CHAPTER XVI

THE CONQUEST OF JONSONG PEAK: THE FIRST ASCENT

The day of our little reconnaissance of the summit of the rocky point above the camp had ended in snow squalls, but monsoonish threats came to naught and the following morning, May 30, was calm and sunny. The party that was to make the first attempt on the Jonsong Peak consisted of Schneider, Hoerlin, Wood Johnson and myself. It was decided that the Europeans should go on ahead of the porters and see if there was any possibility of reaching the South-east Ridge via the north face of the mountain. We knew that the ridge was possible if we could gain it, but the north face was cut off from view by a buttress, and it remained to be seen what was round the corner.

Wood Johnson and I were the first away. Crossing the ridge above the camp, we descended the broad snow-field on the other side diagonally towards the Lhonak Glacier. The glacier is split in its upper portion into two streams, one fed by the Jonsong Peak, and the other by the Lhonak Peak and the Dodang Nyima range. A long lower ridge divides the two, bending down from the North-west Ridge of the Jonsong Peak. So far as we could ascertain from his description, Dr. Kellas when attempting the Jonsong Peak had camped low down at, or near the end of this ridge. His second camp had been on the col between the

Jonsong Peak and an unnamed peak next to the Lhonak Peak. This unnamed peak does not appear to advantage when looking up the Lhonak Glacier, for it is farther away than its more impressive neighbour, the Lhonak Peak. Yet, as we learned later, it is a worthy mountain.

There were no crevasses on the snow-field, and we walked down and across it unroped. The rocks of the buttress were easy but disagreeably loose, and we dislodged great masses that thundered down to the glacier amid clouds of sulphurous dust.

All hope of reaching the South-east Ridge was erased from our hearts as we turned the buttress. One glance at the great precipices falling from the ridge armoured and defended with hanging glaciers was sufficient. Farther along, the rock precipices ended, and directly beneath the peak there appeared to be a chance of reaching the South-east Ridge up the 7,000 feet of snow and ice slopes forming the north face of the peak. But it was a very remote possibility, for the steep average angle of the slopes, plus confused masses of unstable ice pinnacles and hanging glaciers strewn indiscriminately over them suggested dangers at least as great as those of Kangchenjunga.

The reader may wonder why we continued considering attacking the South-east Ridge when we knew that Dr. Kellas thought the mountain to be accessible by the North-west Ridge. The answer is that it is the mountaineer's duty to consider every possibility however remote. Following blindly in the steps of his defeated predecessor is not the right attitude of mind in which to attack a great peak in the Himalayas. That was one reason why we had attempted the Nepal face of Kangchenjunga in

preference to the better known Sikkim face. As regards the Jonsong Peak another reason must be admitted, and that was the appearance of the North-west Ridge ; it looked terribly long. From the col reached by Dr. Kellas, it swept up in ice edges over point after point before merging into the final rock and ice slopes of the peak. Earlier in the expedition we might have gone for it with cheerful *insouciance*, but Kangchenjunga had taught us wisdom. Length alone will forever militate against the ascent of the majority of the greater Himalayan ridges. Yet, Dr. Kellas had seen the peak from a better vantage point than we, for he had approached it directly up the Lhonak Valley and he was too good a mountaineer to waste his time attempting a hopelessly inaccessible route, or one beyond the powers of his expedition. We had already learned to respect his judgment, and the fact that he had tried the North-west Ridge of the Jonsong peak, though he had returned defeated from it, was practically a guarantee of its accessibility.

Scrambling down the slopes of loose boulders, we gained the side moraine of the south branch of the Lhonak Glacier. There we sat down to await Schneider and Hoerlin. They and the porters were not long in coming. The latter were going well. There were only a dozen of them—all picked men—for we hoped to make a rapid push for the top. The porters left at the Base Camp were to relay the remaining loads over the Jonsong La. The men we had were all hard-bitten "Tigers," as tough, hardy and weather-beaten as the Old Guard of Napoleon. They were not merely porters, but genuine mountaineers and adventurers, who enjoyed a tussle with a great

mountain as much as we did, and were as keen as we were to get to the top.

The hanging glaciers on the north face of the Jonsong Peak were too obviously unstable to risk passing close beneath them. Fortunately, the broad upper part of the glacier was unbroken enough to enable us to keep in the middle out of range of their ice avalanches. For the most part we trod glacier ice, but here and there stretches of snow covered it. This snow seemed to have been laid down by some diabolical demon. If there were any watery hollows, they were concealed by innocent looking coverlets into which we floundered, sometimes up to the hips. The diabolical demon could seldom have laughed so heartily as he did that day.

The surface of the ice was curiously fretted with little *nieves penitentes*. This could only have been the work of the sun. Many little pinnacles, no more than a few inches high, were capped by stones, forming minute glacier tables. The stones, of course, had protected the ice from the sun, so that when the surrounding ice had melted away, a little stalk had been left on which rested the stone.

As we mounted the glacier, the snow and ice face immediately beneath the peak came into full view, and we saw what we had not seen lower down, that a possible route might be forced up it. But it was a route that would undoubtedly be exposed to unavoidable risks—risks of both snow and ice avalanches. Our last doubts were removed ; it only remained for us to follow in the footsteps of Dr. Kellas. First of all we must cross the glacier, thence climb to the crest of the low ridge, where we would make Camp One.

For the first time on the expedition we found ourselves among large crevasses. It is easy enough to get off the Mer de Glace on Mont Blanc to the Mauvais Pas if you know the right way, but if you do not, you are liable to get hung up by crevasses at the edge of the glacier. Such was our position now. We could see the side moraine only fifty yards away, and an easy slanting shelf leading up from it to the crest of the ridge, but that fifty yards was riven and torn into huge crevasses, with knife-like blades of ice between. Europeans could, of course, have forced a way even though it involved some tricky ice work, but it was a different matter for the porters. An easy way must be found by which we could send them up and down between Camp One and the Base Camp unaccompanied by a European. A way was found at last along a little horizontal gully of ice which led out unexpectedly to the moraine. The shelf, as anticipated, offered no difficulty, and soon we had reached the crest of the ridge some five hundred feet above the glacier. There we camped.

