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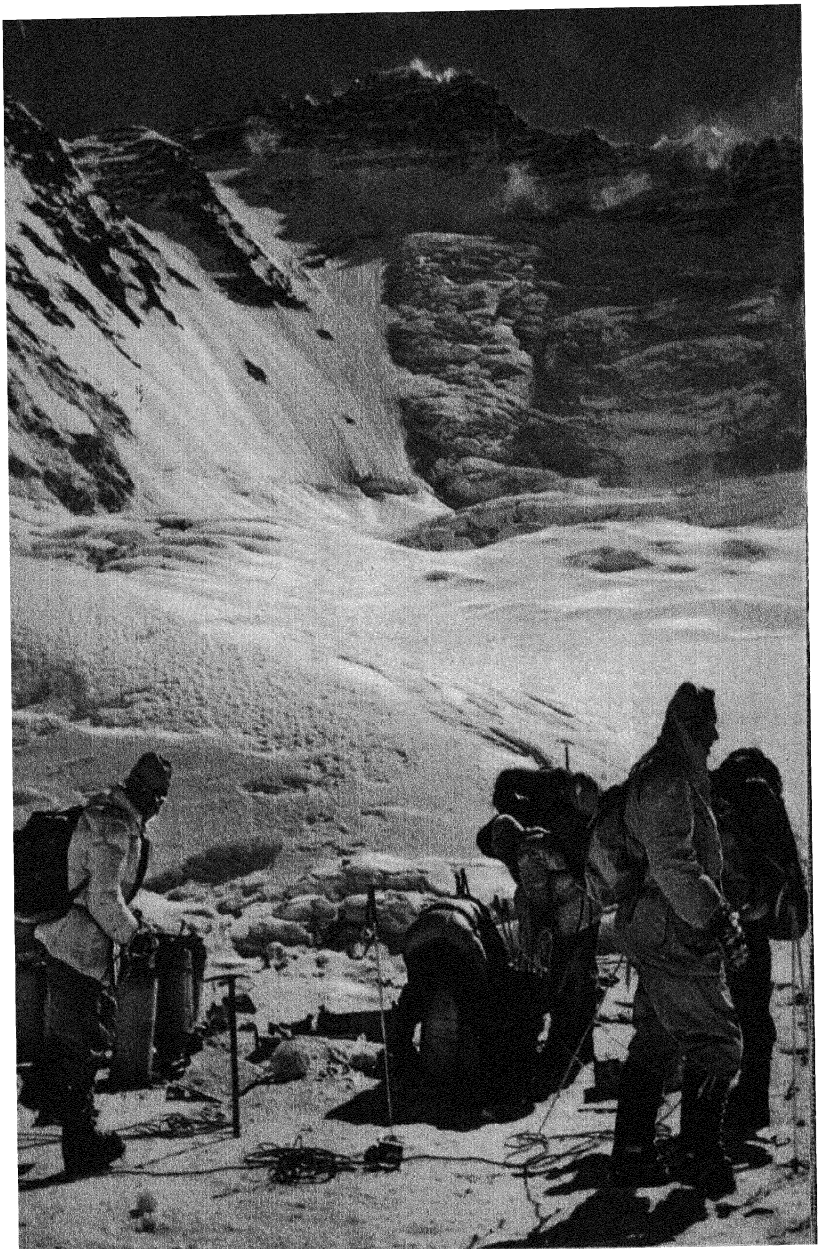
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Author Dittert, Renee and others

Title Forerunners to Everest, 1954

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Forerunners to Everest



IN THE WESTERN CWM

view of Lhotse and the South Col

Forerunners to Everest

THE STORY OF THE TWO SWISS EXPEDITIONS OF 1952

BY

RENÉ DITTERT
GABRIEL CHEVALLEY
RAYMOND LAMBERT

PREFACE BY BRIGADIER
SIR JOHN HUNT

ENGLISH VERSION
BY
MALCOLM BARNES

George Allen & Unwin Ltd
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Translated from
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PREFACE

by Brigadier Sir JOHN HUNT

No one who has had experience of climbing upon a high Himalayan Peak, and especially on Everest itself, can fail to have been gripped by the fine story of the two Swiss Expeditions to Everest in 1952. It was indeed a most remarkable achievement that, on their first visit to the mountain in the Spring of that year, they should have succeeded in reaching the South Col by a hitherto untried route, and that two members of the party should have forced their way from there to within a thousand feet of the top. No less remarkable was the courage and tenacity of their second expedition in the Autumn of 1952. This venture was organized only when the result of the first expedition was known in June. Inevitably, therefore, they arrived at the foot of the mountain dangerously late. By the time that the party had established itself at the head of the Western Cwm, the bitter north-west wind was already in full command of those high places, making life almost intolerable even at their well established advanced base. In spite of this they pressed on, undaunted by appalling hardships and a fatal accident, and again set foot upon the South Col. But there is a limit to physical endurance and only when they had reached this limit did this gallant Swiss party recognize that the elemental forces were too strong for them.

At the time when the news of the failure of the second Swiss expedition reached Switzerland, I was on the Jungfraujoch. With other companions, I was testing critical items of equipment, clothing and food before our 1953 expedition. We had set up a little camp in mid-winter upon that famous Col, and were experiencing conditions of wind and cold not so very different from that which we ourselves were to meet later on on the South Col of Everest. I remember our feelings at that moment: of deep relief and thankfulness because our uncertainty regarding

our own expedition was now ended: profound sympathy for our Swiss comrades and great admiration.

Later, I was to meet some of them at Zürich, where I went in company with Charles Evans to hear details of their expedition and to ask advice from these, our immediate predecessors. We were most generously received and given a great deal of information and sound counsel. When we eventually started to climb the mountain, we found ample evidence of the Swiss expeditions; indeed we benefited by the stores they had left behind.

This book is entitled *Forerunners to Everest*. I feel sure that my Swiss friends will agree with me that there were many forerunners to Everest. The story started in 1921, and before the Swiss went to try their skill and luck a large number of British and Sherpa mountaineers had made sustained and gallant attempts to reach the top. The Swiss themselves gained knowledge and wisdom from these earlier attempts, in the same way as we learnt from the Swiss. The whole epic of Everest is one of combined and sustained endeavour by many, over a long period of time.

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Introduction

THIS is the story of the two expeditions to Mount Everest undertaken in 1952 under the direction of the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research.

The aim of these expeditions was to discover the way to the summit by the southern route and simultaneously to permit a Genevese mission to carry out some scientific studies in the area.

As leader of the Spring expedition I thank my comrades Chevalley, Dittert and Lambert for their initiative in publishing a book addressed to the general public. Its text answers to the exact truth and describes the grandiose setting in which a battle against hostile elements took place. For page after page this book holds the reader breathless as it conveys with feeling the effort to which the severe conditions of life on Everest submitted us every day.

The conquest of Everest, now accomplished by a British expedition, is one of the finest pages in contemporary history. In an age unhappily filled with materialistic preoccupations, it bears witness to the fact that there still survives among men a call to higher standards. The mountains, by raising man for a few precious moments above ordinary life, unveils to him a world which, without this effort, he would never have known. It is a purely gratuitous effort, with risks freely accepted, and energy given in common for a common cause; not the prerogative of a group of individuals or of a single nation, but part of the patrimony of all mankind.

If scientific discovery is an asset acquired for the good of all, so the victories or defeats in the Himalaya have each played their part in the knowledge of all. They contribute to the solidarity which unites all the expeditions and above all they signify the triumph of spirit over matter.

ED. WYSS-DUNANT

At dawn almost everything is covered, but not by heavy clouds. Like guilty creatures of darkness surprised by the light they went scattering away as we came up and the whole scene opened out. The North ridge of Everest was clear and bright even before sunrise. We reached the Col at 5 a.m., a fantastically beautiful scene; and we looked across into the West Cwm at last, terribly cold and forbidding under the shadow of Everest. . . . It was not a very likely chance that the gap between Everest and the South Peak (Lhotse) could be reached from the west. From what we have seen now I do not much fancy it would be possible, even could one get up the glacier.

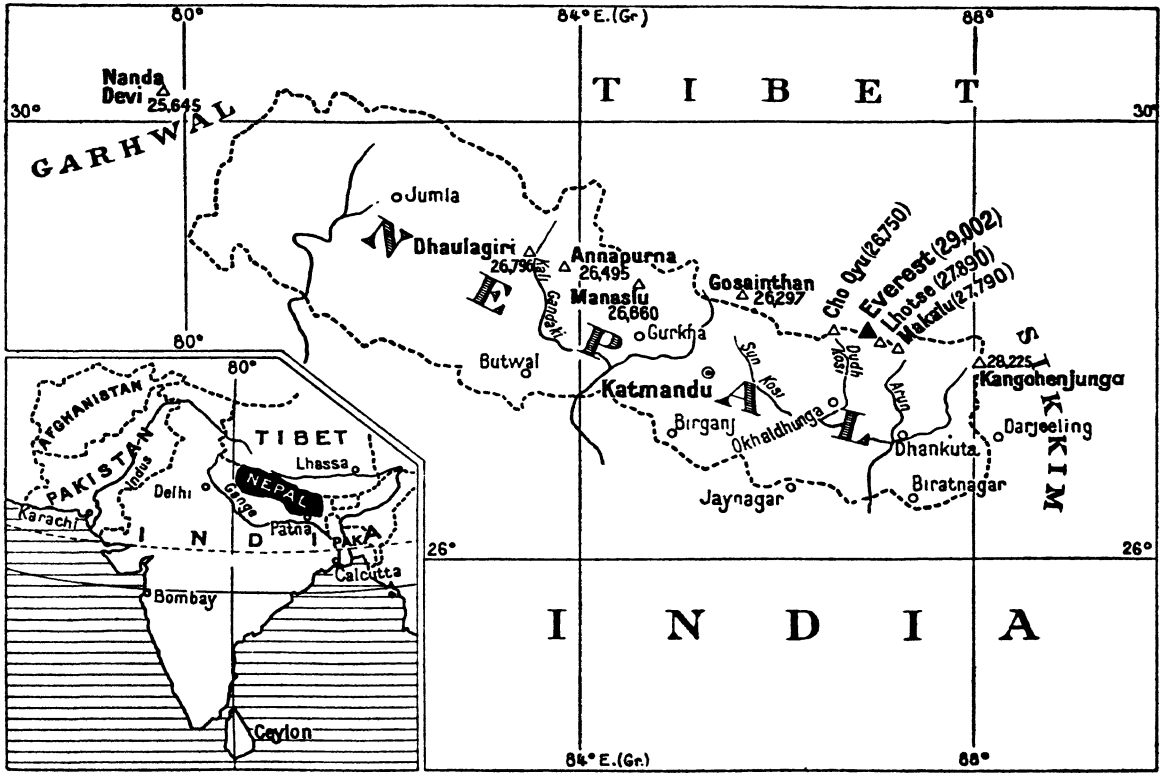
MALLORY (*Journal*, 1921)

PART ONE

No Victory for Pioneers

BY

RENÉ DITTERT


80°
84° E.(Gr)
88°
30°
Nanda Devi 25,645
T I B E T
GARHWAL
Jumla
Dhaulagiri 26,796
Annapurna 26,495
Manaslu 26,660
Gosainthan 26,297
Cho Oyu(26,750)
Everest (29,002)
Lhotse (27,890)
Makalu(27,790)
Kali Gandaki
Gurkha
Butwal
Katmandu
Sun Kosi
Arun
Tamur
Dudh
Kangchenjunga 28,225
SIKKIM
Birganj
Okhaldhunga
Dhankuta
Darjeeling
Jaynagar
Biratnagar
26°
I N D I A
AFGHANISTAN
PAKISTAN
TIBET
Lhassa
NEPAL
Indus
Delhi
Ganga
Karachi
Patna
Calcutta
Bombay
Ceylon

Map of Nepal

CHAPTER I

Through India to Nepal

THERE are many kinds of departure, some small and some great. There are those that pass unperceived by the eyes of strangers and leave only the family anxious, like the departure of deep sea fishermen, and there are those in which a whole nation participates. There are departures without ceremony and departures that are spectacular. But in point of fact we had scarcely the time to think about this question, attacked as we were by photographers, dazed by the commotion that reigned over the airport, and moved by thoughts of those we were leaving and of the adventure that lay before us.

The dream which had obsessed me for three years had taken shape. It was during a conversation with Wyss in the autumn of 1949, on my return from a campaign in Nepal, that the idea of a Genevese expedition to the Himalaya began. It was to be both a mountaineering and a scientific expedition and the project soon became the overriding preoccupation of a group of friends who were the kernel of the small closed circle known as the 'Androsace', the number of whose members never exceeds forty. They are all mountaineering fanatics, and they have so organised their lives that they can climb among the mountains every Sunday of the year and throughout their vacations. It can be imagined that in a circle where the climbing virus has worked such havoc the idea of a Himalayan expedition was quite successful. On the other hand, Dr. Wyss and Dr. Berthoud were looking for backers and they found them.

So far our plans had remained modest, in keeping with our budget, but from the day on which it came to our aid the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research turned these plans into something very big. Karl Weber and Ernst Feuz obtained the necessary

authorisations and launched upon Everest a handful of friends: Asper, Aubert, Chevalley, Flory, Hofstetter, Lambert, Roch, Wyss and myself. The scientific mission consisted of Mme. Lobsinger as ethnologist, Lombard as geologist and Zimmermann as botanist.

Thus we came to the Cointrin airport outside Geneva on March 13th, 1952. The plane door slammed and the engines roared, and after twenty hours of flight, dazzled and tired, we were at last enveloped in the warm and humid air of Bombay, heavy with strange odours. The intensity of life in this city made us dizzy. Its animation contrasted with the softness of its landscape.

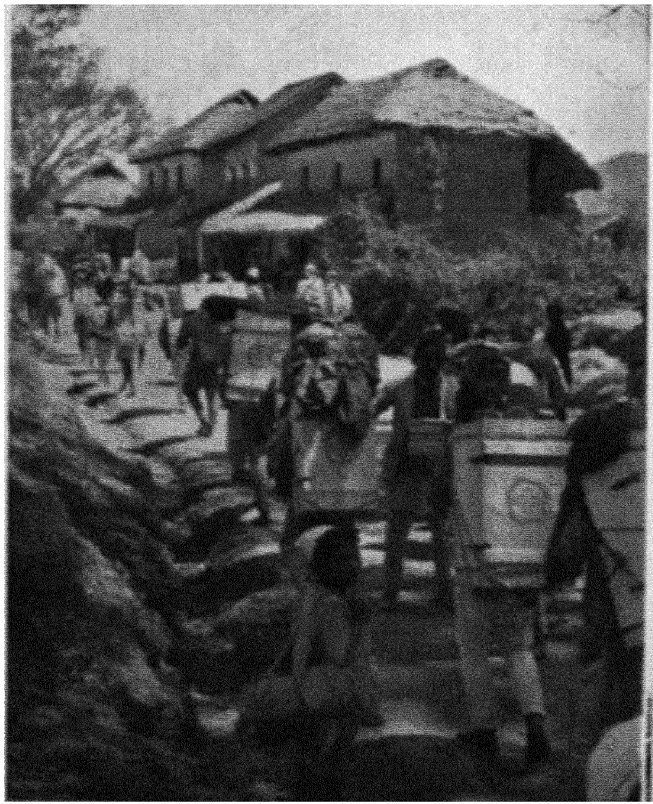
From Bombay our companions went to Patna with the baggage, while Flory and I were taken to Delhi by plane. We flew over the Ghats, then the desert, and then the dried and burned plains of Central India, where the wild beasts themselves must eke out only a meagre existence. Delhi was a veritable flower-bed; I have never seen so many gardens nor such sumptuous blossoming. There were too many things to see and we would have forgotten that we were not simple tourists if we had not been carried away from the capital of India by airplane the very next day, over the great white alluvial plains of the Ganges, to Katmandu.

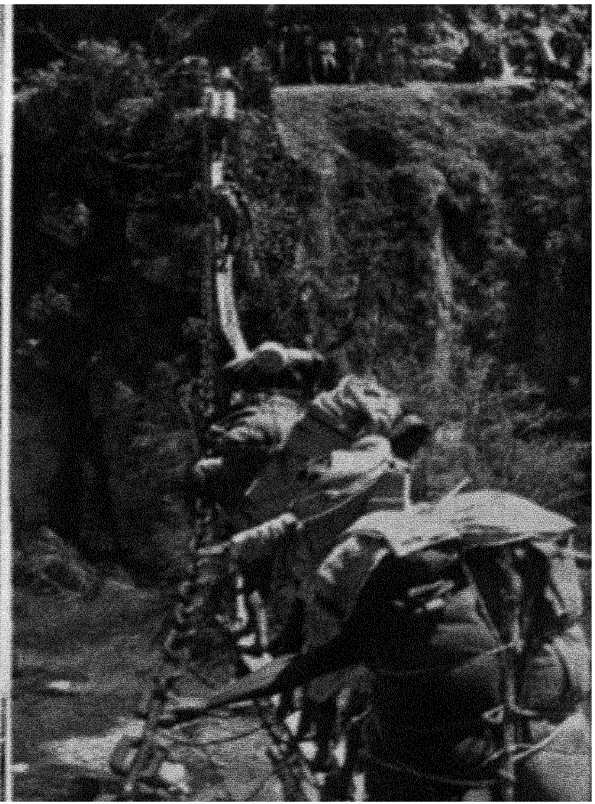
That was our last trip in European fashion. From Katmandu we should have no means but our own legs. The plain and the villages slipped by; the sacred river of India seemed motionless in its large and partly dried-up bed. Dark clouds floated below and we suddenly perceived some dizzy peaks emerging from the mass of this motionless sea, a brief and distant vision which the clouds soon concealed again. It was a first contact nevertheless. A gap in the clouds disclosed the hills of the Teraï, the haunt of rhinoceros, tiger and elephant, a dense dark-green virgin forest, split by gorges and ravines through which the torrents flowed. The weather progressively deteriorated, but we were approaching our goal; the plane lost altitude and emerged above an immense plain enclosed by mountains, richly cultivated with corn and rice. Katmandu lay in its midst.

Flory and I had time to visit the town, being a few days in advance of our comrades, but it would have taken months to have

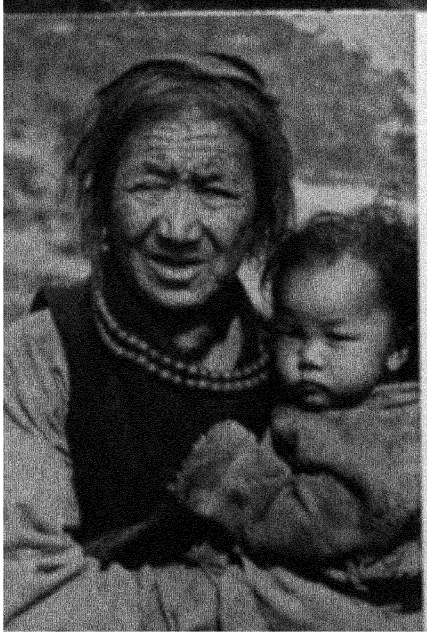
1 (left)
The porters on the road from Kamamuka

1 (right)
Bridge of chains over the Sun Kosi









2 (top) *The camp at Namche Bazar*

(left) *Tenzing's mother; she had not seen her son for at least twenty years*

uncovered everything, so rich it is in Hindu temples and in pagodas with gold and silver roofs, tiered like flowers on a stem and flashing in the sunlight. The streets were lively and coloured. At the glassless windows pastel screens lent a soft air to the blood-red crudity of the bricks. At many of them were curious faces, absorbed in the animated life of the street. The riches of the bazaars overflowed from the shops and the sellers sat among them. The coppersmith, the barber and the shoemaker worked side by side in the open air; the blacksmith hammered at his anvil and the tailor plied his needle. It was a smiling, busy crowd and very different from the care-worn crowds of our own country. The women had flowers in their sleek black hair, silver bracelets on their arms and a serene walk made graceful by their long saris. Among the passers-by, at whom they scarcely raised their great black eyes, the cows ambled, placid, nonchalant and sacred.

It was late and we had eaten nothing since six in the morning. So we quickly returned to the hotel. We there learned that our comrades had reached Patna with their four tons of baggage, which was to be put on a plane, two journeys being necessary to transport it.

March 28th began with a grey and rainy morning and we shivered in our light clothes. A busy day awaited us, concerned with the indispensable purchase of rice, petrol, flour, and so forth, with changing our travellers' cheques at the bank and with a visit to the Indian Post Office, since Nepal is not a member of the Postal Union and India takes charge of its foreign mail.

We made contact with our Sherpas and it was a real pleasure to meet our friends of earlier years again: Tensing and Ajiba of 1947, Dawa Thondup, Pansi and Aïla of 1949, and Ang Dawa of 1950. Some, like Sarki and Da Namgyal, had been at Annapurna and Nanda Devi, while others were about to go through their first campaign with us. Tensing was their sirdar, and all of them were likeable, smiling and full of goodwill. At that moment, in their European-style clothes, they looked awkward, for they were not city sparrows and would only become themselves above 16,000 feet.

We were to leave Katmandu the next day; everything had to be

in order and we had to prepare our personal loads. We extracted our belongings from the containers and filled them into two sacks. The crampons were put aside, and we thus accumulated about 55 lbs. per person. Everything amazed the interested spectators who watched us at work; they exclaimed upon hearing our attempts with the radio apparatus, they marvelled at our tents and at our wadded jackets, and I wondered what thoughts these strange and useless objects had raised in their simple souls. They went into ecstasies at the sight of our boots and high altitude footwear while we dimly envied their ability to travel bare-foot. I almost wanted to explain to them that all this apparent luxury was indispensable for facing the hardships of the cruellest of mountains, but I could only guess at what was happening in their childish hearts, and hope that bitterness was no part of it. Moreover, they did not seem envious; their faces were happy and though by hard labour they succeeded with difficulty in making a living, it seemed that they asked for nothing more and that to live was enough to make them happy. From this we might have drawn a lesson had we been moralists.

Before leaving Katmandu we wanted to take a last walk in Patan and to look again at its low-built houses, timbered and richly carved. A strange atmosphere reigned in the town that evening; a peaceful crowd, dressed all in white, slipped through streets feebly lit by gleams from the windows. In monotonous tones the prayers were being recited by the faithful and accompanied by flutes and tambourines. Religion there was a part of life, and the life of the street extended even into the temple courtyard where the women were spinning, where men were preparing their heavy-smelling fried food for sale and children were playing, while the red, yellow and blue statuettes of fat stood musing before offerings of rice and flowers.

CHAPTER II

The Approach

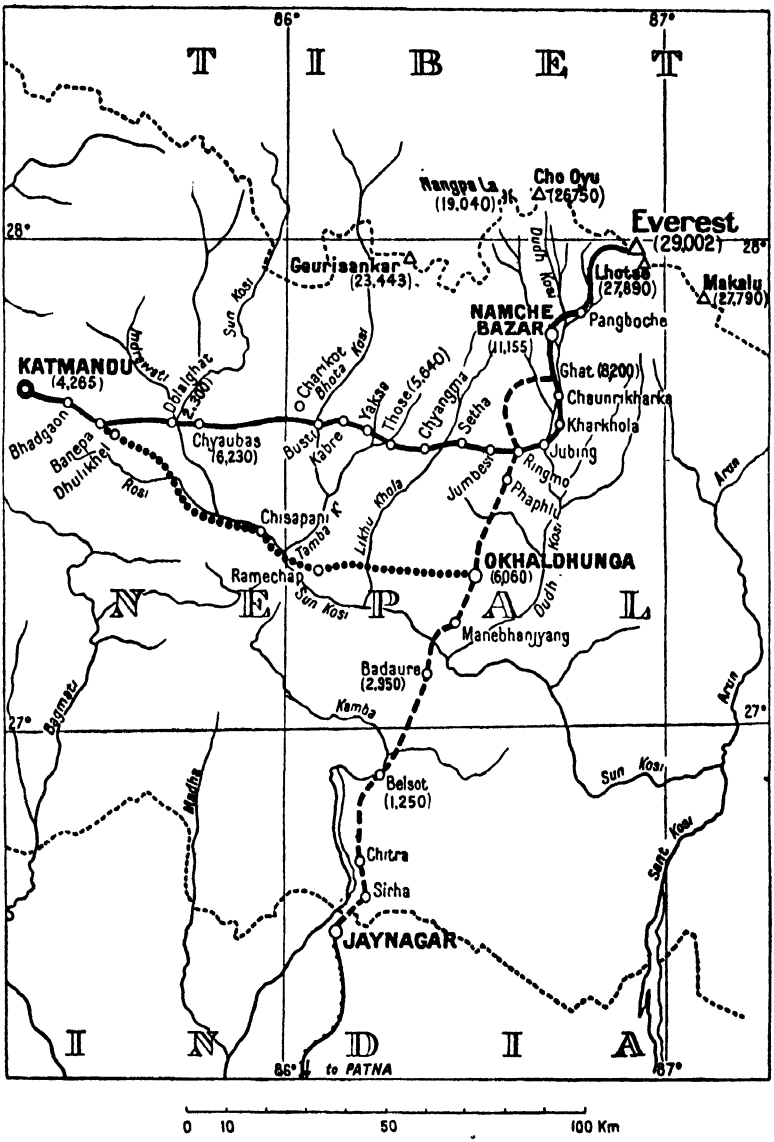
March 29th. Katmandu (4,360 *ft.*) *to Banepa* (5,080 *ft.*).

Early that morning we left the Nepal Hotel without breakfast and without regret. This was the real beginning and for us a moving moment.

We were at the airfield at six; the Sherpas were there before us and Tensing had already shared out the loads. Tensing knows the way to organise a departure: those who are quickest are given the kitchen equipment, those who follow get the tents and personal effects, while the containers and cases for the base camp are kept for those who march at the rear. On the wide, tree-fringed airfield our departure was impressive; beyond the trees were small scattered farms, while snowy summits of 23,000 to 26,000 feet formed a formidable backcloth.

All departures naturally involve arguments about money and we did not escape them. At the last moment our leading coolie had tried to raise the rate of pay by two rupees a man, but we had signed a proper contract with their recruiter and our position was strong.

Fascinated, my eyes strayed from the naked feet of the coolies as they trampled the soil to the expanse of grey earth and to the wide sky heavily laden with featureless white cloud, and then returned to the arched wiry feet of these ragged little men of wretched appearance who quickly showed themselves to be both strong and tireless. The road we followed was usable by vehicles and the trucks that passed us raised a terrible dust which burned our throats. The road cut across the plain through fine crops of rye, among the small and scattered farms. We passed several potteries; the jars and bowls were displayed in the street, but in this region the potters make articles of necessity rather than works of art.



Route of the Spring Expedition

It was warm; for a first stage the road seemed long and we had to pass through several police barriers set up by the government after the revolution. At two of these things went well, but at the third it was impossible for us to make the soldiers understand, and Flory, Chevalley and I stayed behind as hostages until the arrival of the liaison officer, so as to let our porters continue their journey. We passed through several villages and then arrived at Bhadgaon, a strange town, entered by a stone portico of Indo-Muslim style, flanked by two lions. I have rarely seen such intense animation as that which reigned there. The town is dark because the multi-storied houses are of red brick, with balconies and black timbering, and the streets are so narrow that they allow one to see only a narrow strip of deep blue sky. The shadow and the crowds give to the town a bewildering medieval aspect. The main street leads to an immense pagoda, surrounded by vast flights of steps, these being flanked by sculptured lions and elephants. Religion and life there are closely mingled and there was no more disrespect in the washing that was drying on the steps than in the hearts of the men who at that moment were involved in argument between an elephant's feet or in the heart of the child who was perched on its neck.

The sun scattered its white light over the uneven paving. Maize was drying on the eaves of the houses. On reaching a square one had the impression of coming out of a forest, so great was the contrast between the narrow streets, with their teeming life, and the light in the squares which spread out like clearings around a temple. The dishevelled little children, dressed always in clothes that seemed too big, watched us pass with not much more surprise than did the adults.

We passed through numerous hamlets of which we never knew the names. Life everywhere seemed harmonious and easy, perhaps because we did not see its details, perhaps because these red thatched houses recalled the stories of our childhood, perhaps because life there had another rhythm, slow and regular like that of a strong heart and because, without knowing it, there was within ourselves a weariness of our own hectic and noisy existence. During our approach we moved each day towards a silence that

was purer and deeper. Even the very footsteps were quiet and the softness of naked feet in the white dust filled the road very differently from the clatter of heels on a city pavement. Noise is only agreeable if it keeps a human character, and on our way, with the rare exception of the trucks that made us eat the dust, we heard laughter and song and conversation in a high key and childish cries, but we forgot the artificial din of the metalled ways. We did not yet know the quality of sound on Everest, of the wind and of falling séracs, bringing anxiety with them, leaving behind them a more complete silence and arousing in the pit of the stomach that sense of human solitude in the presence of nature.

We crossed the little Sanga Bhaniyang pass by a narrow road cut through the red earth. At last, at about 4.00 p.m., at the hour when the light begins to soften imperceptibly, we reached Banepa, after having covered about eleven miles. That means nothing in a vehicle, but the heat and our new boots made this first stage seem long and we were glad to get there.

Banepa is a very small village, where in the street women were preparing the woof for weaving. After a short slope that was quite steep, we passed the last houses and pitched our camp. The pitching of a camp is always a moment full of comfort and primitive poetry. The tents were erected along a blue agave hedge. A fire crackled and its fragrant smoke spread out in that light cloud which from time immemorial must have brought to the heart of men the joy of broken solitude. Water was boiling in the pots and our dry lips waited impatiently for tea.

Evening fell upon the brown and green valley. We were at 5,000 feet and it was warm. We all spent a joyful evening together, friendly and relaxed, but at nine o'clock, while the sky was lighting up, we went to sleep, not so much because it was the sensible thing to do but because we were pleasantly weary.

March 30th. Banepa (5,080 ft.) to Dolalghat (2,300 ft.).

The morphology of Nepal is strange. On examining the map, one is struck by the way the rivers have cut up the land. The hand which shaped the highest mountain in the world became impatient in the process, rumpling the earth and giving it the angry

appearance of a knitted brow. The valleys are in constant succession; they are narrow and deeply cut. Banepa is at 5,080 feet, Dolalghat at 2,300, Chyaubas at 6,200 and so on; one goes up only to come down again. Nevertheless, the route I marked out on the map turned out to be the best and the quickest.

The second stage seemed to us especially hard and its 17½ miles quite endless under the heavy sun, with our throats tortured by thirst. At six in the morning, Wyss sounded the reveille with a blast of a trumpet and this summons, recalling a nomad's camp to life, gave us the impression that we were some archaic army, but a peaceful one, nevertheless. We cleaned our teeth in tea since it was wise to use only boiled water, and I did not dare to oppose this abuse openly. But at breakfast my economical soul suffered severly as I glumly watched the thin members of the party eating more than the fat ones, while Lambert was showing too great a partiality for jam. Each time that by some discreet remark I reminded them that the food had to last for three months, I had to endure a volley of jests.

We had camped on the road to a temple and that morning the women were on their way there with their offerings: on basket-work trays they carried rice, herbs, and minute egg-cups containing I know not what, copper samovars and beautiful blood-red rhododendrons. It was a sight of astonishing charm. On their return they threw the remains of the rice to the birds and these, knowing the ritual, fell upon it like rain. We too, as if we were some village bridal party, received our share of the rice, thrown over us to ensure the expedition's success. But I was not the only partisan of economy, for it seemed to me that the crows regarded this non-utilitarian distribution of rice with dark looks.

Soon, after crossing a small pass, we entered the Himalayan foothills. In this chaotic and varied décor the hand of man has transformed the landscape. Certain hills still give an idea of the richness of the original landscape, being densely covered with giant red, white or rose-coloured rhododendrons, and with orchids and ferns hanging in garlands from the large-leaved oaks. These hills have the splendour of untouched earth. But man has cleared the forests, sacrificing the needs of the future to those of

the present; he has burned down the tropical vegetation so as to have a little open land to cultivate. The hills have become terraces of masterly construction; they have no walls to support them but have been modelled at the cost of great effort by the Nepalese peasants, who have only the most primitive tools at their disposal, such as the hoe and the wooden ploughshare. By their patience they have succeeded in extracting from the earth two crops a year—rye, barley, corn and potatoes in the spring, rice and maize in the autumn; but now that they have driven back the boundaries of the forest, they have to cover miles in order to find wood, and they have to carry it back to the villages on their own backs, for no animal can travel these rough and winding tracks, over delicately suspended bridges and across a very broken and chaotic terrain. From these terraces one's eyes pass to the deep forests, from the red, burning, naked earth to the majesty of great solitary trees: tulip-trees with blood-red flowers, walnut trees and giant figs. Out of curiosity we measured a trunk: it was nearly 60 feet in circumference.

Gaurisankar (23,443 feet) showed up as we crossed the pass; it was surrounded by boldly outlined peaks which we could not name. We suffered from the heat, from the intense reflection despite the brick-red tint of the earth, and from a thirst that became a greater torment as we passed beside a lively stream, the limpid waters of which brought the saliva to our mouths.

Heavily-laden villagers passed us endlessly on their way to Katmandu. Mostly the loads consisted of fowls: the hens were shut up in cages while the cocks, tied by one leg, clung to the tops of them so as not to fall from their strange perches. These cocks brought a glint to the eyes of our coolies, and the most cunning of them succeeded in appropriating some by stealth. They took care not to let us see them until it was too late to give them back to their owners.

At last the road descended along the side of a hill towards a river. We thought we had reached our goal, but the road stretched on interminably, marked out by the long line of our 180 porters. Despite the beauty of the flora—the datura with their heavy hanging clusters, and the deliciously perfumed white and yellow

jasmine—despite the piercing cry of the pit-pit bird and of the familiar cuckoo and the sound of the horns coming down the mountains to greet us, we felt overcome by weariness.

Dolalghat is a village of fishermen and lies close to the confluence of the rivers Indrawati and Sun Kosi. It was there that we pitched our camp on the banks of white sand. We threw ourselves into the water; it was warm and we could not stay there long and came out, already refreshed and our thirst slightly appeased by the liquid which had penetrated our skins. A cup of Himalayan tea, tasting and smelling of smoke, succeeded in effacing the difficulty of our journey. The Sun Kosi flowed swiftly and gently, blue and limpid between its steep banks of fine sand. Who could believe that the monsoon would fill it with tempestuous and troubled water?

Night descended rapidly. The camp-fires crackled and displayed the crouching shadows of the porters who were singing monotonous chants.

March 31st. Dolalghat (2,300 ft.) to Chyaubas (6,230 ft.).

We passed a good night despite the fact that our coolies went on singing interminably like crickets on a summer evening.

We were awakened at five. It was still dark and we put on our boots by the light of our electric torches. We breakfasted upon chapattis, butter and jam, while the coolies were already preparing to leave, for they wanted to complete at least part of the ascent before the heat of the day. We were the last to leave. One load remained lying there like a reproach, for a porter had deserted during the night. The group would deal with it.

We crossed a first bridge over the Indrawati. A small section of road led us to a further bridge, suspended on chains, and crossing the Sun Kosi; it was so narrow that it was impossible for two to cross abreast and it oscillated under our tread. Then the track began again, worn to the softness of a beach by the passage of innumerable naked feet. But it was pitilessly steep. This stage was to be shorter than that of the previous day, but its ascent was greater. The narrow path wound like a serpent between two cactus hedges and passed through crops of rye. The oaks which

fringed it gave us no shade, for they were lopped very high in order to feed the animals and provide firewood. Higher up we came again upon the splendour of the rhododendrons, and their opulent purple flowers astonished those of our comrades who had not had the opportunity to travel through the forests of Sikkim. The sky was clear above us; the distances were misty and the mountains lightly hid in cloud. The heat was overwhelming; the coolies sought the shade of the fig trees. We were streaming from head to foot; the dust cemented our lips and we suffered from thirst. But the ascent drew to its close and we reached the pass, whence the view was wide. The labyrinth of valleys, rivers and torrents opened up like a fan and the whole of the previous day's stage became clear.

