CHAPTER VIII

THE KANG LA

A calm morning succeeded an angry night. Winter had ousted spring and snow lay over six inches deep. The sky was a clear washed blue, and far to the south blue hazes indicated the heat stricken Plain of Bengal. The crests of Pandim, and the peaks to the south of it were fringed with a faint iridescence as the rising sun shone through their delicate eaves, cornices and flutings of snow and ice. We had little time or inclination to admire the beauties of the scene, for the blizzard had done something more than transform the hillsides, it had turned the hearts of the Nepali porters into water. They refused to go on. Wrapping their blankets round them they cowered in the snow, weak, miserable specimens of humanity.[1]

Cajolery and argument were useless. It was necessary to separate the good men from the bad. Even though it meant delay in bringing some of the loads over the Kang La, it was better that we should get rid of these poor creatures now, rather than find ourselves at their mercy in a less favourable position. Wood Johnson, accordingly, ordered those men who wished to go back to stand to one side. They were indeed a sorry looking crew. The Sherpas and Bhutias eyed them contemptuously. The deserters numbered fifty, and the abandonment of their loads was a

[1] Considering that they were clad only in cotton clothing and were unequipped with boots they are scarcely to be blamed for refusing to traverse the snow covered Kang La.

serious matter. It meant that they would have to be brought over the Kang La by relays of porters. Such a *modus operandum* had little to recommend in it in view of the uncertain weather, late winter and low snow-line. Having sent back the shirkers, and issued snow goggles to our faithful porters, we were at length able to start, not forgetting to leave a reliable man in charge of the dumped loads.

For some distance the path contoured along the south-west slopes of Kabru, then dropped in a series of steep zig-zags into the Rathong Valley. In places it was deeply snowed under, and trail making was tiring work for those in front. It was here that we began to appreciate the sure-footedness of the Sherpas and Bhutias. Though many of them wore rope soled Thibetan boots without any nails, whilst others had no boots at all, they descended with that easy gait characteristic of hill men.

Somehow the Rathong Valley reminded me of the upper reaches of Glen Nevis. There was the same luxuriant vegetation, sky line of crags and firs, and clear torrents hurrying down the hillsides, or hanging in thin, gauzelike water veils from beetling cliffs.

Much to our relief we saw that the lower part of the valley leading up towards the Kang La contained but little snow. The Kang La itself, and the peaks north and south of it were buried in clouds suggestive of another blizzard. Snowflakes were falling as we mounted rhododendron-clad slopes into the Kang La valley, but presently the bleak sky was tempered by a fugitive sun, and the clouds rolled back.

We pitched camp on a bed of dwarf rhododendrons.

Apart from these, the valley was distinctly Alpine in character, and the stern rock walls on either hand dark stained by oozing water, turf-crowned slopes above and below, interspersed with occasional slopes of scree and drifts of snow provided scenery of a type typical to the Alpine gneissic ranges.

By courtesy of *The Times*

Thanks to Dr. Richter's treatment, plus a tough constitution, my chill was already better, and I was able to take my place at mess that evening. Seated on packing cases, we ate our supper in the open, warmed by the sun's last gleams. Up to date Tencheddar's cooking had met with approval, although not always unqualified approval. We were getting used to the varieties of food and cooking he expected us to stomach. It is indeed strange what men

can get accustomed to in the wilds. Even the assistant cook's confirmed habit of pulling his shirt out of his trousers, and wiping the plates with it met with no more than a conventional grunt of disapproval. Our servants waited upon us, and it was a point of honour with each one of them to see that his own particular sahib got more than anyone else. As time went on, we would endeavour to vary the monotony. At this Schneider displayed most aptitude, and his favourite concoction consisting of toasted cheese, salad dressing, Worcester sauce and gherkins remains an unholy memory.

One unfortunate result of splitting up the expedition into three parties was the absence of alcohol in our own party, and it was not until we had crossed the Kang La that we discovered that Tencheddar had accidentally packed some bottles of rum in mistake for Worcester sauce. It was the only mistake he ever made that ended happily.