The actual crest of the ridge consisted of a hog-backed gently inclined snow-field, but we preferred as a camping site a rocky edge almost flush with the snow.

The ridge was well sheltered from the wind by the main North-west Ridge of the Jonsong Peak, and the evening was warm and calm. Far down the valley the setting sun dwelt on the brown slopes of stones and earth, transforming them into sheets of yellow and gold, or lingered on the crests of the ice pinnacles of the Lhonak Glacier. There was one pinnacle conspicuous among the rest which formed a tapering neck, surmounted by a bird-like head with a cruel beak. As the sun set, and other and lower

pinnacles had become cold and livid, one shaft of light, passing through a gap in some distant ridge, lit this pinnacle with a ruddy glare. I almost imagined myself to be looking down at some strange and terrible prehistoric monster steeped in the blood of its victims.

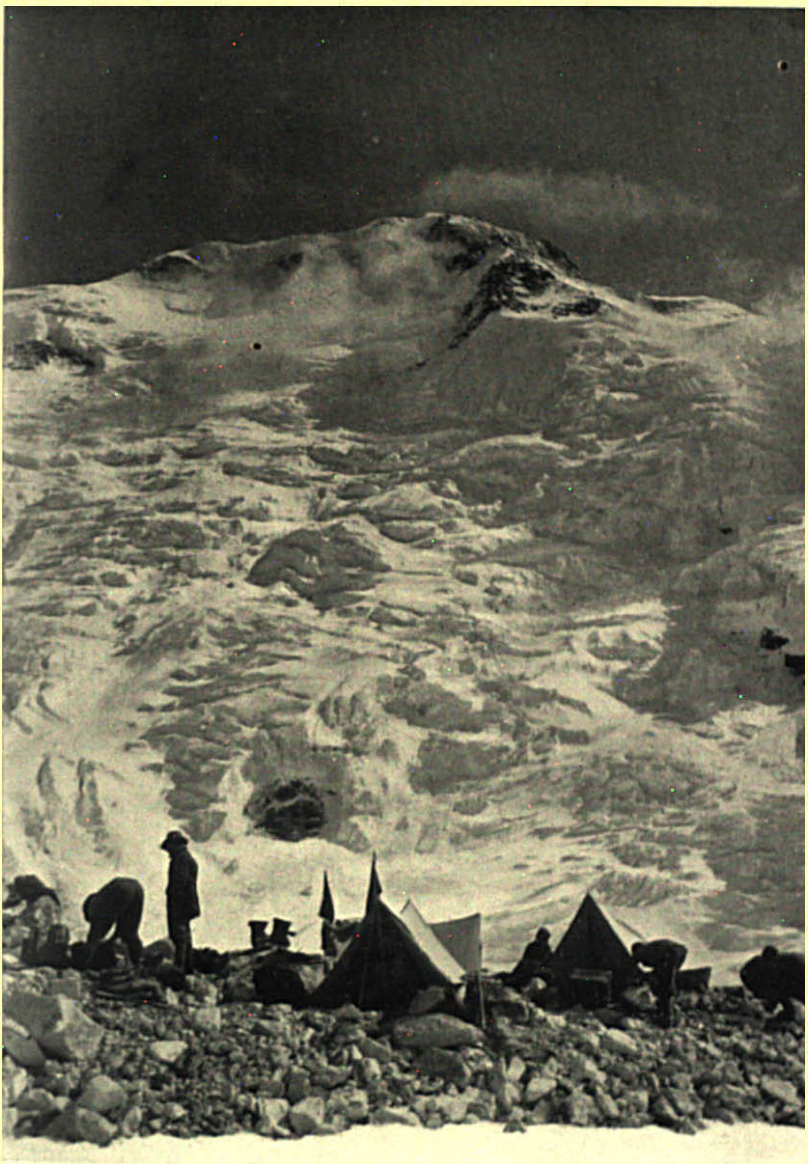
Day perished ; brown changed to violet, violet to purple. The huddle of ice pinnacles became cold and ghostly. Above the world, a vein-like network of cloud tendrils glowed fiercely as though suspended over the blaze of a city's lights. Slowly, they faded, and were lost amid the stars.

On Kangchenjunga we had known no peace of mind, we had awakened in alarm to the roar of ice avalanches, but now we could sleep peacefully.

For the most part the night was a quiet one, with only the groaning and cracking of the glacier beneath to tell of its slow progress. Once came the bellow of an ice avalanche from the Jonsong Peak, like the startled growl of an aroused watch dog.

Morning dawned mistily. Grey clouds roofed in the world ; but the rising sun thinned them, and tore them apart. In its powerful rays they dissolved swiftly into a sky of Italian blue. I was reminded of a Whitsun morning up Langdale; when the turf is silvered with dew, the lambs cry through the low mists, and Pike O'Stickle and Bowfell take to themselves the dawn.

A friendly sun smiled down upon us, as we trudged over the marble-like surface of the snow-field above the camp. We had hoped that the ridge would lead us straight to the col reached by Dr. Kellas, and it was something of a disappointment to find that ahead it looked difficult. The



THE NORTH FACE OF THE JONSONG PEAK—7,000 FEET HIGH—AND CAMP ONE

alternative was to descend to the north branch of the Lhonak Glacier. I volunteered to go on ahead and prospect the ridge. A short scramble up a slope of boulders brought me to a point whence, so far as I could see, the ridge stretched without difficulty for a considerable distance. Seen thus, there seemed every hope that we should be able to follow it all the way and that it would merge eventually into the snow slopes directly beneath the col. Rather prematurely, therefore, I waved on the others. This was a mistake. Only for a short distance was the ridge free from difficulties. Soon it became a conventional Himalayan knife-edge of ice, and writhed downwards evilly into a deep gap. We retreated. Some hard things were said, but they were deserved.