One more hillside march and we reached Chyaubas. It was an arid pasture. We had now left the trees behind, the figs and the banana-trees that flourished up to 5,250 feet and that marvellous tree—the flamboyant—which, naked of leaves, bears its sumptuous flowers in a triumphant manner. Here there was no shade and our tents glistened under the sun. Our camp was pitched on a platform which projected like a balcony above a landscape to which our eyes tirelessly turned. The camp was already up by 4.0 p.m. and the activity around it was great; we were a little lower than the village but the tiny children had come towards us with their wild, astonished, eagerly curious little faces. Doubtless, they had never seen white men before. The adults, too, had a more startled expression than the natives had shown hitherto. We wanted to buy a goat for the evening meal, but the one that was offered us was too dear and too old, so we gave up the idea and ate our curried rice.

We hoped to be at Charikot in two days, which actually seemed possible, for the coolie team was excellent; everything in that respect had gone forward without difficulty, which is by no means always the case. The Sherpas were excellent too; they worked well and with a will. We who lived for the most part in towns were surprised by the extraordinary suppleness of these porters and we never ceased to admire the way in which their feet could tackle all the irregularities in the soil, and their muscular thighs which made it possible for them to carry loads of from 65 to 85 lbs. without

harm. It is a fact that at seven years a child can already carry about 40 lbs., and that the older ones always take care of the younger, so that a sort of heredity has been created in this matter.

We distributed cigarettes to the coolies. They came running from all sides. Night had fallen. We changed tent partners every evening and so avoided the possibility of cliques and maintained a general *cameraderie.*

April 1st. Chyaubas (6,230 *ft.*) *to Lichanku* (5,900 *ft.*).

In the morning the sky was dull. The Sherpas were busy around the fire. Camp was quickly struck, and we were scarcely out of our tents when they collapsed like a house of cards and were packed away inside their sacks. The coolies set out with good humour although five of them had deserted, their loads remaining at the camp until local porters were engaged.

We were now in Buddhist country. It is difficult to fix a true frontier between Hinduism and Buddhism in front of Chyangma, for after Chyaubas they overlap. But here the *mani* engraved on stone showed that Buddhism was dominant. At the entry to the village of Chyaubas a group of men greeted us with long trumpets and the sound filled the valleys. These men were seeking—quite justifiably—a small offering for their temple. The village, with its widely scattered houses, was very pretty, airy and clean. It was dominated by the temple, richly decorated with skilful paintings in bright colours, where, in the peaceful shade, red and gold Buddhas smiled their mysterious smile, with prayer-books in encrusted covers piled at their side. On the hill, and standing out boldly against the clear sky, two lamas were praying before the tombs.

We set up our camp near the temple; on its terrace were bamboo poles bearing prayer flags and the storm made them flap violently in the wind. In the distance, on the high summits, it was snowing.

April 2nd. Lichanku (5,900 *ft.*) *to Manga Deorali* (7,550 *ft.*).

It was cold, but the night's clouds dispersed and formidable mountains loomed up in the north. Roch photographed them, but

we could not name them. The day is near perhaps when they will figure on the maps, but for the time being they retain an enigmatic majesty.

The weather turned fine again. The departure was early, at 6.45 a.m. Once more the long line of porters darkly marked the descent. At the lower end of the village we admired a house decorated with panels, windows and beams of marvellously carved black wood. We soon crossed a hanging bridge of decayed planks; one coolie put his leg through it and Asper his foot. Further on we regained height on the right bank and the landscape changed. There were no longer those brown surfaces—baked and hardened like pottery; the burnt tint was about to disappear, so that the eye could only rest upon patches of young corn, on watery rice-fields reflecting the clouds, and on the approaches to hamlets enclosed between clumps of bamboos and poplars: a wild beauty, and almost a melancholy one, despite the blue sky and the mist that blurred the distances. The region now took on a more alpine character, with small rock walls and mountain scents. We felt more at home.

That day we marched more easily. It was not so warm but, completely dehydrated, we continued to suffer from a thirst of the kind that nothing could appease. Hardly had the tea passed our lips than the thirst returned as before. A small river was crossed by a length of timber. Beyond it was a grass plot where we feasted upon two roasted chicken. Then we gave ourselves up to domestic tasks. Some washed their shirts, others washed themselves, and the river was the scene of joyful activity; it lacked the kneeling washerwomen, but dotted along its course were primitive and picturesque corn-mills. We were not the only ones to have halted on its bank; a party of men were resting there with fine bamboo cages beside them. They were going—one knew not where—to sell their birds.

After a long halt we set off once more. On the way our Sherpas were waiting for us and offered us slices of a curiously refreshing fruit the flavour of which was reminiscent of lemons. The land became wilder; deep ravines followed one another; a flamboyant let fall its red flowers and the petals drifted to the ground. Higher

up were more rhododendrons and their flowers were strewn upon the ground in blood-red pools.

At the pass the view opened upon a wide combe where gentle slopes contrasted with the narrow valleys we had just followed. A storm was growling in the Charikot mountains and broke before the camp could be pitched. When the rain ceased, the neighbouring summits were white.

April 3rd. Manga Deorali (7,530 ft.) to Mandu (4,760 ft.).

The sky was clear. White cumulus clouds were rising like froth. It was almost cold: 45 degrees (F.). When the curtains of cloud drew apart, we faced a theatrical scene: a line of high mountains was disclosed, of dizzy ramparts, hanging ice and bastions of rock all in striking softness against the light. It was a challenge, but the road descended. It passed through a forest of long-needled pines, of bright and fragrant verdure, overlooking a fan-shaped prospect of wide-open valleys, softly tinted, half spring-like and half autumnal, veiled by tenuous mists through which could be seen the complex and graceful pattern of pale-green crops, white and ochre coloured houses, patches of forest, and light clumps of bamboo and poplar. We crossed an impressive hanging bridge with planks that were only eight inches wide and a parapet of heavy chains at elbow level. It moved under our feet like a see-saw and a number of coolies preferred to ford the river, which was not very deep. Sometimes our route followed a slope of hard earth, and sometimes it followed a track; we climbed in heavy heat and then a descent led us to a great river, the Botha Kosi, limpid and turquoise-blue, pitted by the rain as it flowed swiftly between tropically forested banks. Despite the storm, we bathed in its waters.

The malicious sun reappeared for our last climb. Some chattering and others protesting, and all of us puffing and sweating, we reached the Namdu crest, and on a plateau surrounded by agaves our orange-coloured tents rose up like wild poppies. We made our last arrangements with our courier, for he was about to depart. Nima Tensing is tall, slender and built for racing: he was wearing three-quarter trousers and a washed-out shirt, while at his belt hung a *kukri*, the famous Nepalese knife. He had a proud gait and

would know how to make himself respected during the long journey he would have to cover alone.

The last coolie arrived at twilight. Then came the night and it was softly iridescent with moonlight.

April 4th. Namdu (4,760 *ft.*) *to Yaksa* (6,460 *ft.*).

This was a walk rather than a real stage. We were held back by the coolies; they started late and did not follow. In the end we learned that they did not wish to cross the crest that day. So it was better to do a short stage and not lose too much time, for we were obliged to give way to them despite our wish to reach Namche as quickly as possible. However, as it would take us sixteen days to reach the village instead of the twelve we had reckoned, we sent two Sherpas ahead of us to begin the purchase of food and to recruit porters. The Shipton expedition was to pass through Namche and we feared that we would not find porters enough. Having made these arrangements, we could settle down lightheartedly to our afternoon rest.

Yaksa is a village of quite poor appearance; in one field we saw a woman cutting ears of corn one by one and throwing them into a large basket. Each of us took advantage of his freedom in his own fashion. Roch took a portrait of a young girl of Sola Khumbu. Lombard painted a water-colour of the landscape. Some of us bathed in a small lukewarm lake, hidden among the leaves, while the Sherpas did a great deal of washing which soon decked the bushes. Chevalley practised his own profession and dressed the legs of two young porters with ulcerated ankles. For twenty rupees we bought a small black pig which was cooking throughout the night.

April 5th. Yaksa (6,460 *ft.*) *to Those* (5,640 *ft.*).

The morning was one of surprises, disagreeable as surprises too often are. During the night a spring welled up under Flory's tent and a small stream was flowing joyfully. Ten coolies had deserted in the night; five new ones were engaged on the spot and this involved a palaver. Our sirdar was much occupied. When everything was again in order, we set off.

At nine o'clock we were at the pass (8,104 feet), where there were many chortens, those pear-shaped Buddhist monuments built of flat stones. The road turned a hill and crossed a forest of rhododendrons, the like of which we had not seen before; the coolies gathered their red blossoms to eat them. In the villages of white houses, wooden shingles had replaced thatch; buffaloes and a few thin cows were sheltering from the sun under the stable roofs.

At Those we saw workmen for the first time, for this was an iron ore region. Fires glowed in the dark huts, quickened by bellows worked by children or by women. Here they forged traps, three-legged cooking pots, padlocks and the heavy chains for the hanging bridges. Our liaison officer made us visit an ancient gun factory where we could easily forget that we were living in the atomic age. The natives were of a more pronounced Tibetan type.

As night fell, a lugubrious call, like the cry of a human being, rent the peaceful air, and was answered by another. A jackal was seeking its mate.

April 6th. Those (5,640 *ft.*) *to Chyangma* (6,890 *ft.*).

We made a quick departure, for all the coolies were there early. On the previous day Tensing had brought 120 kgs. (264 lbs.) of rice, for which additional porters were needed. Two coolies from Sola Khumbu volunteered to carry double loads for double pay: who would have believed, on seeing them start off, that each of them was carrying 132 lbs? It was astonishing. One coolie started rather drunkenly and we had fears for the load when he crossed a solitary tree-trunk over a river; but it all went off well and he was even one of the first to arrive at the end of the stage! We also engaged a likeable family that offered us its services: the father carried 65 to 75 lbs., the mother 45 lbs., while the boy of about ten years carried the cooking materials in a basket, with sleeping gear also and his small brother of three months.

On this day we began to penetrate into the region inhabited by the Sherpas and Bhotias, a population that has come from Tibet over the high passes and has settled in this part of Nepal. Tibetan

customs, habits and religion are preserved among them; like the Tibetans, they are strong and wear their hair long and braided under a felt hat, trimmed with fur at the visor and the ears, and decorated with red and gold. The women wear two aprons, one in front and one behind, while the men wear long robes drawn in at the waist. Different from our coolies who marched in bare feet, the Tibetans were shod in skin-soled babouches of coloured material to half-way up the leg.

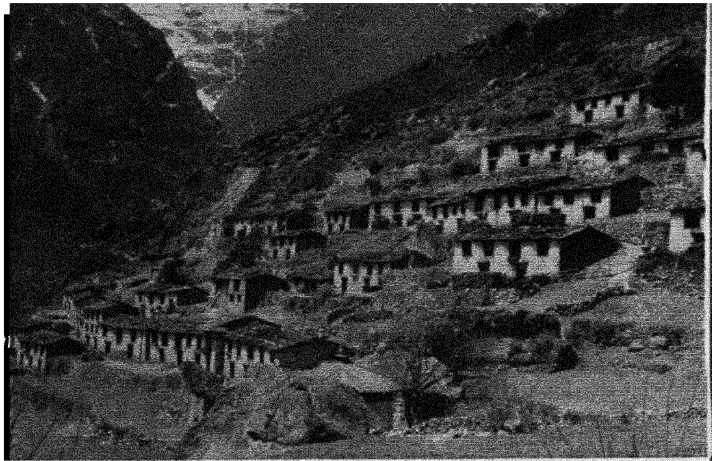
To begin with we reascended the course of the Khimti Khola for about two miles; the river twisted about transparently in its bed of gneiss and sand. Northwards the valley climbed rapidly to a great height, between great slanting buttresses supporting a rock barrier powdered with fresh snow. The road passed between manis and chortens so numerous that we knew we were definitely in Buddhist territory. Clinging to a rock were enormous wasps' nests like great brown shells. The cuckoo followed us through the forest with its mocking call. The lopped oak trees raised tufts of foliage at the tops of their gnarled vertical trunks and the magnolias dotted the dark greenery with their giant white blooms. Stunted and worm-eaten trees were hung with long lichens like fishermen's nets. This tortured forest both charmed and surprised us.

Dwellings were less numerous. Only stubborn crops clung to the flanks of the immense hillsides. Zimmermann, our enthusiastic botanist, was filled with joy at finding the 'Himalayan Daphne', a fragrant yellow bloom.

After a steep slope we reached the Changma La at 8,760 feet, where we were surprised and disappointed not to see Everest. At Chyangma, where we pitched our tent, Tensing unexpectedly met an elder sister whom he had not seen for twenty years and who was married to a local lama. While they spent a long evening in the tent telling each other about their lives, a nightingale was singing.

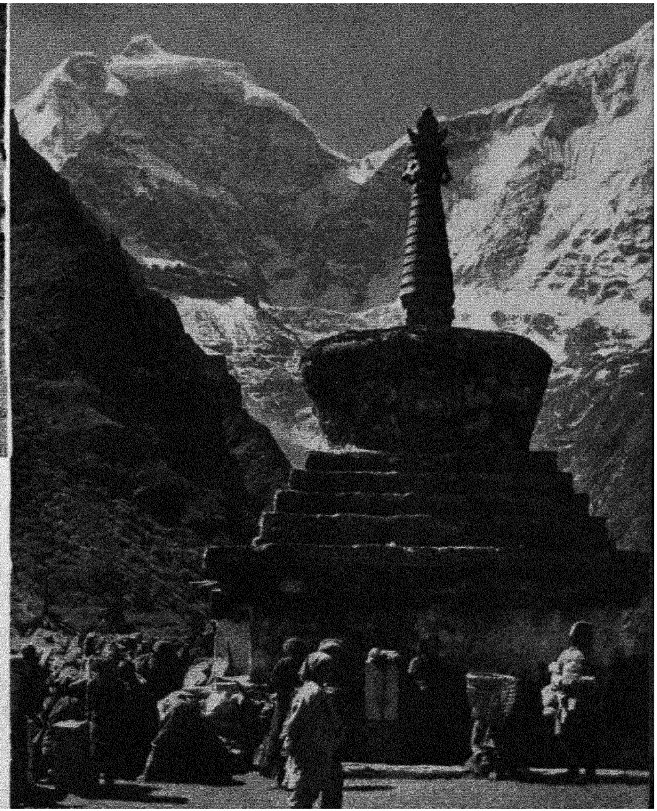
April 7th. Chyangma (6,890 *ft.*) *to Setha* (7,940 *ft.*).

We made a steep and stony descent to the Likhu Khola, a blue river along which we marched as far as the Donsa bridge, where we



3 (above) *Namche Bazar*

(right) *Buddhist chorten at Thyangboche. In the background, Kantega* (22,180 *feet*)





4 *The members of the spring expedition: (left to right, standing) Flory, Wyss-Dunant, Aubert, Hofstetter and Lambert (seated) Chevalley, Roch, Asper, Lombard, Zimmermann, Dittert*

left the valley in order to follow an immense hog's back to Setha.

At the far end of the valley, to the north-east, a great summit reared up; it was the 22,300 feet Numbur. Our camp was pitched on the mountain side close to the village, amongst the plume-shaped oaks in the trunks of which niches were cut to serve as steps to those who wish to climb and prune even further the poor tufts of leaves. The camp faced the setting sun and the evening was beautiful. We hoped to have a good night, but we were on the fringe of a wood and we had scarcely retired into our tents than the wood awoke and was filled with a deafening uproar; the jackals howled in an agonising fashion, a bird sang two notes in a shrill voice, and another cackled disagreeably, doubtless recounting all sorts of forest gossip.

April 8th. Setha (7,940 *ft.*) *to Jumbesi* (8,090 *ft.*).

After that noisy night, I was happy to leave my tent at five in the morning. Not far from Setha we made a short halt in order to visit the temple. On its tiled terrace a young man with a broad face and slit eyes, dressed in a violet tunic, tied at the waist and revealing his brown limbs, was grinding grain. He resembled a Roman legionary. The portico and the interior of the temple were covered with paintings, and inside was a prayer-wheel five feet in diameter and over seven feet high, the cylinder being artistically painted in Sanskrit characters. Inside the wheel were strips of paper in tight rolls, bearing innumerable prayers xylographically printed. At each turn, the formula repeated itself: *Om mani padme hum.*

Here the rhododendrons were in bud. We passed two Tibetan women who were returning from Those to Namche; they had been to buy rice and each was carrying back about 140 lbs! Our own Sherpanis were carrying the expedition's money and to watch them on the march was to realise that these women were as as strong as their men; but they were feminine nevertheless. Their faces smiled under their smooth, oiled bands of black hair into which they sometimes thrust flowers; they love necklaces and possess the unfaltering good humour of women accustomed to a hard life.

As far as the pass we ascended through a forest which was very humid and heavily impregnated with the odour of rotting vegetation. The trunks of the trees were imprisoned in a mass of moss and long clear-green lichens hung their curtains upon the branches. Then the conifers succeeded to the deciduous trees.

From the pass, where the wind was cold, we perceived Jumbesi. At the bottom of the valley flowed the Beni Khola and across it was a bridge of plaited bamboos. We camped above the village on a patch of the mauve *primula denticula* in full flower. We washed at a fountain that gushed from a prayer-wheel which was being turned by the torrent. Perhaps it was a sacrilege, but we did not dare to drink this water, even though it was sanctified.

There came a storm of rain, driven by the wind. The moonlight was veiled. Our candle-lit tents resembled lanterns hung above the void of the valley.

April 9th. Jumbesi (8,090 *ft.*) *to Taksindhu* (9,515 *ft*).

After the night's hail and wind it was fine and cold. We started late, for the coolies had been given an advance, and like all men who feel money at the bottom of their pockets, they had discovered that there were things they wanted.

Slanting over the void, the great honey-coloured slopes stretched out. Everywhere, the *primula denticula* laid an impalpable carpet of violet, mauve and rose over the fields. Even in the distance, on the facing mountainside, the paleness of the dried grass was tinted a light amethyst hue.

Salung was the home village of our Sherpa, Sarki. His mother and sister offered us potatoes roasted in the cinders. Several Nepalese, heavily laden, caught up with our caravan; they were draped in garnet-red cloaks and their bronze-coloured skin made their turquoise earrings stand out brightly.

On the ascent from Ringmo to the Taksindhu pass, Zimmermann went off botanising to the left of the road and we thought he had gone astray. Wyss sounded his trumpet to bring the venturesome sheep back to the flock. We tried to persuade the coolies to push forward to Phuleli, but without success; so we pitched the camp in a clearing beside the Taksindhu lamassery. It was in

process of restoration and we could follow with admiration the minute labours of the painters. The subjects were very clever, very sure and very harmonious, but not being accustomed to it we were disconcerted by the symbolism of this oriental art, which expresses the mysteries of the unconscious mind in a tortured imagery and requires a special initiation to decipher.

In the evening we were drawn to the lamassery again by the strange sound of trumpets, cymbals and drums. The High Lama signed to us to be seated—that is, to squat—which we did with less grace than the natives. In the half-dark two small oil lamps made the fantastic shadows dance, lighting the smiles of the Buddhas, and the copper-coloured faces of the lamas under their red caps, and the thin vapour rising from the cups of Himalayan tea, from which heaven preserve one, for it is salted and thick with rancid buffalo butter.

This was a funeral service. The High Lama recited prayers in a monotonous voice accompanied by the equally monotonous rhythm of the instruments, which did not play any melody. A lama tried to extract a sound from a human femur, but it was choked, for which we were grateful. We were fascinated by the lama's mimicry: his face fluctuated between joy and sorrow and he threw back his head, beseeching heaven, rolling his eyes and scratching himself. The exact meaning of all these symbols escaped us but we had the feeling of being in close relation to these men at whose side we crouched in the heat and obscurity of the smoky room; we sensed the sincerity of their prayers when they raised their hands to heaven like cups or when they partook of the sacrament in grains of maize. We found a distant brotherhood. Throughout this ceremony one of the lamas held a tiny white dog on his knees.

With aching limbs we rose and left, but the service was to last far into the night.

April 10th. Taksindhu (9,515 ft.) to Kharikhola (6,820 ft.).

The temperature in these regions followed a chaotic curve: on this particular morning we started at 7.0 in more than three degrees of frost, but at about 10.0 it was already 90 degrees (F.)

in the shade. There was a long and laborious descent through the forest, where white orchids hung in cascades and giant butterflies distracted us from our efforts. Then came a small clearing where Pansi told us an execution had taken place about thirty years before. Why had they come to this wild spot to put a man to death? From a promontory we overlooked the prodigious valley of the Dudh Kosi and its immense gorge that rests against the high summits to the north. Facing us were the terraced crops of Jubing, the most impressive we had seen, being six miles wide and rising in tiers over more than 3,000 feet. By the side of a tumultuous green river we surprised three large monkeys with black faces and white collars that fled at our approach. We crossed the river by a most precarious bridge, our coolies advancing upon it cautiously. The monsoon would sweep it away like straw.

Then we ascended again. In front of the hovels the bananas were still green, but with their bamboos our Sherpas knocked down some curious small citrus fruit of a bitter and wild flavour. The houses were most primitive, made of mud with roofs of thatch. At Kharikhola the population was welcoming; the coolies arrived there late, led by the native of Sola Khombu who was engaged at Those and carried 130 lbs.

Our evening was saddened by the death agonies of a child who was screaming in the village. Dr. Chevalley had been consulted but we could see from his face that there was nothing to be done. The child's eyes had an unmistakable expression. In these far-off villages men are at the mercy of a harsh and primitive law: the strong survive and the weak die.

April 11th. Kharikhola (6,820 ft.) to Puyan (9,250 ft.).

During the evening we had had a long discussion over the couriers who did not want to travel with the mail singly, but in twos, and for three rupees a day (ten days going and fifteen returning). In the end we agreed and the mail left in the morning. The two men, Phu Tsering and Then Chang had a serious air: we gave them an advance of twenty rupees.

We were now passing many people, for we were on the main Tibetan route through Namche Bazar to Tingri Dzong. Whole

families were on the move, the children of twelve years carrying from 65 to 85 lbs. and the men up to 170 lbs. or more! Out of curiosity, I tried the load of one coolie, which was only 130 lbs. I did not get very far; my shoulders were cut by the slings (two cords), my back bruised by the case and my neck muscles stretched to breaking point by the forehead strap. I put it down hurriedly and heavily, to bursts of laughter from the Sherpas, who were enchanted by this miserable demonstration.

It was a difficult path. We had to ascend over 3,000 feet and the road was as steep as could be. Moreover, we were leaving the hills for the high mountains; above the right bank rose the Karyolung (21,920 feet) and great summits glittered everywhere.

These Sherpa people through whose midst we were passing were likeable and engaging. They were gay and by nature communicative; their individuality was pronounced. Politely curious groups formed around us at our halts and their glances invited confidence and friendliness. One woman, perhaps a little intoxicated, touched our bearded cheeks and roared with laughter.

At the highest point of our stage we made a long halt on a grassy shoulder, under one of those great Himalayan cedars (*cedrus deodora*), 5,000 feet above the deep and narrow valley. As far as Puyan the forest had been swept by fire; smooth grey trunks stood upright and naked, while the mosses, the ferns and the bamboo shoots made a russet-coloured fleece over the earth. Above this unhappy scene the rhododendrons hung their rose-coloured flowers and the magnolias their snowy blooms. Perched above the Dudh Kosi, the poor village of Puyan was our resting-place for the night.

April 12th. Puyan (9,250 *ft.*) *to Ghat* (8,200 *ft.*).

A fine morning, wreathed in mists. Our coolies, having had to sleep in caves with little comfort, because of the smallness of the village, arrived early, all goosefleshed, for the mornings were sharp. Thus we were quickly ready to depart. Between the rhododendron blossoms, and against a blue sky, an astonishing snow-covered mountain appeared. The delicacy of the colours contrasted with the harshness of the landscape.

At Surkya the coolies dispersed in groups in the wide stony channel which formed the bed of the torrent, and cooked their meal over wood fires, while the blue smoke unfurled against the light. Impressive edifices of food were piled in the metal plates—*tsampa,* rice and *dhal*—eaten with the fingers, each mouthful being soaked in sauce that was violently seasoned with chili. Aubert tasted their dishes seriously, like a master chef, and they were all very pleased. A woman from the village, who was beautiful and of pure blood and wore an elegant costume, stood in amused and curious contemplation of this lively troop, and while she chattered continuously with other more modest women, she never stopped turning a marvellous prayer-wheel of engraved silver. I would much like to have bought it, but she refused.

We started off again at ten. Enormous buttresses of dark and compact gneiss stood above us, and to one side of the dusty road, where naked feet and vibrams left their ephemeral mark, there opened a vertical gulf. Despite the sun, everything was bathed in mist; it hid the distances completely and made the light very gentle, spiritualising the severe landscape. We marched in a bluish void extending both to the distances and the depths, impregnating all things and creatures within it with infinity.

We approached the bottom of the valley, where there were gentle breezes and the sound of a river, and a forest of pale pines. The rhododendron was still with us, but its blossom had become paler and smaller, and the trees had become bushes. There were peaches, too, primulas and all the small blue gentians.

Like a new Sancho Panza, Lambert had done a part of this stage on a small pony, for he had slightly twisted an ankle. At Ghat we pitched our camp beside the Dudh Kosi.

CHAPTER III

Everest Ahead

April 13th. Ghat (8,200 *ft.*) *to Namche Bazar* (10,830 *ft.*).

This was Easter Sunday and the weather was fine. For us it was an historic day; we were about to see Everest, the mirage we had pursued for weeks across the sky, over the valleys, the passes and the brown waves of the earth.

After crossing the river six times by fragile bridges which the monsoon would carry away, we arrived opposite a spur which jutted forward like the prow of an immense ship into the middle of a defile. It separated two deep and narrow valleys. one plunging north-west and the other north-east; these met and became one at a very small and deep point, and then ran off to the south, and I have never seen a confluence of two valleys so geometrical. But we were not yet in view of Namche Bazar. The road crossed the Bhota Kosi once again and we attacked the ascent of the grassy hillside.

The track reappeared on the crest of the spur at a promontory which overlooked the valley of the Imya Khola; we were at about 10,000 feet and it was noon. And in this moment we discovered that reality is more impressive than the visions of our imagination; Everest rose before our eyes, framed by Nuptse and Lhotse and forming a formidable trinity. In a green sky it was infinitely high and distant; as the supreme upthrust of the earth, it amasses and completes the movement of the waves that have come together from every direction. How can one doubt that it reaches to the forbidden gates and to the very limits of life? In the white plume that is witness to the power of its supernatural winds its secret lies hidden.

While the attempts were being made on the north face, our side of the mountain was still untouched; however, it was reconnoitred

by Houston in 1950 and explored by the Shipton expedition of 1951, but only as far as 20,000 feet. As we were not yet in action, our feelings were mingled with anxiety, for the summit that reaches to the stratosphere was nearly 20,000 feet above us. But since no attack can ever be launched and no victory ever hoped for while scepticism enfeebles one's faith, we thrust aside the doubts that invaded our hearts. Faith is essential. Nevertheless, the chances of victory must have about them an element of the miraculous, for the factors which should come together in a minimum time—about 15 days—are so many. The participants must be in perfect condition and fully acclimatised, while good weather and absence of wind are vital; all this in absolutely unknown territory where everything was unforeseeable and where no man had yet prepared an entry. For it is a strange fact, but one that has always proved true, that where one man has imposed his domination over the elements another man can pass. The way is open, because the forces of nature have waited for man to prove himself master before submitting. A poor, puny, lonely master, but always since the day when he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge animated by the will to take possession of the mysteries. And the gigantic and inflexible forces become blunted. One man prepares the terrain for another man; everywhere, in every field of endeavour, the inaccessible and the impossible are only a matter of great patience, a patience which man has within him, not as his own property (in fact, failure deprives him of the benefits of his patience) but as a magic ring which the vanquished gives to him who succeeds in the attempt. Thus, in the long run, the gates open which man at first believed to be remorselessly closed. No invention or conquest has ever been realised without being first thought out by other than those who accomplish it; and this fraternity, which does not even reach to the consciousness of man, has made it possible for him to defeat obstacles which in earlier times only the cyclops had faced. This first vision of Everest was the dividing point between hope and failure. Humility filled us to the brim. No victory ever comes to pioneers, but through belief in victory, we would grasp at least part of the mystery.

The road once more absorbed our attention. Many days were

yet to pass before we reached the foot of the mountain and, a little dazed and a little intoxicated, we continued our ascent towards Namche, which was hidden from our view till the last moment.

The situation of the village surprised us. It clung to the slope of a combe carved into the great hillside overlooking the Bhota Kosi, crouching above the forests at the foot of slopes of brown scrub, among grey fields surrounded by stone walls, like some geometrical construction made by insects. Its low houses, rectangular and uniform, rose in successive tiers. Hard and severe, the village is typical of the country and of the men that inhabit it, and has about it something that is both noble and austere.

We pitched our camp at the pass; the wind was blowing, raising a fine dust that filtered into everything, irritating our throats and grating between our teeth. But there was still one smiling feature to the scene: a rhododendron in full bloom, that stood in solitude, like a message of welcome.

At Namche we were to make a two-day halt—to rest, replenish our provisions, perfect our organisation and distribute the loads. This is the home of the great Sherpas who have made themselves famous from the Karakoram to Sikkim, contributing all their strength and all their intelligence to the exploration of the great Asiatic chain. Without them the approach to the few mountains that have been conquered would never have been possible. All the Europeans who have come to these regions owe them a heavy debt, and on this particular day we felt more keenly than ever the ties between us and them.

The coolies were to be disbanded the next day. We met up again with Gyalzen and Mingma Tensing, our scouts, who had taken four days from Those to Namche; they welcomed us joyfully.

April 14th. Namche Bazar.

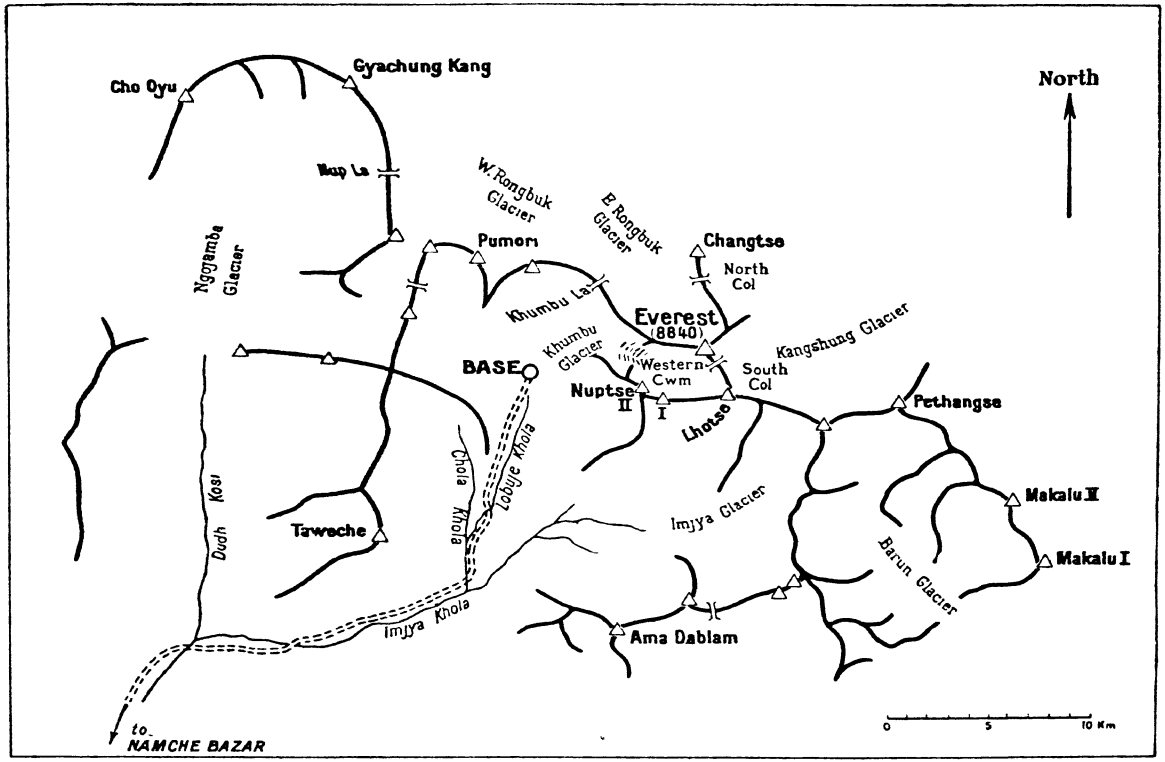
The habit of rising at five and the croaking of the crows prevented us from sleeping late. Today the coolies were going to be discharged; we prepared their pay, counting out the rupees. There were many men and the piles of coins covered several cases. It took a long time and was not without argument; here again the

assistance of our liaison officer, Indra Jung Thapa, was invaluable. The porters had had an advance of nineteen rupees at Katmandu instead of twenty-five, the contractor having set aside six rupees as a guarantee, so that there were loud murmurings among the eighty coolies squatting on the sand in two lines. The men checked their money in Nepalese, which produced a lively and noisy scene. When the whole sum was distributed, some of them gambled with their pay; others started the return journey at once.

Since we were not pressed for time, we climbed the hill overlooking the camp before breakfast, to obtain a better view of the mountains where we were going. Towards the north-east the valley of the Chola Khola, descending from the Khumbu glacier, rested against the abrupt and icy flanks of the chain from Nuptse to Lhotse. In the background was Everest, of which we could see the top of the south-eastern ridge. There was little snow and the rock strata were clearly defined. Ama Dablam, a savage monolith of 22,310 feet, completed the extraordinary character of the landscape. To the left was Taweche, a beautiful peak of 21,390 feet, flanked by enormous glaciers. None of these mountains resembled those at home; they were more audacious, more surprising, more massive than the aiguilles, and more slender than our classic summits.

Later, I was busy completing our provisions—rice, sugar, *tsampa*—the basic foods of our Sherpas—petrol, salt and flour in great quantities, for when Shipton had passed these commodities would be scarce and dear. We received numerous presents, which was touching on the part of these people who had only the strictest necessities. The Sherpas' families brought us eggs, potatoes—so difficult to grow in these high regions—and *chang*. We had also to engage porters to carry to the base camp. Having made these arrangements, we prepared our meal. Pansi had set up his kitchen in a ruined shanty where he was at least a little sheltered from the wind which was raising swirls of dust.

In the afternoon we went into the village. Narrow, muddy tracks ran amongst the stone houses with roofs of rough shingles. At the glassless windows, which were narrow openings with



The Everest Massif

wooden bars, smiling faces appeared with eyes wide open with curiosity. It was our good fortune to go into one of these houses, which was the home of our Sherpa Gyalzen's father. A dark wooden staircase led to the one big room of the house where the whole family lived, all sleeping alike on the floor, wrapped up in yak's wool blankets. Everything was smoked by the fire that burned permanently on the hearth, and the plank ceiling was black, for there was no chimney. We were received with great courtesy and were offered carpets to sit on and tea in pretty cups of Chinese porcelain. Our host was the village mayor and enjoyed a certain affluence, to judge by the number of copper vessels aligned against the wall. All these articles were finely and charmingly worked, like the samovar and the religious objects deposited before a gilded Buddha that had come from Tibet or Peiping. They had been brought over by the caravans that for centuries had been crossing the high Himalayan passes to Nepal and India. Thanks to these continuous connections with Tibet, the population of Sola Khumbu has been able to maintain its traditions. In the full season the traffic is intense.

