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**Bid to Conquer**

**WORLD'S MOST DIFFICULT MOUNTAIN**

**Professor E. P. Stebbing, Edinburgh, in this article tells something about Kanchenjunga, the second highest mountain in the world, the conquest of which is to be attempted soon.**

The attention of the public has been recently turned to this fascinating Himalayan mountain, the second highest in the world, through the announcement that an all-European party are shortly starting from Darjeeling with the object of making an attempt to get to the top—an ascent which is regarded by many as the most difficult of any mountain in the world, and by some as impossible.

I lived for two years, at one of the most impressionable periods of young manhood, under the shadow of mighty Kanchenjunga, and share all the reverence and awe for her beauty and mystery which animates the mountain races inhabiting the eastern side of the Himalayas.

**Awe Inspiring**

To have seen Kanchenjunga at early dawn, when the peaks and the higher crests and cols turn rosy under the rays of the rising sun, whilst the great glaciers and stretches of snowfields lie a gold grey-white, interspersed with dark frowning precipices where no snow may lie, and the deep valleys are filled with writhing cloud masses—to have looked upon this is to have seen a sunrise which will never be forgotten.

But far more awe-inspiring is a sunset over the great chain during a break in the rains in August or towards the monsoon in late September.

The rays then paint the giant mass with grim daubs and streaks of a blood red under which the snowy peaks and exten-

sive snowfields are lit up as though the aftermath of some titanic battle between the gods.

Below the snow the lower ranges take on wonderful tones of orange, yellow, lakes, and mauves, whilst on the nearer slopes and the deep valleys the colours merge into glorious dark tones of blue.

In spite of her majestic size and perfect beauty, Kanchenjunga is a shy maiden, and for weeks on end, aye, and for months, will keep veiled, under friendly cloud masses, the greater portion of her beauties. But the journey to see her as she overhangs and dominates Darjeeling is easy enough.

Far different was the case sixty and more years ago, when the first planters—who included a Scot—settled in the hills and plain below Darjeeling and laid out the now famous tea gardens through which the little Darjeeling-Himalayan train climbs the mountain sides between the plains and the hill station.

### **Feelings of the Hillman**

Far different also was it when Edinburgh citizens started the Kalimpong Mission, which the skill and perseverance of that wonderful man, Dr. Graham, brought to such a marvellous efficiency.

In the somewhat later time of which I am writing the little railway mounted to Darjeeling—but this was the end of all communications, save roads.

Kalimpong, in Sikkim, was 30 miles distant, and one descended to the hot tropical Tista Valley, crossed the Tista bridge, and then climbed to Kalimpong, the little station situated on a ridge, where the fine church commanded great vistas.

Many and oft were the times I rode that road. The forest officer is on the move for considerable parts of the year. He penetrates into places and parts which no ordinary traveller, and few other district officers, visit. And from many of these places, from all when valley sides did not shut one in, could some grand and over-varying view be obtained of beautiful and fair Kanchenjunga.

Can it be wondered at if one became animated with the feelings of the hillman; that one felt that in its shadow all things must be pure and good, and that man in such surroundings might attain to higher aims and feelings than is possible in the congested streets or crowded countryside of modern civilization.

## Regarded as Holy Ground

Will Kangchenjunga be climbed? Almost one feels inclined to echo the conviction of the hillmen, by whom many of these great mountain peaks and stretches of snowfield and glacier are regarded as holy ground, that the great mountain will never be violated.

Kanchenjunga is but 50 miles north of Darjeeling, on the borders of Sikkim, Thibet, and Nepal. But what miles are these!

Unlike Everest, which is a single isolated peak, Kanchenjunga consists of a mountain massif comprising several peaks which are only a little lower than the summit and a number of smaller peaks and pinnacles.

Even some of the latter are among the finest peaks of the world, yet none of them have been so far climbed, except Kabru (24,000 ft.) by Graham. Kanchenjunga itself mounts, ridge on ridge, to a twin summit.

But before even the lower snows are reached the ranges of lower hills have to be crossed. Many of these are themselves 10,000 feet and over.

In between these ranges are hot, damp tropical valleys, beautiful with their exotic growth, but containing a noisome malaria accompanied by cohorts of mosquitoes and legions of leeches.

Into these valleys, some of them no more than 200 to 300 feet above sea-level, the party from Darjeeling (which is 8000 feet) will have to descend.

As the lower valleys are left behind the sides of the upper ones will be found clothed with the dwarf, and at one time rare, rhododendrons discovered by Hooker, whose delicate colouring when they burst into flower in May and June provide a feast of beauty which is beyond description. Then come the upper valleys beyond tree and shrub where flourish the beautiful primulas, saxifrages, and gentians—and beyond the wilderness of great glaciers, snow fields and snowy peaks.

## The Dangers

Kanchenjunga is 28,150 feet. The Bavarian party last year in the autumn tried the eastern face from the Zemu glacier and reached 24,600 feet, when the weather forced them to retire.

In 1905 Aleister Crowley tried the southern face above the Yalung Glacier, but the attempt came to an end when an avalanche swept one climber and three porters into a crevasse.

Avalanches are one of the great dangers on this mountain and the climbing period is short, for the monsoon comes earlier in the eastern Himalayas than on the western side, breaking during the latter part of May. The party this year have probably chosen the best time for the attempt, the end of April or commencement of May.