We descended a slope about 200 feet high to the glacier. Soon we were wallowing and floundering in soft snow, the most terrible snow we had ever experienced. The sun had softened a crust formed by an overnight's frost. For a step or two it would bear us, then a whole cake of it would collapse, and we would go knee-deep or even waist-deep into a hole.

But if it was trying or irritating work for the sahibs, it was much worse for heavily laden porters. Even though we stamped out the track, they, with their loads, frequently sank in to a much greater depth. Over the worst part of the glacier, I do not think we progressed more than 300 yards in an hour, and that along the level.

We halted for lunch. The weather was not propitious ; a snowstorm was brewing, and grey clouds brought with them a tide of scurrying snowflakes. The sun reappeared again for a few moments, but its smile was but a

transitory one, and soon faded and died behind leaden mists.

Above our luncheon place the snow was less disagreeable, and we climbed thankfully out from the worst part of the glacial snow swamp to the foot of an ice-fall. We had come to regard Himalayan ice-falls with something of disdain. They were usually much easier than they looked, due to the absence of big crevasses. This one gave us no reason to revise our opinion. It was a tame affair, so tame that we did not need to rope until above the steepest portion, and that only for a solitary crevasse with overhanging eaves of snow necessitating an awkward step.

The storm clouds had rolled back, and a benevolent sun illuminated the long snow-field before us, that lifted gently up towards Kellas Col, as we had already learnt to call it. Dominating this snow-field rose a little peak. Sunlight and shadow chased across it, a wilful mist concealed it for a few instants. Without it the world seemed dull and lifeless. Then it reappeared, supremely arrogant, and important. Actually, it was just an insignificant hump, on the great North-west ridge of the Jonsong Peak.

We took off the rope, which we had put on for the one crevasse, and trudged manfully up the soft snow slopes. Ahead, was a sky-line, which we thought must be Kellas Col. We breasted it, only to find more slopes ahead. Time was getting on ; the day had been a hard one, for all concerned. Therefore, we were content to camp on a little platform beneath the humpy little peak. Only the tireless Schneider elected to go on, and prospect the way. For once his prospecting nearly led him into trouble. In the dull light, he was unable to see the slight depression formed

by a solitary crevasse, treacherously bridged. He went through up to the waist, and was lucky not to go farther. Although a narrow crevasse, it was a deep one.

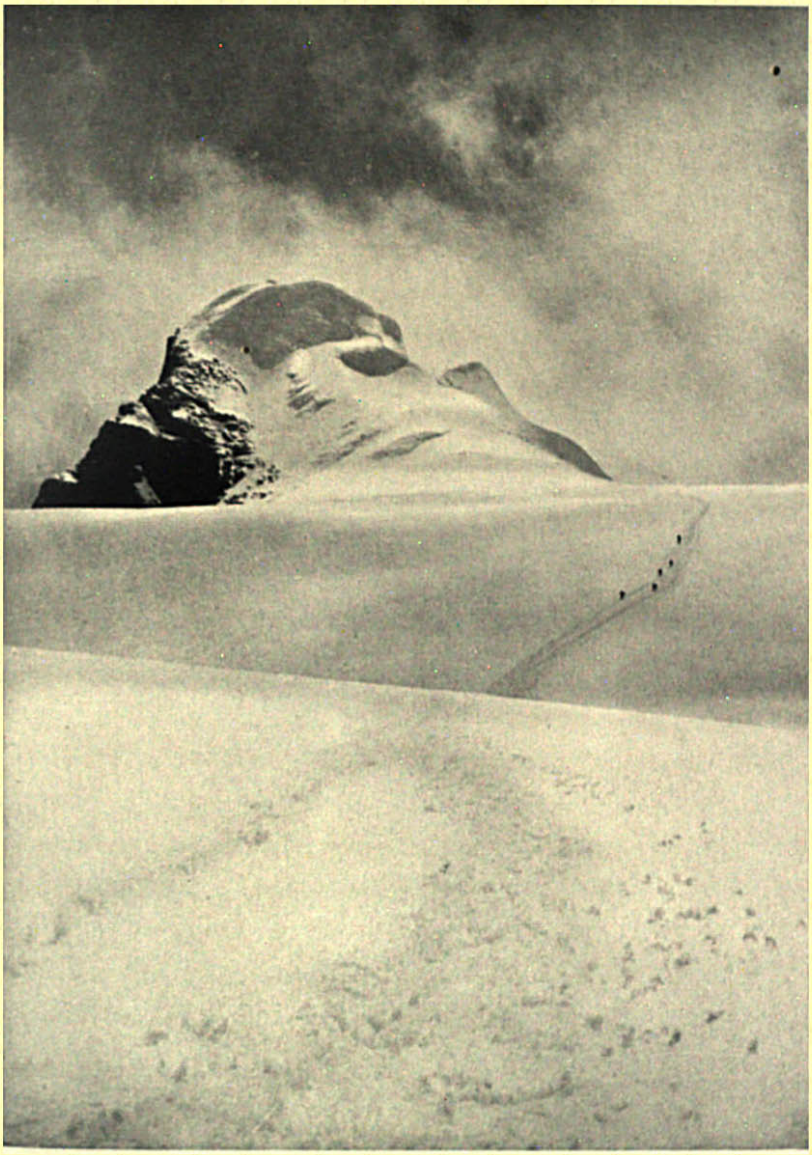
We awoke the next morning to hear the unpleasant sound of pattering snow on our tents. Enforced delay was something more than disappointing. We were short of food and fuel. In order to travel light, we had left as much as possible of the former at Camp One, and of the latter we had taken all the Meta solid fuel available at the Base Camp, the remainder had still to come over the Jonsong La. We estimated that if the snowstorm delayed us but one day, we would only have enough Meta to heat two cups of hot tea a day. How long would it last ? Monsoonish opinions alternated with hopes of a clearance, but the snowfall continued without intermission.