Namche has a school and we went to look at it. A master was teaching Nepalese to some fifteen children; its alphabet is difficult, like the language itself, for nothing but Tibetan is spoken here. The little ones were seated on the ground in an inner court and they were attentive and studious; their eyes lit up at our visit but they went on spelling out their lesson in a high voice and, when we left with their teacher to go to the temple, they continued their work without any supervision.

That evening we ate yak, the precious beast that provides the natives with milk, butter, cheese, wool and leather. Its flesh reminds one of beef, but ours was certainly the ancestor of numerous generations. This first evening at Namche was spent pleasantly, for it was a coincidence that our Easter Monday was also the Nepalese New Year and it was celebrated in *chang* and with songs.

April 15th. Namche Bazar.

For me the day was not to be one of relaxation, for I had too

many preoccupations: there were still many purchases to make, there were the accounts, and the provisions had to be weighed in order to divide them into loads of 65 lbs. Questions of supplies and transport weighed on my mind that day and I wanted to take unrestricted advantage of our last day in this welcoming village.

Tensing's mother, aged 80 years, came to offer us a sack of potatoes and some *chang*; in her arms she carried a grandson who looked at us gravely through his slanting eyes.

As my permanent Sherpa I engaged Ang Norbu, who was my companion in 1947. We were much moved at meeting the widow of Ang Dawa, the mother of a very young child. Her husband had died of a sickness a short while before; he had been a brave man, intelligent and reliable; in 1939 his shoulder had been broken in an avalanche on the Chauklamba and in 1947 he had been Roch's Sherpa. His disappearance affected us like the death of a friend.

April 16th. Namche Bazar (10,830 *ft.*) *to Thyangboche* (12,300 *ft.*).

Snow had fallen during the night and the summits were all white; although the weather was fine in the morning, the sky remained veiled. Because we were soon to leave the places inhabited by men, we looked intently once more at the motley population that pressed around us in their Ghurka and Tibetan caps, with their ample woollen cloaks drawn in at the waist and their coloured cloth boots; their faces had a wild sort of beauty and their hair hung down their backs.

Gyalzen summoned the porters. They threw themselves gaily upon the loads that were pointed out to them and they set off at once; among them was a fair number of women and of quite young porters. The four Sherpanis who had formed part of the troop ever since Katmandu were still with us; the long trip had not affected their good humour and their pleasant dispositions, qualities which gave real charm to their heavy features.

We followed a pleasant track high up on the side of a hill, and enjoyed crossing these areas of vegetation before we reached the deserts of ice and stone. The dead trees gave life to some clusters of orchids; as it filtered through the bracken the light was

green and fluid; the fragrant junipers sheltered some blue iris; the silver and russet trunks of the birches were the colour of a fox's coat. Soon there would be nothing but thin grass and then no grass at all, but only hostile matter.

The approach was drawing to an end. The landscape became increasingly severe. Hanging glaciers fastened their steely blue masses to the dizzy ramparts; Ama Dablam stood like a glittering candle behind Thyangboche; Kangtega (22,350 feet) and Thamserku were the advance guard of a succession of impressive peaks, but Chomolungma (Everest), which we had sought for so long, displayed only a jagged ridge or a fragment of a wall, when for a moment the wind tore a hole in the clouds that obstinately hid the mountain from us.

There came a clearing on a spur of rock, overhanging the green depths of the valleys. A sky filled with overwhelming summits and a meadow eaten into by the snow, and this was Thyangboche, a monastery where the contemplative life could only be disturbed by a storm or by the passing shadow of an eagle.

The lamas were expecting us and in our honour had erected two blue tents decorated with symbolical fish. Walking in our socks, we paid a visit to the temple carrying sticks of incense and feeling a little out of our element. We had to spin about sixty prayer-wheels before penetrating the temple courtyard. The lama received us in his private apartment and we seated ourselves on the carpeted floor. On one wall were *tankas,* holy images painted on silk stretched between two sticks; on a bench were trumpets, fifes and drums; and the far end, in a decorated niche, was the statue of the Dalai Lama; and another wall was occupied by prayer-books and books of philosophy. They served us with tea; a young lama came in with a silver teapot decorated with dragons and we were handed porcelain cups. Then began a highly comical performance. Lambert, with a broad smile, his eyes bright with malice, watched us as our nostrils trembled at the nauseating odour of the beverage. Wyss quickly obliged and was promptly served with a second cup; others moistened their lips while trying to think of other things, but this salted Tibetan tea, covered with rancid butter, forced its vigorous presence upon them. Then, with

hypocritical skill, the fragile cups made their way to Lambert who, good-natured and imperturbable, saved our faces by drinking it all, so that the cups came back empty, to the great relief of the more scrupulous and the joy of the lama who saw his tea so much appreciated.

That evening the clouds trailed over a melancholy landscape and the snow began to fall. We had our supper and then studied the next day's route. When we entered our tents for the night, it was in a sky that was again clear that I searched for the pole star.

April 17th. Thyangboche (12,300 *ft.*) *to Pheriche* (13,600 *ft.*).

Once again the weather was cloudy and a light film of snow lay over the tents. We started off, but not for long, for soon a woman came to stop us. She wore a Tibetan cap and a red-brown dress under a striped apron of many colours, to which her green silk cuffs and golden necklace gave a charming and harmonious touch; she was the mother of one of our porters and had come to invite us to her home. In truth, we were far from suspecting he was a Sherpa: he was young, with long hair and a soft girlish face. The mother thanked us for having brought her son back, but her thanks were undeserved, for we knew nothing of the family's affairs. The boy had escaped from the paternal home and had got himself engaged as a porter in order to return there, so that we were present at the warm welcome to the prodigal son. Tensing put in a word that we might have sugared tea. We made a vain attempt to eat roast meat with chop-sticks but, casting furtive glances around to see how our comrades were succeeding, and seeing that there was none who could do so, we ate with our fingers.

We resumed our journey along the gorges of the Imya Khola, and passed through the village of Pangboche, prettily situated among the conifers and birches. Then came a stony pasture, where all the vegetation was suffering from cold and drought; the leaves of the last rhododendrons were rolled up like cigars.

We picnicked before the confluence of the Imya Khola and the Chola Khola. We were perplexed and for a long time we argued among ourselves as to which of these two valleys we ought to take

to reach the Khumbu glacier. We decided in favour of Pheriche, where we pitched our camp, but we were still uncertain of the next day's route, for Shipton's sketch did not correspond with the map. We were ready to believe that we were mistaken, that the map was inaccurate and the sketch correct. Then came Tensing, who was categorical: we were on the right road and reading Shipton's text confirmed this. The sketch was wrong. We hoped that the weather would improve so that we might be able to find our way over the moraines and choose a site for the base camp.

Pheriche was a melancholy pasture under a grey sky. Yaks with long white tails were browsing on the meagre grass in the enclosures. It was cold and we got out our woollen garments. Evening fell and lights went up in the tents. Pasang was playing the flute.

April 18th. Pheriche (13,600 *ft.*) *to Chokpula* (15,420 *ft.*).

We bought a yak for 100 rupees. Beefsteak would go up on its own feet!

At dawn a clear sky revealed the formidable mountains dominating the valley, the festooned rampart of Taweche and the sharp and vertical profile of Ama Dablam. It was a brief appearance, for the weather became dull again and clouds quickly muffled the summits. Asper, Roch, Tensing and I left on reconnaissance. At Lobuje we dumped our sacks and pushed on despite the wet mist, for it was necessary to find a site for the base camp. Beyond an endless chaos of crumbling moraines, we passed the mouth of a tributary glacier and reached a frozen lake. Laborious ups and downs followed, and we were breathing heavily, for we were already beyond 16,000 feet. Eventually we came to a combe, but pushed on still further to 17,000 feet. It was then about three in the afternoon and we were obliged to give up so as to get back before dark.

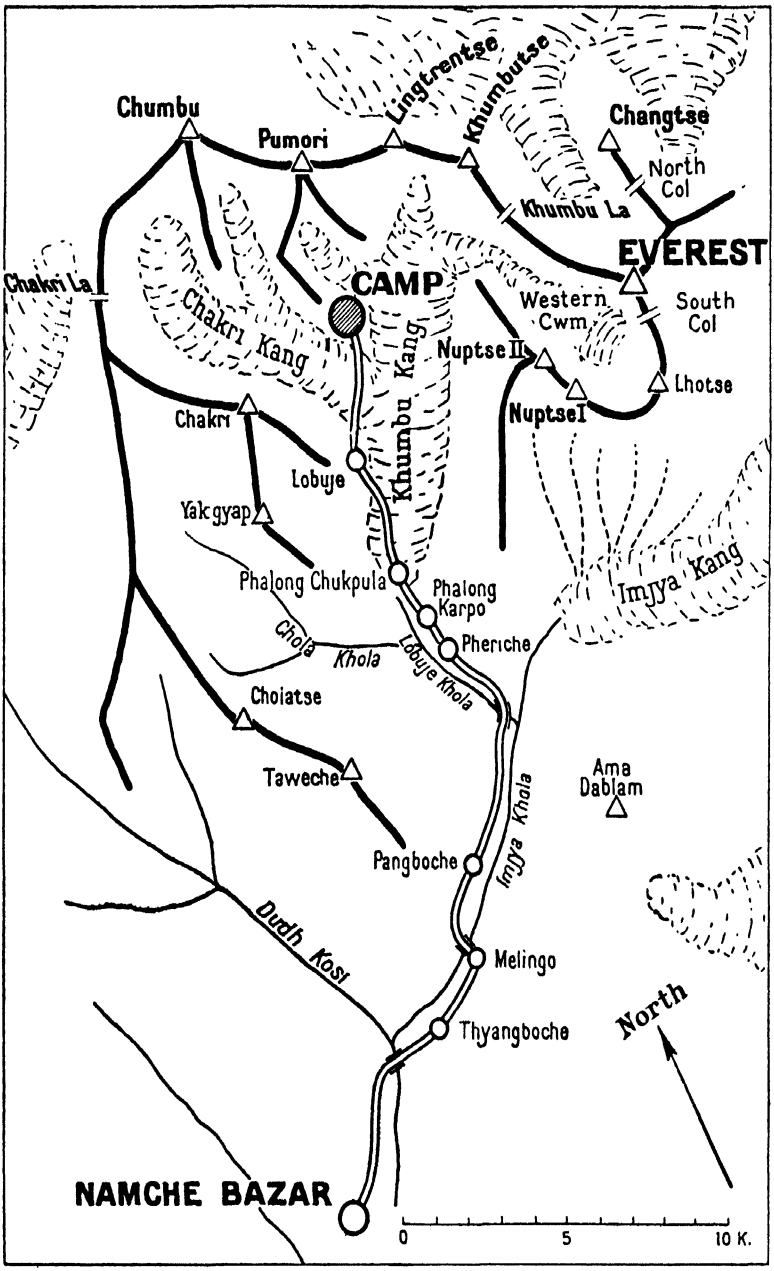
A fleeting clearance allowed us to recognise the 20,000 foot Lho La, but the icefall which ought to be seen emerging from the upper Khumbu remained invisible. We were perplexed. Snow fell and it was cold. The fresh snow made the stones slippery. The

small reascents worried us and our feet seemed heavy. Asper, who had just beaten his own altitude record, had a headache. Slipping over the soapy stones, the return journey seemed to us long and monotonous. At Lobuje we collected our sacks and ate. The mist became even thicker and snow continued to fall. Tensing stopped with his nose in the wind like an animal sniffing a trail; he thought he could detect the smell of the coolies' fire. Eventually the call of a trumpet reached us and then again; our comrades were signalling the position of the camp to help our return.

Hail was mingling with the snow and we were glad to get back. At Chokpula there was little room for many people and the porters crowded together to shelter as they could. It was a hard night for sleeping under the stars. We exchanged experiences. The scientists had found material: for Lombard, veins of tourmalin and granite injected into the gneiss masses, and for Zimmermann a rich vegetation in the black moraines—androsaces, blue poppies, edelweiss. As for ourselves, the conclusion of our exploration was as follows: we were certainly on the Khumbu glacier, but we would have to pitch our base camp much higher than we had reckoned. That would involve supplementary porterage, for it would be necessary to supply the camp with wood.

April 19th. Chokpula (15,420 *ft.*) *to Lobuje* (15,750 *ft.*).

Some of us were already suffering from headache, due to altitude, and Chevalley had distributed aspirin the previous evening. Dry coughs had rent the night and insomnia had broken the camp's nocturnal calm. At five in the morning a limpid sky accentuated the implacable summits. The white and blue peaks stood before us in all their cruel coquetry: to the north, Pumori (23,190 feet), Lingtrentse (21,730 feet) and Nuptse (25,680 feet) framed the heavy, frozen waves of the Khumbu glacier, while to the south lay the dim abyss of the Imja gorges out of which sprang the peaks of Ama Dablam and Kantega. The rising sun opened the blue veins of the mountains and their gilded blood was spilled upon the summits. The light became dazzling and dark goggles were distributed among the porters. The camp came to life and acquired colour, as the yellow, red and green sweaters moved to



The Route to the Base Camp

and fro; fires crackled and blue smoke mingled with the evaporation of the snow to weave an impalpable veil.

At nine we set out on a short stage of only one hour. Then Wyss, Chevalley and Flory went on patrol. The weather had turned bad again and at two in the afternoon they had not come back; they had followed our tracks of the previous day and had pushed on towards the upper part of the glacier. In the evening they returned tired but bringing useful information about the difficulty of progress in the moraines beyond the point we had reached, and they had, moreover, been able to see the entrance to the séracs. Lombard and Zimmermann had climbed to 16,570 feet; Lombard had found the tracks of the 'abominable snowman'—abominable because they arouse curiosity without satisfying it. The invisible *yeti* leaves his footmarks on the snow and uneasiness in the hearts of the romantically-minded, but our scientist measured the footmarks without fear: 29 cms. long, 12 cms. wide. The 51 cm. paces formed a single line.*

Camp was at Lobuje and there we organised the sequence of operations: the following day a party of porters, led by some sahibs, was to go and establish the base camp, while the others were to seek for wood down the valley; this task was to be repeated for two days, after which the base camp would be occupied and supplied with wood and the Namche coolies disbanded. We would keep the four Sherpanis to maintain a shuttle service to Namche for provisions.

The yak had ended his sad journey and we ate him with relish.

April 20th.

I left at 7.0 with Aubert, Hofstetter and Lambert, to fix the site of the base camp. We were followed by 75 laden porters. While we were moving between the moraine and the mountain one porter was hit by a falling stone. Wounded in the face, he bled profusely. I dressed the wound and sent him back to camp.

While crossing the tributary glacier we built numerous cairns. We hesitated considerably over the site of the base camp and

* 29 cms. = 11½ ins.; 12 cms. = 4¾ ins.; 51 cms. = 20 ins.

eventually decided upon a depression situated at 16,570 feet, near a frozen lake which would provide us with water. The place was stony but sheltered, and Pansi seemed to like it. The porters constructed some small walls which, roofed with our large tarpaulins, constituted the kitchen.

We set out again before noon to go and examine the route to the séracs. Knowing the difficulties encountered by Chevalley and Flory the day before, I decided to pass up the central part of the glacier which seemed to me favourable. The first moraines alongside the glacier were quite chaotic, but once we reached the central part progress turned out to be easy, being half on ice and half on stones. Our march became a promenade along a valley bordered by gigantic pinnacles of ice in the softest tints of blue and green. Some of them were more than 100 feet high and just like peaks with vertical faces and finely defined ridges. A strange light, filtered by the mist or by light snowfall, gave an unreal appearance to this singular world. From time to time fragments of ice-covered mountain wall were glimpsed through the veil.

We progressed in this fashion until 2.0 p.m. and reached a point about 300 yards from the entrance to the séracs below the Lho La. We found a perfect site for the future Camp I at 17,225 feet. It was a very sheltered basin surrounded by ice pinnacles, where the glacier was entirely covered with stones. The return journey was made by the same route and we got back to base camp in 1½ hours. My comrades laboured a little and I made the track over the soft snow; we had to cross some glacier pools and these, unfortunately, were not quite frozen so that we took a few foot-baths, though they were not serious. Our reconnaissance and the return to the base camp had taken altogether 3¾ hours. I thought we would keep about thirty porters to speed up the transport to this camp, avoid fatigue and gain time.

The Sherpas were waiting for us, but the porters had already gone down to Lobuje. The return was speedy, thanks to the track they had made in the moraines of the tributary glacier. At the Lobuje camp our exploration made everyone optimistic.

It was snowing a little. Every day, at about 1 p.m., the clouds ascended the valley and snow fell during the afternoon.

April 21st.

At rest at Lobuje. The light dawn mists rapidly dispersed. Föhn trails streaked the very clear sky and then dissolved in their turn. It was cold: at six in the morning there were 29 degrees (F.) of frost and a thin film of snow covered everything.

The landscape gradually engraved itself on our minds. The completely white snow- and ice-covered precipices of Nuptse hung above the Khumbu glacier. Its western face forms an immense arc of dark grey-black gneiss veined with clear, almost white, granite. It is an imposing mass in which one cannot distinguish a clearly defined peak, but owing its beauty to its dimensions and to the prodigious labours of nature inscribed upon it.

Southwards, under light that varied with every hour of the day, at play with the beautiful clouds which billowed up or stretched themselves out in the great spaces of the sky, rose Taweche and its satellites, wonderful and light above the depths of a valley that was drowned in the mists. It was a vision of perfect beauty, radiant, full of mystery and majesty, never ceasing to draw our eyes: an impression so strong and so gentle, thanks to the purity and the upward surge of its lines and surfaces, to the harmony of its aerial masses and to the brilliance of its carved silver, that the mountain is like a jewel set in the blue sky.

The nearest décor was a mixture of winter and spring, with patches of snow and yellow moraine. It was peopled with birds, capercailzie, vultures, and small rabbits. A lammergeier, which was hovering around, drew near, circled over our heads, settled a hundred yards away and walked about in its feathered breeches. When flying, its hooked beak could be distinguished as it turned its grey head from side to side. Lombard reported finding a duck that had died of exhaustion on the moraine, and Wyss found a dead curlew, strange migrators that had been lost on the ice on the roof of the world, at over 16,000 feet, far from the marshes where they live.

April 22nd. Lobuje (15,750 *ft.*) *to Base Camp* (16,570 *ft.*).

I was the last to leave the Lobuje camp at eight o'clock. All the loads were shared out, including a large tent belonging to the owners of the pasture, the lamas of Thyangboche.

The weather was fine and all the mountains were clear. The base camp was already looking well and activity there was intense. We paid the coolies who had accompanied us from Namche: seven days at three rupees and three rupees for the return journey. Numbering about 180, they took part in cash and part in notes and all were satisfied. They promised us their assistance on the return journey and offered to carry as far as Jaynagar. We kept about thirty of the best for carrying wood and provisions to Camp I.

April 23rd. Base Camp.

After breakfast Lombard and Zimmermann left with Wyss, determined to photograph the tracks of the *yeti* and the *yeti* in person. At Camp I there was great animation. Roch carried out topographical readings, while Lambert, Asper, Aubert and I, assisted by the Sherpas, prepared all the provisions for Camps I to IV, which we theoretically and naïvely fixed at the foot of the séracs, at the top of the séracs and at the South Col. The list of provisions reserved for each camp had been prepared by Wyss and I the day before, and we now unpacked everything and divided it into four piles, each representing a camp. A fifth pile would remain at the base. For each of the four envisaged camps, the provisions were then divided into four groups of equal importance and these were packed separately. Each represented a unit, divided into secondary units: A, B, C and D (e.g. Camp IV = 4A, 4B, 4C and 4D). A was a priority unit for, besides provisions, it comprised kitchen equipment, fuel (Camp I, wood; II, primus; III, primus and meta; IV, meta), oxygen, reserve clothing, rockets, signal detonators, radio, tents, etc. No camp could be occupied until a complete Unit B had been transported to the site. Units B, C and D—provisions—would be transported according to need.

Our thirty coolies made a second trip with Asper to Camp I, completing some of the loads with wood. They were to make a third and last trip with the rest of the loads and then they would be discharged. On April 25th, Chevalley, Aubert, Lambert and I were going to occupy Camp I in order to explore the séracs on the 26th and following days.

This organisation occupied two days but it was necessary, for

great precision would be indispensable during our operations on the mountain. As for Chevalley, he prepared his pharmaceutical 'units', exercising his wits in imagining all the troubles that might come upon us at high altitude and already battling with them in his mind.

In checking all this material we had one unpleasant surprise: the petrol we had bought at Namche would not burn! We would have to return it and find usable petrol instead.

Wyss, Lombard and Zimmermann came back very excited. They had seen, touched and photographed the *yeti's* tracks, but of the live *yeti* there was not a trace!

CHAPTER IV

The Khumbu Icefall

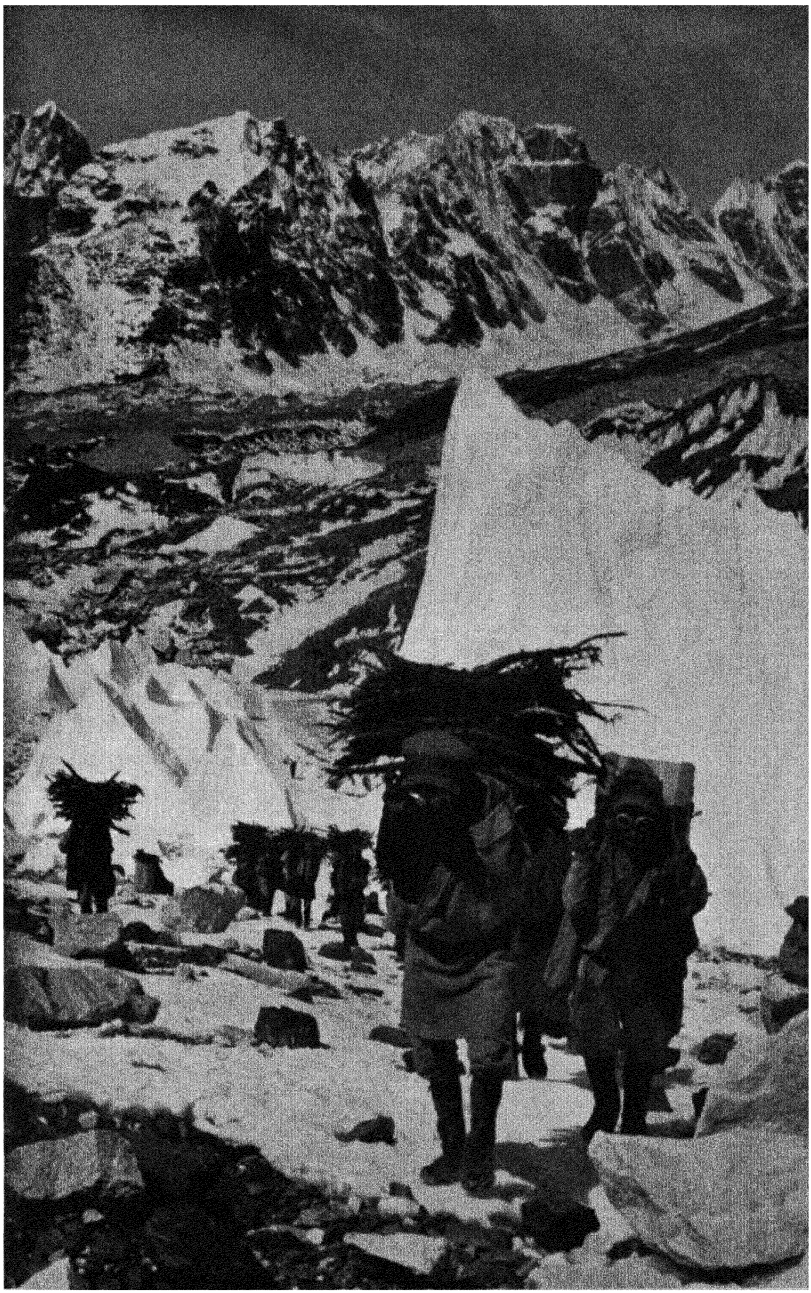
April 25th. Camp I.

The approach stage was over, and that evening, for the first time, we were face to face with our task. Our problem now lay before us, between the formidable walls of Everest, Lhotse and Nuptse. It was the first of three problems that awaited us, and were until then unsolved by man: the passage of the Khumbu séracs, the ascent of the South Col and the Summit.

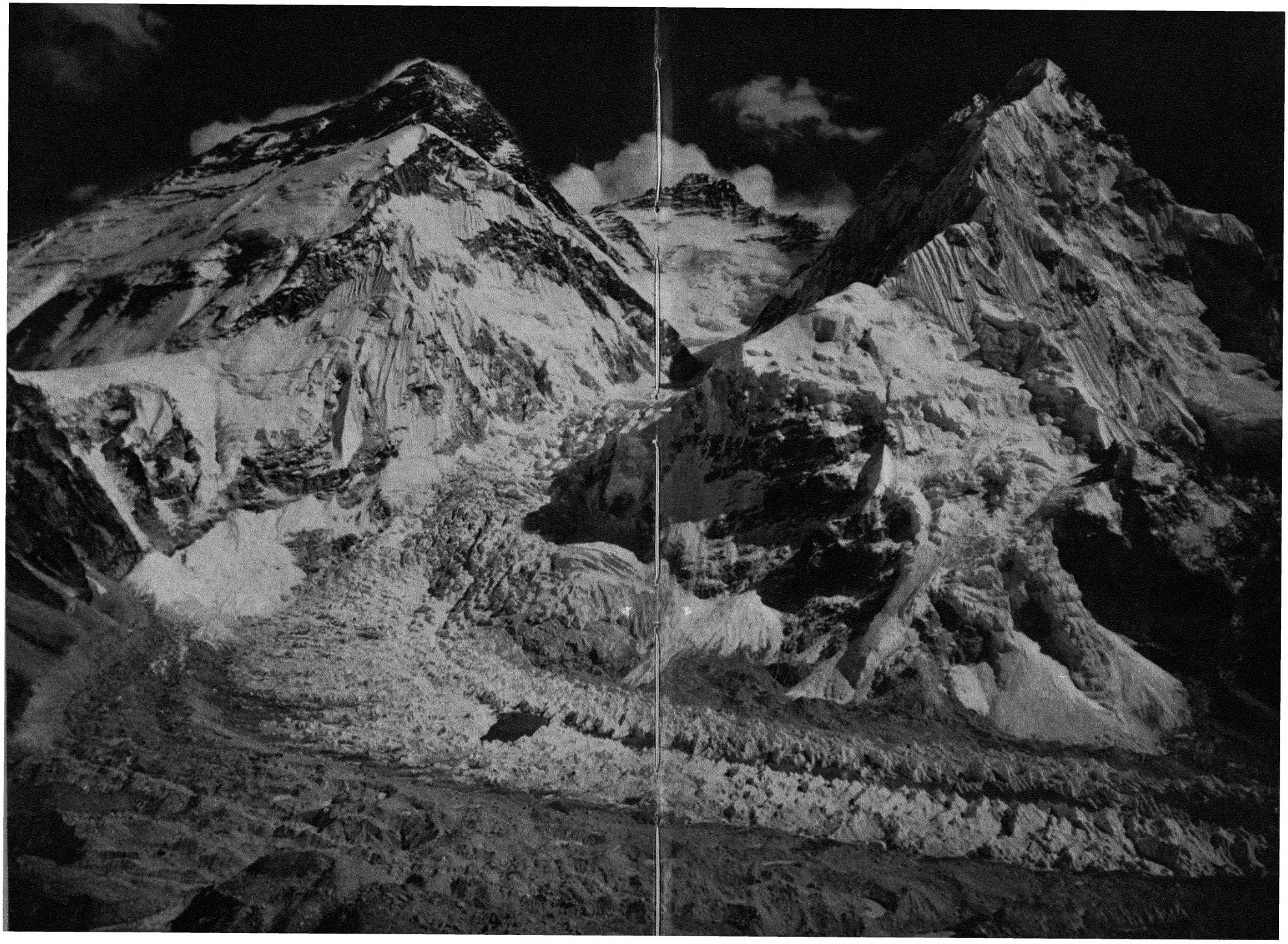
From Camp I we could see the glacier stretching downwards like a river of frozen waves; the sun had gone and the stony landscape had assumed a livid tint; needles and pinnacles of ice rose up about us like a numberless crowd of spectres. Our camp was pitched in a hollow overlooked by a barrier of ice towers that were worn away into holes. At the foot of the towers were small frozen tarns. Quite close, on a rocky eminence, our three tents were waiting, with a great pile of wood that looked out of place in such a stony world. On the glacier we had passed the porters who had brought it up, a long line of dark figures silhouetted against the whiteness of the ice, and we had exchanged friendly salaams with our hands in front of our foreheads as we watched them leave for the valley, nimble and fast in their cloth boots.

In the afternoon the sky had clouded over and snow had begun to fall heavily, damp at first, but afterwards cold and dry.

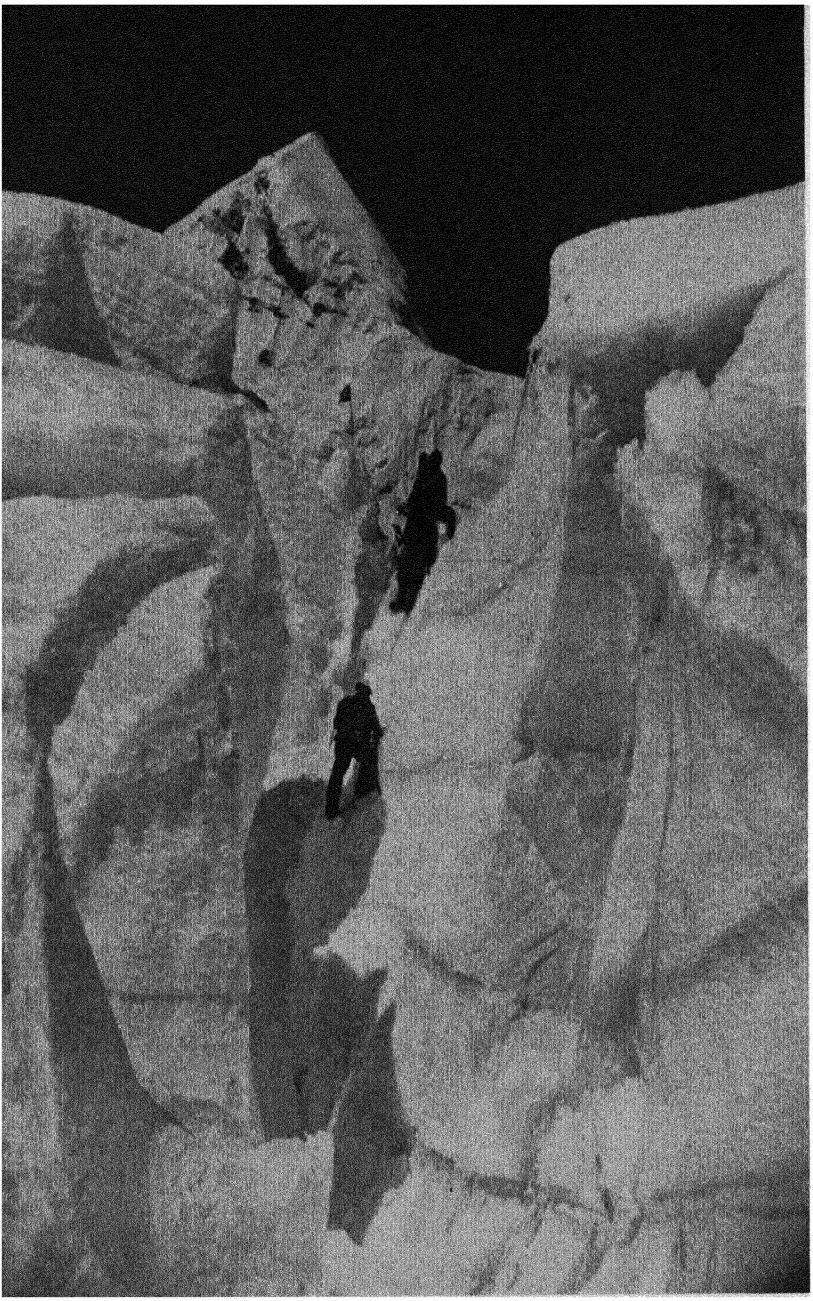
'In a few days we shall know if Shipton was right,' Chevalley said to me as he joined me in the tent; and before we went to sleep, we talked for a long time of the British expedition of 1951, of the exploration of the Khumbu basin by Shipton and his companions and of their vain attempts to break out into the Western Cwm. In Geneva we had followed them eagerly, although we did not then know that we would be the first to tread in their



5 Porters from Namche on the Khumbu Glacier between Base Camp and Camp I



6-7 *Everest—Lhotse—Nuptse, showing the Khumbu Glacier, the icefall and the Western Cwm*



8 *In the Khumbu icefall*

steps. We knew Shipton's story by heart and it was the cause of some of our day's anxieties. We did not know what defences the barrier would put up against us the next day, but we knew quite well what our predecessors had had to face.

Three climbers and two Sherpas had made a first reconnaissance and had succeeded in forcing their way through the first half of the route in execrable snow conditions. Two days later, Shipton and his six companions established a light camp in the icefall itself. Bad weather blocked them for twenty-four hours, then the sky cleared and they were able to leave. Led by one who had taken part in the first reconnaissance, they quickly overcame the first half, but the second half turned out to be a much more severe undertaking. Seeking a way through the labyrinth, lost among the enormous towering séracs, never seeing more than fifty yards ahead, and ploughing through deep fresh snow, they made very slow progress. But about the middle of the afternoon they approached the top of the icefall. Having decided to retreat at four o'clock, so as to have time to regain their camp before nightfall, they reached the last sérac. A deep fold still separated them from a ridge of ice marking the point where the glacier makes its first downward plunge. It resembled the gentle wave that immediately precedes a waterfall. In order to pass it they had to climb diagonally on unstable snow. The leading rope was half-way up when the avalanche started. Pasang and Shipton, at the two extremities of the fracture, were able to drag themselves out of the moving sheet of snow; Riddeford was more or less suspended between them, while the sheet broke up and poured downwards. All came through without harm, but they did not continue and beat a retreat to camp without having reached their objective, the Western Cwm.

'Our problem,' I said to Chevalley, 'is even more difficult than theirs. It won't be enough just to get through. The porters must be able to make the trip every day for a whole month.'

'For a month?'

'Or even a month and a half. However, sleep well!'

We tried to sleep, and as a soporific we could think of Houston's predictions. He was the first to approach the séracs in 1950; he

said they were very difficult, if not impossible, and that this was not in any case a reasonable route for attempting the ascent of Everest. Moreover, Tilman, who had photographed part of the Khumbu, had said that, since the world's best climbers had failed on the Tibetan route, it was difficult to see who could succeed on one that was even more difficult. Finally, Shipton had expressed the slightly more optimistic opinion that the séracs guarding the Western Cwm are a formidable obstacle; he was uncertain if it would be possible for a large number of porters to get by, though without them no attempt on the summit was possible. We would know the next day what our chances of crossing the barrier might be.

On the morning of the 26th the weather was clear. But the snow had covered everything—loads, tents and wood. It was our first experience of the cold. Outside, in 36 degrees (F.) of frost, the Sherpas were busy around the fire. They knew we had a hard day ahead of us and at seven o'clock they brought us a mixture of tsampa and honey. The sunlight licked the crests of Nuptse but the immense rampart which rose more than 8,000 feet above us in a terrifying network of ice flutings and ribs of rock, remained sunk in shadow. We waited for the sun before we set out, at 8.20, in a rope of four: Aubert, Chevalley, Lambert and myself.