As soon as the sun disappeared it became very cold, and a bitter wind got up, hustling down the valley from the snows. It was necessary to let the world know something of our doings, and I sat up late that night hammering on a portable typewriter, until numb fingers no longer functioned and an overwhelming desire for sleep, after two bad nights, submerged journalistic considerations.

The porters had now been marching for ten days without a rest, and an off day was certainly theirs by right, but the unsettled weather, and the possibility of another snowstorm decided Professor Dyhrenfurth to push on over the Kang La without delay, and not only this, but to try to cross it in one day from our present camp. In view of the quantity of snow on the pass, one day certainly meant

a very long and tiring march, for our camp was not more than 13,000 feet, and the Kang La is 16,373 feet. In addition, none of the sahibs or porters were acclimatised yet to altitude, and 16,000 feet to an unacclimatised body is more of a strain than 20,000 feet to an acclimatised body. Porters, also, were carrying a load of sixty to eighty pounds each. Taking all these considerations into account, it was doubtful whether such a long march was advisable.

To our delight and relief, the following morning dawned brilliantly. The wind had dropped, and a benevolent sun warmed the chill air of the upland valley. Our porters were if anything more susceptible bodily and mentally to weather conditions than we, and on this occasion they started off in great heart.

For a short distance above the camping site the valley floor is almost level, and covered in loose stones. We mounted over an ancient and steep terminal moraine. Thenceforward, the way lay entirely over snow.

The direct heat of the sun, and the reflected glare of it from the snow were terrific. Unfortunately, protective glacier face cream was not available, and all we had were some tubes of ordinary cold cream. These proved almost completely useless and despite liberal applications, we could feel our skin becoming dried up, scorched and burnt. As we gained height, there were backward and enchanting views. The great foot-hills that had enclosed us during our march through the tropical forests to the snows seemed now mere rucks and folds in the earth's surface. The deep valleys along which we had laboured had sunk out of sight ; belts and bands of translucent blue haze, from which white cumuli clouds born of steamy earthen heat were

beginning to nose their way upwards like white whales, alone told of them. It was as though we were gazing out upon some ocean from a viewpoint of few miles inland, the nearer peaks forming the broken edges of the coastal cliffs overlooking the long rollers of the foot-hills.

Hoerlin and Schneider with their usual indefatigable energy left early with the intention of climbing the Kang Peak, 18,280 feet. This rises south of the Kang La, and if Mr. Graham's description is correct would appear to have been climbed by him. Their ascent would act as an excellent spur to the porters.

On the Sikkim side of the Kang La there is a small uncrevassed glacier which is joined by another glacier from the north. This northern glacier, which boasts a considerable ice fall, leads up to the foot of a symmetrical snow peak, the delicately pointed summit and sharp ridges of which invite exploration and conquest. Southwards, were a number of rock peaks and ridges, one of which bears a striking similarity to the well-known Dent du Géant and Rochefort Ridge, on the range of Mont Blanc.

As we plodded through the soft snow we experienced for the first time that Himalayan malady known as glacier lassitude. In our case, this lassitude, the mental and physical weariness induced by climbing the long snow slopes, was due probably to the fact that in six days we had ascended no less than 13,000 feet. But glacier lassitude is due to something more than mere lack of acclimatisation ; sun and glare have much to do with it, as does also a curious lifelessness in the air. In the snowy trough we were ascending the air seemed dead and incapable of vitalising lungs and body. It lacked oxygen, and was as

depressing to breathe as flat soda-water is to drink. In Himalayan glacier hollows evaporation in the tropical sun is so rapid that maybe the air is deprived by absorption of some of its oxygen. Only in snow and glacier hollows does lassitude attack the mountaineer, and by climbing a ridge he may rid himself of its baneful effects in a few minutes. It is also interesting to note that lassitude only makes itself felt on windless days, and that wind always restores energy to the apparently fatigued body.

We halted for lunch on a level place some 500 feet below the crest of the pass. Directly above rose the steep slopes of the Kang Peak, and on them were the minute figures of Hoerlin and Schneider. How slowly they seemed to move. In the soft snow they were finding the going very laborious. They were making for one of the ribs falling from the summit ridge, and by the time we had finished lunch they had gained it. Thenceforward, the way looked less exacting physically, though more difficult from a climbing standpoint. The porters watched interestedly, forgetting their own tiredness.

