

**Kanchenjanga:
The Story of the 1905 Expedition
by Aleister Crowley**

*Originally published as a five-part
series in the 6 October, 13 October, 20
October, 27 October, and 3 November
1909 editions of Vanity Fair.*

Bandobast

How ridiculous appear those persons who claim that romance is dead, when one remembers that one has but to walk down to Northumberland Avenue and take one's passage on a pirate ship! How ridiculous, when a single week's march from the railway plunges one into the depth of a gloomy and forbidden land, into forests whose leeches make them all but impassable, and upon glaciers whose terrible solitudes have never yet been invaded by man! Yet this spice of adventure is not to be obtained without an infinity of trouble. Now that amateurs—mostly Austrians, more shame to England and the Club that has crushed every spark of mountain ability from the youth thereof!—hold all the strictly Alpine records, the glamour that superstition lent has all but faded from the great European chain, while the Canadian hills are unlikely ever to recover from the infamous nomenclature which has branded their innocent snow-fields with the names of so many nonentities by a scheme of mutual admiration which was formerly the monopoly of *belles-lettres*. Even in the Himalayas, the last resort of the lover of solitude and common decency, we have been saddled with such horrors as Mount Godwin-Austen, Mount Bullock-Workman, and the unspeakable like. Only the punning allusion with its Nirvanic suggestion renders Everest a pleasant enough substitute for the noble Chomo Kankar—but it is a mere

piece of luck that Colonel Everest was not called Colonel Snooks. Many, with a cynicism not unforgivable, would urge that it would be in full accordance with the spirit of the age that a beautiful mountain should own some hideous name—it is to avoid that spirit, though but for a while, that I am about to seek the solitudes of Kinchenjunga. As a concession, let me promise that should I succeed in reaching the summit, it will be my pride and pleasure to rechristen it Mount Brodder.

Arriving at Darjeeling after an uneventful voyage, I first gave vent to my feelings, as in my previous article, and then set about to see what preparations were necessary. Had I been Mr Pierpont Morgan I should presumably have approached the King-Emperor with a view to purchasing his Indian dominions; it would have been a waste of money, for the resources of the Empire are generously at the disposal of the reasonable traveller. Nothing can exceed the personal kindness and practical help which everybody concerned is only too ready to bestow. The Government will take every possible trouble that can be of any service; that is, to a responsible expedition with an intelligible object. It is no doubt true that a certain charming lady, who has acquired no small reputation in Mahomedan circles by beating her husband from time to time in front of his coolies, somewhat loudly complains that she finds Anglo-Indians uncivil and disinclined to help. If this is really so, it is most extraordinary. Don't you think so? For myself, I must not let slip the opportunity of saying how very highly I value the innumerable kindnesses I have received on all hands. From the very start my formidable task was smoothed on its broader lines, while in the details I received much help when an enthusiastic Italian gentleman, M. Rigo de Righi, the able young manager of the Drum-Druid Hotel, at which it is my much-prized privilege to stay, proposed to me to allow him to join us. As he speaks both Hindustani and Tibetan, and has had six

years' experience of the natives of these parts, my scruples were easily overcome.

Defamation of Character!

The next business requiring attention was to find a head man to contract for and manage coolies. M. de Righi knew an excellent fellow; but he was in prison! This, however, as you know, is no drawback to a man's character in this country. Crime is common enough, but so is conspiracy. It is consequently the merest toss-up whether a given prisoner is a sinner or a victim. Anyway, if he is a good man at his job, nobody cares. So when he came out I engaged Nanga Sirdar in spite of the following communication of a jealous rival:—

"To the General Sahib, Darjeeling.