We sank into icy snow, which was especially troublesome because our boots were damp and had frozen in the night. It was not easy to force a route through the monstrous labyrinth. We were at the point where the buttress of Everest and the ridge of Nuptse form a narrow and abrupt gorge; forced to find an outlet for its enormous mass through this narrow passage, the glacier at first breaks up, then plunges downwards in frozen cascades and blue cataracts. This chaos forced us back: blocks, cubes, crevasses, landslips, and gullies seemed in league to bar our way. I tried to the left and ran up against a vertical wall of a hundred feet; I tried to the right, but we had not gone fifty yards when a chasm prevented us from going further. Fifty yards ahead was all we could ever see. It was a procession of blind men, moving entirely at hazard. We returned in our tracks and tried elsewhere. More than once, in this dangerous labyrinth, I thought that we were

strangely like insects, less by the disproportion between our own smallness and the immensity of the mountains than by our obstinate will to get through, like ants that come back again and again when obstacles are piled up in front of them.

The séracs were like a measureless white forest. The needle-sharp points rose up cruelly, as fragile as Gothic architecture. We searched for our route under the frozen arches, leaving a deep furrow in the snow and cutting at the fragile ice. To advance, make height and gain ground, was our sole, obsessing idea. For a long time the sun made us forget the morning's cold. This alternation of icy cold and heavy heat is one of the mysteries of the Himalayan climate. At one moment the soft snow formed clogs under our crampons and then, when we passed into the shadow of a sérac, it was icy powder snow again. We were weary, but we still rose, still believing that we would soon discover an illusory staircase beyond which we imagined an easy level path that would take us to the Western Cwm with our hands in our pockets. But it was a succession of illusions, hopes and disappointments.

Yet our will to escape was so strong that, climbing constantly, we let the hours pass, despite the clouds that had invaded the sky and the question that constantly recurred to us, of how, even if we got through ourselves, we could send the porters every day into such a hell.

It was two in the afternoon. We had done enough for the day. The altimeter reading was 18,400 feet. We had gained 1,150 feet in height in six hours. The heat, the glare and the step-cutting had worn us out. We would return tomorrow.

While descending, we marked the track wherever there was a a chance of making a mistake; with our axes we improved certain passages, and we cut steps where, to gain time on the way up, we had got by with the help of our crampons.

Despite our uncertainty of overcoming this obstacle and our fear of being stopped, perhaps completely, by this incredible cataract, we felt more light-hearted than we had ever been hitherto. Once again activity had quietened us. At four o'clock we were back at camp, exhausted. We recounted our day to those who had come up from the base camp, curious to know how far we had

got; they were ready to relieve us if we wished it. But we did not wish it—not yet. We wanted to make one further attempt the next day, in the continuing hope of being the first to break into the Western Cwm, which to us was Paradise, so easily is man, the incorrigible optimist, carried away by the belief that he will find peace when he attains the goal he has set himself today.

Around the camp fire we followed in our minds the winding track we had pursued during the day, pondering upon what we would find the next day beyond the green flag we had planted at our last step. Around us the Sherpas came and went; their faces were a little enigmatic and moon-like, their teeth flashing; we were touched by their kindness and captivated by their good humour. I do not think it is possible for anyone to be more obliging and less servile. In a way they seemed to be able to divine our wishes and needs, and to anticipate them. There was no need of many words, for thay have something of the wonderful intuition of children. But they often find words that go straight to the heart; one day, having made some request of me, Tensing, their sirdar, had added: 'I ask this of you because you are the father of the Sherpas.' How could one refuse anything after that?

Evening closed in upon the camp; the frost and the silence resumed their sway.

April 27th.

The frost had yielded a little. Would the spring weather now settle in? Before we left, I wrote a note for the party which would climb up that day from the base camp, so that they would relieve us the next day: 'Flory, Hofsetter, Roch, Asper party. As soon as possible, come up to meet us and improve the track. Tomorrow you will climb to Camp II and continue the reconnaissance if we have not found a way out today. Dittert.'

At 7.40 we left. In a little more than two hours we reached the green flag, the end of the previous day's labours; then it had taken six exhausting hours, now it was a walk. It certainly seems that the mountains always gather their whole strength against the first to attack them; when one man has got by, their defences slacken and those who follow pass without resistance. It was natural,

for it was no longer necessary to plough through the snow and seek a way out; but on a rock face it is just the same and that is much less natural. It is as if it is enough for a man to force a way only once and the spell is broken.

But scarcely were we on virgin ground than the battle began again; it was to last the whole day. Like damned souls seeking escape, we passed along the feet of tottering towers of ice and over fallen blocks that formed the bridges over deep crevasses. We moved forward in silence, as if we feared that by speaking we would provoke the powers that were waiting to crush us or to swallow us up. The deep snow clogged our progress. Finally, we reached an abrupt wall of ice. Once again we imagined that as soon as this wall was surmounted, everything would be better. Wearied by my efforts of the day before, I got Aubert, my old climbing comrade, to relieve me. But he turned round at once: 'There's another one beyond!' At first the obstacle seemed impossible. 'Look over there to the left,' Lambert said to me. 'That slab of ice, that ought to be all right.' In fact, a tapering slab of ice that had broken away from the wall rose diagonally, overhanging an enormous crevasse. As carefully as an acrobat, I set out on this alarming crossing.

We had been making even slower progress than the day before, but we felt that the way out was near; the glacier sweep was broadening out and the slope was less steep. The altimeter reading was 19,300 feet. It was two o'clock; we had still another hour in which to try and cross a monstrous crevasse of livid, greenish transparency. I was seized with fury. I sent Aubert off to the left, which appeared to me vulnerable where a ramp seemed to debouch upon a tunnel. For more than an hour we struggled to reach the entrance of the tunnel. Would it lead us out into the fields of the blessed? We were not to know, for the hour fixed for the return was long past. During the gymnastics, Lambert had broken a crampon, which did not put him in a good humour, for he was the most careful of us all with his equipment and we had laughed at him so often for the meticulous and ceaseless care he gave it. It was 3.15 and our height was 18,700 feet. We were beaten.

On the return we marked the site for Camp II and we soon found the comrades who had climbed up to meet us. The expedition's leader, Dr. Wyss, was not very enthusiastic about our route. Roch was filming furiously.

Together we regained Camp I. This two-day struggle had worn us out and the Sherpas saw it. How friendly and kind they were as they unroped us, untied our crampons and boots, and brought us tea!

Before going to lie down in our tents we talked over the last two days and made our decisions for the next. All of us had had moments of intense fatigue, depression and sudden exhaustion; and then our powers had returned as suddenly as they had gone. It was doubtless a result of altitude and slow acclimatisation. Throughout the day, despite the intense and heavy heat, nothing had moved; there were no slips and no collapses among the séracs. Nevertheless, those fragile structures made us anxious.

We made some calculations. Two and a half tons of loads to send into the Cwm. That represented 125 porter journeys with 45 lbs. each! The risks were greater than the loads.

Despite our weariness, we made our plans. The next day, Roch, Asper, Flory and Hofstetter were to go up and instal Camp II. All the available Sherpas would begin to transport the units from I to II. Between 900 and 1,100 lbs. are required to equip a camp with food, fuel and alpine equipment. The four Europeans would stay there with two Sherpas and the rest would come down again to resume the transportation the following day.

Together we settled the tasks of the four comrades who were relieving us: to find a way out of the séracs, to break out into the Cwm, to fix the site of Camp III, to send out a light reconnaissance further if possible, and to make contact with the base camp by radio or Sherpa to tell us what arrangements to make for equipping Camp III.

At ten in the morning we heard the Sherpas moving about among the tents and stirring the wood fire. I, too, went out to spend a few moments with those who were going to take their turn in the struggle. The weather was very fine and not too cold. A few clouds passed across the sky, coming from the north-west;

it was a good sign. The loads were ready and the Sherpas were being organised into three ropes of four men each, led by Tensing, Ajiba and Dawa Thondup, hardened veterans who had won their 'Tiger' rank by carrying to above 8,000 metres (26,250 feet) with British expeditions. Their loads formed the first unit for Camp II. Their green, yellow, red and blue anoraks alternately vanished and reappeared among the pointed, turquoise-tinted pinnacles of ice.

Silence returned. In the sunlight, relaxed, quiet and already a little rested, we sauntered about and attended to odd jobs. Lambert was very busy repairing his broken crampons, while we prepared loads and observed that those who had gone up had forgotten their kitchen equipment and their Iselin shovels. "They will go by the next post!" we said.

For two long hours we remained seated before a tent with Chevalley, watching the sun's shadow moving along the flutings of Nuptse, and working out in our minds some hazardous routes upon this terrifying rampart. Would the day come when new generations would seek new routes in mountains which for us were the very symbol of the inaccessible and impossible?

I asked Chevalley what he thought of our acclimatisation to altitude. 'We are not high enough yet,' he replied. 'Nevertheless, several symptoms prove that the process has begun. Vertigo, moments of muscular weakness, breathlessness after effort, insomnia and headaches certainly show that we are no longer at sea-level!' I asked about appetite. 'We will lose that higher up,' he went on. 'It was above 23,000 feet that Tilman said he would have preferred only gluttons among his men, because gluttony consists in eating when one has no hunger and the main problem of altitude would thus be solved."

'Do we all react in the same way?'

'No, some are troubled more than others. The symptom which seems most disquieting to me is breathlessness at night or during rest. But those who were already suffering from this at Namche Bazar are complaining less about it now."

Our conversation was interrupted by a large avalanche to the left of the séracs. At one o'clock we made radio contact with

Camp II. The news spluttered in the receiver. They had arrived; all had gone well. The ascent had taken three and a half hours. The camp was being established.

We asked if they had seen the avalanche. 'No, we have seen nothing,' was the reply. 'But a sérac has just collapsed some fifty yards from the camp.'

An hour later the Sherpas arrived, a happy troop, fresh and in fine fettle. Each of them had carried up his 45 lbs. in three and a half hours. We had taken seven to open the route.

There were more things to repair. There was always something broken, gaiters that had been torn by crampons and trousers that were showing rents. Lambert became our tailor and took Tensing's anorak from him; these two seemed to understand each other without the need to speak.

At four o'clock I left with Chevalley to visit Wyss at the base camp and discuss arrangements for assuring the equipment of Camp II as soon as it existed. It was a fine and peaceful descent at the end of an afternoon which was a little grey from a veil of light clouds. Shadow and light played at defining and then effacing the uncertain outlines of the high peaks, so high that they seemed to float in the sky. Our imaginations accustomed themselves only slowly to this Himalayan scale, of which neither words nor pictures can give the measure. In the slanting sunlight the pinnacles of ice threw out gleams like the flashing of a lighthouse. At sunset, great black clouds blocked the horizon.

The base camp had become organised during our absence and, compared with the wilderness of séracs and the still precarious installations of Camp I, it seemed like a return to civilisation. The piled-up loads of provisions and equipment were impressive. The vegetation had not yet come to life, but a little brown moss and yellowish grass that had hardly emerged from a long hibernation sufficed to rest our eyes.

Base Camp was too low and one of the reasons for our visit was to propose to Dr. Wyss that the real base be transferred to the site of Camp I. The Khumbu séracs, which were not yet defeated, would put up a very stiff resistance to the provisioning of the high-altitude camps. There was little probability of abolishing Camp II

and two stages would be required for passing from Camp I into the Western Cwm. It would be easier to supervise the difficult organisation of transport from Camp I. Wyss had already thought so.

The Khumbu Glacier was the centre of all our conversations. It was an agonising weight on all our anticipations and plans. To expose the porters to the risks of that passage day after day was to take a heavy responsibility and, hearing the coolies singing in the tents nearby, we felt that our responsibility was increased by the fact that those who had put their confidence in us retained something of the curious naïve simplicity of children. They sang, they played and they went where we told them to go. But the stakes had been placed, the struggle had begun and the risks accepted both for ourselves and the others.

'If you are not prepared to give a little credit to luck and chance,' Chevalley concluded, 'it would be better not to come to the Himalaya at all.'

A long evening followed in the large mess tent which was to make the journey to Camp I the next day. Interrupted often by the laughter of the coolies in the kitchen nearby, we read again a few pages of the history of our mountain and we came to the story of the third attempt of 1922. Somervell, Crawford and Mallory, accompanied by fourteen porters, were engaged on the slopes of the North Col. The ice was covered with snow that was adhering well; the worst passages had been passed and nothing had moved.

'The scene was peculiarly bright and windless,' Mallory wrote, 'and as we rarely spoke nothing was to be heard but the laboured panting of our lungs. This stillness was suddenly disturbed. We were startled by an ominous sound, sharp, arresting, violent, and yet somehow soft like an explosion of untamped gunpowder.'

Though he had never heard this sound before, Mallory knew instinctively what it meant. He saw the surface ripple and break. Then he began to move slowly downwards, carried away helplessly by the moving surface. A wave of snow passed over him and buried him. When the avalanche slowed down and halted, his arms were free and his legs near to the surface. He was soon on his feet on the motionless snow. Somervell and Crawford and the

porter who had been behind him freed themselves almost at once. Four other porters were safe and sound about 150 feet lower down. The other two ropes, one of four and the other of five men, had been swept over a precipice of ice forty to sixty-five feet deep and hurled into the crevasse at its foot. One of the Sherpas was freed and still alive; another was found head downwards but still breathing, although he had been buried for forty minutes. Seven men perished. This catastrophe, the biggest until then of all Himalayan catastrophes, put an end to the third attempt on Everest.

It was a difficult matter of conscience for a man like Mallory. He was not one to shirk his responsibilities. The next day—which gives great strength to the evidence—he wrote to G. W. Young: 'I am quite knocked out by this accident. Seven of these brave men killed, and they were ignorant of mountain dangers, like children entrusted to our care. And I'm to blame.'

Such was our evening at the base camp. We went out for a moment before going to sleep and watched the coolies who were still laughing and pushing one another about, slender little men with yellow faces, happy to be alive.

The sky was filled with stars. The crescent of the rising moon cast a wan light on the icy armour of Nuptse, producing a scene from another world where reality comes close to a dream.

The next day we were awakened late by the chatter of the coolies and Sherpas, inexhaustible like bird-song in a forest at daybreak. On the snow-free moraine the Sherpanis were knitting in the sunlight; the fires were blazing in the kitchen ingeniously set up by Pansi. But we were restless, with our thoughts up beyond Camp II, and impatient to know where the spearhead party was. Already in the Western Cwm? Or halted by fatigue or by some unknown obstacle which the night's imagination represented as uncrossable —a wall or crevasse that defied us to cross? Our imaginations, held in check by day, took a fine revenge in our dreams.

To reinforce the porters, the two Sherpas who had remained below to help Pansi in his kitchen were equipped for altitude. We had to use every possible shoulder and every pair of legs; we had none too many and perhaps not enough. They soon left, laden

with the large mess tent. The headquarters was to be nearer the operations.

Headquarters! Operations!—and I, who had always smiled at this military language when I found it in stories of the Himalaya, was using it too! Whether I wished it or not, the concept of a campaign was forced upon me more strongly every day. However, my previous Himalayan experiences had made me a convinced adept of light expeditions. Like Tilman and Shipton, I thought it necessary to sacrifice weight for speed, but here one was dimly aware from the start that the problem was different. One would not dream of pushing an assault party forward recklessly, carrying eight or ten days' provisions, taking with them a few Sherpas and transporting their camping equipment a little higher every day. The distances are too great, the defences too powerful. It is necessary to occupy the conquered terrain, that each camp established shall be sufficiently provided with equipment and food to become in some degree another base camp. That involves, for all the lower camps, problems of transport which can only be solved by numerous parties the personal needs of which considerably increase the difficulty they have to overcome, that of weight. To put a party of four men in fighting condition above 26,000 feet requires three hundred men at the start in Katmandu. More or less the proportions of war.

I was thinking of this aspect of the Everest problem while following the track at a fast pace, for it was indeed becoming a track, running along the moraine like a slender pencil line. In fact, an expedition like ours, I told myself, resembles a pyramid: the higher one wants to go, the stronger the foundation one has to provide. The important and difficult thing to determine is the exact relation between height and the size of the foundation. For a pyramid it is an aesthetic question, for Everest it is a question of results. An expedition can prove abortive because it is too heavy and therefore too slow, or because it is too light and forced thereby to risk men without provocation beyond the limits of altitude—and exhaustion—at which they can live, without being properly supported by those who work at lower levels.

I acquainted Chevalley with some of my reflections and,

without halting, he concluded: 'In fact, the mountains themselves give us a good example of what you are saying. Compare the foundations of Everest with those of the Salève at Geneva!'

At about five o'clock we came upon Aubert and Lambert at Camp I. Lambert was pleased at having repaired his crampons. They both looked rested. 'Any news from above?' we asked.

'Nothing yet. They were seen this morning at ten. They had had to abandon the tunnel and were climbing up to the left of the séracs. They were seen to return to camp at three this afternoon. The Sherpas are resting. They took four hours, there and back, to carry their twenty kilo loads to Camp II. This morning they left earlier than yesterday; they did not want to be there in the heat. So they did not hang about. What lungs they have!'

In the evening we succeeded in establishing radio contact with those above. But the reception was very poor. The words: 'Reached a huge crevasse, hemp ropes, to construct a bridge, lengths of wood' came through ceaselessly.

The sky, which had been so clear during the day and of gentian blue, was veiled as the afternoon drew to a close. We began to grow used to this sudden change. In the Alps it would be a sign of a serious change in the weather, but here it seems to be a simple phenomenon of condensation which quickly ceased to trouble us.

April 30th.

We were awakened early by the customary sound of the kitchen bellows. Suddenly, a roar as of thunder swept down upon the camp. I leapt from my sleeping-bag and my heart stopped beating. An avalanche! I heard a strangled voice shout: 'It's coming down on us!' Then silence returned and there remained only a cloud of snow-dust, falling upon the tent-cloth. I went out. Swirls of powder-snow were still blowing about, filling the valley. Later in the day we were able with glasses to discover the fracture in the snow almost at the top of the Nuptse precipice, more than 6,000 feet above us.

Once again the Sherpas left for Camp II at an early hour—at 6.30—but without cutting their breakfast short, for it was a respected and prolonged ritual. The four to eight inches of snow

that had fallen in the night scarcely slackened their pace. I gave them a message for the men above: 'Yesterday's transmission was badly understood. Send precise news, say exactly what you want.'

Aubert and Lambert prepared to ascend to Camp II in order to relieve Roch and Asper, who were to come down in the evening, as we had learned from a note just brought down by Tensing: 'Reached the entrance to the Cwm yesterday. Enormous crevasse. Succeeded in crossing it. A rope bridge will be needed. Prepare the ropes and wooden anchorages. Asper has toothache. My rib is giving me pain. Both of us will descend this evening. Send a relief party. Roch.'

All the summits were smoking: the snow that had fallen in the night was flying off in great transparent plumes. Good weather, good news. There was plenty to do. Camp II was now provided with food and fuel for twenty days and four men. Next, we had to prepare the components of the first units for Camp III. Contrary to what I had hoped and anticipated, Camp II would have to remain; it was impossible to consider making the carry from I to III in a single stage, for it would be too long and, moreover, the hours during which we could send porters among the séracs were too few. Until ten in the morning the risks were small. I had decided, on the day when I was entrusted with the technical control of the expedition, not to forget that responsibility for human life had been given me too. I had sworn to myself never to expose them when I could avoid doing so. It was a question of degree and it was not an easy one to decide. But that day I decided to abandon any gain in time which might result from abolishing Camp II, because that would involve additional risks, and the passage of the séracs would continue in two stages.

Chevalley suddenly came down the slopes above the camp and called out to me: 'They are coming down!'

'Where have you come from?'

'It really has been done. I climbed up to photograph the clouds around Taweche. I watched Roch, Asper, and I think, Sarki and Ajiba on the glacier. They are not far off. It was odd to follow them with glasses; they appeared all of a sudden, then vanished behind a sérac, just as if they were playing hide-and-seek.'

A quarter of an hour later, in fact, all four of them arrived.

'Well? Is everything all right?'

'Let's have a drink first. Yes, it's all right.'

I watched them eat and drink. Their faces were tanned and furrowed by the sun; they seemed tired, but above it all they had a happy air. While they ate—which did not take long—we could get only broken sentences out of them, interrupted by bursts of laughter and conspiratorial glances with the Sherpas, who seemed happy too.

'The Cwm is immense. All crevassed. Pass the tea.'

'We saw the South Col. Unpleasant!'

'It gives you a pain in the neck to look at it—it's so high.'

'Powder snow on the ice from top to bottom.'

'Well over three thousand feet. Haven't you got any more to drink?'

'You should have seen Flory pushing his way through the snow. He liked making tracks!'

'And Asper like a spider hanging in the crevasse!'

'Did he fall into it?'

'Oh, no! Just to get up the other side. We'll tell you in a minute. Let's have a drink.'

Evening had fallen. The shadows invaded the camp and the frost came down from the summits with the breeze that blew valley-wards every night, as in the Alps. We got into our wadded suits and went into the mess tent. Then Asper and Roch told us their story, quietly and lengthily:

'The day before yesterday, the ascent was quick. We were at Camp II by midday.'

'Twelve-ten,' Asper corrected, he being the expedition's chronometer.

'You and your minutes! It was a fine thing to see the Sherpa parties go by. They have an extraordinary way of jumping from one block to another with their twenty kilos.'

'Twenty-five!'

'You're a terror! As for me, I had ten kilos six hundred and fifty grams and was puffing as much as they were. However, I pushed ahead from time to time in order to wait and film them.

Tensing had to get them to take care when crossing the snow bridges. They often go on to them two at a time and they have to be told to keep the rope stretched; they always hold the loops in their hands. However, everything passed off well. We have put up the tents about a hundred and fifty feet above the spot you marked, on top of an enormous cube of snow about eighty feet across, a sort of sloping platform surrounded by crevasses, a real stronghold with moats. The Sherpas helped us to put the tents up and to level the slope. Then they went off, except for Ajiba and Sarki.

'In the afternoon we discussed the next day's itinerary. Your tunnel didn't seem much good to me. I tended instinctively to climb further to the left, seeking the right bank. It was perhaps quite as dangerous, but I didn't much like the idea of finding myself in the middle of that chaos. It's like with rivers, I prefer to be beside the bank! However, about four o'clock an enormous sérac broke off at its base about fifty yards away and went off down the slope, smashing itself to bits.'

'Did you sleep well?'

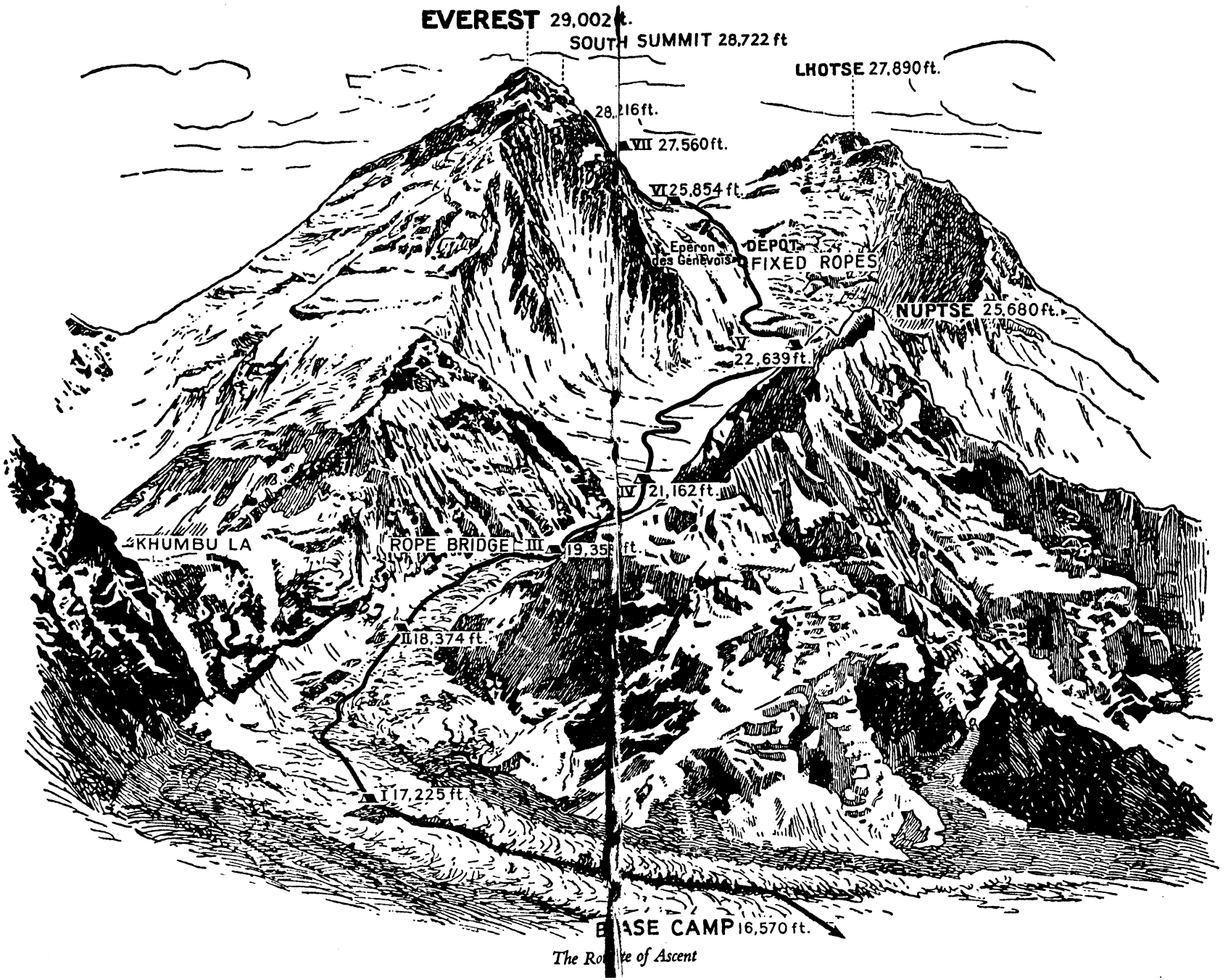
'Yes, a little nervously! You feel that you're in shelter, but you're anxious all the same! Yesterday morning it was terribly cold. Flory was worried about his feet.'

'So was I,' Asper broke in. 'But we started out early. At twenty minutes to eight we had gone quite a distance.'

'The sight of the falling sérac settled it.' Roch went on. 'We abandoned your route to the right and we started up a good couloir rising to the left. Flory pushed on in front, in good form. We quite quickly reached a large accumulation cone of avalanches and séracs that had fallen from the western shoulder of Everest, which stands about five thousand feet above the glacier. The crevasses constantly draw you towards this precipice. The stuff that falls down fills them up quite a bit. So it's not too bad.'

'It would be a question of always getting past before the sun gets to work up above.'

'That's right. So we've called it "Suicide Passage". About half-past eleven we reached the top of the steep slope and the altimeter—which you cannot quite trust—registered 19,000 feet.



The Route of Ascent

The landscape had changed; now we could see the north face of Nuptse and from it were falling the fastest avalanches I have ever seen. We guessed the depth of the upper Khumbu Glacier by the distance of the streaks of the rock strata which flank Lhotse on the right. In front of us was an area less steep but very crevassed. At first we manoeuvred among the holes and gained ground, thanks to a lucky series of bridges. But things got worse a little higher up and the last crevasse crossed the whole combe from the foot of Everest to the foot of Nuptse. There was certainly a way through on the extreme left, at the base of the precipice, but overhung for at least three hundred feet by a series of leaning towers of Pisa, only more so. All four of us looked at one another meaningly, and we were a little disheartened. So we had something to eat. After which we began again to walk along beside the crevasse, looking down into it carefully from time to time in the hope of finding a stairway.

'Suddenly Flory, who was in front, said: "That might be all right!" He pointed out a bulge of snow about fifty feet down, from which one might climb up the wall by cutting steps up to another block and from there to the other lip of the crevasse. Asper, our acrobat, proposed to try. We tied him to a double rope and we let him gently down to the bulge; he crossed on his toes, but the wall in front of him overhung, a fact that was invisible to us above. Poor Asper, we had sent him down for nothing. It would have taken hours of cutting. So we pulled him up and began walking again. We must have looked like the Jews on the shore of the Red Sea!

'We tried again, but in vain, on a slab of ice. It ended in a sloping knife-edge and plunged into an abyss full of fallen blocks. We gradually came to believe that the slope under the towers of Pisa offered the only way through and we went back there, having almost decided to try. But after twenty yards we stopped. Definitely, we'd be mad to try that way through. And it was already late. What would we find on the other side? Weariness, altitude, prudence—together they had the last word. After a last glance at the coveted and well-defended Cwm we made off. "Till tomorrow," we said. In an hour we were back at our tents. What a night! You ask Asper!'

'I didn't close an eye,' said Asper. 'That roof of ice above me

terrified me. I saw that crevasse again and those two bulges, and I thought that I succeeded in gaining a foothold on the upper side. By swinging pendulum fashion, I would be able to get out. Provided the Sherpas could bring the wood we asked for by radio. Sometimes, while dozing, I saw myself on the other side.'

'We did not understand your radio message. We only heard the words "bits of wood". We thought you wanted to roast a sheep on a spit. So we sent you those ladder rungs.'

'They came up just in time,' Roch continued. 'We were just starting off when the porters arrived. With Ajiba and Sarki laden with wood and ropes we took an hour and a half to reach our nightmare crevasse. While we were on the way up we had seen a sérac fall on our right; it collapsed upon another and sent it off into space. On the edge of the crevasse we planted an axe to secure the double rope. Come on, Asper, you tell the story.'

'It wasn't really a complicated business. I held on to the double rope and descended on the tied one. When I reached the level of the bulge, I drew myself up to the wall and then pushed off with all my strength. I touched the bulge, but swung away again to my starting point rather violently. I tried again. I thought I'd succeeded but I swung back!'

'What depth were you at?'

'About twenty feet. The crevasse must have been about four yards wide or more at that point.'

'You began again?'

'No. Those swings back against the wall were too painful. It's a good way to make meat tender! And at 19,000 feet this kind of gymnastics is not so good as in the Alps. Your heart beats like a drum. And you're out of breath, like when you dive too deeply and are afraid of not reaching the surface!

'From above, we suggested another technique,' added Roch. 'About sixty feet down we could see a dim bridge of blocks from which a sort of ice-chimney began which might perhaps enable him to reach the same place. We shifted the double rope and let him down very low. He seemed very small down there. That immense crack was terrifying, with its blue ice, its jammed blocks and the reflections that played in the shadows.'

'As soon as I reached the opposite wall across the blocks,' Asper resumed, 'I began to climb up again. To start with, everything went well. The ice was pitted and gave good holds. Then it smoothed out and I turned left where there were stones embedded in the ice.'

'We were in the boxes,' said Roch, 'or rather in the pigeon-loft! We looked straight down on it all! He reached the bulge, stuck his axe into it and then was on top of it.'

Asper then continued his story. 'From there a crack allowed me to escape and to come out on the other side of the crevasse. But you can take it from me that the first man to sit down in the Western Cwm was gasping. I was worn out. It took at least five minutes for my heart to calm down enough for me to breathe deeply. My legs and arms were like jelly. I wouldn't have had the strength to wipe my nose.'

'He looked just as if he wanted to bivouac all by himself in the Western Cwm!'

'I pushed my axe in as far as the blade and made the double rope and the climbing rope fast. On the other side they had anchored them. Flory crossed first *à la Tyrolienne* and Ajiba followed. It was the first time he had tried this kind of exercise. He hesitated a moment, then he commended his soul to the god of the mountains and came across. Didn't you, Ajiba?'

The Sherpa, one of the best 'tigers' in Nepal, who had been following the whole conversation, motionless and silent, grinned broadly, though his face lost none of its enigmatic immobility.

'How many times have you come to Everest so far, Ajiba?'

'This is the fifth time.'

'How old were you the first time?'

'Twenty-two years. That was in 1933, with the sahibs Smythe, Shipton and Harris, who found Irvine's axe.'

I interrupted this dialogue in bad English, being too curious to know how thay had set up their bridge.

'On both sides, two yards from the edge, we dug deep trenches to reach a layer of hard snow and bury the wooden crosses we had made with the ladder rungs, to which we fastened the ropes. At the bottom of each trench, we dug four T-shaped channels, the

vertical stroke in the direction of the crevasse, to receive the hempen rope which was passed four times from one side to the other. In the horizontal stroke of the T we buried the wooden crosses where the loops began. After that we filled the snow in on top and soaked it with all the liquid available. That would make it hold like cement. The running ropes had been held as taut in their loops as a guy-rope. With a balancing pole, you could cross upright like in a circus.'

'I hope the crevasse doesn't open!'

'Oh yes! We'll have to watch that closely. But we can't prevent the Khumbu from moving.'

'Is it difficult to get across?'

'No, it's all right. You have to let one leg hang down either side to maintain your balance and you pull. There is scarcely any rise. We shall have to cut a good step for landing. On the return, we took twenty minutes to get six of us across and to transport the sacks which were attached to a slip-ring.'

'Did you climb up any further?'

'We tried to reach the middle of the Cwm in order to see the South Col.'

'Did you see it?'

'Yes. We were even quite excited at the thought that we were the first to see it from that side of the séracs.'

'What does it look like?'

'The South Col?'

'Everything.'

'Disappointing. We didn't finish our inspection. The Cwm is long. The air is so clear that it is difficult to judge distances. It must be more than three kilometres to the foot of the slopes of the Col. And right to the end it is split by crevasses which will make us lose hours in zigzagging from side to side!'

'And the Col?'

'Under the Col itself, it appears to be very steep. There are rock slopes. Under one of those spurs there had been a snow slide, and the ice was showing through everywhere. To the right, below Lhotse, the glacier is less steep, but it can only be seen face on and it's possible we're mistaken.'

All our thoughts were already fixed upon new objectives. The first of the three problems was already solved and was leaving the field of our preoccupations. What a restless animal is man; he gives all his energy to attain an end, and it is the centre of all his thoughts; he is obsessed by it, but when he has reached it, he forgets it and settles upon another. For days we had thought only of the Khumbu, to the point of forgetting Everest itself, and now we were beginning already to think only of the South Col.

Nevertheless, this was to be one of the happiest evenings of the expedition, perhaps the happiest of all. We all of us felt relaxed—liberated. With the Khumbu conquered, we were certain, not of getting to the top, but of climbing high. Without admitting it—because mountaineers are superstitious creatures—we had feared until that evening that we would not get through. And without a doubt more than one of us had dreamed of a gloomy return and a bleak welcome back and long faces when we disembarked from the plane. None of us, I believe, had gone there out of vanity, for glory's sake; but all the same, to return to Geneva without overcoming the séracs would have vexed us all!

Meanwhile, though our imaginations, freed for the space of an evening, were already haunting the slopes of the Col and the high crests, we well knew that the next day and the day after, and through all the days until we either succeeded or failed in our endeavour, the Khumbu séracs would remain suspended like a silent threat over all who had, day after day, to follow that terrifying route which had just been opened through the most extraordinary amphitheatre of ice in the whole world.

The next day would bring new problems. Roch and Asper were tired, for we had made them talk for more than two hours. Roch was still suffering from the effects of jaundice and a rib that had been broken a month before. Asper had a dental abscess on which the doctor had declared war with a copious supply of penicillin.

May 1st.

My preoccupations as transport officer wakened me before dawn. The figures danced in my head. I juggled with loads, Sherpas, tents, sahibs, camps. Who was it who said that war, in

the final analysis, is only a question of transport? The major difficulty lay in the fact that I had to give an exact solution in every case to a problem of which the data were partly unknown. How many camps would we have to establish before the South Col? How many men would be able to stay up there, and for how long? What material would we need for the ascent of the South Col? So many questions to which the future would reply too late. To make decisions, I needed the answers at once. It was a Chinese puzzle. I lit my electric torch and got out my note-book. One thing was certain: we had to leave the Western Cwm in a month at the latest; it was a trap in which we must not be caught by the monsoon at any price. Thus we had thirty days. For the attack there would be eight Europeans and ten Sherpas: a total of eighteen men for thirty days, representing 540 days' provisions. At nearly 3 lbs. per man per day, that represented nearly 14 cwts. But that was a minimum; therefore, let us say 16 cwts. I smiled suddenly when I thought of our calorie calculations and worked it out: 1,540,000 calories.