The last slopes of the Kang La remain in my memory as entailing something more than a weary trudge. I was, of course, still weak from fever, and every upward step meant an expenditure of will power as well as physical energy. At long last the slope eased off, and stepping on to an outcrop of rocks, I gazed down into Nepal. Little was to be seen save battalions of fleecy clouds struggling up the snow-filled and desolate valley leading to Tseram.

From a scenic standpoint the Kang La is not an attractive pass. Like some of the passes across the Alps, such as the Brenner, the Simplon and St. Gotthard, it is fatiguing

AN OLD GENTLEMAN FROM THIBET

without being particularly interesting. Perhaps its greatest charm is the sense of isolation and remoteness from the world of men inspired by it. It is suggestive of some Arctic landscape, frigid and hostile to flesh and blood. Looking down the way we had come, I could see the men strung out in a long line of slowly moving dots. It was difficult to realise that these dots on the vast counterpane of snow were indeed men, and each man, in addition to the load he was carrying, carried another load of care and trouble, joy and sorrow.

Did I really soliloquise thus? I doubt it. It is only now, seated in a comfortable chair, and breathing the air of Primrose Hill approximately 200 feet above sea level that I can think of what I ought to have thought of on the Kang La, and forgetting for a moment the grumble of traffic, and a distant yet audible inferno of pneumatic drills, conjure up in my mind's eye that string of little men toiling up the weary snow-slopes.

After a short steep slope on the Nepal side of the pass, the snow filled valley curved gently downwards. After the labour of the ascent it was an easy matter descending through soft deep snow. It was an interesting fact that however much altitude may effect a man climbing in the Himalayas, he can, given easy ground, descend almost at an Alpine pace. Some remarkable instances of this occurred on Everest where slopes that had taken hours to ascend were descended in a few minutes.

The "Memsahib" was as usual well to the front of the party, and we congratulated her on being the first European woman to cross the Kang La. After a short distance, the valley floor dropped in a steep boulder strewn pitch.

Below this was another level section, and there, among stones and patches of snow we pitched camp.

Two or three of us arrived with jarring headaches. It was the first and last time on the whole expedition that I was affected thus, and it is tolerably certain that the headaches, which seemed to strike through the head from the back of the neck to the eyes, were induced by intense sun glare plus an altitude to which our bodies were not yet acclimatised. We found aspirin tablets the best remedy and under their influence the headaches disappeared in a few minutes.

The northern side of the valley on which we were camping, had been almost denuded of snow by the sun, but the unbroken snow covering the valley floor on the opposite slopes seemed to offer possibilities of ski-running. Actually, ski would have made the traverse of the Kang La much easier, but it seemed hardly fair to use them in view of the laden coolies, and it was necessary, too, for the Europeans to stamp out a track through the soft snow. Descending, however, we had no such scruples, and Dr. Richter set an example by running down the upper slopes on ski, which in lieu of bindings, he had tied on with odd bits of string.

Scraggy dwarf rhododendrons were growing on the slopes above the camp, and soon a dozen or more little fires were smoking on the ledges and crannies, as the coolies cooked their evening meal. The day had been a hard one, an exceptionally hard one, even for our toughest Bhutias and Sherpas. The Alpine porter seldom carries more than a load of forty of fifty pounds, and this as a rule only along paths up to huts ; on mountain ascents he carries considerably less. Our men had carried sixty to

eighty pounds each over a pass higher than the summit of Mont Blanc. They had, of course, been used to carrying heavy loads from early childhood, but even so their work that day had been simply magnificent.

An hour or two after we had arrived Schneider and Hoerlin rejoined us. Their attempt on the Kang Peak had been crowned with success, albeit the ascent had been scarcely enjoyable in view of the bad snow conditions. The view had been marred by mist, but once they caught a glimpse of Jannu, 25,294 feet, which had impressed them as being a magnificent mountain.

We had camped at about 4 p.m., but as the evening drew on stragglers were still coming in, some of them very tired. Of Wood Johnson, who was bringing up the rear, there was no sign. As it was likely that he was experiencing difficulty in getting the last of these stragglers over the pass, I set off alone from the camp to meet him.