Had we known, stern events were afoot. Frau Dyhrenfurth, who had been left in charge of transport organisation, on the Nepal side of the Jonsong La, having carried out her task of sending relays of porters off with the remainder of the loads, had left for the Jonsong La. As luck would have it, the day that she traversed the pass coincided with the snowstorm. Duvanel and Dr. Richter had come over before her, and she had no European companions. She was accompanied, however, by her servant, the Nepali Subadar, and a Subadar Major, who had recently come up from Khunza. In spite of the snowstorm, these last two escorted her to the actual frontier before turning back, another remarkable instance of the courtesy and help with which the Nepalese authorities had greeted us while we were in Nepal.

To traverse a pass 20,200 feet high in a snowstorm

during which we, mere men, were cowering in our tents, was a fine effort, and one which, as regards height alone, has probably only been surpassed by women on two or three previous occasions. Luck had held, and the crossing of the Jonsong La had been successfully accomplished. Unfortunately, it had been marred by one slight accident, and a glissading coolie had come to grief and broken an arm. Disaster had also overtaken some of the more fragile loads. Of the two typewriters on which I was wont to hammer out my dispatches one was no more. The box containing the gramophone records had broken loose from a porter's back, and bounded down the glacier. Only a number of strong and thick records that had been supplied by Eberl had survived, and these were strictly classical. Our souls, and our porters' souls, hungered not for Wagner or Beethoven, but for the bass-voiced gentleman who used to advise us every evening to give ourselves a pat on the back. Now he was lying shattered to fragments at the foot of the Jonsong La.

It was still snowing the next morning, and our spirits sank to zero. We had little enough food and fuel left, and could not afford to play a waiting game. We had to decide definitely whether we would advance, or retreat. The former was scarcely practicable, and the latter seemed inevitable. We were preparing to descend when the snow stopped. A bright light smote through the mist pall ; a tiny patch of blue sky appeared. Miraculously it broadened and an eager sun burst through. The mists rolled back ; a wind from the north-west completed their discomfiture; they had to relinquish their hold on our ridge, and retreat to the Lhonak Valley, where they congregated in



DESCENDING THE JONSONG PEAK BELOW CAMP TWO. THE PEAK IN THE BACKGROUND IS A MINOR BUTTRESS OF THE NORTH-WEST RIDGE

sullen battalions ready for a further assault on the heights.

Nearly two feet of new snow had obliterated our tracks. It would be hard but not dangerous work going on, for so far as we could see there was no fear of the gentle slopes we must climb avalanching.

It was certainly hard work, but not so strenuous as we had anticipated. The new snow was of a more or less uniform depth, and was light and powdery. We climbed roped, for there were several concealed crevasses, two or three of which were only discovered by " trial and error."

From the Lhonak Valley the North-west Ridge had appeared a definite edge all the way from Kellas' Col. In point of fact, for some considerable distance there is no ridge, and what appears to be a ridge from below is merely the edge of a gently sloping snow-field. This snow-field gradually narrows, until at a height of about 21,500 feet it does actually become ridge.

One or two of the porters were feeling the effect of the altitude, and one of them, Nima, unroped himself from the rest. He was cautioned and tied up again. In the absence of an accredited sirdar, Nemu was put in charge. It was interesting to watch the psychological effect of responsibility. As Mr. Samuel Weller would have had it, he seemed to " svell wisibly." His countenance became even more earnest and worried, if such a thing were possible, and he fussed about like an old hen over a brood of chickens, but withal, he made a good sirdar, and one whom the men respected and obeyed.

At the head of the snow-field was a platform, on which we enjoyed lunch and a welcome rest. Immediately below the platform and to the west precipices dropped to a great

glacier, which has its source in the snows of the Jonsong Peak. This glacier at first runs in a north-westerly direction before curving round to the west. It is at least fifteen or twenty miles long, and its direction, and the ranges bounding it, are delineated inaccurately on the Government map. Whence do its waters flow? Do they enter the Khunza Valley at Kangbachen, or do they flow northwards into Thibet, and join the headwaters of the Arun River? This was a question that we were unable definitely to solve, but it seems probable that the latter direction is the correct one. This glacier, like the Jonsong Glacier, only consists of bare ice for a few miles. Its lower portion is so moraine covered as to be invisible, but the ice continues for many miles under the stones. As Mr. Freshfield pointed out, many of the early travellers and surveyors utterly misjudged the length of the glaciers in this district owing to their thinking that the glacier ended at the point where the ice was no longer to be seen. In its upper portion this glacier rises in a great ice-fall. Rocky spurs jut out into it, and over these ice avalanches fall periodically with thunderous roars.

Beyond the glacier, we looked over ridge upon ridge of peaks, some easy looking snow mountains, others more difficult, and here and there carnivorous-like fangs of rock, forming summits which appeared hopelessly inaccessible. Our gaze passed far across these turbulent mountains, to where seventy miles away two superb summits stood aloof from the world—Everest and Makalu.

Everest has been described as a dull, if imposing mountain, when seen from the north and not to be compared with Makalu in grandeur or beauty. The latter is certainly

a superb peak. Its delicately shaped summit based on two wide shoulders is as perfectly proportioned as the Lhonak Peak. Yet, grand mountain though it is, it somehow lacks the sovereign dignity of the World's highest summit. From our position we saw the North Ridge of Everest in profile, sweeping down in a graceful parabola to the North Col, to the right of which rose the little North Peak. But the most imposing face of the mountain is its southern, or Nepal face. No European has ever stood beneath it. Were he to do so, he would find himself looking up the grandest mountain wall there is. The north-west face of Nanga Parbat rises 22,000 feet from the Indus Valley. It is possible that Everest's southern face does not exceed this height, and it is probably less, but no other mountain can show a face to rival its unbroken general angle, combined with its length. We saw it in profile, and seventy miles away though we were from it, it seemed to drop and drop for thousands of feet, to disappear finally into the flocks of cumuli cloud that browsed about its base.