Sixteen hundredweights of provisions, as much or more material, tents, fuel, mattresses, sacks, ropes, pitons, oxygen. Without the slightest doubt, we had to transport 1½ or 2 tons from Camp I to Camp III.

Day had come. Before breakfast I sketched out a transport plan for the next three days:

1st May: Twelve Sherpas to go up to Camp II. Six of them to sleep at II with Aïla and Pasang, who are already there. Thus, eight Sherpas this evening at II. The other six to come down again to I, where Sarki and Ajiba will rest for today.

2nd May: Six Sherpas to go up to II, Sarki and Ajiba remaining there, the other four coming back. The eight Sherpas at II to take up the first units to Camp III.

3rd May: Four Sherpas to ascend to II. Ten Sherpas to ascend from II to III.

I interrupted my calculations. A chess-player's mind was required to combine thirty moves in advance, but I do not play chess. On the other hand, at over 16,000 feet one has more diffi-

culty in making combinations than in the plain. I do not know if the brain can acclimatise itself, but I had the feeling that it would be a mistake to organise a chess tournament on the Khumbu plateau! Anyway, for the time being it was necessary first of all to equip Camp III completely. Decidedly, I had done enough thinking for one day. It was six o'clock. I took my pulse to please the doctors, who had not yet abandoned their belief in science! 60! It was all right.

It was cold outside: eighteen below freezing (F.). I joined the Sherpas who were eating in a circle around the fire and had breakfast with them for the first time, seated beside my old 'tiger', Dawa Thondup, my senior by four years. Since our expedition to the Abi Gamin in 1950 we have understood one another very well. It was he who was first on the rope when we reached the summit. He too had memories. In 1933 he was on Everest; in 1939 on K.2; in 1949 with Roch on Gangotri; in 1950 at Annapurna. Leaning against one another, we warmed ourselves and watched the flames without speaking.

At seven the loads were ready and the Sherpas moved off under Tensing. I had tried in vain to make radio contact with the men up above. No reply. Tensing was taking them a note: 'Camp II party. Try to organise the route to III. We are preparing everything so as to begin the transport. Push as far as possible into the Western Cwm. But take no risks! Flory and Hofstetter will descend this evening to I. Chevalley and I are coming up to relieve them. Till this evening. Dittert.'

We waited for the reply before leaving and that gave us a peaceful morning. Before going up, moreover, I had to have a talk with Roch, Wyss, Chevalley and the others. Perhaps they had thought of simpler and more effective solutions than mine. But they fell in with mine. After all there were not fifty solutions; one had to load what was down below on to the shoulders of the Sherpas and transport it higher up. And as for us sahibs, who had the 'luck' to be reserved for the final struggle, we were not to carry anything much.

The transfer of the base camp to Camp I was slowly completed that day. Parties of porters came and went on the moraine; two

Sherpanis arrived, accompanying Pansi the cook, who was driving our meat supplies before him: real fresh meat, a live yak. Chevalley discovered a small fragment of prayer flag caught in the hair at its neck. Poor yak, that did not save its life! But we decided not to let it be slaughtered by a coolie, for the sight had sickened us a few days earlier. We would kill it with a pistol shot. But the expedition's pistol was at the base camp and belonged to Flory. So the yak's life was saved until Flory's return and the beefsteak was passed over for the day. Pansi, the imperturbable Pansi, shrugged his shoulders imperceptibly. He was one of the oldest 'tigers' in our party; he was forty-six years old. Too many experiences had doubtless hardened him; in 1950 he went up to Camp V on Annapurna, he had carried Herzog and Lachenal during their endless martyrdom, and in 1951 he was with the unfortunate men from Lyons on Nanda Devi. Perhaps he thought: 'Such a fuss about a yak. Eat the meat while you can. You don't know what the gods have in store for you. When they want to destroy a man, they don't show so much consideration.'

Before setting out for Camp II, Chevalley examined Asper again. He was suffering a great deal and Chevalley gave him another penicillin injection, perhaps at that time the highest injection in the world!

Despite the late hour of departure—1.20 p.m.—it was not warm and Chevalley led off at a good pace. Thunder clouds had invaded the valley, coming from the north, by turns covering and uncovering the rampart of Nuptse which was so high that we were unable to accustom ourselves to it, to the extent that when the clouds momentarily cleared we always looked for the summit too low. If you double the height of the great routes on the Italian face of Mont Blanc—the Poire, Sentinelle and Innominata—that will give you its measure. But the imagination is powerless: such things have to be seen to be believed. And the snow that was then falling, veiling the outlines, accentuating certain reliefs, strengthened the feeling that we were moving, fragile and vulnerable, through a supernatural and hostile world. We felt ourselves intruders in this crowd of monstrous blocks, balanced upon their worn bases. We were moving against the current among ice

that was descending imperceptibly towards the plain. For more than a hundred yards the track was covered with the debris—blocks and powder—of a sérac that had fallen in the night.

Before four o'clock we arrived at Camp II: it was like a patch of oil on angry waters, or a minute and very peaceful haven at the mercy of the waves. Three solitary tents and that was all; around them crevasses, and above them on all sides the glaucous masses of séracs in a thousand different shapes.

High up in the couloir overlooking the camp we saw two ropes descending: Aubert, Flory, Hofstetter, Lambert and Tensing were not long in joining us. Much more optimistic than Roch and Asper, they told us about their day.

'It took us an hour to reach the rope bridge. A strange business, that crevasse of theirs, but it was the only solution. Higher up we marked out a site for Camp III with flags, almost in the middle of the Cwm. For once it seemed better in the middle of the stream than at the banks. It is equally distant from the hanging glacier on the shoulder of Everest and from the couloirs of Nuptse.'

'What's its height?'

'Between 19,000 and 19,300 feet. We went on towards the foot of the Col. The plateau is not very wide but the direct line is cut by a series of immense transverse crevasses, so that you have to draw across to the right and pass along beside the walls of Nuptse. There is no choice. But in the event of a snow slide, this passage would be quite as dangerous as the couloir below the crevasse.'

'Real cross-fire.'

'Yes, and their artillery has been well sited. No dead angles to sneak through. You have simply got to pass into the field of fire.'

'We will have to use a trench-mortar.'

'I don't think so. The target is too big. And the very thought of carrying the thing up here makes my shoulders ache.'

'What a trap to shut ourselves up in!'

'Yes. If six feet of snow should fall when we're up above, we've had it. But the Col doesn't seem too bad.'

'That's not the view of Roch and Asper.'

'They were worn out by the crossing of the crevasse and fatigue

makes one pessimistic. You shall see, we shall be able to get up to the Col. It will be long, because it seems to be steep and we shall certainly need some fixed ropes. However, we did not see it for long. At two in the afternoon the curtain came down and it began to snow. The clouds that came up from below and the snow that pursues us every afternoon are astonishing. We're not used to seeing the weather cloud over from below.'

'That will teach us to climb so high. What height did you reach?'

'About 19,700 feet by the altimeter. The first time any one of us had been up to 6,000 metres.'

'Except Tensing.'

'Oh, him! The higher he goes the better he feels!'

Hofstetter and Flory left us. Though they had stood up admirably to three hard days between 16,500 and 19,700 feet, two or three days at base would do them good. They were delighted that they had been able to stand the height easily. This is an anxiety, almost always unadmitted, for everyone who comes to the Himalaya for the first time, weighing upon his thoughts throughout the approach. 'How will I get on up there?' he asks himself. How high shall I be able to climb?' And he takes his pulse more often than required and when it beats too quickly he is careful not to mention it to the doctor for fear of compromising his chance of being in the assault pair. How many sleepless nights have not been haunted by the problem of choosing the pair who will try to reach the summit? An obscure and unavoidable rivalry, a desire to be at the top of one's form at the hour of decision. Perhaps many of the troubles attributed to altitude are born of these fears.

The two sahibs took Aïla with them, for he was not feeling so well that day. But he was not one of the anxious ones; he knew quite well how he reacted to altitude: he, too, had many memories of the Himalaya, almost since the heroic age, for in 1936 he was in the Rutledge and Smythe expedition, which made the Tibetans believe that their god looked upon such expeditions with an evil eye, since he sent the monsoon three weeks before its time. All the attempts were brought to a halt by squalls and avalanches, and more than luck was required to bring everyone back alive.

Aïla ascended with the French climbers to Camp V on Annapurna in 1950.

We watched them go. Lambert called out to Flory: 'Don't miss your yak; don't fire at 300 yards!' When they left the camp, they forced on one's imagination the idea of a very small ship leaving the shelter of a well-protected port for the tumult and dangers of the sea.

Since our arrival the weather had improved; the snow had ceased and the clouds had dispersed. It was almost windless. The sun was about to vanish behind the crests of Nuptse. Shadow and light, at the will of the peaks and couloirs, moved slowly in patches, bright and dark, yellow and mauve, outlining the shapes and disclosing the relief of the flutings where the boldest imagination would not dare to invent an itinerary. To the north, Pumori, still wholly in the sun, raised its geometrical pyramid in an almost perfect isosceles triangle, thickly armoured with ice. The slanting sunlight, playing upon the ridge, tinted with bright rose the transparent mists that played in the eddies.

Then the shadow rapidly crossed the Khumbu, climbed the séracs, turned the green and blue blocks livid at once, and licked the edges of the crevasses. With great silent strides it brought us the chill of night. Camp II was a strange little island. A crevasse had opened there during the night, luckily between the tents. The enormous cube had split into two blocks. On the one were two tents for two sahibs, one tent for the two Sherpas and an old 1949 tent for the kitchen; luck was still with us. On the other were the tents for the other Sherpas and it was possible to cross from one block to the other.

That evening, to celebrate the first great stage, we prepared a big feast: melted cheese on biscuit, bacon, pemmican, fruit juice. And we went to bed early because the days were well filled. We were a little breathless when getting into our sleeping-bags. So that they should not freeze, I put my boots inside the bag.

May 2nd.

Condensation that night was so great—the humidity and the fall in temperature, too—that everything in the tent was white when I looked at the time, and every movement raised an im-

palpable cloud of snow. But we could wait for the sun before we rose; for there it came late because the camp was orientated westwards. To warm ourselves up, we could look at it on the facing slopes. To emerge from the bags was more difficult than to get into them; all our muscles were numbed and the least effort agitated our hearts. The entire machine was rusted up. There was no desire in our bodies to go out into the cold. I have always thought that heroism must be rarer at dawn than in the evening—I often observed the fact in Alpine huts: in the evening everyone is praying for fine weather the next day, and when the next day comes they wish that it was raining.

But that day there was no question of either rain or snow. I heard Lambert's voice calling: 'Not a cloud! Get up, you sluggards!'

To get out of one's bag at 17,700 feet, to pull on one's trousers and the waterproof trousers over them, and to lace up one's boots, all with numbed fingers, trying at the same time to find a non-existent breath at the bottom of one's constricted lungs, was an exhausting business. That morning I did not want to take my pulse! But when I did, it was 84! In my notebook I wished to write 63. But I did not. Breakfast had to be swallowed quickly. It was cold between the bowl and the lips, and the half-warmed porridge reached them frozen. That morning the wind was savage.

Crampons, rope, loads; at last we were ready. The sun was about to rise above the Nuptse; it was already level with the séracs and filling them with rainbow hues nearby. A hundred yards to ascend and we should be warm. We set off on four ropes, fairly well spaced for safety. The six Sherpas went in front. They were well laden, but they went quicker than we did.

A couloir between the walls of about two hundred yards brought us to the danger zone, a plateau overlooked by fearful masses of hanging ice which clung to the shoulder by undiscoverable means.

We wanted to move quickly but could not. Our hearts refused to respond. So we marched sedately, rather like professors in a quadrangle. That went on for an hour, and a very long hour it was. During a halt I took my pulse, since I felt so well: 63! I said to Chevalley: 'I say, doctor, when I stop my pulse is 63!'

'Good, you're getting acclimatised! You must make a note of it, it's interesting!'

Eventually, to this artillery range, where we should have liked to have known the hours of firing!—there followed a safer region. 'Just at the moment when one was beginning to get used to it and becoming fatalistic,' Chevalley observed.

There were some more enormous crevasses to work our way round respectfully and then we attacked the bridge of ropes. Beside the first cluster of cables that had been stretched across by our comrades, we set up a second for the loads, which would save time. We adopted the same system, with anchorages buried deeply under tightly-packed and watered snow, with hemp lines passing four times from one side to the other and constituting the carrying cable. The Sherpas took their lessons in crossing from Lambert and they were good pupils. However, the crossing above the glaucous abyss, more than sixty feet deep to the first platform, was impressive. But these men are philosophical and religious. They are not fatalists, properly speaking; they do not believe that everything is written and their destinies settled in advance, but they hand over the business of looking after their lives and deaths to their god and have entrusted their future to him and rely upon him. And in the most serious circumstances this gives them a calmness and a serenity which has not failed on occasions to quieten the nerves of Europeans that have been stretched to breaking-point. Perhaps they have learnt something from us, but what they have to teach us, or to teach us again, is, I believe, quite as important. And more than once, in the course of nervously exhausting ordeals at the upper camps, I have tried, thinking of them, to master my impulsive temperament and to exclaim a little less than I wanted to. Not always successfully, as my comrades will tell.

But the loads, having no nerves at all, were of exemplary docility and, twisting around, passed from one side to the other suspended from the moving cable by a stout slip-ring, hauled from above and made safe from below.

We then took a rest in the brilliant sunlight. It was warm; there was neither wind nor cloud. We sat upon the loads, bearded,

tanned and burned, our eyes hidden behind coloured glasses. Seated upon the last step of the unique and incredible staircase, we silently contemplated the amphitheatre where we were going to try our luck in the next few weeks. Everything was grand and beautiful. The wind had carved the brilliant snow crests, giving a sharp outline to the great face of Nuptse. Monstrous cornices were leaning over the summit ridge, hanging over the void where they cast their shadow. In the background, and far off, it seemed, the glaciers of Lhotse were framed in the almost perfect half-circle outlined by the east ridge of Nuptse coming to meet the west ridge of Everest. Above the ice, the rock strata beneath the summit stretched their horizontal and parallel lines as evidence of the earth's convulsions at the era when its highest mountain was being formed. Other almost horizontal lines, but sinuous and gentle, were the crevasses that crossed the whole Cwm, forming alternate lines of shadow and light, green and white, almost as far as the eye could reach. To our left the enormous and shapeless mass of Everest, a mixture of rock and ice, scaled the sky and was lost there, masking the summit of the Goddess-Mother of the Winds from our sight.

'Shall we go on to Camp III?'

'Yes, but we'll take it quietly.'

At noon the Sherpas dumped the first six loads—120 Kgs. (264 lbs.) on the site chosen the day before.

In less than two hours, suffering a little from the heavy heat, we regained Camp II. As for the crevasse, its crossing became quicker and quicker, and the technique was being perfected. Under the hanging séracs we lengthened our strides and arched our backs.

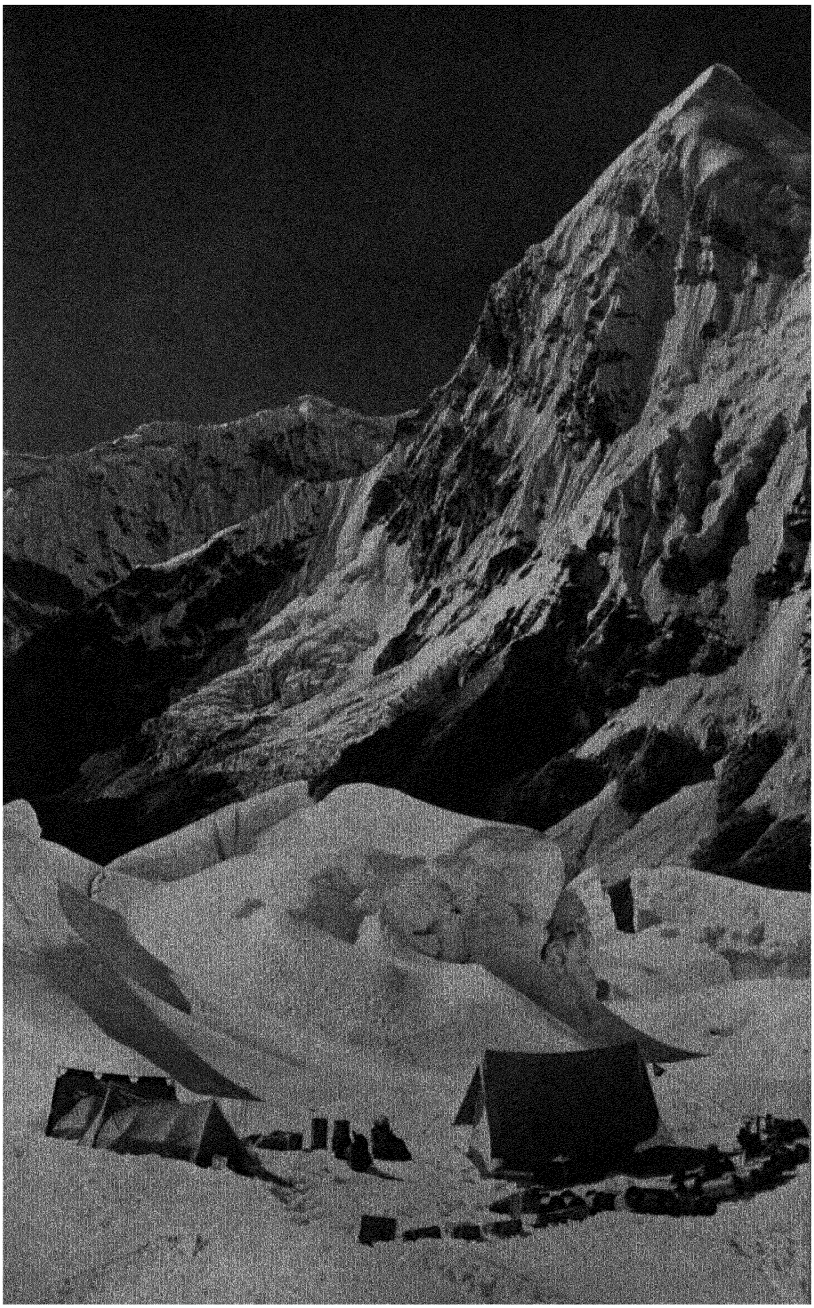
On our arrival at camp we made radio contact with base. Good news: Asper was improving. I told them that Gyalzen was sick and going down. He was coughing and breathing with difficulty. He was one of the youngest of our Sherpas, perhaps the youngest, being twenty-one years old. Though he would have to look after himself carefully, he would quickly be home, for he came from Solo Khumbu. But he did not seem serious. Was it a sign of the greater difficulties in adaptation with very young constitutions? We should see. I asked for Aïla and Mingma Tensing to be sent

up. Men were needed for carrying. Further good news: Flory had succeded in slaughtering the yak.

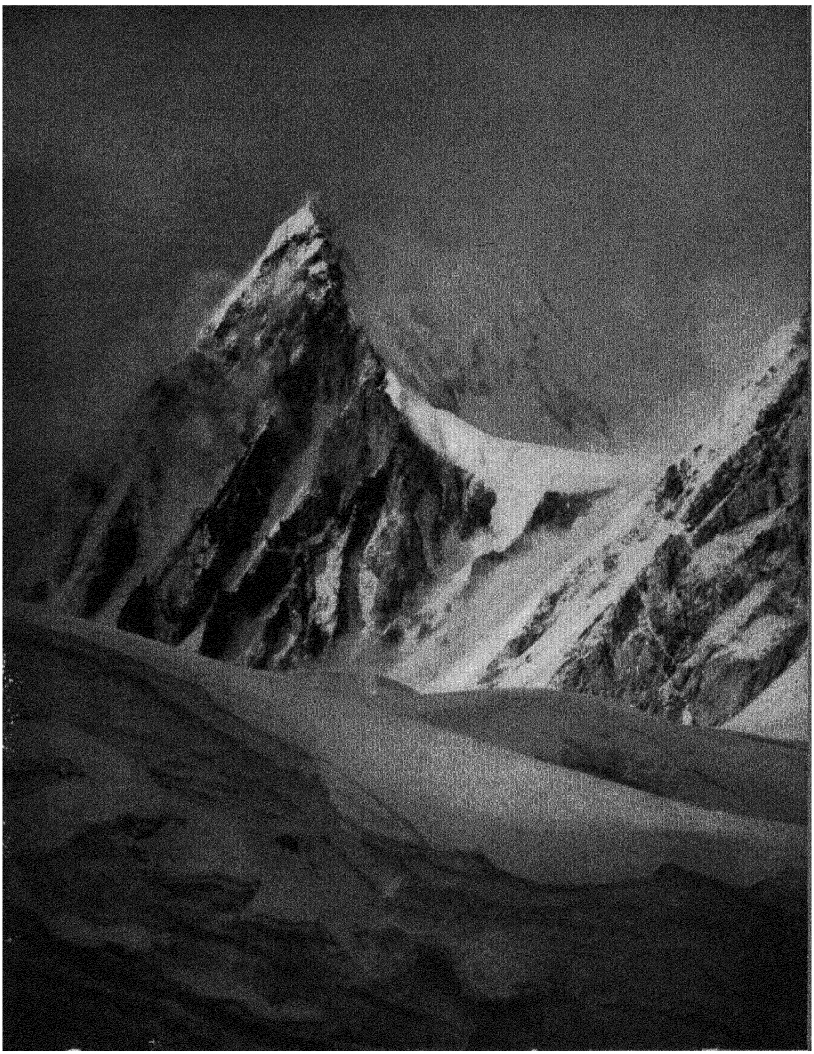
Then we quietly prepared the loads for the next day; we worked in our pullovers, without gloves, halting occasionally to admire the singular tricks of the light and the patterns of the snow in which we thought we could discover the changing shapes of animals and sorcerers. The weather was so fine that we ate in the open. Sure, now, that the Cwm was ours, I offered a bottle . . . of fruit juice. The tomato juice was congealed: in spite of the heat, the thermometer showed eleven degrees (F.) of frost. One could acclimatise oneself even to the temperature.

However, we were not long in seeking the shelter of our tents. To them, too, one became attached. One was full of respect for the fine cotton cloth, the silk awning, the nylon groundsheet. We were well aware that the least neglect, the least tear, could gravely endanger our meagre comfort and our chances. At a distance, it is difficult to imagine to what extent the success of an expedition is closely dependent on this precious, fragile and irreplaceable material. I heard Lambert still gossiping outside my tent and thought how, if his party on the Aiguilles du Diable in 1938 had not lost two of their sleeping-bags, torn away by the wind, their five successive bivouacs in the storm would not perhaps have had such serious consequences. Certainly, when we had discovered them after days of searching—straying staggering, exhausted and frozen at the bottom of the Combe Maudite—we did not rate very highly their chances of survival. And when we saw the havoc of frostbite we would have wagered heavily that Lambert would never again be seen in the mountains. So it was a pleasure to think that now, fourteen years after that terrible adventure, none had hesitated to appoint him when it was a question of choosing the members of the expedition. His readaptation was a great triumph of will and patience.*

*Early in 1938, Raymond Lambert, with two other climbers, one of them a woman, were marooned for four days by a blizzard, close to the summit of the Mont Blanc de Tacul, spending much of the time in the illusory shelter of a crevasse. Finally, Lambert made a desperate effort to fetch assistance and at the cost of severe frostbite, eventually reached the Glacier du Géant, where he was discovered by a search party. Frostbite cost him his toes; his two companions, though near to death from exposure and exhaustion, survived relatively uninjured.—*Trans.*

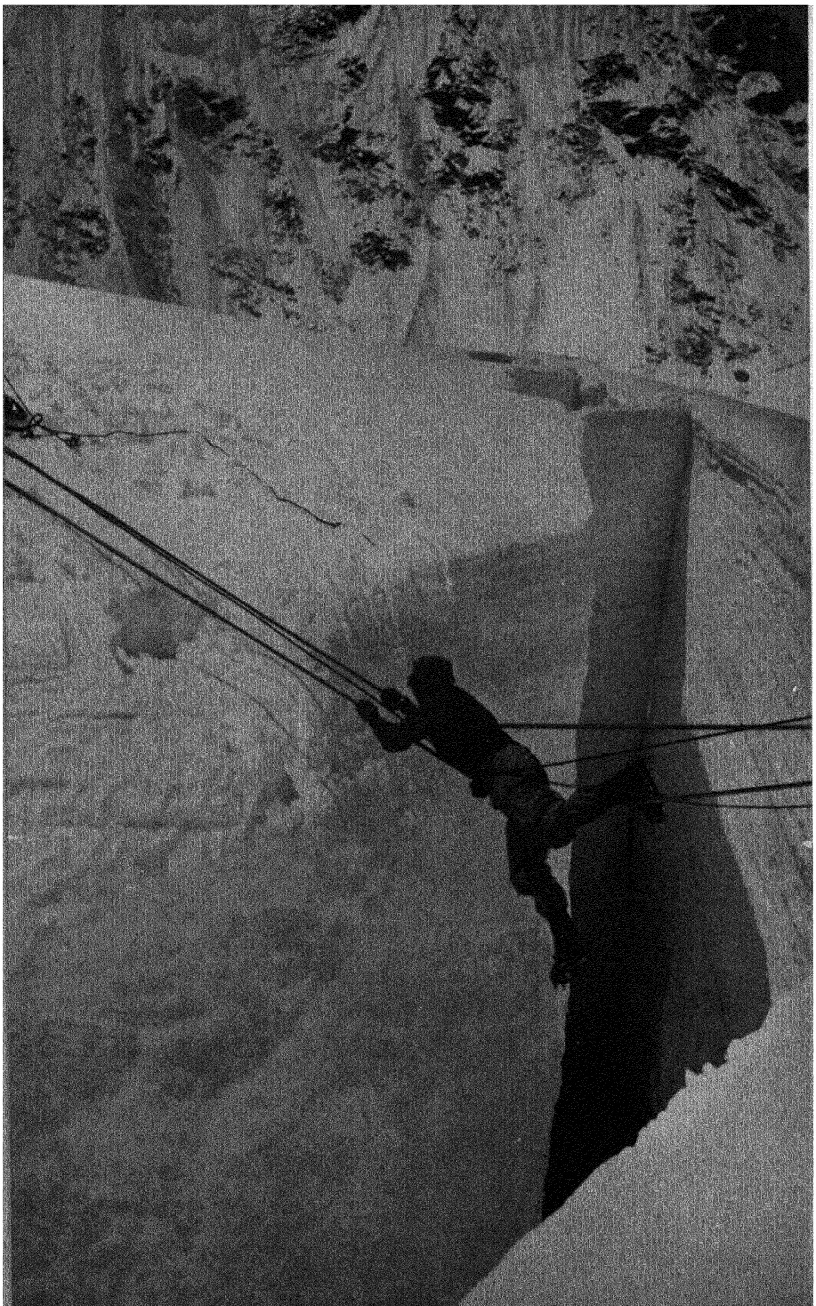


9 *Camp II in the Khumbu icefall; in the background Pumori, (23,190 feet)*



10 (left) *Labyrinth of séracs in the icefall; in the background, the ice-covered wall of Nuptse*

11 (above) *View from the top of the icefall across the Lho La into Tibet*



12 *Rope-bridge across the great transverse crevasse at the upper end of the séracs: a Sherpa crossing it*

It was his voice again that woke me on the morning of May 3rd. He was up already and grumbling. He did not like it if breakfast was delayed, firstly because he thinks one never leaves soon enough, but also because he has a good appetite. He could be heard nagging the Sherpas and hustling them about. At last the tsampa and chocolate arrived simultaneously with the sun.

That day it was a heavy column that set out: nine Sherpas and four sahibs, who, because they felt in good form and wanted to see what it was like, were carrying too. Once more we crossed with measured tread the dangerous zone where we would gladly have run if we could. But it was not possible to do so. Our tracks of the previous day had been swept away by falling séracs.

'All the less for us,' I said to Aubert.

'There are reserves up above,' he replied.

There were thirteen of us altogether, but that day I felt that luck was on our side and everything seemed to be going well. I did some calculating. Thirteen loads today, six the day before. A few more days at that rate and Camp III would be equipped. The crossing of the crevasse was quick. Some of the Sherpas glanced at one another. Their chattering had ceased. Was it a sign of anxiety? No. Lambert crossed; they followed him with their eyes and they began to chatter again, crossing in their turn. The loads followed and they continued on their way. As soon as a rope was ready it very slowly resumed the zig-zag track that rose towards Camp III.

'I don't like that anchorage,' Lambert said to me, pointing to the cable that carried the loads, which had already become slack. 'I shall stay here with Chevalley and put it right.'

We went on with Aubert. Camp III was taking shape. Two tents were up and the assembled pile of loads were already imposing. We waited there a moment in the hope of making contact with Camp I. But our walkie-talkie was not behaving itself. We received no reply except an appalling crackling.

Aubert observed that the waves were afraid of crossing the séracs.

We did not persist and made off. It was cold. The weather had clouded over rather earlier than usual. An icy wind, with frozen

snow, lashed our faces. Like polar figures in our fastened hoods, we descended. Lhotse was invisible, lost behind a screen of dense fog. The wind whistled, the frozen snow pattered down upon our hoods and stung our cheeks. Dark and heavy clouds covered the summits. When he left, Aubert had picked up some red stakes and he planted them every thirty yards. Each time he halted I shouted to him through the wind: 'Hurry up, Tom Thumb!'

'Tomorrow you'll be very pleased to be able to find the camp again if the weather is like this,' he replied. 'What's more, I prefer to use the old track, its easier than shoving your way through new snow.'

'All right! But hurry!'

At the crevasse crossing we found Lambert and Chevalley. They had completed their work on the bridge. The cable was stretched like a violin string. Hurriedly we went down to Camp II and arrived there early, before one o'clock, which was a good thing, for I had office work to do. It was the right weather for keeping to one's room, anyway! To complete the illusion, I took off my high-altitude boots and put on real slippers that were warm and comfortable. But in spite of everything it was difficult to make the illusion last in such a place; the noise of falling séracs and avalanches, the whistling of the wind, the dull creaking of the glacier which continued its obscure labours, and the driven snow which penetrated the smallest chinks, recalled me to reality.

We made good contact with Camp I. These conversations were somewhat reassuring, like a hand stretched out at the right moment. They told us about the fresh meat. I asked them to bring up to Camp I some timbers at least four metres long to assure the maintenance of the passage and the eventual retreat. In fact, certain crevasses were opening up at an alarming rate, so that the porters had to change the beginning of their route every day. We might receive some unpleasant surprises in the course of three weeks.

Tensing went down with Pasang. The porter with the tsampa had not arrived and reserves were running low. No tsampa, no Sherpas! If necessary, Tensing would send Gyalzen to his home at Melingo to buy some from his parents. We also needed petrol.

On the other hand, our reserves of rice and sugar were sufficient for the duration of the expedition.

Before preparing the distribution of tasks for the days to come, I cast a glance at my last plan. All was going well; we had been able to transport more loads to Camp III than I had provided for.

I wanted to try and arrange things so that Camp III might be definitely occupied in four or five days. But I maintained that everyone should be able to go down to I or to base to rest and eat as he pleased before the long period of intensive and uninterrupted efforts that were to follow. I maintained that the 'tigers' too should benefit from this day of rest; they too had need of it and perhaps more need than ourselves for, until now at least, their efforts had been greater and more sustained than ours. I therefore settled on the following scheme:

4th May. All the Sherpas from Camp II (twelve) will go up to Camp III with four sahibs. Chevalley and Dittert will sleep at Camp III with Tensing, Pasang and Sarki. Two sahibs and five Sherpas will go down again to Camp II. Four Sherpas will descend to Camp I.

5th May: Chevalley, Dittert and two Sherpas will push on to the end of the Cwm, to reconnoitre the terrain and eventually fix the site of Camp IV at the foot of the South Col. One Sherpa will remain at the camp. Lambert and Aubert will go up to Camp II with four Sherpas who will descend again to Camp II while Lambert and Aubert will descend to Camp I. Asper, Flory, Roch and Hofstetter will leave Camp I and occupy Camp II with all the available Sherpas. Four sahibs and eight Sherpas.

6th May: Chevalley, Dittert and three Sherpas will continue the reconnaissance of the Cwm. The four sahibs and the eight Sherpas from Camp II will go up to Camp III. Three Sherpas will stay, making two Europeans and six Sherpas. Five Sherpas and four sahibs will sleep at Camp II.

7th May: Six Sherpas and two sahibs will go up to Camp III with all the material and instal themselves there. Aubert and

Lambert will go up again from I to III and establish themselves there.

8th May: Eleven Sherpas and the sahibs will transport from Camp III to Camp IV. Some will go down again to Camp II to fetch what remains.'

Only two tents would be left at Camp II, for from that moment I planned to revictual the upper camps—the equipment would already be there—in a single stage from Camp I to the crevasse where the men from Camp III would descend to get the loads. When they arrived from below, the porters would ring a bell to bring down those from above and no one would need to cross.

A tent is a poor place for office work. To write one has to lie on one's stomach—the tents are low—leaning on one's elbows and waiting for inspiration.

Before going to supper, for I was hungry, I wrote a telegram to the Foundation. 'Khumbu problem solved. Camp III almost installed in the Cwm. Attack on South Col about to begin. Difficult appreciate difficulties. Party strong and willing. Excellent form. Good health. Hope. Dittert.'

After these intense intellectual efforts I joined my friends who were already eating. There was no lack of appetite. Pemmican, bacon, sausages, cocoa, jam—we found them all very pleasant. The fears that Hofstetter and Flory had felt at the beginning—since they had more delicate palates than the rest of us—were stilled. But I had no desire that day to give myself up to considerations—disputed and disputable—of the advantages and inconveniences of the régime we had chosen to adopt. There would be time on our return to sum up the rights and wrongs of our arrangements. For the time being I ate, and to judge by the seriousness and silence of my companions, they found the menu agreeable for 19,000 feet!

May 4th.

An excellent night. I felt so well that I took my pulse: 60. It was the perfect figure! In the night the sky had cleared and too little snow had fallen to efface the track. At eight o'clock, Tensing and

Pasang arrived. They had solved the tsampa question and they had brought us our mail. The courier was two days early; we did not expect him till the 6th May. Silently I watched the faces of my companions. They were reading. What power there is in a letter! In one second they had torn themselves away from Camp II, its séracs and the cold; they had removed themselves to another country, carried away over thousands of miles. But I did not watch them for long; in my turn, I too was carried away to my old and indulgent mother, and to my brother, by those almost transparent sheets of air-mail paper. And after reading, one felt a desire to stretch as if awakening.

Before leaving Camp II, where I hoped we had now spent our last night, I gathered the Sherpas together and through Tensing I explained to them very gently that if they continued to help themselves indiscriminately to the food it would end badly for everyone. They looked at me with mouths slightly open, fixing me with the slightly contrite air of children caught in the act. 'If you eat the sausages intended for Camp IV,' I told them, 'there will be no more when you're up above.'

Tensing declared with smiles that they recognised the seriousness of my argument.

As soon as this matter was put to rights, we equipped ourselves and once again took the route through the couloir and under the dangerous canopy of hanging ice. This time an enormous sérac fell down on our track a few minutes before we passed, accompanied by a cloud of powder snow. Aubert and Lambert made precipitately to the left, to avoid a danger that had already passed. I looked at Aubert. He was nervous and tense. I knew him well, my oldest, most faithful and most reliable companion. The many adventures we had had in the fifteen years and more during which we had together formed an inseparable rope, climbing on all the great Alpine routes, had taught me to read his expressions.