Night was falling swiftly as I plugged uphill. The evening was a calm one, and there was not even the faintest whisper of wind. For some distance I could hear the murmur of the camp beneath, and smell faintly the odour of burning rhododendrons, but soon nothing was to be heard. The gaunt, craggy sides of the mountains enclosed me. The murmurous trickles released by the sun had been clenched by frost to their channels. The silence of the high mountains at eventide was unbroken. I felt very lonely. Had it not been for the track stretching before me, a mere thread drawn across the snowy waste, I might have felt myself the sole inhabitant of a frigid planet. There was indeed an element of unearthliness about the scene. In the High Alps a man may find himself temporarily removed from

civilisation, but always at the back of his mind is the thought that he has but to turn downhill, and in a few hours at the most he will regain civilisation. But in the High Himalayas such sub-conscious knowledge does not exist, and the wanderer experiences the genuine meaning of solitude. Above me the sun glowed redly, cruelly, on the peaks, but round me the snows were livid, deathlike, and the black rocks jutted through like unburnt coals amid the white ashes of the world.

So I trudged on, conscious only of the pounding of my heart, and the crunch of the crusted snow beneath my nailed boots. Far above, on the last slopes of the pass, some black figures appeared, moving slowly and jerkily, like marionettes operated by tired hands. They approached, a sorry little procession of exhausted men. Wood Johnson was with them to cheer them on. He, too, was very tired. He said it had been necessary to *drive* them over the pass. They were so tired, he said, that they had sat down and asked to be left there to die in the snow. He had himself been forced to carry loads up the last slope to the pass. Both physically and mentally he was worn out with the strain. If we others had known difficulties of this sort were likely to arise, we would, of course, have remained behind to help, but we had not known, although in view of the trying day it had been even for unladen Europeans we might have guessed.

Three or four of the porters could hardly stagger, but we supported them as well as we could, cheering them on and telling them that they had but a short distance to go. Several loads had been abandoned on the pass, but there was one grey-haired old man, who looked the oldest of our

porters, who, although in bare feet and as exhausted as any, steadfastly refused to abandon his load. To him it was a point of honour to get it to camp at any cost. I wish I could remember his name. So we continued down the snow slopes towards the camp, a little army of exhausted men.

All the peaks were livid now, and the reflected glare of the sunken sun illuminated the snow-fields in a weird opalesque afterglow.

Leaving the others, I hurried on to the camp, and rousing it, returned with men carrying lanterns. It was quite dark by the time we had got back to the tired porters. Willing hands relieved them of their loads or supported their faltering steps. It was bitterly cold as we stumbled down the last ice-glazed rocks to the camp.

The poor old man's bare feet were frost-bitten, happily not seriously, and he and the remaining stragglers were completely exhausted. It was only due to Wood Johnson that the casualties were not more serious. Thus ended the march over the Kang La.

The weather maintained its promise, and the next day dawned fine. Eberl decided he would take advantage of it, and return to Darjeeling and Calcutta. His leave of absence was not long enough to permit of him coming to the Base Camp, and he could not afford to take the risk of being held up by bad weather returning over the Kang La. We parted from him with regret.

The sun glare of the previous day had done its work only too efficiently, and I awoke conscious that my face was a temporary ruin. Edward Whymper in "Scrambles among the Alps" gives a harrowing description of the effects of sunburn.

"They have been scorched on rocks and roasted on

glaciers. Their cheeks—first puffed, then cracked—have exuded a turpentine-like matter, which has coursed down their faces, and has dried in patches like the resin on the trunks of pines. They have removed it, and at the same time have pulled off large flakes of their skin. They have gone from bad to worse—their case has become hopeless—knives and scissors have been called into play ; tenderly and daintily, they have endeavoured to reduce their cheeks to one uniform hue. It is not to be done. But they have gone on, fascinated, and at last have brought their unhappy countenances to a state of helpless and complete ruin. Their lips are cracked ; their cheeks are swollen ; their eyes are blood-shot ; their noses are peeled and indescribable."