We could have stopped long gazing upon that view, but our start had been a late one, and the sun was well past its zenith. So far the foot-slogging had been easy, if arduous, of a type Baedeker would class as, " For adults only." Immediately above us, the snow-field rose in steep waves, before narrowing into a sharp snow-ridge. Henceforward the climbing was, " For experts only, with perfectly steady heads." At the foot of the lowest wave was an incipient bergschrund. This was only visible on the right, on the left it was firmly bridged. The wind sweeping the slopes above it had compacted the snow into a hard icy cake. Luckily there was no ice, and a few slashes with the adze

end of the axe sufficed to make a step. Above this lower wave, the slope eased off for a few yards ; then came a similar wave but a few feet high, and easily surmounted.

We found ourselves on a level shelf, forming the lower lip of a long snowy trough. Above the trough rose the final wave. We looked at it with sinking hearts. Like the ice wall of Kangchenjunga, it was a brutal, elemental bulge of blue ice. Schneider thought there was a possibility of circumventing it, and quickly traversed along to the left like an old hound nosing out the trail. A minute or two later he returned with the glad news that he had found a way, and the advance was resumed.

At one point the lower lip of the trough we were traversing was split at right-angles by an abysmal cleft. An insecure-looking tongue projected on our side, and from this we stepped gingerly across. At its westward end, the trough and the ice bulge petered out into an ice slope to gain which we had to cross another crevasse. Now came the first real climbing of the day. The ice slope fell away to the right, like the roof of a house, ending in a sheer drop to the glacier we had discovered. Steps, and good steps, had to be cut. A slip on the part of the porters was not to be thought of. Schneider cut the steps, which Hoerlin, Wood Johnson and myself enlarged to the dimensions of buckets for the porters. Nevertheless, we gave the latter a tight rope. The slope was short, not more than 100 feet high ; and soon we stepped on to the crest of the North-west Ridge. There we experienced a disagreeable surprise. For some way the ridge was level, then it rose to an icy point which formed a respectable peak in itself. So far the ridge was reasonably broad, and free from difficulty, but

NEARING CAMP THREE ON THE JONSONG PEAK

beyond the little peak it narrowed to a mere ice-blade of obvious and aggressive difficulty. Between this ridge and the Jonsong Peak was a gently inclined glacier, forming one of the heads of the glacier flowing north-west. Could we but gain this glacier all would be well, for from it's head we could attack the final slopes of the Jonsong Peak.

There were two possibilities of descending to this glacier. One, by following the North-west Ridge to a point where it sank to within reasonable reach of the glacier, and the other, by descending the ice slopes directly beneath us. Both were possible, but to get porters over either route meant an extra day's work, and another camp, and for this we had neither sufficient food nor fuel. The only alternative was to camp where we were on the ridge, and leaving the porters, making a bid for the summit the following day. It would be a very long and strenuous day, and a race against time. Any real difficulty such as steep rock climbing, or step cutting, would defeat us, and enforce retreat if we were to escape being benighted. It was by no means certain that there were no real difficulties on the final 2,000 feet of snow slopes and rocks separating the head of the glacier from the summit. It certainly looked easy enough, but as we knew from bitter experience, apparent easiness in the Himalayas is too often apt to prove a delusion and a snare.

Another factor by no means to be neglected was altitude. We had been going slowly to-day in the soft snow, and that from 19,500 feet to 21,700 feet. We would go more slowly on the morrow. Such was the problem, and like that of the Jonsong La, it was one that luck alone could solve.

The ridge was a poor place to camp upon, and we would

have done better to have descended to the platform below, or to the trough. But every foot of height and minute of time was precious, and we decided, therefore, to stop where we were, even though forced to bear the brunt of the west wind.

It would be difficult to imagine a more superb camping site, and we lounged about in the sun enjoying every minute of the remainder of the day. As we did so, we studied the route to be followed, and after a prolonged argument as to the respective merits of the ridge and the ice slope, the former was adopted as affording the most convenient route to the glacier.

On the peak itself there were two possibilities. One up the crest of the North-west Ridge, which would mostly consist of rock climbing, and the other up snow slopes to the col between the highest point of the peak and a subsidiary summit to the west. The final decision, however, as to which was the better of these two routes would have to be left until we were actually at grips with the mountain, for it was difficult to tell by mere visual examination which was likely to prove the easiest.

From a geological standpoint, the Jonsong Peak is very interesting. It forms the point at which the gneiss of Kangchenjunga, and the limestone of Thibet meet. The upper part of the mountain is composed of stratified limestone, precisely similar to that of Everest, which we hoped would provide as easy climbing as it does on Everest. This limestone is based on gneiss. Where the two meet, there are alternate layers of gneiss and limestone, which run for a considerable distance across the mountainside.

For warmth and companionship's sake we placed our

tents end to end. Hoerlin and Schneider shared one, and Wood Johnson and I the other. The porters were housed in a tent of Polar design, which had been found to withstand the fiercest winds. They had also a little Welzenbach tent, which in shape resembled a triangular slab of cheese, being head-high to a sitting man at one end, and sloping wedge-like to the feet-end.

As the sun set, the west wind rose, and howled with bitter venom across the ridge, blowing fine powdery snow through every chink between the laced-up flaps. Our little camp was bathed in a ruddy glare. So beautiful was the scene that Wood Johnson and I, peering through the gauze-covered ventilation square at the back of our tent, could not forbear to go outside and photograph it. For perhaps a minute I stood in the snow, fumbling with numbed fingers at my camera. The sun was sinking northwards of Everest. One stiletto of cloud spanned the ranges, its hilt reached to Everest, its acute point, so acute that it was hard to tell where it ended, stretched far over Thibet. The hilt was dark, the point afire, as though it was steeped in blood. Although seventy miles away, Everest was as sharp and clear as though it rose from the range across the nearest valley. The North Col and the weary East Ridge up which expeditions had fought their way were clearly distinguishable. As I gazed at the final cone, beneath which high hopes were shattered, I thought of Mallory and Irvine. Their last resting place is surely one to be envied. When all the other peaks were cold and grey, one steadfast cloud banner streamed from it, whilst below, the great mountain drew to itself night's purple folds, like the toga of some imperial Cæsar.