'Aren't you well today?'

'Yes, yes. I'm all right.'

'Did you have good news of the children?'

'Yes, they're all right. Jean Luc often asks after me, it seems.'

'How old is he?'

'Twelve. Evelyn is seven.'

'You've got the blues today, old man. It's you—you and Lambert—who have done the most until now. I'd like you to go down for a day's rest at the base camp before you finally settle in at Camp III, because once up there you'll have to stay till the end.'

'O.K. You're quite right. We'll go up today for the fifth time and then we'll go down and rest.'

An hour later we were beside the crevasse. For the first time a young Sherpa, Mingma Tensing, was frightened and refused to cross. I did not insist; there was work for him on the lower routes. His comrades carried his load to Camp III and he went down with Lambert and Aubert, who strengthened their bridge again while awaiting the Sherpas in order to return with them to Camp II. From the crevasse to Camp III the snow was deep and heavy to plough through. We advanced nevertheless. Despite our torpor, when we arrived at Camp III I rapidly verified the loads and made an inventory of them.

Suddenly, I stood up; the roar of an avalanche—surely an enormous one—sounded below on the right bank. The sound struck against the facing rampart and came back to me, muffled. What time was it? One-fifty. Lambert, Aubert, the Sherpas! It would be forty minutes before we could contact them on the radio—provided they replied.

At two-thirty we called them. 'Hullo. Here is Camp III. Camp II, please answer.'—No reply!—'Camp II, please answer. Camp II! Camp II!'

'Yes, here we are. We saw the nigger!' ('To see the nigger' is slang, among climbers of the Salève, for having had an escape).

'You mean the avalanche?'

'You would have thought it was looking for us! But it started off half a minute too soon. What a sweep!'

'We were worried about you.'

'That's not all.'

'What else?'

'Some crevasses have opened up. You know the one filled with

blocks, below the couloir. We had some difficulty in crossing it. It's absolutely essential that those timbers are sent up.'

I was reassured and wanted to joke again. 'You don't want to spend the winter there?'

'Not much. I'm afraid of getting cold feet.'

'And next year, when it's the turn of the English, there will be nothing to do here.'

'Contact Wyss and tell him to act quickly.'

As always, the weather clouded over after midday and there was a little snow. At brief intervals the torn clouds opened up and framed the crests of Lhotse. We were at the level of the Lho La on the Tibetan frontier. Very far off, beyond the pass, we descried a mountain that must overlook the Rongbuk valley. We could distinguish the South Col and could see the great slope; Everest was still hidden. Camp III, consisting of a little Spatz tent for the kitchen and three French tents, was situated in the zone of the great transverse crevasses of the Cwm, exactly as if placed among the bones in the immense throat of a whale.

The nature of the silence had changed. It seemed that with altitude it gained in purity. It was an insupportable silence and made us think that avalanches fall and the wind whistles by simply in order to break it. We too, at moments, spoke loudly in order to escape its spell. Sometimes it seemed to paralyse us. But it was a happy supper that followed in the open. The weather was fine again and rose-coloured mists clung to the slopes. We enjoyed the slices of yak, but at six o'clock the cold descended upon the solitudes and we soon disappeared into the tents. There were no little walks after meals! Sleepwalkers and night-walkers would do well to keep away from the Western Cwm!

CHAPTER V

In the Western Cwm

May 5th.

We had slept badly despite a relatively mild temperature. Our breathing had proved irregular and broken. Chevalley called it Cheyne-Stokes respiration; I called it plain short-windedness. It would pass. Chevalley took my pulse: it was 60. What did I tell you! At five-thirty we heard the Sherpas moving, getting the primus working and preparing tea and porridge.

At 7.15 we set out on two ropes, Tensing, Sarki, Chevalley and myself. It was not cold but the fog was spread out at 23,000 feet. Visibility was poor: it was one of those 'white days' that skiers detest because they destroy all relief—especially the one who makes the track, for he at times is blind. Chevalley stopped me simply by a sharp pull on the rope.

'Can't you see that crevasse?' he asked.

'No. Where?'

'Three yards in front of your nose.'

Indeed, I had not seen it. But the crevasse was enormous and so deep that it must have far exceeded three hundred feet, on an estimate made by prolonging in the imagination the curves of its lateral walls. It curved away both to right and left. We decided to try to the left so as to avoid coming too close to the yellow granite rampart of Nuptse, streaked with black bands and plastered with ice that might well send us a volley.

We were short of breath and made slow progress. We took turns in making the track and changed often, about every five minutes. Profiting by a moment when Tensing and Sarki were leading, we tried out the oxygen apparatus, but we were not high enough to estimate its value.

The weather deteriorated and the north wind was blowing

violently; the squalls tore up the snow and plastered it over our faces. To gain time we moved boldly over to the right, working our way past the last crevasses at the very foot of Nuptse. Thus we reached a smooth plateau and were at last free of the crevasses. The firmer snow made it possible for us to make quicker progress. In less than an hour we plunged quite deeply into the Cwm, but the weather worsened, the cloud ceiling descended rapidly, and the gusts of wind became increasingly brutal. We had to stop and return to camp. We ate quickly before we turned round.

The descent against the wind was more troublesome than the ascent. Literally, we leaned against the wind as we marched. It had effaced the track and this had to be remade. Ours was a rough encounter with the lord of the heights, though we were only at about 20,500 feet. Passing me as he relieved me of the lead, Chevalley shouted in my ear: 'This is only a sample,' and he pointed to the crest of Nuptse where furious clouds, carried along at an incredible speed, were tearing themselves to pieces.

Through a rent in the fog we caught a glimpse of Everest, quite black and windswept. For a moment the little skylight of the South Col was visible. How high it was! It seemed quite inaccessible, 5,000 feet above us.

The wind whipped the smooth, iced flutings of Nuptse. The hard, green ice was everywhere. The wind-blown powder-snow slid along the channels, creating impalpable avalanches that fell towards us, though the strength of the wind was such that it stopped them in mid-course and sometimes even drew them into rising whirlwinds. It was strange to move in this fashion through the very trajectory of avalanches without fear, since they would never end their journeys. But if the monsoon should arrive too soon, if there were heavy falls of snow before we had left the Cwm, then we should be unlucky.

We continued to tack against the blizzard, like fishermen caught in the open sea by a wind blowing from the shore. At noon we were at the camp; we arrived there at the same time as the four Sherpas from Camp II. They brought me a note from Lambert, who was waiting at the crevasse with Aubert to see them safely over: 'We hesitated to come up because of the fresh snow and

risks. We did so nevertheless; that makes five times in five days. Enough. We're going down to I. Hofstetter, Flory, Roch and Asper have announced their arrival at II this evening. Wyss is getting busy about the timbers. Good luck. Lambert.'

I sent back the Sherpas with a word for Lambert: 'Radio contact at two-thirty or three o'clock. We penetrated quite deeply into the Cwm. We're all right. René.'

Then we hid ourselves. To spare our high-altitude boots, we had marched in ordinary boots. Our feet had suffered as a result. Until evening, the returning circulation gave us pain, but it was not serious. From the shelter of the tents it seemed that the wind had doubled in violence; the frozen snow beat upon the stretched cloth like a shower of pins. The wind seemed to be seeking a quarrel with the tents; it moved in savage thrusts, halting and then returning.

At two-thirty there was no answer to our call. At three o'clock Asper replied: 'Asper here. Camp II. How are you?'

'We're all right. Have Lambert and Aubert passed you?'

'Yes. They've set off again for Camp I.'

'Are all four of you there? How's the tooth?'

'That's all over. Hofstetter's in great form and I'm all right. Flory is suffering from indigestion due to the yak. Roch is better.'

'Good. Come up tomorrow only as far as the crevasse. There's no point in settling in yet at III. I still want to fix the site of IV and mark the track from III to IV. Be careful tomorrow below the crevasse, it's very dangerous. If there has been a lot of snow, don't come up. Good night.'

During the transmission the weather had cleared again. We profited by the return of sunshine to dry our half-frozen equipment which we had to get into condition for the next day. We were suffering from fatigue and lassitude. I wanted to drink—to drink something warm. At that altitude the cold attacks a man severely, and both his physique and morale are affected. He feels himself overtaken by a sort of apathy; he becomes flabby and will gladly give up the struggle. This lethargy attacks his will and in his struggle against it he has only his will; it is a hard phase in the process of acclimatisation.

May 6th.

I was awakened by the crunching steps of a Sherpa in front of my tent. The sound was unmistakable: it must be cold outside. As I dragged myself from my sleeping-bag I raised a cloud of rime from condensation. The weather was magnificent. All the summits were powdered with fresh snow and the light wind that tore it away carried it in transparent veils that twisted themselves into spirals before vanishing into the air.

We made rapid preparations; it was too cold to hang about. At 8.20 we left with Tensing and Pasang. Tensing, at the head of the party, led at a pace which Chevalley was not the only one to find too fast. After a short while, under the pretext of taking his turn at making the track, but actually in order to slow the pace, the doctor took the lead and kept it. The slope was gentle and the powder snow was deep. As always, the sky slowly clouded over. Behind us a wedge of cloud closed the Cwm. Filtered by the mists the light was unbearable, and as on the day before I advanced almost blinded, seeking my way across crevasses concealed by a thick bed of snow. Every step had to be sounded; a regular pace could not be maintained. Slowly we approached the foot of Lhotse, but it was pointless to go further that day, for we had been marching for more than five hours and the distance from Camp III was already too great for porters.

Before us was the immense symmetrical face of Lhotse, but we were still too far away to judge its steepness. The lower two-thirds of this wide face were occupied by a broken glacier (named the Lhotse glacier) on its right half and by a smooth slope on its left. We examined the whole of the face closely, but access to it remained a secret. Directly below the Col was too steep and offered no hope; a snow slide had left hard ice from top to bottom. A little to the right, a very steep rock rib rose up to a shoulder overlooking the Col. It certainly seemed that our best chance would be in the smooth slope of Lhotse, to the right of the rock rib. But what a depth! Chevalley reckoned the slope to be over 3,000 feet. The Col must be more than 5,000 feet above us.

'What do you think, Tensing?'

'Good, good. Quite as good as the North Col. Better than the Col Longstaff.'

'We'll go and look at it one of these days.'

'Yes, you go and look at it!'

We descended about 300 feet and fixed the site of Camp IV, quite close to a moraine at the foot of Everest, but on the glacier in order to avoid possible stone-falls. On the ascent we had been a little frightened at finding blocks of ice that had fallen from Nuptse and were lying on the glacier more than two hundred yards from the foot of the wall.

We made a short halt. However quickly we returned, it would still be long. We staked the route and felt the heat greatly, for the Cwm is nothing but a great concave mirror reflecting the light. At the camp we found our friend Sarki, one of the most intelligent of the younger Sherpas. He made tea for us, but was himself more thirsty than we were.

'Not feeling well, Sarki?'

'No, not feeling well.'

He had a high temperature, but no other precise symptoms. Chevalley examined him. It was an attack of malaria. He would have to go down for two or three days.

May 7th.

A forced rest. The weather had broken, and the barometer had fallen far in the night. Chevalley inaugurated the 'Khumbu foot-bath'; three times round the tent in bare feet. That would have revived the dead! At nine o'clock the Sherpas arrived from below. No chatter this time and no smiles. They had an angry look and were muttering and grumbling. There was a storm brewing. The journey from Camp II to Camp III had not pleased them at all. I saw their point of view, but it was the best and the only way. The real reason was something else; they had fed badly at Camp I. There had been no yak and not enough tsampa ; Pansi was not there. They declared that they wished to go down to the base camp, then, changing their opinion, they wished to stay with me. That flattered but did not suit me. I brought out all my eloquence and a little English, explaining to them that one more

journey from Camp II to Camp III was necessary, that on the next day all the units would be at Camp III and then they could stay. The storm slowly subsided. And when I reminded them of Ang Tharke's statement to Tensing, after having accompanied Shipton, that no load would even reach the Western Cwm, their smiles returned. They had the right to be proud of what they had done. Thanks to them, three units for Camp IV and two for Camp V were already at Camp III. To end with, I promised twenty rupees to all those who reached the South Col. The chattering broke out once more.

To Chevalley I said: 'Don't you think I ought to go down to Camp I and finally tidy up the shuttle service between base and here. I've got the impression that they've fallen asleep down there. It's absolutely essential that everything goes without a hitch in the next three weeks.'

'It's tiresome,' he replied, 'that the base camp has not been completely transferred to I.'

'That's not a very serious matter. On that trip, by making the journey every day, four Sherpanis are enough to assure the transport of provisions. That's all that's needed.'

'And higher up—how about that?'

'Gyalzen, Mingma Tensing and the two assistant cooks will climb from I to the crevasse. There they can ring the bell and someone can go down and get the loads. In any event they will have to come up twice a week, but the route will have to be kept open.'

'What happens here?'

'Here everyone will have to do transport to IV. As soon as it is ready, we will push on in force to V. But first of all we have to decide the route and settle the site of Camp V.

Hofstetter and Flory had just arrived with Roch and Asper, who would stay at III. The track was not completely covered up, but it had been a blind ascent through squalls of wind and snow. We had done well to flag our track properly. Before noon, Roch and Asper went back to Camp II.

May 8th.

Sarki had had a terrible night. He had been shaken with shivering fits. He had to go down at once. There was rapid dis-

cussion. I was to descend with Tensing and Sarki; we would take Pasang with us to II and he would bring up one load. The three sahibs would improve the marking out of the route to IV.

By eight o'clock we had started. Sarki looked bad; he dragged his way laboriously to Camp II and remained lying down all day. I shook hands with Asper and Roch, who had completed their preparations for their ascent, and continued my way down to I. Fundamentally, I was annoyed at having to descend. Three days at Camp III had so filled my head with problems about how to reach the South Col that I could think of nothing else. Moreover, the silence and solitude of that narrow and almost inaccessible Cwm, cowering under the immeasurable threat of ramparts of stone and ice, had impressed me. I am no mystic, nor were my comrades, but I could not prevent myself from feeling that we had penetrated a sanctuary where I was at peace with myself. That day it seemed to me that I had been driven from the temple.

At Camp I, I dragged Wyss from his writing and explained to him the decisions I had taken to assure the shuttle service. From the following day only the four Sherpanis and Nuri would be left at the base camp, while Pansi, the 'tiger' cook, would set up his stoves at I. The emergency timbers had arrived; they would be taken up to Camp II and higher still, in the direction of the crevasses that were opening up. Aubert and Lambert, rested and well fed, were going up that evening to II and were taking paludrine to Sarki.

May 9th.

Another day to spend at Camp I. I was consumed with impatience for action, and this was a forced rest. To kill time I watched the others at work. Pansi had no sooner arrived than he set about his tasks. On his behalf some porters went to get some of the great flat stones that covered the glacier and built three walls to shelter his kitchen. The north wind, coming from Tibet, was icy. It shook the grey tent-cloths furiously and, despite the sunshine, we found it difficult to keep warm. Soon we sat down around the fire, Pansi presiding: the lid of the saucepan was taken off and we could smell yak. This was the last day of comfort. I thought of the hiss of the primus in the upper camps and the cup

one held in one's hands to warm them—and I wanted to be there.

The cold made me anxious; it seemed to me too intense for the time of the year. Spring was ascending the valleys, but so slowly that here it was still winter. Were we too early? The winter monsoon had been so late! But these were idle questions, for time was not on our side. One thing was certain: on the 1st June we had to be back at I. That is, in three weeks.

That day our Sherpas were a long time in returning. It was perhaps because of Sarki. At last, at three o'clock, more than three hours late, they arrived. Poor Sarki! He was worn out, exhausted by the fever that had been consuming him for two days. What a paradox it was to suffer from this hot-country sickness in the icy cold of over 21,000 feet. We took off his boots, gave him tea and aspirin, covered him well and stretched him out in a tent. He let us do this without saying a word, his body shaken with terrible fits of shivering. But his eyes expressed gratitude. I was very attached to these men. At that moment his five companions threw themselves upon the potatoes and, out of sight, were talking among themselves, relating their adventures during the day; a bridge had collapsed, a Sherpa had slipped and taken a bath in a glacier torrent. And they laughed.

The next day they would go up again with me and 220 lbs. of loads. They had brought me down a note from Lambert. He had written it at Camp III.

'*May 9th.* A good sixth ascent to III. Nothing broken. Seven loads have arrived here. Did some carrying too: a Sherpa apprenticeship! Asper and Flory, on reconnaissance to the foot of South Col, will sleep at Camp IV. Aubert and I will join them tomorrow. Roch is filming: the cine camera is his prayer-wheel! Looking forward to seeing you. Lambert.'

Good. They had taken up seven loads, so that seven remained at II. They would have to be collected. The next day they would have to take nine loads to Camp IV.

I went with Wyss to examine the condition of the food. The sausages and bacon had stood the journey admirably, though it was not easy to send these specialities from Switzerland and Lyons through tropical lands.

The question of loads bothered us also. The boxes this time

were a little too big and would not go into the Sherpas' sacks. They were also too fragile. The drums were stronger but they held less. As to petrol, the problem was finally settled by the use of jerricans: no leakages, no loss, it was perfect. When one thinks of the worries of the first British expeditions over these petrol losses, which exasperated them throughout the journey!

At seven in the evening I finished the report that would go to Zürich the next day. I added Chevalley's medical report, of which these were the essentials:

'State of health of the sahibs: Asper has fully recovered from his dental troubles. Good cure by penicillin. Flory, who had been weakened by indigestion, has recovered his strength: he is in full form. No serious catarrhs of the respiratory tracts, nor tonsillitis. Slight pharyngitis.

'Sherpas: Sarki evacuated to Camp I. Violent attack of malaria. Gyalzen has difficulty in adapting himself to altitude. Too young perhaps. One porter immobilised for two days with ophthalmia: believe he will get on all right with goggles at Camp II.

'Acclimatisation. Very satisfactory. Sleep excellent, or sufficient. Breathlessness at night receding. Headaches have disappeared. Appetite very good. However, some have a slight tendency to lassitude and anxiety.

'Oxygen. Tried oxygen on May 5th above Camp III. Deep or crusted snow, easy terrain, irregular slope. About 19,000 feet. The trial was not conclusive, the altitude insufficient; breathlessness and muscular fatigue were not accentuated enough. The problems to be solved are whether it will be necessary to inhale while on the march, the dosage and the co-ordination of the rate of breathing with that on the march or at rest during the more or less frequent halts. In any event, for inhaling on the march the regularity of the terrain plays a capital role (the English have already observed this). The fact of being roped often greatly diminishes the capacity of each to maintain his own rate of march and respiration. Mechanically the apparatus seems perfect. Night trial: in ten minutes my pulse decreased from 90 to 75. At rest, after effort, heart-beats returned to normal more quickly with oxygen. One minute instead of three. Chevalley.'

CHAPTER VI

The Struggle for the South Col

THE following morning, with Mingma Dorje, I again took the road to Camp III. It was, in truth, a strange road. We were both heavily laden and without crampons, because I had left them at the higher camp. I marched loosely like a disjointed puppet in order to maintain a precarious balance on the hard ice, which was covered with small pebbles that rolled about like marbles.

In the heavy heat we passed along beside the pinnacles of ice, moving among the towers, those tottering icicles that defied the laws of gravity. Mingma Dorje was also without crampons, but managed quite well, especially as he had until then accompanied Mme. Lobsiger, the expedition's ethnologist, and had scarcely had the opportunity to practise these acrobatics. We made a short halt at Camp II; it was deserted and melancholy, with its two solitary tents standing like toys on the enormous cube of ice surrounded by crevasses.

Once more, the last time on the ascent, we pressed on, trying to hurry our pace through the couloir that lay in the trajectory of the hanging séracs. Once more we played at tight-rope walking on Asper's ropes across the crevasse. Finally we dropped our loads at Camp III. Chevalley, Hofstetter and Roch were there; the others were at Camp IV, or higher, and we would be receiving news of them at any moment.

Roch and Chevalley had just returned from a photographic expedition to the small shoulder of Nuptse overlooking the camp.

'It is extraordinary,' said Chevalley. 'You can see over the whole curve of the icefall, a real emerald river! You can follow the track as it tacks about through the chaos. There were ants everywhere, four in the couloir above Camp II and others quite close to Camp IV. We tried to see Flory and Asper, who must have pushed on to

the far end, but we saw nothing. It must be further than we thought.'

He was interrupted by the arrival of the Sherpas descending from Camp IV. They carried a long message from Lambert.

'*Camp IV. May 10th.* I write this at Flory's dictation. He has just returned with Asper and Ang Dawa. They left this morning at 7.30 in terrible cold. No sun before 9.00. They pushed through deep snow until 11.30. Ang Dawa dropped out with headache from altitude. They left him well provided; aspirin. Continued until 1.00 p.m. *Absolute necessity to establish a fifth camp* at the foot of the slope. Completely misled by the distances. The combe is interminable. Above it a great couloir, half snow, half ice. Approached it by a ledge of the Lhotse glacier. Probably the better possibility of reaching the South Col. Much step-cutting in prospect. The glacier is steeper than we thought. Exposed to avalanches in the event of snowfalls. Tomorrow I am going up with Aubert, one tent and food for two days. Ang Dawa and Pasang will do the carrying to the foot of the glacier and return to Camp IV. Health and morale good. See you soon. Long live the South Col! Regards. Raymond.'

We re-read and discussed this note for a long time. The light of two candles shone upon the smooth walls of the large igloo where we were installed, which was Roch's masterpiece. There was both good and bad in this news. The optimism of the two parties up above was reassuring, but the prospect—rather, the necessity—of pitching a fifth camp at the foot of the glacier thwarted our plans and annoyed us, because we had thought to pitch Camp V on the South Col.

'Everest is bigger than one thinks,' remarked Roch. It was hard to swallow.

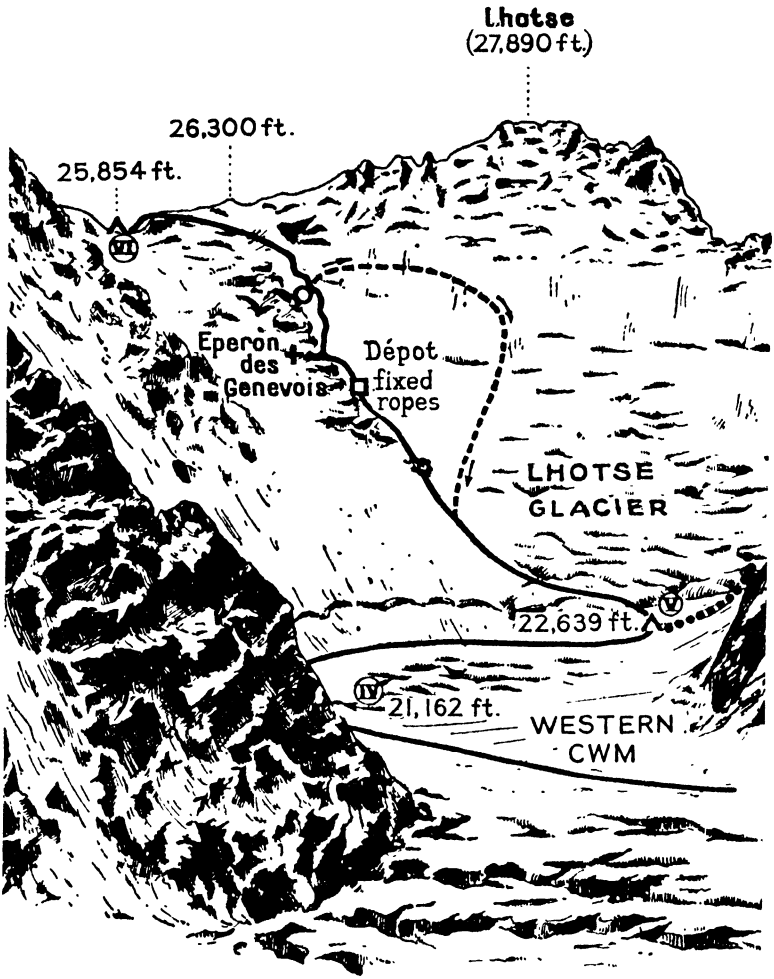
At this moment the face of Da Namgyal was framed in the rounded doorway of the igloo. He was pushing our meal in front of him and looking into the vault with a distrustful air: it did not inspire him with confidence.

'It's quite safe, Da Namgyal.'

'Yes,' he said, grinning and retreating immediately.

The news from Camp IV obliged us to improvise new solutions.

'What do we do tomorrow?



Route of the Spring Expedition.

Point reached by the Reconnaissance of May 15th.

Point reached by the Reconnaissance of May 17th.

Aubert-Flory Reconnaissance of May 19th.

Chevalley-Asper Reconnaissance of May 19th.

Camps of the Spring Expedition.

Ascent of the Spring Expedition

'We wait here.'

'Why not go up to IV?'

'It will be sufficient if the Sherpas carry the loads there. There is no point at all in going to eat the victuals up there before being able to push further on. There is enough for four sahibs at IV at the moment.'

'We will go up the day after tomorrow. Lambert will have made his reconnaissance and we shall be able to see things more clearly.'

'If the weather's all right,' said Aubert, who at this moment entered the igloo. It was snowing and the wind pierced our anoraks and jackets. How cold it was!

'It's the same every evening.'

'But it has never been as bad as this. Let's hope it's not the monsoon!'

May 11th.

A day of waiting at the camp. The cold was intense: over 21 degrees of frost (F.) at 8.00 a.m. For a long time we followed with our eyes the column of eight Sherpas ascending towards Camp IV where they were transporting the first units destined for the South Col. They would vanish into a glacier fold, reappear, disappear again and then re-emerge higher up, becoming more and more indistinct despite their coloured anoraks. With glasses we searched in vain at the end of the Cwm, at the foot of the Lhotse glacier where Lambert and Aubert were doubtless seeking their way. But it was probably more than 2½ miles away and between 2,500 and 3,000 feet above us. In the blinding light refracted by this mirror, we could see nothing.

At about 11.00 a.m. three blasts of a horn sounded in the immense valley

'Someone at the door!' someone said.

'Who's going down?'

We decided to go all together. We hurriedly put on our boots, ropes and goggles and descended to the crevasse to bring the loads across and send our report as well as our mail to Wyss. Then, in the violent sunlight, breathing hard in the melting snow, we reclimbed to the camp, each with 45 lb. on his back.

Stretched out in front of the tents, we watched the sun make its way from one horizon to the other. It was warm, but it only required a cloud to cover the sun for a moment and an icy cold made us suddenly shiver.

At about 3.00 p.m. the Sherpas returned from Camp IV. They looked tired. The height, the too rare atmosphere, the warmth, the light, the deep snow, the distance and the weight of the loads had carved new furrows in their tanned faces. They brought with them a laconic note:

'*Camp IV.* Lambert and Aubert have gone until tomorrow. Ang Dawa and Pasang have just returned, the first completely sick (from altitude), the second rather fagged out. Things are all right, nevertheless. Flory.'

Driven by the north wind, the rising clouds had emerged from the séracs and were filling the Cwm. In a moment winter had succeeded to spring; a grey light badly lit our camp, which was immersed in the mist and more than ever isolated from the world, battered by the furious gusts that made the tents flap like prayer-flags and seem to drown us in icy water. Like arctic foxes running into their earths, we slipped into the igloo to await the evening, to eat and to lose ourselves in long discussions.

It was a long night, broken by insomnia. Unconsciously, in a half sleep, one clung to the tent walls, as if to defend them from the gusts which were bent on uprooting them. One heard them coming afar off, whistling like express trains. Everything shook as the squall passed and then returned suddenly to silence until the next. At all the camps—V (the latest), IV, III and I—we waited, sleeping or awake, for the day to replace the night. Only Camp II was empty. It was a long, wind-whipped night.

On the morning of the 12th, when I left my tent, I no longer recognised the camp. It was buried under a foot of fresh snow, powdery and cold. Not a track could be seen; it was winter, immaculate and cruel. Snow was still falling; the passing clouds were brushing across the ice. The light was opaque, grey and lustreless. There was neither shadow nor relief. But the intensity of the wind had luckily diminished. Life returned. The Sherpas beat the tent roofs that were plastered with ice and new snow. And laughter could be heard again.

A burst of light suddenly broke through a rent in the clouds and the sun cast its splashes of colour on the lustreless world, which had been so oppressive the moment before. Yellow, green and blue streamed over the glacier and the mountain walls. But a real clearing only came in the afternoon, though this was soon enough for the heat to melt the infiltrated snow and transform the ground sheets into swamps. There was nothing to do but rest. We had to wait for the avalanches to fall and the walls to free themselves. Lambert and Aubert must be blocked—God knew where!

However, in the evening indications of fine weather appeared: rose-coloured mists on Pumori, signs of a clear horizon, a gentler descending breeze, and a low temperature. We thought we could distinguish a tent below the séracs of Lhotse.

The next day the camp woke up before daybreak. A grand departure of all the Sherpas and four sahibs followed, making a long column of twelve men *en route* for Camp IV. It was fortunate that the route had been staked, for not a sign of it could now be found in the labyrinth. Hofstetter and Chevalley, at the head of the column, opened the track, often ploughing through the thick snow up to their knees; we followed behind, step by step, suffocated by the heavy heat and the stagnant air.

At IV we found Lambert, Aubert, Flory and Asper. They were awaiting our arrival, particularly Chevalley and his store of medicines. The two Sherpas were *hors de combat,* especially Pasang, prostrated in the tent with headache. He had no fever, but his pulse was 130. Ang Dawa was not so ill, but he complained of violent stomach cramps. There are no really effective remedies against these altitude miseries. The sick Sherpas were a little like animals in that they curled themselves up and neither spoke nor moved. As soon as they had staggered off with their doctor and Hofstetter, who was going to take over the administration of Camps III and IV for several days, I installed myself in a tent with Lambert and Aubert, who told me about the last two days while Roch busied himself with constructing an igloo.

'It is quickly told,' they said. 'Yesterday we set out at nine o'clock with Pasang and Ang Dawa, who carried the equipment, a tent, the stove and provisions for two days. We flagged the route

as much as we could while ascending, so as to be able to find it again. With snowfalls every day it was better that way.'

'What time did you arrive?'

'At 1.30. It was longer than we thought. But we were ploughing into the snow deeply and it was hot.'

'And when did the weather break?'

'At the same time as with you at Camp III. We saw the bad weather arrive as usual. The Sherpas went down quickly. We put up the tent in a clear patch. But it was badly erected, for we were in too much of a hurry to get inside. It made us very breathless. We ought to have cut a platform with our axes.'

'And yesterday morning?'

'What a surprise! I woke at six and there wasn't a breath of air and there was no frost. I soon understood. There was a foot or more of fresh snow. We could hear the snow sliding down the mountains, but in the fog it was impossible to know if it was to the side or above us. A very comfortable feeling, that!'

'Raymond shook me in my sleeping-bag and said, "Hurry, it's sliding off everywhere." And I was sleeping well for the first time! It didn't take us long to pull on our boots, fix our sacks and be off.'

'Didn't you want to wait for the sun to reach your slopes?'

'Not much. The snow was sliding enough as it was! We didn't talk much on the way down. If we have to descend from the South Col in a metre of fresh snow, it won't be very pleasant!'

'What was the height of your tent?'

'23,000 feet by the altimeter. But it gets erratic with these changes of weather. I don't think we were quite so high: 22,300, not more, I think.'

'What about the South Col?'

'We did not see it. We'll see it tomorrow perhaps.'

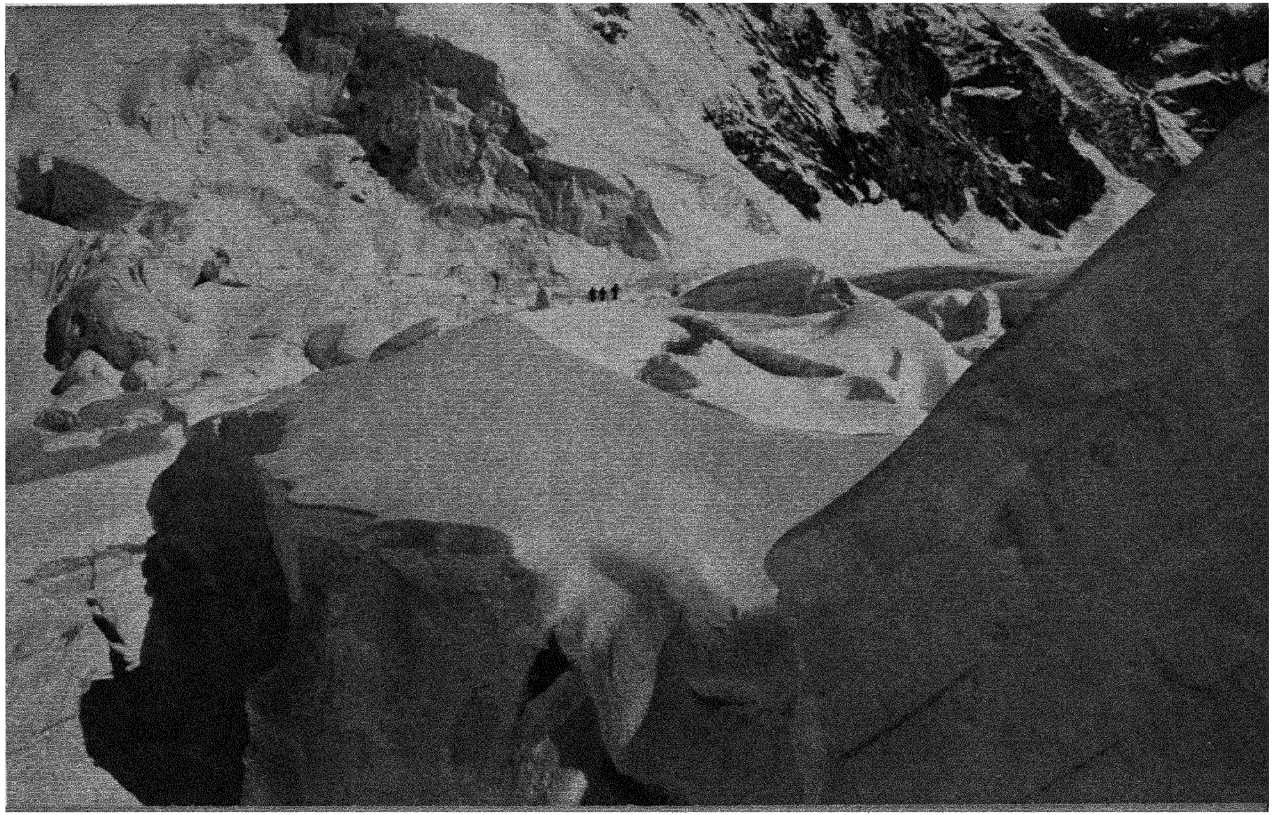
Roch and his Sherpa masons put the last touch to their igloo. Camp IV took shape. Its five tents almost touched one another. A hundred yards away the last waves of a strange glacier, the like of which we had not seen in the Alps, icy balconies in tiers, supported by a series of ice columns. Five hundred yards further off a moraine thrust like a ploughshare into the combe. It was there that I would have preferred to have pitched Camp IV, but it was

not important and the Sherpas were finding that the distance from Camp III to Camp IV was quite enough. There were many loads already piled up, the first units for Camp V and the Col, provisions, ropes and oxygen canisters. It already gave an impression of strength and of forces in reserve. Our immediate future was entirely in those loads that had been dumped at 21,000 feet—patient, docile and heavy. We made our dispositions for the next day. Flory, Asper and Aubert would open the track to Camp V—it was snowing again—and return to Camp IV to sleep. Lambert, Roch and myself would follow them with Tensing, Dawa Thondu and Ajiba.