"Sir,—I beg most humbly and respectfully to bring to your kind notice that your honor I am Nima Serdar conductor of Sikim feuld and interpeter tibetan language, and your honour has been submitted my Testimonial and your Trustworthy my certificate and allow me for act after a some weeks and therefore your honor beg to inform you I having heard Nungan Sirdar was servant of woodlands Hutal and he stole a Rickshaw of his Masters and sold at in Kurseong a Gentleman when the Manag-
eress got traceing and he was santenced for One year, and alone said Nungan Sidar freen from the Jail to this morning and appear before you for the work, he is acused, how will be found gentlemans cook, and you will kindly enquiring to the Matter and consedered, and I shall ever, pray.

I have the honour to be, Sir,
Your most obedient servent,
NIMA SERDAR BHOTIA,
Darjeeling, 24 6-05."

Thanks for the information sent by Mr Dover from Gantok, in Sikhham, I began to get a grasp of the bandobast—

that nightmare of the amateur lexicographer—that would be requisite. Darjeeling is practically the last post where supplies can be obtained; it is unsafe to reckon on anything beyond. Now, if a coolie carries 80 pounds and eats 2 pounds a day, how many coolies must one engage to carry 100 loads of 80 pounds each to a distance of 20 marches from the base of supplies? I leave my readers to work out the answer, but the net result of my own problem, which was very much more complicated, was that I decided to send on 8,000 pounds of rice, *dal*, *ghi*, salt, *satu* (made of barley, gram, and other foods, which they mix with hot water and chew; Mr Dover remarks that a man can only eat 1 1/2 pounds, eating all day), chiles, and other nutritious and succulent commodities for the coolies to Jongri, at the south foot of the Guicha La, one of the passes over the east branch of the south outlying spur of the Kinchenjunga massif, the spur that connects it with Pandim. In view of the persistent rains of Sikkim, this food had to be tinned and soldered up, and, in view of the presumable carelessness of the coolies, I decided to pack the tins in a rough wooden framework. Behold, then, a vast collection of old paraffin tins, crates, sacks of food, carpenters, plumbers, and other necessary adjuncts to the task of carrying civilization to the snows upon the verandah outside my room in the Drum-Druid Hotel.

Skating in Hades

Under the constant personal supervision of M. de Righi or myself the work went steadily on, till on July 24th and 25th 110 loads in all left for Jongri. Mr White, of the Political Department, was kind enough to supply the coolies for this purpose; and I have also specially to thank him for the trouble he took in sending for his photographs from Gantok and Calcutta, so that I might have an opportunity of examining them. In spite of my continual ill-health—people who would go to Darjeeling as a

health resort would go to Hades for the skating—the work went on steadily enough. Calculations, lengthy bargainings, careful weighings, more careful inspections, occupied days and nights—there is no "bridge" for the luckless man who is sent on ahead to make the bandobast. Whatever he forgets is finally forgotten. Neither wealth nor intellect will conjure up in the wilderness of glaciers a single ounce of sugar that has not been taken at the start and nursed carefully up to the moment it is needed. Lists, labellings, numberings, cross-checkings, weighings—where is Romance gone now? And I feel with a peculiar shame that nine-tenths of the population of London would do this job a great deal better than I can. Well done or badly done, however, it *is* done; and I have nothing to do but wait for my three old comrades, the shikaris Salama, Ramzana, and Subhana, who are coming over from Kashmir to stiffen the transport service, and the doctor, who with his two friends Raymond and Pache, should soon arrive from Switzerland. Being extensively ill, I take ten days in Calcutta to recruit; and no sooner does the beautiful warmth of the plains get into my Darjeeling sodden carcass, than I feel fit to do anything in the world. As the Duke of Wellington pointed out long ago, Calcutta is only "unhealthy" for the beef-and-pork, guzzling, whiskey-swilling folk who insist on treating it as if it were Sussex.

I wish the rest of the party would turn up. But they have been shipwrecked in the Gulf of Suez—which is undignified—and I suppose will turn up four days late with a ton or so of provisions which they are bringing out from Switzerland. So that I have let this article run on, perhaps unduly; but what fun it will be in three weeks' time when I can go in for a thousand poetical descriptions of the march to the foot of the mountains!