The cold was intense. We had no thermometer, but there were at least fifty degrees of frost. I took two photographs, but my fingers became white and dead. I beat and rubbed them for fully a quarter of an hour inside the tent before the sluggish circulation returned. After cooking a cheerless and limited supper, we gulped down gratefully our one precious cup of hot tea, and wriggled into our sleeping bags.

The night was a wild one. The wind roared across the ridge, its snow-charged gusts flinging themselves on the camp with an insane fury. Once again our little tents held out nobly. Nevertheless, it was not altogether a comfortable feeling knowing that there were precipices on either hand. I thought of Captain G. I. Finch and Mr. Geoffrey Bruce's windy night on Everest, but their experience was a far worse one than ours.

Dawn broke ; the sky was unclouded, and the sun rose unhindered, but the wind continued with unabated violence. We peered out of our tents. A *tourmente* of wind-blown snow was whirling past, and far up in the blue sky to the leeward of the ridge its crystals scintillated in the sun like a myriad elfin spear points. At the Base Camp they would be thinking about breakfast, basking in the sun, maybe. Possibly some observant eye would note a slight fuzziness about the ridges, but little would they realise what it really meant. To start was impossible, for to have faced the blast would have meant frostbite. The peak was within our grasp, yet we must retreat. With our limited supplies of food and fuel, we could not afford to wait another day. From Camp One we had sent back all the porters we could possibly spare. Instructions had been

KELLAS PEAK

sent to the Base Camp to send up food and fuel at the earliest possible moment, but this was scarcely likely to arrive in time. The hard work of the past few days had been wasted. We had resigned ourselves to endure yet another bitter disappointment when with dramatic suddenness, at about 8.30 a.m. the canvas of our tents ceased to roar and smack—the wind had dropped ! For some time we lay listening for its return, but save for a petulant gust or two, it did not return. We ate a hurried breakfast, while our servants thawed our frozen boots—I think Nemu took mine to bed with him—and packed our rucksacks with necessaries.

At 9 a.m. we were off, in two parties, Schneider and Hoerlin on one rope ; Wood Johnson and myself on the other. We were all wearing crampons. Walking easily up the ridge we gained the summit of the ice peak which is about 150 feet above the camp, and nearly 22,000 feet high. This marked the beginning of the difficult section of the ridge.

From the ice peak the ridge descended steeply for some distance, in a series of sweeps to a col above which it rose again to another little peak. The col was only about 200 feet above the glacier, and once it was reached, the descent to the latter should be a comparatively easy matter. There was no possibility of keeping to the crest of the ridge, it was too sharp, whilst enormous cornices festooned with icicles overhanging the Lhonak side had to be avoided. We must traverse well below it on the south, or Jonsong Peak side. Had we not had crampons, the mountain would not have been climbed that day, for without them the steep icy slopes would have involved several hours of step

cutting. As it was, steps were seldom necessary although it was tiring work flexing the feet in order to drive the crampon spikes well home. But if crampons made it possible to succeed without step cutting, it was not altogether easy work. The slope was too steep to face outwards, we had to face sideways, and descend like crabs. Below, sharp shark's teeth of rock, projecting viciously from the slope, and a bergschrund awaited a false step.

Schneider and Hoerlin moved for the most part both together, and were soon far ahead. Wood Johnson and I moved for the most part one at a time and were therefore very slow. This slowness was dictated partly by the fact that Wood Johnson had had little previous experience of snow and ice, and was actually wearing crampons for the first time. There was, however, another reason of which I was not aware at the time, he was not feeling fit. It is only fair and just to remark that considering his unfamiliarity with such work he put up a remarkably fine performance. The technique of crampons is not to be learned in a day.

Below the col, the ice was harder and steeper than above, and Schneider found step cutting essential. This enabled us to catch up to some extent, but even so by the time the first party had reached the glacier, we were still a long way behind. Schneider had cut a cunning zig-zag staircase, which led to the one place where the bergschrund could be crossed without much difficulty. After flexing the ankles on the slopes above the col, it was a relief to tread in good honest steps. The upper lip of the bergschrund was steep, but this Schneider had facilitated by hacking out large buckets of steps.

Seated on the glacier, we ate a snack of chocolate. The weather was now perfect, and the sun burned down with a fierce intensity, untempered by a breath of wind. Before us, the glacier sloped gently upwards with scarcely a ripple to mar its smooth surface. Trudging up it, mere dots now, were Hoerlin and Schneider. They were at least an hour ahead of us. We started after them. Almost at once, I noticed that Wood Johnson was going very badly. We had not gone far before he said he was too tired to go on. He said he would sit down in the snow, and wait until I returned. Naturally, I thought that altitude alone was responsible. He was feeling what I felt on the Ramthang Peak, when wearing the expedition boots, only worse. Under the circumstances ; a safe glacier, a windless day, and a broiling sun, I felt no scruples in agreeing to his suggestion that I should go on to the summit. Had I known, however, that he was suffering, not from altitude, but from a definite physical malady, there would have been no question of my going on. I should have returned with him then and there to the camp.

Would it be possible to overtake Schneider and Hoerlin ? They were going very fast. Could I go faster ? I thought I could, for I was feeling very fit. I said good-bye to Wood Johnson with deep regret. It was something more than hard luck for him, and no one was keener than he to do the Jonsong Peak. Yet, he could console himself with the thought that should it be climbed, his share in its conquest would be as great as anyone's, for it was only his able management of the porters, which was every bit as important towards the success of the undertaking as the actual climbing, that had rendered the ascent possible.