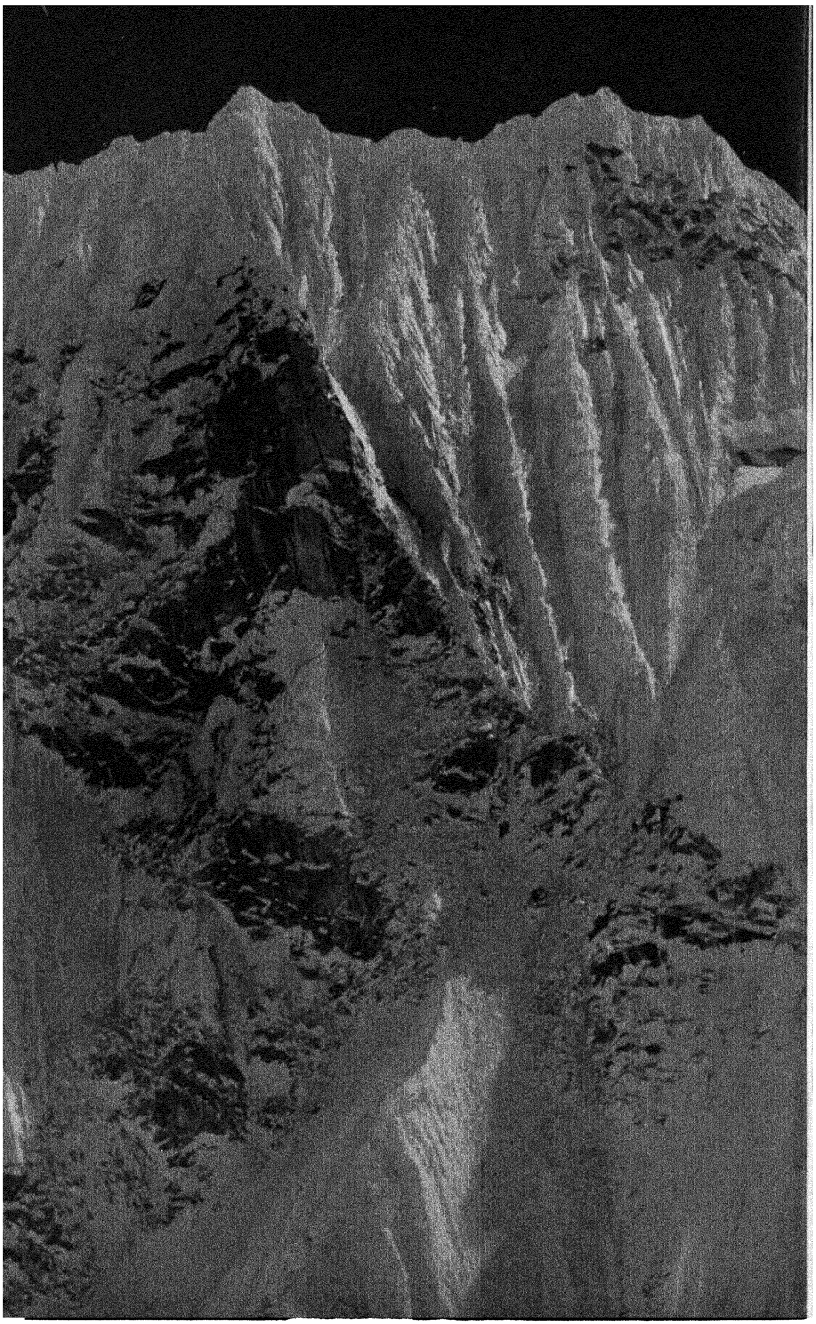
May 14th.

The temperature was extremely low—more than 32 degrees of frost when we left Camp IV in the tracks of Flory, Asper and Aubert, who had left at six o'clock to open the route and enable us to economise our strength. If all went well, I reckoned for my own part to stick to Camp V and not to descend again before eventual success or failure. We had fifteen days left. It should be enough, but the South Col remained a disquieting unknown quantity to say the least. The need to find the best route, and the days lost in vain reconnaissances, might extenuate the climbers and exhaust their physical and moral resources before they were able to launch the assault. This is the heavy penalty that pioneers have to pay—a tribute of errors, wasted labour, and inevitable (because unforeseeable) mistakes—a terrible burden of added hardships which those who would follow us would never know. If only two or three men could be held in reserve and spared these preliminary trials, maintained in condition and only launched on a route that was sure, prepared and equipped! But that was an unrealisable dream. Raising my eyes to the slopes of the South Col, which were emerging as we progressed towards the end of the Cwm, the height and steepness of the obstacle alarmed me and persuaded me that we should all use all our energies in preparing the way for our 'tiger' porters. For the Col itself was only one stage in our difficult enterprise.

That day I had many worries. I had done all I could to organise the shuttle service between the camps in the best possible way, and to provide for everything. But to foresee everything—that



13 *The threshold of the Western Cwm*



14 *The crest of Nuptse* (25,680 *feet*)

too was a dream and I was well aware of it. Something was always lacking: one day it was sugar, the next day benzine, or meta or tea. And the Sherpas were not all-enduring; they too could go missing. Some of them were already affected by altitude sickness and had been sent back nearer to base before they had reached the 23,000 feet level where deterioration begins remorselessly to destroy the benefits of acclimatisation.

I was delighted to be in direct contact with the slopes and rocks of the South Col. As far back as I can remember, action has always exercised a soothing effect upon me. Sleepless and anxious nights before a climb and bad dreams have always been swept away at the grey of dawn by the cold, by effort and by tangible difficulties! If only one had no imagination! Yet without it we would never undertake anything.

At Camp V we found our companions and they helped us again before leaving us for a few days. Flory had been ill that morning and had to leave the other two to make the track more often than he. But it could be seen that he was determined to get the better of it; his face was tense and resolute. It gave me confidence to see him work like the others at levelling the snow in order to erect the three tents.

Camp V took shape: in one day it had tripled its capacity. It would have to triple it again before being sufficiently equipped and established to support the attacking parties effectively, to receive them on their return and make them fit again.

The height of the camp was about 22,650 feet, the extreme limit at which one might stay for any length of time—and our stay would indeed be long—without deterioration, properly speaking, beginning its evil task.

Seen from the camp the Col had a gentle and deceiving appearance, all its slopes being foreshortened. Seeing it thus, I was reminded of my first arrival at the Charpoua refuge above Chamonix, whence the Petit Dru, similarly foreshortened, had the appearance of a modest and kindly hill of large accumulated blocks! But the figures proved the contrary. The Col rose more than 3,500 feet above us, although one might easily reckon it at half that figure. The average slope varied between 40 and 45 degrees, almost that of the Brenva route on the south face of Mont Blanc.

As the afternoon drew to its close our glances returned ceaselessly to the black mass of Everest and to the sapphire-coloured patch of ice that marked the Col. A spur of rock, which we had named the Eperon des Genevois, branched off from a shoulder to the right of the Col and, descending half-way down the slope, cut it into two equal parts, separating two couloirs which met at its foot, thus describing an immense Y, in the branches of which we were going to try to force a route the next day. If we were forced back, we would have to take our chance in the slopes immediately above us, to climb over the base of the séracs descending from Lhotse and from there try to reach the Col by a long traverse, taking the slopes obliquely. From all the evidence this itinerary offered fewer objective difficulties but was much more exposed to the risk of avalanches than the branches of the Y, and in the event of heavy snowfalls, all retreat would be immediately cut off.

The difference in altitude where we had to pass was so great that our chances of reaching the Col in one stage, without establishing an intermediate camp, seemed at first sight to be small, and it was questionable whether we would find any site on the Eperon where we could erect two or three tents. We passed through all the phases of hope, confidence, anxiety and irritation—the small change of all nights before hazardous undertakings.

The wind froze us. We breathed with more difficulty than at Camp IV. Yet we were very far from imagining that we should need eleven days of exhausting effort before we succeeded in establishing a precarious camp on the sapphire-coloured patch.

When at five o'clock the next morning Tensing brought us cups of tea, Roch and I had been awake for a long time, roused by the squalls. The wind was sweeping its kingdom. It snatched at the powder-snow in the combes, lifted it up, carried it away in dense whirls, dropped it and then picked it up again. It scoured the ridges and uncovered the rocks. Its constancy was broken by lulls and crises. Its complaint rose from a murmur to a wail and to rending cries. It wore our nerves. Sometimes it raised a shrill note, as sharp as a blade of steel, vibrating like a knife thrown into a wooden target.

Because of it, the keen frost—36 degrees (F.) below—seemed

more cruel. The rare air, the cold and the wind made the simplest movements painful, like dressing oneself, pulling on one's boots, lacing them up, slipping into one's anorak, putting on crampons, bending over to adjust them, roping up—so many wearying tasks. We tried to do it all quickly so as not to leave our fingers exposed for more than a moment, for they could not be warmed again once the frost had caught them. Three rapid movements and our hands were back in our pockets. A few seconds later we began again. At last we were ready. At least ten minutes were required to do what would have taken scarcely one in normal weather.

Before six o'clock we left the camp on two ropes, Lambert and Tensing, Roch and myself. A wide ledge supported by the Lhotse séracs and rising above the upper Khumbu Cwm by about 300 feet, first brought us above the *bergschrund*—which was here almost entirely filled by the debris of séracs, though it was otherwise enormous—and afterwards to the main branch of the Y. Lambert and Tensing, attacking the couloir, found ice almost at once and this obliged us to abandon them. We ourselves were moving obliquely to the left, taking the couloir diagonally, and thus remained in a more favourable area. We were continually looking to see if it were still not possible to make our way on to the Lhotse glacier. For was this not the day's objective? It was futile; everything was iced and we went straight on up. The wind-blown snow was not bad and made normal progress possible—normal, be it understood, for 23,000 feet. Three steps and then a halt, and for each step two or three breaths. Higher up, the snow being deeper, our pace slowed even more. The oxygen was no great help to us for it could not be used while moving, so great was the resistance to the breathing action. And the benefit of the inhalations taken while resting was small, being limited to the duration of the halts, because the tissues could not create a reserve of oxygen. We climbed straight up towards a rock islet situated at the foot of the Eperon des Genevois. This would be the first stage in our journey.

We gained about 300 feet an hour, scarcely more: three hours on Jacob's ladder, in the axis of the greatest slope. Three steps, a halt, three steps; endlessly dragging one's boot out of its hole to lift higher, so that it could dig another hole. At last we reached

the base of the rock islet. A halt below the overhang of the rocks, sheltered from the waves of powder-snow that were lifted by the wind and fell in cascades. The wind was brutal and the frost was biting despite the clear sky. We were weary. Making contact with the approaches to the South Col had been severe. Opposite us, the walls of Nuptse remained immense and very high. Above us the slope seemed interminable. In the depths of the valley, blocking the Khumbu gorge, the pointed cap of Pumori had fallen away, for we were above it, being then about 23,600 feet.

It was not yet ten o'clock and our day was not ended. The snow, which was now harder, obliged us to cut steps. Four, five, six blows with an axe were needed there, while lower down two had been sufficient. We were in a bad way. The 23,000 feet level is a step which cannot be passed without difficulty. It means a new phase in acclimatisation. In a few days we would climb better and quicker.

Cutting steps exhausted me and stupefied me. I was empty-headed. I thought only of the moment when I would surrender my place to those who came behind. At last, Lambert's rope relieved us. Seeking the safest line, Lambert climbed straight up towards the beginning of the spur. The slope was steep, between 40 degrees and 50 degrees. Ascending last now, I had more frequent rests. I leaned my forehead on the axe and waited for my heart to calm down. I listened to the labours of the leader, to the resounding blows and to Roch's breathing. I watched the rope running up between my legs. It rose slowly, by jerks of eight or twelve inches and I dreaded the moment when it would tighten again and I would have to start moving once more. When my turn came, I raised my head and looked upwards. Lambert was cutting at the hard ice, fifteen feet below the base of the spur.

In the rocks it was somewhat better. However, the effort of climbing proved a hindrance to regular breathing, but it seemed to me that the distraction imposed on us by the rock-face, though it was an easy one, compensated for the respiratory discomfort. Moreover, on rocks we could gauge our progress better. To the rocks succeeded sections of snow and of ice. The slope was continuous, very regular and very steep; it was unbroken by any

shelf. There were no resting places and no emplacements for a camp. Nothing, in fact, but the slope. To right and left were the upper branches of the Y, white or green, snow or ice.

At last there came a platform, quite small, about two yards long and less than two feet wide.

'And here's Camp VI,' said Raymond, the first to sink on to this welcome terrace.

'What's the time?'

'One o'clock. Seven hours since we left camp. All speed records have been beaten.'

Silence followed. Four words made one as breathless as did two steps.

'What's our height?'

'About 24,600 feet, I think.'

'That makes us half-way up.'

'A little more. There must still be thirteen to sixteen hundred feet to the Col.'

'If we even get to the Col! But the end of the Eperon is above it.'

'That's a good thing. To get to the South Col, we go downhill.'

'But not today, anyway.'

'No; today I've had enough.'

Resting, one very quickly felt well again; as soon as one's heart had calmed down, as soon as one had been able to find air at the bottom of one's lungs, exhaustion disappeared. But the moment one restarted, only a few steps were needed to be back at the same point. Recuperation was not deep.

'It looks rather big to me,' said Roch, pointing to the shapeless mass of Everest. 'There ought to be a hut at the South Col.'

'Well, while we are waiting for your hut, we might go and take a look at the left-hand couloir.'

We had something to eat, put on our sacks and departed, scarcely ascending, but drawing off to the left by a system of shelves which took us to the edge of the upper left branch of the Y, the one which leads direct to the Col. We glanced at one another. There was nothing but hard ice, like glass.

'We must come back again and take a look higher up,' I concluded. 'That avalanche started below the Col.'

Then came the descent. It was very slow: 2,000 feet in two hours. In the Alps or in similar terrain it would have taken less than an hour. But our muscles were as if made of cotton, without elasticity or resilience. At five o'clock, with flabby legs and empty-headed, without feelings, we disappeared into our tents. Ten times I returned to the job of unstrapping my crampons and pulling off my boots. I had no more strength than a convalescent putting his feet to the ground for the first time after a serious operation. It was the same when I tried to get into my sleeping-bag.

'It's as difficult as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle,' said Roch to me as he watched my desperate efforts while awaiting his turn, for the tents were small and low.

At last it was done. Fever, cold and shivers. I wanted to sleep, but I was agitated and nervous, and my throat was burning; my tongue was as dry as felt, despite the tea the Sherpas brought us.

'Don't you want any pemmican?' asked Roch, who never spared me comment on the alimentary régime we had chosen. But I was in no state to respond, or even to appreciate a joke.

'No, thank you!' I said, 'I don't want anything. I want to sleep.'

Roch settled down beside me. For a long time we turned and turned. At last, stupefied by aspirin and sleeping tablets we sank into a dreamless sleep.

The sun was glowing on the golden roof of the tent when Tensing drew aside the flap and brought us each a cup of tea; in his copper-coloured face his extraordinary smile shone as brightly as snow.

'Had a good sleep, sahibs?'

Sleep had given us back our strength, and the prospect of a day's rest was sweet. Our lips were still tight from the fever and our throats were sore. It was a taste for life itself that we seemed to drink with our tea.

Through the open end of the tent we watched the snow that was carried off by the wind and rising to attack the glittering walls of Nuptse. We rested—rather, it was a half-rest, for after an hour or two in the high-altitude camps one no longer knows what to do with oneself. One wants to sleep, but sleep flees. When the wind drops, one settles down in the sun and it is too hot.

The wind returns and it is too cold. So while awaiting the arrival of Chevalley and Aubert, I made rapid notes. I wrote down my impressions of the previous day, because I have known for a long time how it is with me: as soon as I am rested, I forget all my weariness, all my anxieties, all my desire to be down again as quickly as possible and, as soon as I get back to Geneva, certain that I am absolutely truthful, I will tell my friends about our first reconnaissance of the South Col as if it was a pleasure party in which it was a pity they did not take part. How good it is that we do forget. Life would be impossible if the worse moments did not become the best memories.

In the middle of the afternoon, Aubert and Chevalley arrived with Ajiba, Dawa Thondup and news from the plain.

'What have you been doing since Tuesday?' I asked.

'I began by looking after Pasang and Ang Dawa,' Chevalley answered. 'Pasang is getting better. On Wednesday he went down with Hofstetter and me to Camp II. There was no longer any track and it was almost as laborious as the ascent. In the couloir we found Mingma and the two cooks, seated on their loads and not very decided whether to go any higher. Our arrival revived their courage and gave them the prospect of a track as far as the crevasse.'

'Was there anybody at II?'

'Wyss had just arrived with Gyalzen and Sarki, who has fully recovered. We picked up sahibs' loads for the reascent—fifteen kilos each (33 lbs.) Yesterday, when I wasn't busy watching you with glasses, I was looking after my patients. Ang Dawa is not brilliant. I'm afraid it might be a stomach ulcer. If that is confirmed, I will evacuate him. Flory had trouble in digesting his yak. It turned to gastritis, but he is so determined to get better that he certainly will!'

'How was Wyss at II?'

'He arrived at III yesterday and he is now at IV. If he continues to acclimatise so well, we shall see him here tomorrow or the day after. But I found the ascent to V rather long. I slept badly and I was carrying too much. This series of steps is endless.'

'After this, there isn't another step until you get to the South Col.'

'Is it difficult?'

'It is long!'

'That's the impression I got while watching you yesterday. When are you starting out tomorrow?'

'Early, so as to take advantage of the cool.'

Evening fell. The wind had died down, but the frost was keen nevertheless. Before going to sleep, I looked around the world to which I had little chance of returning but to which I was already attached by the ties created by effort, fatigue, fear and hope.

From the terraced tents of Camp V I looked at the Western Cwm as it fell away into the first séracs. Pumori, the triangular lock of the valley, scarcely rose above us. Beyond, some very big mountains, very far away, rose out of the plain of Tibet, composing an horizon like a hazy lacework. Despite these, my eyes always returned to the massive tower of blackish rocks that was Everest, and to the famous 'Yellow Band' very high up, where all the attempts on the north side had broken, a bed of clear schists, passing right through the mountain from one crest to the other and prolonging itself above our heads in the summital area of Lhotse. Would we reach it in our turn? Would we pass it? One day of rest had restored strength to my spirit. The previous day, on the return, I was a broken carcass; this evening hope, desire and will were mine again.

May 17th.

Five in the morning. Frozen snow sounded the reveille on the tent walls. The west wind shook us as if we were small boys lingering in bed. Interior condensation showed us what the temperature was outside—36 degrees of frost. Everest was showing its white plume.

The sky was steel-grey when we started out once more in two parties, one of the inseparable Lambert and Tensing, the other of Aubert, Chevalley and myself. Roch, who was staying at the camp that morning in order to do some filming, encouraged us with a big smile and the optimistic comment that it would get quieter at sunrise. For the moment it was not calm and swirls of powder-snow were dancing strange ballets. Even the throbbing

music of clarinets, bassoons and all the wind instruments was there. When I passed on my choreographic thoughts to Aubert, he shut me up with a peremptory 'You go and put on a ballet-skirt. That'll bring me back to my seat!'

Our pace, however, was not that of ballerinas: far short of it. Heavy, sluggish and awkward in our wadded clothes and anoraks, and with frozen muscles, we reached the main couloir. Nothing remained of our tracks of two days earlier but a hardened ribbon into which, however, our crampons bit well.

Determined to assure ourselves finally of the impossibility of using the left-hand couloir—the one that would lead us directly to the South Col, we pushed towards that side. The ice broke through and it was pointless to persist; so we ascended direct to the rock islet below the Eperon. From there we made a new attempt leftwards.

Aubert got busy, gained thirty yards diagonally, drove a piton into the ice, made us secure, waited for us and then set off again, secured in his turn. Another thirty yards. The madly swirling snow dust was so dense that despite the short distance Aubert disappeared from time to time. Another piton rang as it sank deeply under the hammer-blows. It was now necessary to cut every step in the blue ice and we experienced the unbearable weariness that step-cutting rapidly provokes. On that side we were checked.

The sunlight that had slid at last over our slopes had hardly warmed the air and the wind was still biting cold. We regained the rock islet and halted; we were chilled, our fingers were numb, and we trembled in the wind like frozen trees.

Camp V, viewed from above, was very small in the dazzling basin and seemed to us a picture of rest. Figures like ants were moving about the tents. Far across the glacier, above Camp IV, a group of almost imperceptible black dots was travelling along the track. The Sherpas!

'Coming?'

'Yes, coming.'

We resumed the track we had made two days earlier towards the base of the Eperon. We had to cut new steps in the zone below the first rocks. These passages did not offer serious objective

difficulties, but our arms were without strength, our legs clumsy and our hearts frenzied. Our lungs never seemed to be able to fill; in order to inflate them better, we opened our mouths like fishes out of water, and our mouths, tongues and throats dried up.

Throughout the ascent I examined the arrangements we should have to make to get the laden Sherpas through. We should have to cut wide deep steps in the ice below the spur, plant spikes and pitons, and stretch fixed ropes. It would be a long job, but indispensable. If the monsoon arrived on time, two full weeks remained to us.

As hard as the effort was, I suffered less than I did two days earlier. Seventy-two hours at 23,000 feet had not caused any of the deterioration I had feared. On the contrary, acclimatisation continued. It was a good sign. At last we reached the little platform where we had stopped on the previous attempt. We swallowed a few scraps of food, as a sort of duty. I remembered Tilman's jest about the advantage of having gluttons on Everest because they are, by definition, capable of eating without hunger. I had no desire to jest. I was tired. And the still, fixed, mute faces of my companions told me that I was not alone in being so. Tensing seemed the most alert of us all. But this stillness was also a sign of our will to recuperate. The halts were brief and we knew that the intense well-being which resulted from them would only last as long as the halts themselves. As soon as we set off again, utter weariness returned. We savoured our rests like some rare liqueur.

Lambert and Tensing went in front; we followed. Higher up we wanted to try and leave the Eperon on the right and thereafter reach the Col by ledges of snow and rock. Suddenly the rock changed aspect and colour, for we had reached the slabs of the Yellow Band which run through the whole versant from Everest to Nuptse. From below it seemed that there was no more than one wide band; in reality we crossed three of them, one after the other, separated by intermediate bands of a darker colour: a strange freak of geological times. We must have passed 24,500 feet. We were higher than the Col separating Lhotse from Nuptse. Once past the bands, we climbed more easily, in broken black gneiss.

Despite our desire to climb higher, our pace remained very

slow. We could do nothing against our hearts and lungs, and as always in the mountains, it was the most experienced who regulated the pace. The one who finds it hardest must go on continuously at the limit of his powers, using up all his reserves, in order not to hold back the others who, compared with him, take it easy, because they have no need to go all out. Unjust, perhaps, but inevitable. It is true also of life itself.

At three in the afternoon we were at about 25,250 feet. A further halt.

'Will it be all right, Tensing?'

'For the Tigers? Yes, it will do. Ropes will be needed down below!' And he made a gesture of clinging to an imaginary rope.

'How much will they be able to carry?'

The sirdar's smile turned into a grimace. 'Twelve kilos, not more.'

'That will be enough.'

Above, it did not seem that there were serious obstacles to prevent us reaching the Col. Before turning round, I tried once more, for the last time, to traverse to the left, in the persistent desire to follow the normal and the shortest route, the one which would avoid our having to climb to the shoulder and afterwards descend to the Col. For half an hour, secured from the Eperon, I manoeuvred on the slabs. At the end of the rope, I could at last cast an eye into the couloir. The ledges were iced and the itinerary, though possible for a party of climbers, would be too exposed for laden men. I had wasted my time, but the question was settled.

Then came the descent, monotonous, less breathless than the ascent, less exhausting for the heart, but almost as fatiguing because of the precautions required. At 10,000 feet one would have leapt from one block to another, but here every step was secured, knowing well that in the event of a slip we should not find in our muscles the resources and resilience to recover. And in this always uniform and interminable terrain, the nerves also grew tired and we found that the tents of Camp V still remained quite small and took a great deal of time to come and meet us. Roch's predictions of the morning luckily came true at two in the afternoon: the wind ceased to whistle in our ears.

At last, at six o'clock, staggering, stumbling, empty-headed,

like drunkards, we arrived. Whether one descends oneself, or whether one watches others descending, the impression is the same, of an effort which takes a man to the limits of exhaustion.

The violent gusts in the night did not prevent any of us from sleeping, but the morning laziness, the breathlessness brought about by the least step or by movements that were too abrupt, and the desire to avoid doing the smallest jobs, clearly showed us that the fatigue from the previous day was still deep. A day's rest was needed to overcome such a low condition.

The health of everybody was good on the whole, but Roch was coughing a great deal. Tensing had a sore throat, Chevalley had blackened lips, while my own eyes were painful. My sight was not very clear: a slight conjunctivitis. Yet I had not taken off my goggles for a single minute.

At eleven in the morning, I called Camp IV on the radio. Wyss answered me.

'Everything all right?' I asked.

'Yes. Try and climb to the Col with oxygen. If you breathe quietly, it will be all right. From III to IV I ascended as quickly as Hofstetter,' he replied.

'Above 23,000 feet it's no longer so good.'

'Why?'

'Impossible to use it while moving. How are things getting on down below?'

'They're getting along well. The supplies are coming up regularly. Hofstetter is watching everything closely. Asper and Flory are on their way up to V; they left here more than two hours ago. Flory is better. Asper is making progress, but I have examined the graph of his pulse readings, and I think he is too young to climb the South Col. As for Roch, it's much the same, or rather it's just the reverse, he is no longer young enough. Anyway, you must decide.'

'What about the séracs?'

'They are changing every day. But we're keeping the way open, thanks to the timbers. Camp II is completely surrounded by crevasses and you'd need a proper bridge to get there.'

'Any other news?'

'Of Shipton, yes! He has abandoned the ascent of Cho Oyu. The police forbade him to pitch his base camp on Tibetan territory and he had to establish it in Nepal, too far from Camp II. There was bad health too: one of them could no longer see clearly, another had dysentery, and a third bronchitis, and so on.'

'Who told you all this?'

'Lombard, who saw him at the Nangpa La. Zimmermann is here today. He wants to look for fossils and flowers on the western ridge of Everest. What are you going to do tomorrow?'

'Final reconnaissances. And then, up we go. . . . Keep the track in condition; I've an idea we'll be tired when we come down again.'

'Good Luck!'

'Thanks. Is that all?'

'Yes. End.'

Asper and Flory arrived a little later, happy at joining us.

'Nine days at Camp IV! We began to find the time long. Just like a foreman's job in a marshalling yard. This way for Camp V! Don't forget the mail! What are you going to do tomorrow?'

'We were waiting for you before we decided.'

We then held a council of war. Seated in a circle on the loads for more than an hour, we talked the matter over, compared ideas and weighed our chances. It was a ridiculous assemblage of microbes gravely brought together at the centre of the immense circle of massive peaks.

'What do you think, Raymond?'

'I think our route is good and that we won't find a better one. We shall have to launch a party to try and break through to the Col while the others equip the base of the Eperon.'

'What about you, Roch?'

'I think we must make one more try to the right of the séracs. If we reach the main slopes of Lhotse, immediately above us, the oblique traverse to the Col would not be bad.'

'What about avalanches?'

'The risks are no greater than in the couloir to the right of the Eperon.'

'Yes, but we are in the couloir for only two hours while we would have to spend the whole day below Lhotse.'

'Yes, but we may find a plateau below Lhotse and be able to pitch a camp there.'

'What, another?'

'Imagine what a climb of well over 3,000 feet in a day will mean for the Tigers.'

'Of course, it's terrible. But I think it's the only solution.'

'Who knows?' said Chevalley. 'It is possible that we will discover a tent site before the summit of the Eperon.'

'There didn't look much chance of that.'

'I know, but while we haven't been there, we know nothing for certain.'

Opinions took shape. Lambert, Tensing and Asper thought that from the next day we should have to put all our strength into the attack on the Eperon by the route already explored. The others reckoned that if there was still a chance of finding a less exhausting route, we ought to look for it. As the equipping of the base of the Eperon could not be undertaken before a party had made absolutely certain that it would be possible to follow the route to its end, nothing prevented us from making two final reconnaissances the next day. And that was the decision we took unanimously. Flory, Roch and Aubert would try the glacier route to the right, while Chevalley, Asper and Da Namgyal would resume the Eperon route and attempt to reach the Col.

May 19th.

Last reconnaissances. Fine weather. But the wind raged through its kingdom. Its intensity did not slacken throughout the day. Roch, fatigued by violent fits of coughing, gave up the idea of going with Aubert and Flory to reconnoitre the route he had thought of on the glacier. On that side the absolute impossibility of reaching the upper stretches of the Lhotse glacier with porters was quickly proved. After ascending for about two hours in very steeply inclined couloirs, Aubert and Flory ran up against a compact ice slope, very tough and difficult to cut. It was vain to hope to make a staircase through a difference in level of some 1,600 to 2,000 feet, which we should then have to equip with fixed ropes for security. Three hours after their departure, Aubert

and Flory returned to camp. Thus the last doubts were dispersed; there was nothing more to do but await the results of the reconnaissance being carried out by Chevalley, Asper and Da Namgyal.

Before setting out, Chevalley had examined me, for I had suffered in the night from violent headaches. His diagnosis was that I had frontal synusitis, which had been the cause of my troubled vision the day before, and he injected a million units of penicillin to cure me quickly. Being tired, I scarcely left my tent. I was filled with anxiety lest this should be the effect of six consecutive days at 23,000 feet. At that moment I was incapable of any real effort.

At about five in the evening, Lambert, who was resting that day, paid me a visit in my tent. He too was anxious, but not for himself.

'They are not on their way down yet,' he said to me.

'Who?'

'Chevalley and Asper. No one can be seen on the Eperon.'

'Is there any mist?'

'No, it's clear and you can see to the top. At five o'clock they should be on their way down. We saw them go up, and we ought to see them even better now, since it's no longer against the light.'

'What can we do?'

'I think we must wait another hour and then try to take a tent as high as possible, bivouac and climb up tomorrow to see what has happened. You know, in this wind it won't be very pleasant on top.'

'I agree! Who will go up with you?'

'Flory. He's in good shape.'

Ten minutes later there was a cry from behind the tent.

'There they are!'

'Who?'

'Chevalley—all three! They're only five minutes away.'

In fact, a few moments later the doctor's face was framed in the opening of the tent; it was literally hollow with fatigue. He seemed to have lost several pounds. One would have thought he was ten years older.

'Well? Where have you come from? How did you come down?'

'By the right-hand couloir.'

'Good. We were anxious. How was it on top?'

'We did not get to the top. Nevertheless, we got higher than the Col, to some 600 feet or so from the shoulder which overlooks it.'

'Is it all right?'

'Yes, it will do.'

'Go on.'

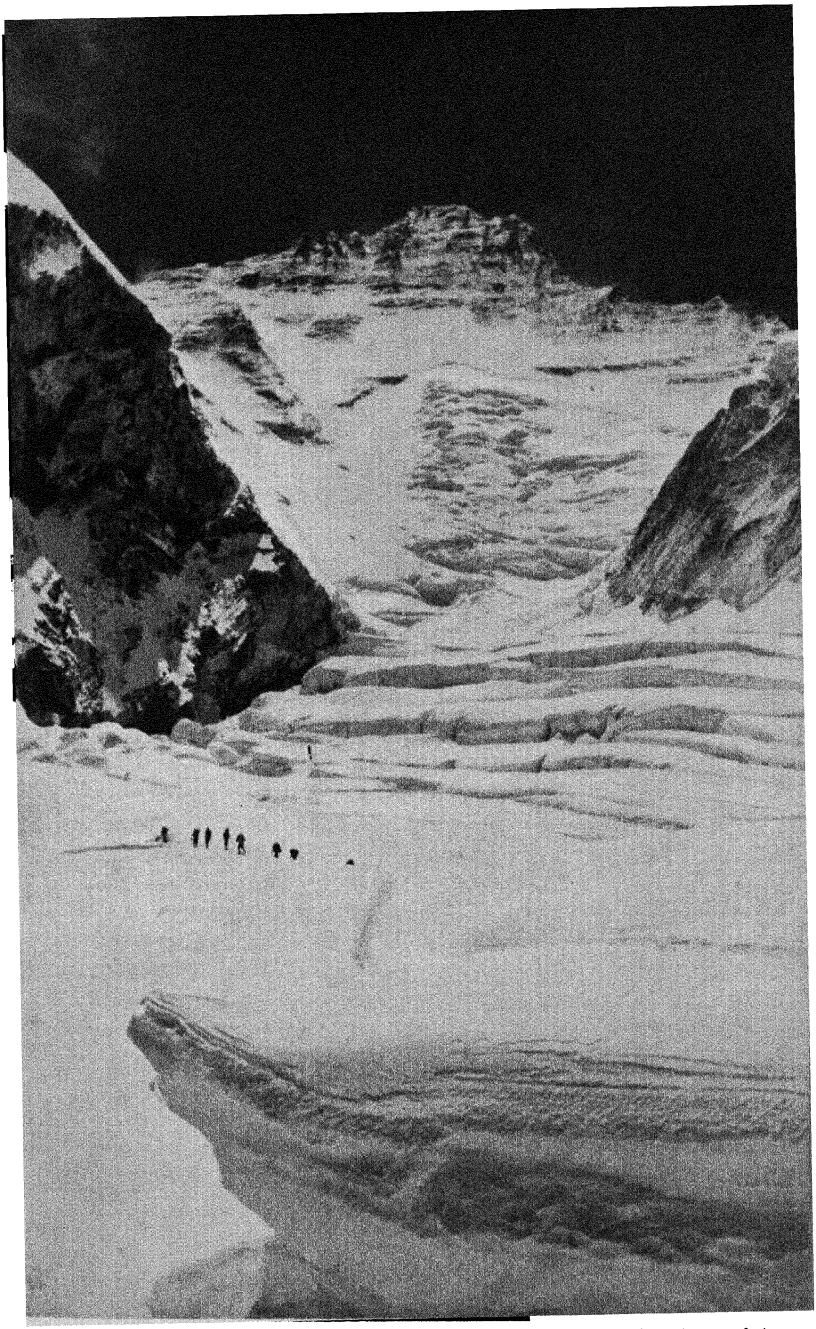
'No. I must have a rest. I'm all in. The couloir is endless.'

He spoke with difficulty. His eyes were hollow. His face was heavily wrinkled. It was a case of deterioration, and I thought this little game must not go on too long: I was sick, Chevalley was exhausted. He told me nothing, so I will confine myself to reproducing the notes in his diary which he could not write that evening but which were drawn up the next day.

