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THE ATTEMPT ON KANCHENJUNGA

FATE OF FORMER EXPEDITIONS

The advance party of the international expedition going to the Himalaya to attempt the summit of Kanchenjunga has left Europe and will reach India at the end of this week.

Among the high places of the world the Himalayan peaks are in a class by themselves. The Alps are small by comparison with them ; a few isolated peaks in the Andes or Africa or the Rocky Mountains come within the same range as a score of the giants among them. The Himalaya are a great assemblage of unscaled peaks towering over a land of immense altitude in the heart of Asia. Man has walked in this land only rarely and at the greatest risk of his life.

Each group of the greater peaks has its peculiar scenery but none is finer than the magnificent massif that culminates at 28,150 ft. in the summit of Kanchenjunga. The visitor to Darjeeling, who climbs to the top of Observatory Hill, sees it 50 miles away over range upon range of lower ridges, split with deep, gorge-like valleys, incredibly remote and icily aloof, lifting its glaciers like shields to the deep blue sky.

A MAGIC CORDON

The eye can pass at a glance over leagues of ridges and valleys between Darjeeling and Kanchenjunga, but the foot of man cannot take them at a stride. The problems of reaching the base of the greater peaks of the main watershed and of carrying sufficient food and equipment are second only to the problems of scaling the peaks themselves. It is largely due to these initial difficulties and to the expense of organizing and maintaining a large banderbast of native porters that so few expeditions are undertaken in the high Himalaya.

Mount Everest, Kanchenjunga, Nanga Parbat, Nanda Devi, and the Bride Peak have all repulsed determined assaults by some of the finest mountaineers of past and present generations. Lieutenant-Colonel E. F. Norton and Mr. T. H. Somervell got to within 1,000 ft. of Everest's summit, and Mr. G. H. L. Mallory and Mr. A. Irvine perished in a final attempt. Kanchenjunga has remained inviolate through three assaults, two weak ones ending in disaster, and a third, an exceptionally strong one, which failed 3,000 ft. from the summit. Nanga Parbat (26,700 ft.) took the life of Mr. A. F. Mummery, the most brilliant mountaineer of his time, together with the lives of his two Gurkha followers. Nanda Devi (25,660 ft.), the highest peak entirely within the British Empire, has defeated the best efforts of that great Himalayan pioneer, Dr. T. G. Longstaff. The Duke of the Abruzzi was forced to retreat when only a short distance from the summit of the Bride Peak (25,110 ft.) in the Karakoram. In addition, there are scores of peaks of 25,000 ft. or more that have never been attempted, and are never likely to be unless by some aeronaut in a helicopter.

The highest actual summit yet attained is that of Trisul, 23,406 ft., which was climbed in 1907 by Dr. Longstaff with the Italian guides Alexis and Henri Brocheril. It is almost as if there were a magic cordon drawn at 25,000 ft. round the necks of these giants by the Mi-go, the "Abominable Snow-men," whom the natives believe to dwell in horrid rage on the summits.

PIONEERS

In spite of the obvious challenge of Kanchenjunga, little was known of the mountain and its immediate environs until the closing years of last century, although Sir Joseph Hooker, the pioneer of exploration in the Eastern Himalaya, had explored the ridges to the east of it many years before.

It was not until 1905 that a direct attempt was made to climb Kanchenjunga, by a party consisting of three Swiss—Dr. Jacot-Guillarmod, M. Raymond, Lieutenant Pache—and an Italian hotel-keeper from Darjeeling named De Righi, who put themselves under the leadership of Mr. Aleister Crowley. In 1911 and 1912 Dr. A. M. Kellas, who died during the second Mount Everest expedition, made two bold and successful expeditions on the peaks to the north and north-west of Kanchenjunga and on the ridges of Kanchenjunga itself.

In 1929 Kanchenjunga was twice attacked by two separate parties, one going before and the other after the monsoon. Both of them failed.

What are the lessons to be learned from these past attempts on Kanchenjunga? First, that it is not a mountain to suffer fools gladly. It allows no margin, forgives no mistakes. It is a relentless opponent, which will hit back with every weapon in its armoury, with storm, cold, avalanche, and the more insidious devices of sheer altitude. Yet it has been proved assailable by an expert party of mountaineers who neglect no preparations and observe all precautions. The present party are clearly out to attack it purposefully and methodically, taking full advantage of the lessons learnt by former parties on the giants of the Himalayas, and they have in them that sturdy spirit which is necessary for conquering so great a mountain.