Every man possesses his own natural pace on a mountain, and by natural pace I mean the pace at which he is able to conserve the greatest amount of energy. This pace is, of course, apart from the difficulty of the ground, dependent on general bodily and mental condition, combined with the limitations imposed by altitude. At 22,000 feet pace and rhythm are synonymous. Increasing the pace, and breaking the rhythm, results in an output of energy far out of proportion to the time saved. This I discovered to my cost. At low altitudes, this loss of energy is negligible, and there is always a larger store of energy held in reserve than at high altitudes. The men who reach the summit of Everest will be drawing on their last dregs of reserve energy. My attempt to catch up Schneider and Hoerlin failed because by going faster than my natural pace I unfortunately exhausted myself by utilising my reserve energy.

Putting every ounce of energy into it I toiled up the glacier at a speed which would not have been out of place on Mont Blanc. I got within 100 yards of them, as they sat resting prior to leaving the glacier in favour of a steep little couloir leading up into the rocks of the peak. Here I sat down in a state of tired inertness, from which I never fully recovered for the remainder of the day. It was fully half an hour before I could move, and during that time I had the mortification of seeing Schneider and Hoerlin continue on their way. Quite rightly, they could not afford to wait for me. The peak was, after all, the first thing.

I started again to follow them. The spurt had done me little good, for I was now almost as far behind as I had been when I left Wood Johnson, and now I had tired myself

to such an extent that I could not go as fast as Schneider and Hoerlin.

If I have described at length the evil effects of hurrying at high altitudes, I have done so to save others who may be tempted to hurry. Rhythm will one day get men to the top of Everest, but hurry, such as a race against time or weather, will defeat them utterly, and perhaps even render them so exhausted as to bring about disaster. It is possible that Mallory and Irvine perished thus, for if Mr. Odell was not mistaken in thinking he saw them, they were so late in starting that their attempt must have been a race against time.

From the head of the glacier, there was no question as to which route should be followed. The apparently easy snow slopes leading up to the col between the two summits of the Jonsong Peak were composed not of snow, but of ice, and ice set at a steeper angle than had appeared from the camp. The rocky North-west Ridge was by far the easiest route.

I plugged up the couloir. At first wide and fan-like, it gradually narrowed. Its western bank was formed by the ice slopes of the glacier falling from the ridge connecting the two summits. The other bank consisted of rocky shelves. On one of these shelves Schneider and Hoerlin had left every article of equipment they could spare. Obviously, they considered that time was of the utmost importance, and that if they were to reach the summit without being benighted on the descent, they must climb to it as lightly laden as possible.

At the ledge, they had left the couloir in favour of the rocky shelves. I preferred to continue up the former, for

the rocky shelves were ice glazed here and there. It was not altogether a wise choice, for it was fatiguing work kicking and cutting steps in the hard snow of the couloir, and after climbing it a short distance I left it in preference for the rocks.

A falling stone passed with the vicious buzz of a racing car. I looked up. Schneider and Hoerlin were fully 500 feet higher. They were now on the crest of the ridge and silhouetted on the sky-line. They seemed to be moving quickly. I scrambled to the left out of range of anything they might send down. The mountain was patently rotten—a ruined mass of broken, shattered limestone. I looked at my watch, 3 p.m. My height was about 23,000 feet, approximately 1,500 feet from the top. It would take another three hours, at least, perhaps four hours. To go on meant being benighted. Great mountains have little sympathy for the solitary climber, and the Himalayas none at all. The foolhardiness entailed in going on would be fair neither to my companions, nor to myself. So I sat down, and prepared to enjoy a quiet half-hour.

From my position I could see Wood Johnson seated on the glacier. He had followed me slowly for a short distance, and then returned and stopped near the foot of the ice-slope. Now that there was no question of going on, I felt contented and happy. The day had been something more than a disappointing one, but altitude has the beneficial effect of dulling disappointment in the same way as it dulls ambition, and ambition had sunk beneath the oily surface of lassitude. From my perch I gazed upon a view combining both interest and beauty. All the nearer peaks were below, and I could gaze over the Lhonak and Dodang summits.

Northwards, over the Dodang Nyima range was the brown plateau of Thibet, contrasting oddly with the nearer snowy summits. Little cloud nautilæ sailed gently over its vast expanses, their undersides tinged brown from the reflected ruddiness of the earth. North-west of the Lhonak Peak were rolling snow peaks and snowfields. What a paradise for the ski-runner or mountaineer they would make, for there are many summits between 20,000 and 23,000 feet that are assailable either on ski or foot.

I turned to descend. Schneider and Hoerlin were out of sight now. I could not even hear their voices. Eastwards of every peak and ridge, blue shadows were stealing over the snows, greedily gulping the sunlight ; now and again a chill, little wind puffed across and was gone. Here was a peace such as we had not experienced on Kangchenjunga, a peace unbroken by the grumble of ice avalanches. Quickly I scrambled down the rocks, and descended the couloir until it was possible to glissade safely. It had taken me nearly two hours to ascend to my highest point from the glacier ; I scrambled and glissaded down in a few minutes.

I strolled down the glacier to Wood Johnson. His appearance shocked me. His face was drawn and haggard, and he showed every sign of being a sick man. I was even more shocked to learn that, some time after I had left him, he had had a stomach seizure, and had actually fainted. He recovered consciousness to find himself lying in the snow. I asked him whether he thought he would have the strength to ascend the ice ridge to the camp. He replied that he was game to try.

There were three things that might be done. I could return to camp and bring back porters. This I dismissed

instantly as being impractical; the porters would be more of a hindrance than a help on the ice ridge and could never be got back before nightfall. Moreover, they were not used to crampons, and steps would have to be cut the whole way—hours of work. We might remain where we were until Schneider and Hoerlin returned, but they would most likely be back late, possibly after dark, and they would be tired. The sole remaining alternative was for Wood Johnson and myself to start as soon as possible and take things very easily in the hope that Wood Johnson would be able to muster up sufficient strength.