Wood Johnson had not unnaturally suffered most, for he had been far longer exposed to the sun, and in his anxiety for the porters had neglected to look after his face. The non-mountaineering reader may think I am making a lot of this affliction, but those who gently brown, either artificially or naturally on the sands of Margate or the Lido, have little conception of the truly dreadful state that the Himalayan sun reduces the countenance to. Anyone who has ever experienced the agony of eating and smiling, or the sleepless nights it may cause will have good cause to remember it. As a Doctor once remarked to me : " Take a man straight from England, and sit him for a few hours without clothes on in the middle of a snow-field in the sun, and he would most probably die." I believe he would.

The previous evening I had eyed the snow-fields around with that sort of longing that every ski-runner knows. Now

I determined to try my luck on ski. We had brought with us ski for every European member of the party. Made by Schuster of Munich, they were a compromise in length and weight between ultra short or summer ski as used in the High Alps, and standard length winter ski. The wood was hickory, and the bindings detachable clip-on ones, of a breed not familiar to me, a compromise between Huitfeldt and Alpina.

Unfortunately, however, these bindings had already left in one of the porter loads by the time I was ready to start, and like Dr. Richter I had recourse to string, and odd lengths of yak-hide thongs. The porters watched my preparations with intense interest. I think they thought that the ski constituted part of some flying machine by the aid of which the sahibs would alight on the summit of Kangchenjunga. In the narrow forest paths, their porterage had been an irritating and difficult business, but the porter carrying them had treated them with the utmost care and respect. Had he known that they were not part of a flying machine he might possibly have been tempted to throw them away.

Dirty faces grinned expectantly as I fastened them on. Willing hands helped to tie the cat's cradle-like bindings of odd bits of string. At length I was off, shooting down the slopes into the middle of the snow-filled valley. The snow was board hard, with a delightful loose crystalline surface into which ski could be edged. It was very similar to early morning spring snow in the Alps, but in the Alps a two or three inches deep surface of crystals is only experienced after a snowfall ; normally, the surface is conducive to skidding, and the traverse of steep slopes is tiring. But on

this Himalayan snow which gains its crystalline surface from the heat of the mid-day sun, any swing is possible, from the Telemark to the stem Christiania.

The running was of its kind the most perfect that I have ever experienced. Would that it had been longer. As I glided down the valley I was scarcely conscious of movement ; only the procession of mountains on either hand, the gentle slush of the snow beneath my ski, and the breeze meeting my face suggested it. I felt Einsteinian. It was I who was stationary, and the world that was slipping away beneath me.

The valley floor dropped in another pitch ; it was necessary to make downhill swings. I became more conscious of movement, and movement swift, fierce, exhilarating. Some porters were marching down the side of the snow. I swooped past them in tremendous style, leaving them gaping in wonder. My triumphant progress was short lived. Suddenly both ski came off together. The world ceased to slip, it revolved with great velocity and in revolving dealt my nose a shrewd blow. I arose, my neck was full of snow, and my mouth full of hard words. From above was borne down faintly a roar of laughter ; the prestige of the flying machine had vanished for ever.

We descended from winter into spring. A softer air lubricated our tortured countenances. There were patches of grass and dwarf rhododendrons, whereon we flung ourselves down for a few moments of delightful repose. We turned a corner. Below was the emerald green Alp above Tseram, where Mr. Freshfield pitched his camp thirty years previously. Behind were the snow-clad peaks of the Kang La. Over the ridge to the north we could see some glittering

summits in the neighbourhood of Jannu, forming the culminating points of acute ice ridges, defended beneath by ribbed curtains of blue ice. They looked, and probably are, unassailable.

The vegetation became more luxuriant as we descended. Small flowers peeped shyly out between the boulders of an ancient moraine. Everything was green and glad in the sunlight. A rough path led us gently downwards to Freshfield's camping site.

Since Yoksam our camping sites had been poor ones. It was pleasant, therefore, to find a level pasture of dry, springy turf on which to pitch our tents. Around were woods of firs and giant rhododendrons. The air was permeated with sweet scents. Near at hand the voice of a crystal clear stream babbled a friendly welcome. Majestic snow-clad peaks stood watch and ward over this little Eden.

