out inky black clouds which floated detached from the main body of cumuli, saying that they were typical monsoon clouds. We had endured one great disappointment, were we to experience another? Time alone could tell.