As we stood considering the situation, two minute dots passed slowly up the last snow slope towards the summit of the Jonsong Peak. They traversed to the right and disappeared, but in a few minutes more, reappeared, toiling upwards. At last they stood on the summit, barely distinguishable against the deep blue sky. It was a great moment. Schneider and Hoerlin had accomplished a splendid feat of pluck and endurance. Taking into account the height lost in descending from the camp to the glacier, they had ascended about 3,000 feet in seven hours. Schneider had led magnificently whilst Hoerlin's performance, considering that not long before he had been ill with influenza, told of a splendid constitution.

Wood Johnson's strength must be kept up, and I insisted on him eating some chocolate. This put new life into him, and he decided to make an attempt to get back to camp then and there. It was a journey I shall not easily forget for he was very weak, and every upward step cost him an intense effort. He had reached the stage of not caring what happened to himself, and only the

knowledge that he was roped to me, and that by slipping he would involve me, as well as himself, in disaster, prevented his complete collapse. It was one more example of how closely, spiritually as well as physically, two friends can be linked by a mere hempen line. I do not know how long we took to climb the ridge, the time seemed interminable. It was probably about three hours. Slowly, rope length by rope length we progressed. The declining sun flamed and died around us. A vivid furnace with bars of scarlet glared behind Everest; the tropic night rushed down upon us. The wind rose again, and began to numb our hands and feet.

A wall of mist gathered on the Lhonak side of the ridge. At one point near the crest of the ridge, the nearly horizontal sun thrust each man's shadow against it, in a beautiful Brocken Spectre. As I lifted my ice-axe to plunge it into the icy snow, so did a ghostly figure, surrounded by a brilliant, prismatic halo, gesticulate, with a weird, eerie abandon. Slowly, the sun sank behind the ranges, its spear-like beams radiating far into the green heavens, like the spurts from some monstrous explosion.

The wind pack fell upon us, beating our faces with painful spiculæ of snow and ice. A myriad stars looked down on a scene of intense effort and the snows around us had assumed a cold pallor as of death, as I took in the rope for the last time. We breasted the crest of the little ice peak, and looked down the broad easy snow ridge to the camp. Porters came rushing forth through the gloom to meet and greet us. Only then did Wood Johnson collapse. His effort had been one of which any mountaineer might be proud.

A minute or two later, our servants had pulled off our boots as we sat in our tents. Our feet had lost their feeling, my own had become encased in ice, for during the heat of the day, my boots had leaked, and my feet had become wet. In a trice, Nemu had my stockings off, and started to massage my toes with his horny hands. He proved himself an adept at it, and soon I was groaning under the exquisite torment of returning circulation.

Food and fuel had arrived that day in the shape of a chicken and coolie food, some petrol and a primus stove. How we poured down hot tea, and gnawed the tough chicken! A meal was prepared for Schneider and Hoerlin. It was not until some time after dark that they arrived: they were very tired, but by no means exhausted. When we had all assembled once more, and not until then, a bottle of rum began to circulate steadily between the occupants of the two tents. One day, many years hence, the bottle in which this rum was contained will come out at the end of the glacier beneath, perhaps to provide some future generation of airmen with material for speculation as to what sort of men were those who elected to climb on their flat feet before the helicopteral age.

The wind was blowing hard again the next morning, and our start was delayed, even later than on the previous morning. This was unfortunate as it meant that by the time we got down below Camp Two, the sun had done its worst, and the snow was in vile condition. It was a curious fact that the principal precipitation of snow had been confined between 19,000 and 21,000 feet. Above and below that range of altitude there had been practically no new snow.

It was a trying descent for Wood Johnson. Once more he fainted, but soon recovered. It was a weary wade for him across the level glacier near Camp One, and it was a tired party that floundered through the snowy morass and plugged uphill to Camp One.

At Camp One a surprise awaited us. Professor Dyhrenfurth, Kurz, and Wieland had come up from the Base Camp with the intention also of climbing the Jonsong Peak. Schneider, Hoerlin, and Wood Johnson were to descend to the Base Camp the next day for a rest, after which the first two were to ascend to the Choten Nyima La, the 18,500 feet pass on the frontier of Sikkim and Thibet, whence they hoped to ascend the Dodang Peak, 22,700 feet, the highest point of the limestone Dodang Nyima Range, bounding the northern side of the Lhonak Valley. I should like to have accompanied them, but I naturally preferred to attempt the Jonsong Peak once more, and although feeling in need of a rest, I decided to go back with Professor Dyhrenfurth's party next day.

Some cylinders of oxygen had been brought up from the Base Camp, more as an experiment than anything else, for there was certainly no necessity for oxygen. However, it can be extremely beneficial taken medicinally, as was demonstrated in the case of Wood Johnson. He had arrived practically exhausted at Camp One. As is common with exhausted men, his pulse rate was a high one, 115, but after a few minutes' inhalation of oxygen it was found to be 95, and much of his strength had returned to him. Therefore, I would recommend that even if oxygen is not taken on future Everest expeditions as a help to actual climbing, it should be taken as a revivifier. Also it promotes

warmth, and may thus stimulate the circulation, or minimise the effects of frostbite. A dose taken in the morning before the start of a climb should prove a valuable preliminary to a hard day's work.

Plenty of food and fuel were now available, and that evening we did our best to make up for the privations of the last few days.

I cannot close this chapter without reference to the porters. Although on short commons, they had not once grumbled, but had carried out their arduous tasks with uncomplaining cheerfulness and fortitude. As a reward for their work, they were to be given three days' rest at the Base Camp, and a bonus on their pay. All save one of them were ready to descend. Nemu was not going to allow his sahib to return without someone to look after him ; he would accompany me once again up the Jonsong Peak.