At one end of the pasture a new hut, constructed of rough-hewn timbers, intended for yaks and their herds, had been built, but of the yaks and herdmen, or more important, the Nepalese Subadar, whom we had hoped to find waiting for us with coolie food, there was no sign. Doubtless, our coming had not been observed, and it was possible that the Subadar might be waiting for us in the hamlet of Tseram, which was some twenty minutes' walk farther on. But it was not so much the beauty of our surroundings to which we first turned our attention, as to the great wall of snow-covered peaks to the north of Tseram and the Yalung Valley, peaks very similar in steepness and general appearance to those hemming in the Gastern Valley, near Kandersteg in the Bernese Oberland. Did the way via the Mirgin La to Khunza lie over this wall? We knew

that we must cross the Mirgin La, but the map and Mr. Freshfield's description had not led us to expect anything so formidable in appearance. Already, the Kang La had forced us to realise how great was the task that we had embarked upon in attacking the Nepalese side of Kangchenjunga.

Coolie food was running short, and it was imperative to find the Subadar without delay. Accordingly, that afternoon, Wood Johnson and I set off for Tseram.

A rough path oozing with snow-drifts led down the mountainside, through a tangle of giant rhododendrons into the Yalung Valley. Less than a year previously, the young American, Farmer, had passed this way with his porters *en route* to the Yalung Glacier, whence he made his attempt on Kangchenjunga which ended so tragically. We had received a telegram asking us to make every possible enquiry and search for him, and in particular to visit the Decherol Monastery, which, according to the map, was situated some distance up the Yalung Valley, below the terminal moraine of the Yalung Glacier.

A quarter of an hour's walk brought us down to a muddy torrent, flowing from the Yalung Glacier, which we crossed by a small bridge. During the flood season, Himalayan torrents must be immense. The width of the torrent bed, and the jumbled confusion of great boulders carried down by the flood waters bear witness to what the Yalung River is capable of, but now it was no bigger than an Alpine torrent from a glacier of moderate size.[1]

As we ascended the north bank of the stream, a head rose cautiously over a large boulder. We shouted a greeting, but it abruptly disappeared, and its owner, a boy, bolted

[1] See Appendix: "Glaciology: Snow Conditions and Avalanches."

precipitately as though all the devils of the district were at his heels. There came a furious clamour of dogs, and a few instants later we approached a rude hut, long and wide-eaved, with the boards of its roof weighted down with stones. A wizen-faced old man wearing high Thibetan boots and a dirty black robe girdled at the waist came forth to greet us. Behind him was his wife, twisting her fingers in shyness and embarrassment, while eyeing us half fearfully with narrow, dark, restless eyes, under a tattered fringe of hair. Close at hand, two savage Thibetan sheep dogs strained at the cords with which they were fastened to stakes in the ground.

The old man was the yakherd of this remote valley, and if being dirty constituted good yakherdmanship, he was certainly efficient at his job. There was no question of any high-water mark round his neck, for no tide had ever penetrated as far. Yaks were obviously his great enthusiasm in life. He smelt of them too. His wife was, if anything, dirtier and more odorous.

From them we learned that the Nepali Subadar had been staying at Tseram waiting for our arrival for some time, but not hearing anything of us, he had gone down the valley the previous day. This was most unfortunate ; we must find him and obtain coolie food at all costs. The best man for the job was our Gurkha, Tikeram Thapa, and we arranged with the old man for the loan of his son as a guide. Meanwhile, should our coolie food run out entirely, there were always the yaks. We were told that their owner, who lived in the lowlands, had kindly sent up a message to say that if necessary we could slaughter one. If possible, however, we wished to avoid feeding our

coolies on meat, as they are vegetarians, and meat has a deleterious effect on them.

We asked the yakherd for information regarding Farmer. He was not able to tell us much. Farmer and his porters had not passed through Tseram itself, being unwilling to attract attention owing to the fact that they had crossed the Nepalese frontier without permission. They had avoided Tseram by traversing the rhododendron-clad hill-side above that hamlet. As for the Decherol Monastery, that had been a ruin for thirty years or more. This was all he could tell us, but we decided if we had time, we would go some distance up the valley and attempt to discover traces of Farmer.

The evening was chilly, and we adjourned into the yakherd's hut. One end of it was reserved for yaks, the other end for the yakherd and his family. A mass of dirty straw, alive with fleas, was the family couch. At one corner were piled some sacks of grain, rough cooking utensils, and wooden drinking cups. The rough and uneven floor was paved with stones and dried mud. A fire of rhododendron wood was burning on a primitive stone hearth, but as there was no chimney the smoke had to find its way out through chinks in the roof, a process more efficient in theory than in practice.

The old man and his wife, and two or three of our porters, who had come down from the camp, squatted round the fire, and a greasy looking concoction of some buttery substance was brewed, but fortunately, we were spared having to drink it. It was a scene simple and primitive, that will live in my memory. The last gleams of sunset filtered through the cracks ; there was a glimpse of

forest and mountain. Is happiness to be measured in terms of modern invention? Was not this old man in his old hut, through the chinks of which he could watch the sunset and the stars, with his simple philosophy and his yaks, happier than many dwellers in a city?

In the last light we walked back to camp. A profound quietude enwrapped mountain and valleys. Below, the lazy smoke from the yakherd's hut lifted gently upwards, mingling imperceptibly with the night. For the yakherd and his family it was just the end of another day, the passing of another spoke in the wheel of life.

That evening after dinner we sent for Tikeram, and acquainted him with the urgency of the situation. He was keen and willing to start at once. " I am here to help," he said, and set off at once on his journey through the night, guided by the yakherd's son with a lantern.

Whether or not we were forced to remain at Tseram until food arrived, it was essential to rest the porters. It is not too much to say that we had arrived a dilapidated party in health and morale. Several of the porters had bruised or cut feet, and one or two, including the plucky old man who had refused to abandon his load, minor frost-bites. Worst of all, a number of them were suffering from snow blindness. There was no real excuse for this, for they had been issued with snow glasses, but the native is both careless and improvident. Snow blindness is, as I know from personal experience, extremely painful. Its first effect is by straining the optic nerve to put the vision out of focus. A profuse discharge follows, and the eyes ache abominably. It is impossible to open them in the light without severe pain, as the light seems to strike them

almost like a blow. Fortunately, ordinary snow blindness is as brief in its effects as it is painful, and two or three days' rest and treatment are usually sufficient to effect a complete recovery. Our porters, however, did not know this. They thought they were dying, or about to become completely blind, and it was a pitiable sight to see them cowering beneath their blankets, pathetic bundles of humanity, outside Dr. Richter's tent.

News came that Hannah and Wieland were in difficulties. Their porters, not unnaturally, had refused to traverse the Kang La without boots. The next day, therefore, we called for volunteers to return over the Kang La to carry boots to their help. Thirty-seven of our best men immediately responded, and were sent off under the charge of Lobsang.

The situation was certainly not promising. Every day was of vital importance, and here we were relegated to Tseram for an indefinite period.

That morning, Kurz left early to map the lower portion of the Yalung Glacier and Valley. He returned later, confirming the statement of the yakherd that the Decherol Monastery was indeed a complete ruin.

Had it not been for our anxiety over the transport, and the painful state of our faces which made eating a misery, and sleeping difficult, we might have enjoyed our four days enforced rest at Tseram. To while away the time we rigged tape between two upright poles, made a quoit from rope, and played deck tennis. Even at such a moderate elevation as 10,000 feet, we found this somewhat strenuous, but exercise had the excellent effect of quickening acclimatisation.

That evening Wieland arrived, and acquainted us with

the situation on the other side of the Kang La. It was not a good one, but we knew that we could rely upon Hannah and Lobsang to get their men across. For the rest, everything depended on the weather. Actually some of Hannah's men had already arrived, carrying light loads, having marched direct from Dzongri.

On April 20, Wood Johnson and I, with Nemu who had accompanied Farmer to show us the way, visited the Yalung Valley to search for traces of Farmer. From Tseram a rough track traverses the north side of the valley. It was evidently the former route to the monastery, for we passed a number of rude walls and shrines covered in inscriptions.

Like most large Himalayan glaciers, the Yalung Glacier terminates in a great moraine some 1,000 feet high. Above this, the glacier is moraine covered for so great a distance that Lobsang, who was with Farmer, told us that they had had to march for three days before they trod ice.

It was while resting after lunch on the slopes of the valley near the terminal moraine of the glacier, that two curious incidents occurred. The first was an earthquake shock, the same shock, I believe, that was experienced in Turkestan and which we afterwards saw mentioned in the newspapers.

The second incident was an amusing one. As we sat smoking, we saw something moving in the valley beneath, half hidden by a huge boulder. Whatever it was, it seemed too large for any animal likely to be met with thereabouts. Nemu, however, had no doubts upon the matter, and fell on his belly with a frightened whisper of " Bad Manshi, Sahib ! Bad Manshi ! " (Bad Men, Sir ! Bad Men !)

This was interesting ; were we at last to meet one of the redoubtable Snow Men in person? Lying flat and motionless

behind the rocks we peered intently down into the valley. For perhaps ten minutes we gazed, and we were beginning to wonder whether what we had seen had been a mere figment of imagination, when suddenly with majestic tread out walked—an enormous yak. Needless to say, we burst into a roar of laughter at poor Nemu, who had been trembling with terror, but his superstitions were not to be so easily over-ruled. He declared that like other of our porters he had on several occasions actually seen the " Bad Manshi," and described them as being huge men, white skinned and naked, but covered with thick hair.

Native temperament is childlike in many respects. Given work to do, or some object in life to fulfil, our porters were happy, but after having been left to their own devices for two or three days, they were only too liable to get into mischief, or work up some imaginary grievance. Among our porters were one or two men who, had they lived in England, would make admirable paid labour agitators or " tub thumpers " in Hyde Park. As it was they did their best to stir up strife among the rest of the porters, and to a small extent they succeeded in deluding the more credulous.

That evening, we were eating our supper in the Mess Tent, when there came an excited babble of voices. We took no notice of them until we had finished our meal, then Wood Johnson went outside. As usual, the trouble had originated with a few of our more unreliable porters. The Sherpas and Bhutias stood eyeing the scene passively, if curiously. A few minutes later, thanks to Wood Johnson, the agitators were slinking away amid the laughter and jeers of the remainder of the porters. The trouble had

SOME OF OUR "TIGERS"

arisen simply owing to Narsang forgetting to issue a ration of sugar. To get behind the native mind would indeed be to get behind the mind of a child.

Late that evening, Tikeram Thapa arrived with the welcome news that he had found the Nepali Subadar, and that the latter was coming up to Tseram the next day, bringing a few local porters with loads of coolie food. Tikeram told us that he had marched over twenty miles down the valley in the night, guided by the yakherd's son, although he had fallen and damaged a knee. It was a capital bit of work.

The same evening we made the discovery of the bottle of rum which as previously mentioned had been accidentally substituted by Tencheddar for a bottle of Worcester sauce. Despite the transport thorns besetting our way, we went to bed happy that night.

The following day we decided to shift the camp to Tseram, and carry as many loads as possible up the mountainside above in preparation for the start to Khunza. Diplomatically, we had made friends with the yakherd by presenting him with a number of empty tins which he had obviously coveted, and as a result he was willing to guide us to Khunza by a route over the Mirgin La that was well known to him. In such a remote part of the world an empty condensed milk or bully beef tin obviously possesses a very definite value.

The hillside above Tseram scarcely belies its apparent steepness. It is steep, but nowhere dangerously so. We returned to find the Subadar had arrived. He proved to be a thin-faced, sad, somewhat anæmic-looking man, with a long, straggling, and ill-nourished moustache. He was

clothed in baggy white breeches and a black jacket. The only indication of any rank was the Nepalese coat of arms in gold above his turban. He seemed a cultured and educated man. We told him of our labour agitators, and he proceeded to tell them exactly what he thought of them. Making a number of comments on their ancestry, their personal appearance, and their chances of future salvation which, if he was to be believed, were nil, he ended up by telling them that the Maharajah of Nepal, whose country they were now in, had given orders that every assistance should be given to the expedition, and that he, the Maharajah's representative, was there to see it done. If, he concluded, it was not done, there was always the time-honoured custom of chopping off a few heads. There were no more labour troubles.