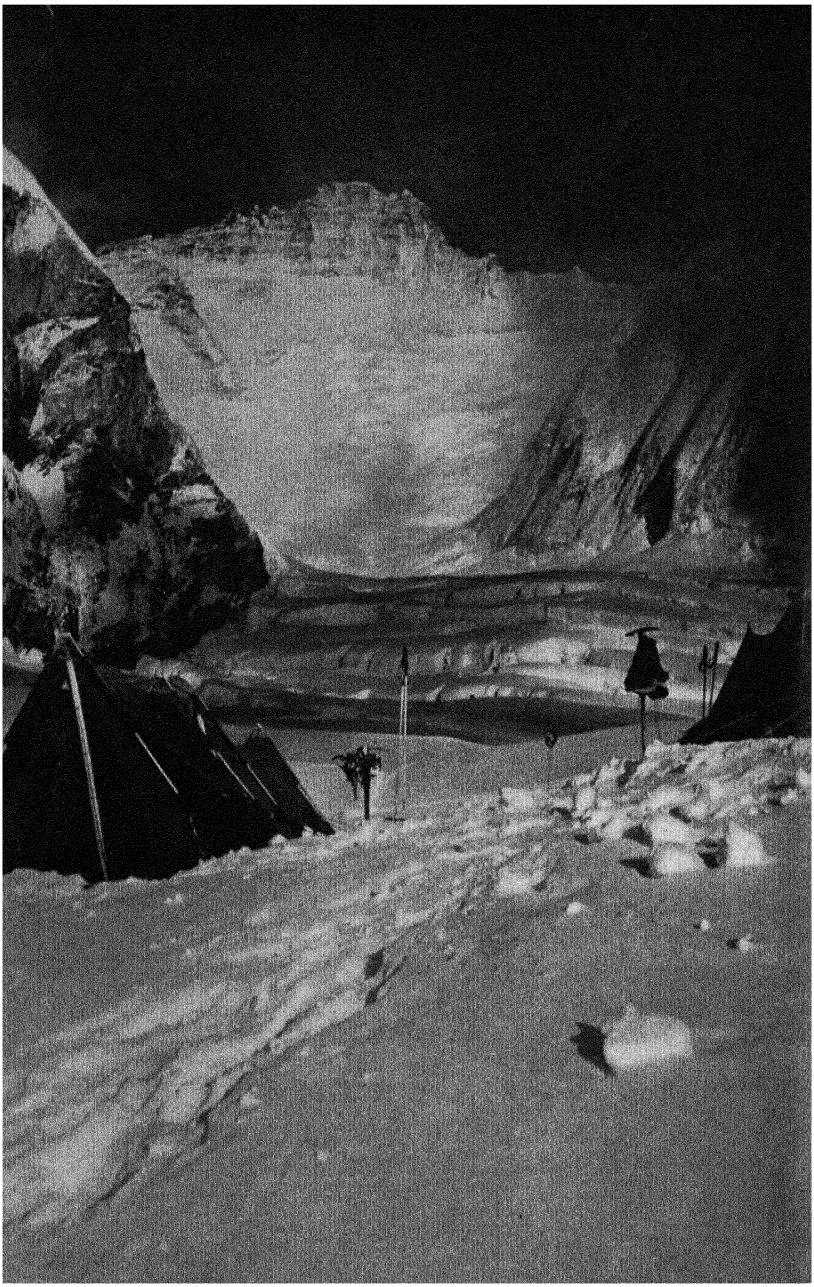
Chevalley's diary. May 19th. Camp V. Third reconnaissance towards the South Col.

We left at 7.00, Asper and myself with Da Namgyal, with the purpose of reaching the South Col, climbing obliquely along the right of the Eperon from the point reached on the 17th.

Wind very keen and disagreeable, sweeping the slopes of the Col and the Eperon. A descending wind. We had to climb against it, working our way across a racing mass of snow dust. It lasted all day, enormously increasing the effort and fatigue. The trip to the rock islet was very laborious. I made the track to start with, then Asper went in front. A halt on the rock. A Niagara of snow dust ran over us, froze on our faces, and filtered in under our shirts despite the protectors. After the rock, I went in front. At 11.00 we reached the lower platform—the future depot. A halt and some food. 11.40, started off again. Climbed along the Eperon, as on the other day. Shortly before reaching the point where we began to descend, we moved obliquely across to the right and entered the steeply inclined combe between the Eperon and the slopes of Lhotse. Easy march on flattened strips of snow and rock outcrop. Fatigue due to the altitude. Nevertheless, I advanced at a satisfying pace. Unfortunately, after the 'depot' Asper was visibly in a bad way. He had to stop often, sit down or lie down. Da



15 *The Western Cwm is reached by man for the first time; in the background, Lhotse* (27,890 *feet*)



16 *Camp III (19,358 feet) in the Western Cwm*

Namgyal was also in a bad way. At two in the afternoon it seemed to me that we were not more than an hour from the crest. My comrades could do no more. There was only one solution: to give up. The wind was terrible. More than once we had to advance on all fours so as not to be blown away. It was impossible to continue alone or leave anyone alone in such weather. Everest could be seen, showing us a very steep face. The South Col, masked by the top of the Eperon, must have been below us. Altitude was difficult to estimate; we were almost at the level of Nuptse.

A brief discussion followed with Asper. He was in a bad state, but was willing to go on all the same. He was very reluctant to give up so near the end. I explained to him that for his first ascent to the Eperon he had done well, that we had all had the same experience: terrible fatigue the first time and noticeable amelioration the second time. That pleased him. Our task was fulfilled. From the point we were at we could see to the crest. There was neither wall nor ice barrier to stop us. The terrain remained the same to the top: steep, strips of snow, broken rock. Unfortunately, we had not found the slightest sign of a possible site for a camp, not a serious level place, not a ledge nor a platform. Nothing. There was no break in a slope that rises in a single flight from 22,650 to 26,250 feet. Everest's armour is smooth.

For the descent, I had the idea of traversing below Lhotse and following the great couloir—the right bank of the Lhotse glacier, the right branch of the Y. While in that direction, we completed the exploration made by Flory and Aubert that morning: we saw moreover that they had had to give up very soon.

Asper and Da Namgyal were in agreement about using this route. At the start there was a long horizontal or slightly descending passage; this was easy. We were on the upper edge of the Yellow Bands. The endless descent of the couloir followed. It is difficult to imagine what is represented by 3,000 feet of continuous slope without a rest or a platform. Monotony. Fatigue. However, it was not difficult but it was quite steep, about 40 degrees, so that the slightest slip would be unforgiven. In general the snow was good; one's feet sank in, too far for our liking. There was

harder snow at places and a few yards of ice to cut steps in. These hard slabs were recognisable from a distance and could be easily avoided. The descent restored Asper and the Tiger. It took us three and a half hours—less than 1,000 feet an hour, a pace appreciably slower than ascending in the Alps. Return to Camp V at 5.30 p.m. Comrades anxious. They looked at us with consternation. We must have looked exhausted! In fact, Everest is no joke.

Such was the day of May 19th, devoted to the final reconnaissances. The stakes had now been placed. Of the four possible cards only one remained: that of the Eperon. The others were bad: so much had been proved. We had one last discussion before making our decisions.

'Don't you think,' asked Flory, 'that there might still be a chance through the left-hand couloir, by the branch of the Y that leads direct to the Col.'

'No,' Lambert replied, and in this I supported him. 'There's nothing to be done there. We have tried three times: from the base, from the level of the platform and half-way up. Ice everywhere. It would take ten days to cut the steps and would need a kilometre of fixed ropes.'

Flory did not insist. 'What about Chevalley's couloir, the right-hand branch of the Y?'

'Nothing to be done there. You heard what he said when he got back: "That couloir is endless!" Deep snow, over 3,000 feet in height by direct ascent, and risks of snow slides. No site for a camp, even by moving off to the right into the séracs. What do you think, Tensing?'

'Couloir bad. Eperon good.'

'Will the Tigers go up?'

'Yes, but it will need fixed ropes below.'

'We'll put them up.'

The situation was difficult, but at least it was now clear. It is hard to imagine the terrible burden which weighs upon the first expedition to attack such problems: the uncertainty as to the route to follow, the obligation, under penalty of an irremediable mistake, to reconnoitre all the possibilities before pushing ahead. The

best route has to be found at any cost, because the best is quite bad nevertheless. The age of 'variants' in the Himalaya is not yet near; time must pass before one searches for supplementary difficulties and hitherto unknown solutions! In an attempt like ours, whatever precautions one is able to take, one finds oneself faced with the unknown and forced to improvise. For five days we had investigated the approaches to the South Col. And our investigations made it possible for us to get a clear idea.

But a situation is not good simply because it is clear. Our chances were limited because these 3,000 feet and more that we had to cross without a break in order to reach the assault base, constituted a formidable obstacle. Theoretically we knew it well enough, but now this unbroken wall, without a terrace or a resting-place, was before us.

'Have you considered,' said Aubert to me, 'that on Annapurna their last camp was at 24,000 feet and the summit at 26,500?'

'I have thought of it often. From their last camp to the summit they had 650 feet less than we have from here to the Shoulder!'

And the Shoulder is only 200 feet below the summit of Annapurna! And we've got to climb there with weapons and baggage!'

'These are our conclusions, then. We are all agreed that the only possible solution is by the Eperon.'

'Agreed!'

'Since it is impossible to pitch an intermediate camp, we shall have to make two or three transports of food and material to the platform. On the other hand, we shall have to equip the base of the Eperon, cut good steps and place fixed ropes. How long do you think they should be?'

'Between 100 and 150 yards should be enough. Fortunately the worst passages are below rather than above.'

Half an hour later, everything being settled, I made radio contact with Camp IV.

'Hullo, here is Camp V. Camp IV please answer.'

'Hullo, here is Camp IV, Hofstetter.'

'How are you?'

'All right, and you?'

'Everything is settled. We've got to take the Eperon route. No intermediate camp is possible.'

'What are you going to do?'

'Tomorrow, Lambert, Roch and Flory are going with three Tigers to equip the base with fixed ropes and to construct a platform. After that we'll have to reckon on two days of transport to this depot with the units for Camp VI. Pass this on to Wyss.'

'When shall I join you?'

'You are still too useful at III and IV. Wait for a few days. You will be less used up than us when the moment comes.'

'Are you all well?'

'Not very brilliant. But nothing serious to report. It's laborious.'

'End? *Salut!*'

'*Salut!* End.'

May 20th.

The wind, that evil but constant companion of our sleeplessness and of our days, was blowing a gale all night. It was our turn this time to learn that it is one of the permanent elements of the Himalayan climate. It seems that though it sometimes gives us brief and illusory respites, it is in order to go, God knows where, to gather new reserves of strength, bitterness and spite. Of all the demons that guard the mountains, according to the old beliefs of the locality, it is undoubtedly the most persevering in its task and the most attentive. The Goddess-Mother of the Winds is well defended by her sons.

Nevertheless, I felt better that morning. The million units of penicillin seemed to have worked, but because the penicillin had been congealed by the cold, Chevalley had some difficulty in making a second injection. We were all suffering in varying degrees from a deep irritation of the throat; we breathed too often and, nine times out of ten, with open mouths.

For those who were not working it was another day of waiting. Three parties were toiling on the Eperon: Flory and Dawa Thondup, Lambert and Tensing, Roch and Pasang. We vainly attempted to watch them from the camp. Squalls of powder-snow hid them throughout the day despite the fine weather. Having

left at 8.30 they returned only at 4.00 p.m., emerging from the blizzard suddenly, like shadows made of the clouds.

I joined Raymond in his tent.

'Did you succeed?'

'Yes, but it was tough.'

'The wind?'

'Terrible. It took our breath away. We did not dare to open our mouths because of the powder-snow. And breathing through your nose may be all right for the seaside. Here you want a mouth twice as big as it is.'

'That's why they chose Genevese for this expedition. They've all got huge mouths. Did you fix the ropes?'

'Yes. In the squalls you couldn't see from one rope to another. The wind has so scraped the snow from the left-hand couloir that the ice is showing through everywhere, quite green. When Flory saw it, he said nothing more about trying that way! Below the rock islet, we had to cut more deeply. Tensing thinks it will be good enough.'

'And above it?'

'Above it we did everything. Five or six blows with the axe made splendid steps. I placed the first fixed rope at the base of the Eperon, fifty metres of it. It was fixed with pitons and a ring at the top. It looked a little like the Hornli ridge below the Shoulder of the Matterhorn. Higher up I drove in piton after piton. Then we fixed a hundred metres of rope while descending.'

'A hundred and fifty metres in all? Will it be enough?'

'Yes. The Sherpas have tried it out. They pulled on the ropes with all their strength. They smiled and Tensing was optimistic. He doesn't fear anything, that fellow. An extraordinary type!'

'And the platform for the depot?'

'As six of us were too many down below, Flory went ahead with Dawa. When we joined them, they had begun to dig. It wasn't easy in that wind. When you stood up, you risked losing your balance. It was too small for all of us to work at the same time and those who were doing nothing froze where they stood. It wasn't funny. We succeeded in levelling out the surface a little, but it was impossible to dig a real terrace, however small.'

'Will you be able to pitch a tent there?'

'That's out of the question. There's no room. You would need dynamite.'

'What about the loads?'

'We'll have to secure them with ropes. Pitons have been planted. Those who had to watch the others working moored themselves to these pitons. If they were able to prevent me from being carried away, they will do to secure the loads! They are less heavy than me. Anyway, we could not hold on there any longer, so we made off. Those who are going up tomorrow will perhaps have better weather than we did and be able to scratch there a little more, especially as the route is made and in order up to that point.'

'You've done well. How do you feel?'

'Dog-tired, but I'm all right. There's no doubt one still acclimatises even above 23,000 feet. How's your synusitis?'

'Not so bad. Asper worries me a little.'

'Too tired yesterday?'

'Yes, I think so. He hasn't budged from his tent today. Wyss and Chevalley think he's too young to go up to 26,000 feet.'

'The lucky devil is only twenty-five; that's twelve years less than me.'

'And fifteen less than me. He's got time to come back again to 26,000 feet.'

'He ought to go back to Camp IV for three or four days. He would recover better there. Don't you think so?'

'A good idea and I'm sure he'd agree. Look who's coming!'

Lying flat on our stomachs in the tent, we watched a party of five men ascending from IV at a good pace. Five minutes later Hofstetter arrived, followed by Ajiba, Aïla, Phu Tharke and Ang Norbu.

'How are you getting on, Hofstetter?'

'I'm beginning to know your camps. A real postman, I am! On the road every day.'

And he smiled broadly under his curly hair; there is not an ounce of surplus fat on Hofstetter and he has the supple figure of a long-distance runner, which he is.

'What are you going to do tomorrow? I saw a whole crowd on the Eperon during the ten minutes it wasn't blowing. What a wind!'

'They have fixed some ropes and prepared the depot.'

'Good. I'm not bored down below. The Sherpas like to have a sahib with them. All the same I could leave two of them here with you this evening. They are quite numerous enough to deal with the last transports. Keep Phu Tharke and Ang Norbu; they are at the top of their form.'

'Very well! I was just going to suggest it. Aren't you thirsty?'

'No, thank you. I'm going back in a moment. It's late. Five o'clock.'

After he had gone, we made our arrangements for the next day. Chevalley strongly advised me to wait another twenty-four hours before facing the squalls on the Eperon. He offered to replace me and ascend to the depot himself. I agreed.

May 21st.

Three ropes—Aubert, Norbu and Da Namgyal; Chevalley, Pasang and Ajiba; Tensing and Phu Tharke—left the camp at 10.00 a.m. This at last was the first transport in the direction of the South Col. The loads were reduced, but were still quite heavy: 22 lbs. I recalled the first stages and the 66 lbs. easily carried by our coolies. I recalled those who, tempted by double pay, and perhaps in order to show off their prodigious strength before the Sherpanis, had carried double loads—132 lbs.—for five days. From Camp I to Camp III, 55 lbs.; from Camp II to Camp V, 44 lbs. However, the expedition was thinning out, it was constantly becoming less numerous, and its needs were diminishing.

From Camp V our eyes followed the porters' progress. Their pace allowed us to estimate their chances—and ours—of reaching the South Col in one day. It was soon evident that the hard work of the day before was bearing fruit. The heavy party advanced regularly and tranquilly. In three hours it reached the depot. Seven days before it had taken us seven hours to reach the narrow platform beyond which we did not go that day. And we were not loaded. If all went well the Tigers would reach the Shoulder and

the South Col in seven hours. Tensing's optimism, on which I had been relying for days past, seemed at that moment justified. I called Raymond.

'They are there. They have only taken three hours.'

'With a ladder that's not surprising.'

The hour of decision had come, I felt. Lying in my tent, I made my plans. I wanted to think things over alone before consulting all my friends. My project was to launch two parties, one after the other, of nearly equal strength, both capable of conducting an attack from the South Col towards the summit. The first party would ascend to the Col on the first day, accompanied by the greatest possible number of laden Sherpas. The next day, it would try to pitch an intermediate camp between the Col and the summit at about 27,500 feet. On the third day there would be an assault by two men who would afterwards descend to the Col. On the next day (the fourth) the first party would descend to Camp V while the second party would leave Camp V and in its turn go up and try its luck.

My reflections had reached this point when Chevalley entered my tent.

'Back already? What's the time?'

'Two o'clock. We were quickly finished.'

'Yes, I think we'll have to take the plunge tomorrow.'

'Whom will you send?'

'I was just thinking about it.'

'Try to have two parties of equal strength. It's important.'

'Who seems to you to be in the best form at the moment?'

'How do you feel yourself?'

'Very well. I've no longer any kind of pain. And I'm rested. I would like to go up.'

'Sure! But if you will allow me to give you a doctor's advice, after two million units of penicillin you would do better to wait for two or three days. That's not all. If you go off with Lambert, the second party will be weaker.'

'Who seems to you to be in good form?'

'Lambert and yourself. Flory, Aubert and I are also well. Yesterday, it seemed to me that Hofstetter was in astonishing condition.

Asper ought in any case to go down to III to rest; he has not recovered since our reconnaissance the day before yesterday and he won't recover here; it's too high.'

'And Roch?'

'He is sleeping badly. His cough is exhausting him. It's not a very good idea to look after a broken rib at 23,000 feet.'

'Good. For Roch and Asper it's settled. If they are better in three days, they will ascend with the second party. Lambert will be in charge of the first group, and I will take charge of the second. Would you like to stay with me? I would prefer to have the doctor in the second line. He will perhaps be needed.'

'Agreed. And who goes with Lambert?'

'Aubert and Flory.'

'And Tensing?'

'He will have to go with them. He'll have to be there to get the Sherpas up. There's no question about it. And even if there was, I would leave him with Lambert. They understand one another and they make a fine pair for the assault. Go and fetch them, will you, since you've got your boots on? We'll decide all together.'

Alone again for a moment, I felt tormented. Fundamentally, I regretted not going up the next day, not being with the first on the South Col, not seeing the veil lifted from the mysteries we had come to discover. However, I do not think I wanted to dispute with my companions the honour of being the first, for our party was without envy and it was because of this that, amidst so much fatigue and suffering, we had been so happy together, despite the clashes which our characters made inevitable.

No one raised any objection to the plans we had just elaborated. Lambert accepted the project with his usual tranquility and calm confidence. Aubert was a little doubtful about starting the next day, after the carrying he had just done to the depot. Perhaps he regretted that we should not be together, for our comradeship in the mountains was of long duration. Nevertheless, he got on very well with Lambert and Flory, and Raymond's contagious serenity in difficulties reassured the *pater familias* who was sometimes rather anxious about his responsibilities.

'Let's hope it will be fine,' concluded Lambert, pointing to the ugly clouds rising towards Pumori.

But we were so accustomed to seeing the weather cloud over at the beginning of the afternoon and the enormous seething cloud mass gush from the séracs and invade the Cwm, unrolling over Camps III and IV and dying at the edge of Camp V, that we did not believe a change of weather to be imminent. Yet we were all aware that in a few days, ten or twelve at the most, the whole range would sink into storm and fury.

That night we might well have believed that the monsoon had fallen upon us and stolen all our hopes. It must have been midnight when I was suddenly torn from a heavy drug-induced sleep by gusts of such violence that I sat up with my ears cocked, leaning on my clenched fists. I thought I knew the Himalayan wind, but this roar, as of a turbine at six thousand revolutions, these high-pitched whistles of the squalls as they scoured the crests, and the whips that lashed at the tents—these were something new, that I did not know.

I recalled how Mallory had said, after his first expedition, that a wise man would do well to reflect and tremble, even on the threshold of his supreme attempt, such is Everest's terrifying harshness.

The gale made us tremble—both us and our tents—and gave us the time for reflection. For thirty-six hours a furious wind immobilised us in our fragile shelters. It was the sole master of space. Lying motionless and uneasy, we listened. The night passed and the wan daylight filtered through the cotton walls. And with the wind came the cold. Forced to go out to see to a tent-pole that was giving way, I was rendered breathless by the fearful sight that met me. The fresh dusty snow was flying in uninterrupted whirlwinds and the dark storm-clouds, coming from the south-west, were racing madly across the sky. I could hear them roaring as they broke more than 3,000 feet above me against the rugged bastions of Everest, then invisible in the fog. Like a fear-stricken beast I went back to hide. In a few hours the white and impalpable dust would penetrate everywhere and it was impossible to defend oneself against it. With our caps pulled down to our eyes

and with our sleeping-bags fastened around our necks, for two nights and a day, and for a further morning, we cowered down and did not move. In the intervals between squalls the harsh coughs of inflamed throats and bronchi could be heard in the various tents and these were the only signs of life, except that the indefatigable Sherpas, profiting by a brief calm during the first day, brought us something to drink.

Did we think? Scarcely, for altitude seals the brain. One's imagination is even less active, fortunately. Rather, one is invaded by waves of vague feeling; a desire to leave everything, to descend once and for all, to see grass and water and leaves once more; anxiety at the idea that if the snow was beginning to fall, the avalanches would not miss us; terror at the sudden thought that we might have been at the South Col or even higher. And then at moments, seeing clearly through this maze of anxieties, the hope that the nightmare was about to end, that the sunlight would return, that all our chances were not extinguished. The will to go on was still alive, deep down, fragile, threatened, but living, like flames that one has to shield with both hands lest they die.

And suddenly, on May 23rd, at about ten in the morning, the last gust whistled over our heads and silence settled down, as calm and deep as if nothing had ever troubled it. We came out almost at once, dazed, numbed, stretching our stiff muscles, in an agony of thirst. And the sun, melting the clouds, swept the whole Western Cwm, revealing everywhere a blinding whiteness. In one moment the sky was blue again from Pumori to Lhotse, from Nuptse to Everest, and at the same moment our hearts grew lighter and we found once more the taste for living.

In less than an hour the sun tossed us out of winter into summer. A heavy stagnant warmth weighed upon the camp. The frozen spray turned into a thick dough. Inside the tents everything melted and began to run. We emptied them, swept out the water, and stretched out ropes for drying our things. We paid visits from one shelter to another, dazzled by the intense light, a little like marmots leaving their earths for the first time after a long hibernation.

Thirty-six hours of blizzard at 23,000 feet certainly did seem

long. The icy cold had been trying to some of us: fits of endless coughing broke the silence. Roch and Dawa Thondup were more affected than the rest. Our best Tiger was suffering from very severe laryngitis; he was shaken by violent spasms and his voice had gone. He would have to go down to Camp III the next day with Asper, who had not recovered properly from the too strenuous efforts he had put up two days earlier. Thondup was distressed at being sick at the moment of participating in the hardest action. This veteran of Everest, the one who has without a doubt taken part in the greatest number of Himalayan expeditions—three times on Everest already, Nanga Parbat, and Annapurna—has still at thirty-six the enthusiasm of youth. The doctor was feverish, slept a great deal and wrought havoc in his medical stores, as if he believed in his remedies. My synusitis had improved and I felt well—thanks to the aforementioned medicines. To sum up, the health situation was not bad on the overall view.

By radio I confirmed to Camp IV our arrangements for the next day's assault. The evening was clear and it did not seem that those two days of tempest had been the forerunners of a premature monsoon. Eight days remained to us for pushing our assault as far as possible above the South Col. For twenty-six days we had been living among ice and rock. We had now to bring things to a conclusion and throw all we had in physical and moral resources into the last battle that was to begin the next day.

CHAPTER VII

The First Assault

(by Raymond Lambert)

May 24th.

The day towards which all our efforts had been tending for so many months had come. This was the hour of assault upon the summit. Behind us were all the preparations in Geneva and Zürich and the cities of India, the endless approach, the successive camps, and the agonising crossing of the séracs; the whole past gave place to the final question which now faced us. When we came down again, we should know the answer.

At dawn the sky was clear and the weather calm. Nevertheless, I was distrustful. We had been so brutally trounced for two days that I was still filled with vague anxieties. I am not, I believe, a nervous person, but in those thirty-six hours of raging gale, curled up in my sleeping-bag and listening to the shrieking gusts, in a sort of waking nightmare I had seen myself trapped by such weather at the South Col or even higher, and I had the feeling that at 26,000 feet there would be no mercy. At Camp V there had not been more than forty-five degrees of frost (F.); at the South Col or higher there must have been seventy, and I still had about me the bitter taste of those five bivouacs in a February storm on Mont Blanc. My feet would remind me of them even if my memory was bad.

'What are we going to do?' I asked Dittert, who had come to have breakfast with me.

'You're going up,' was all he replied.

Dittert, who had been suffering from synusitis for a few days, and absorbing penicillin like a sponge, had recovered with surprising rapidity. He had become once more the one we called 'le gosse' despite his grey hairs, which must have increased in

number in the last month, since he had carried alone the formidable burden of organising the camps. Yet he was still his droll self, lively—too lively sometimes—but quick to recover after his first over-brisk reactions, happy to be alive, happy to be there, completely absorbed, concentrated, and thinking of nothing but the expedition: a leader with whom one does not argue. This was my first expedition to the Himalaya and to him I entirely surrendered the responsibility of command. I said to myself more than once: 'You will try to do the best you can and what you are told to do.' So I concealed my anxieties about the weather and contented myself with pointing to the small thin clouds of ice which were passing across Nuptse and the great foggy masses like cotton-wool which were clinging to Pumori.

'Isn't that a bad sign?' I asked.

'No, that's nothing. The wind has gone. Everest is without its plume. You can start.'

'Good!' was all I replied.

The preparations were longer than desirable, but at nine o'clock we started off. Aubert and Flory were with me, and six Sherpas were climbing with us; three of them were to stay at the Col and these three would only load up at the depot.

We took the Eperon route once more. But not for long. My fears were confirmed, for the sky was quickly veiled, the clouds of ice drew together over our heads and the ceiling gradually descended. We watched it approach anxiously. The summits were swallowed up first—Everest, Lhotse, Nuptse—in order of height, then the South Col. Just as we reached the slope that leads to the rock islet below the Eperon, the wind began to blow again, not very hard but cold, and it began to snow.

We halted and discussed what we should do. Having been made pessimistic by two days of hurricane, our heads being still filled with the roar of the gusts that would have carried away anyone on the Eperon or the South Col, we lost courage. The thought of being involved in the unknown region of the South Col, where no one had yet been even in good weather, frightened us. The prospect of being blocked there, and of being frozen where we stood, or carried off by avalanches on the return, filled us all with

fear. The flanks of Everest are one of the places of the earth where one is not ashamed of occasional fear. However, as usual we gave our fear the good name of prudence and turned round.

We made a rapid retreat and met with a cold reception at the camp. Our comrades did not seem to have found the weather as bad as we did. Dittert was not pleased and did not hide it from me. I bent my back to the storm and hoped that the sky would justify us. But it went against us. Blue troughs appeared, the cloud ceiling broke up, the snow stopped falling and the wind ceased to blow. At noon the sky was unclouded and the weather magnificent.

'One day lost and we haven't too many. You will have to begin again tomorrow and push on to the end. There is no more time to lose,' the *gosse* said to me. It was not the first time in our mountaineering life that the weather had taken a malicious pleasure in smiling after threatening us. How many defeats have been due to these morning storms that have panicked us and made us retreat, and then dispersed like smoke in the middle of the day! Never is it so fine as when one has given up!

Hofstetter arrived and a good meal in the sun softened the ill-humour which prevailed in Camp V, though I was still a little rancorous about the ironical sky and about myself, and I felt my will harden, determined not to allow myself to be overcome by illusory anxieties and to put all my energy into the scales. Like the waves of the sea that do not subside when the hurricane is over, the human heart has need of a few hours' respite in order to calm down after it has been troubled. Our revenge upon the mountain and ourselves would come tomorrow.

May 25th.

Fine weather, a slight wind and 36 degrees (F.) of frost. At 8.15 I set out again with Aubert, Flory, Tensing and the Tigers Pasang Phutar, Phu Tharke, Da Namgyal, Ajiba, Mingma Dorje and Ang Norbu. Once more we made for the main couloir of the South Col where the ice was now breaking through everywhere. The Sherpas laboured behind us with their loads of from 22 to 26 lbs., but their pace was regular; they kept together and gave a great impression of security. A slip would have been fatal, for

the upper lip of the *bergschrund,* immediately below the rock islet, overhung the glacier by at least 130 feet. Ajiba seemed in a bad way; at the end of about an hour, he put down his load and stopped. Despite the cold he was covered with sweat and was shaken from head to foot with convulsive shivers. These sudden attacks of malaria were startling. Luckily we had not gone so far that he could not return alone. We watched him depart while the other Tigers shared out what he had been carrying and we resumed our direct ascent to the first rocks of the Eperon des Genevois.

The steps we had cut had resisted the hurricane and we gained height quite quickly. The snow that was torn from the ridges made our efforts more difficult and we felt the cold severely as we dragged ourselves along the fixed ropes to the depot of food and oxygen which we had set up on a rock platform at about 24,600 feet. Here everyone loaded up again with what he thought he could carry—oxygen canisters, meta, food and tents. At 12.30 the heavy column moved off and progressed slowly along the Eperon before engaging on a flank traverse to the right in the old tracks of Chevalley and Asper, which were still visible, though a week old. Small seams of rock followed the sheets of snow. We rose gradually although we were short of breath; our halts were more frequent and they were longer. Time passed rapidly by and the sun drew near to the crests of Nuptse, which were at about our own height. The obligation to surmount the 3,250 feet between the upper Khumbu glacier and the Col in one stage is still a trial for those who wish to attack Everest from the Nepalese side.

It was 4.00 p.m. We had been on the move for eight hours and the Shoulder still eluded us. The sky was always quite close, at 100 to 150 feet above our heads; but when we had climbed these 100 to 150 feet, the sky was still a little higher up. The cold and the wind were now so unbearable that two more porters, Ang Norbu and Mingma Dorje, fearing frostbite, stopped, refused to go on and declared that they were going to descend. How could we prevent them? Had we the right to do so? In adventures of this kind, a man should remain free and the sole judge of what he can do and what he wants to do.

We helped them unload and saw them off. Three Sherpas out of seven had gone. For those who continue such an abandonment is always difficult to bear. Here the blow was hard because, in order to succeed, we needed the contents of their sacks at the South Col. After a fashion we moored what we could not carry where it was; we should have to come back and get it. Our already too heavy sacks were weighted still more. Flory took a tent; I took one too; but during these manoeuvres, which were tricky on so steep a slope, we let Aubert's sleeping-bag slip. The wind seized it and it disappeared.

We resumed the endless climb, hauling ourselves up from one rock to another and from one step to another with great difficulty. We looked grotesquely like smugglers at the North Pole in our wadded jackets, with our fur caps down to our eyes and our Lapland boots. We had twenty-day beards and our lips were covered with cream. But it is only after the event that we see the comic side of things; for the time being it was as much as we could do to endure.

The sun sank, the cold became almost unbearable despite our efforts and our clothing. It was 7.00 p.m. We had been climbing for nearly ten hours. At last the slope eased off a little. It was time. Darkness was falling quickly. We would not reach the South Col that day. Without a word, we worked at improvising a bivouac. We dug two platforms with our axes. Strength was needed to wield the axes; we had not got it and the work was slow. Night had fallen when the two tents were up, two little high altitude tents which are good enough for one man alone, or for two if tightly packed together. But we were three and the Sherpas four.

Frozen, with our ropes still tied and our crampons still on our feet, we went into these precarious shelters. Thinking that a particularly fierce gust of wind might take both us and our shelter to the foot of the Col, I had thrust my axe into the snow up to the hilt and to it I had firmly tied the end of the rope. In this fashion Everest would hold us on a leash throughout the night!

We were packed too closely to get into our sleeping-bags;

motionless, pressed one against the other, not daring to move for fear of pulling away the badly secured tent ropes, we listened to the moaning of the wind, to the rustle of the snow, the slapping of the tent-cloth and the chattering of our teeth. Suddenly the flap opened and the indefatigable Tensing, he who always thinks of others, brought us something to drink. He had succeeded in heating some soup in the neighbouring tent. '*Merci!* Tensing. Go and sleep.'

The night was endless, like the slope to which we were moored, like all dimensions in this terrible land. We endured, we waited in patience, we breathed deeply in order to control our hearts, and we suffered the cold which at first froze our skins and then penetrated slowly to take up its abode in our flesh. Without speaking of it, we thought that this supplementary and unforeseeable fatigue would rob us a little of the strength we would need above the Col.

But all nights come to an end. 'Fine day, sahibs!' Once again it was Tensing, bringing us chocolate.

Dawn was breaking, driving the shadows from the summits of Nuptse and Pumori. Everest was still no more than a shapeless mass, dark and as if crouching. On our left was the Lhotse glacier, of an indefinable melancholy tint in the last moments of the night. We had no desire to stay abed. We tried to warm ourselves up by exercise, but at 25,600 feet one does not exercise for very long, even for this purpose. It took us more than an hour to take down the tent—we abandoned one of them—to fold it and reload the sacks. At last the slanting sunlight licked the slopes and with it came the courage and confidence that the night had taken away.

The Sherpas were scarcely in good shape, which was not surprising after the night they had just experienced. Nevertheless, Phu Tharke and Da Namgyal wanted to go down several hundred feet to fetch the rest of the loads abandoned by Ang Norbu and Mingma Dorje. Pasang would wait for them. The things we were forced to leave we would come and fetch from the Col or the Shoulder, which could not be more than about 600 feet above us.

We resumed the ascent to the South Col, which had put up an eleventh hour defence. Our muscles were frozen and our limbs

were stiff; each step cost us dearly. Nevertheless, we gained height. Nuptse, the height of which had terrified us when we looked at it from the lower camps, was now lower than ourselves. We were approaching 26,250 feet; everything about us told us so, even our lungs. We were coming close to Lhotse, where my eyes instinctively sought to discover a way up, as if they were beginning to form new plans for the future. But the present occupied me entirely, more than I desired.

At last, at ten in the morning, we came out on the hump of ice above the South Col. It was a sudden revelation. In two perfect curves, the south ridge rose to the acute angle which it formed with one of the ribs of the west face: this was the south summit. Eagerly we examined this terminal ridge and its means of access. Everest had now ceased to be the shapeless and monstrous mass we had seen until then. It was a new mountain, still massive, but powerful, and pointed at its summit, which pierced the sky. To the left was the black mass which overlooked the Khumbu, striped with channels of ice; to the right were snow couloirs, rocky islets and the white ridge disclosed for the first time to the eyes of man who were overtaken by desire, despite their fatigue.

This emotion was intense but brief, for it was no place to dream. The day was not ended. Tensing gave us his sack to take down to the Col and himself returned to the bivouac site to fetch the equipment and ascend with the other three Sherpas. On the Col the wind was violent. There was not a trace of snow: nothing but stones welded together by the frost; a desert in miniature. One would have to be as hard as rock or ice to resist the gusts that had been passing across the Col for millennia and seemed in a rage to prevent us from putting up the two tents. On all fours, clinging to the earth like insects, we at last succeeded in bringing sense to the refractory cloth. It took us two hours, and then came the waiting. It is difficult to imagine what these hours of waiting mean for an expedition in the Himalaya.

Tensing returned, escorting our three Sherpas, who were all in bad condition. Pasang declared that he wished to die where he was; Phu Tharke zigzagged like a drunken man; Da Namgyal was

suffering from migraine and held his head in his hands. They were out of action. Perhaps they would be usable after a night's rest, but one does not rest above 26,000 feet, where the system deteriorates whether one moves or does nothing. Tensing himself was in extraordinary condition. Twice more he was to return to the bivouac site and reascend with loads.

Aubert and Flory were lying down while I went from one place to another, taking photos. A sea of cloud covered the high plateaus of Tibet. Only the enormous pyramids of Kangchenjunga (28,150 feet) and Makalu (27,790 feet) broke through it. But my eyes ceaselessly returned to the ridge along which we were to go the next day to try our luck in bad conditions for, from all the evidence, the Sherpa party was finished with the exception of Tensing. Tensing at last returned and we went together to sleep.

The next day, despite a better night, the altitude continued to wreck the constitution of the Sherpas and they left us.

'That's another trump card gone,' said Flory, watching them depart. Indeed, how would we be able, without using up our last strength in the process, to carry the equipment, foodstuffs and tents necessary for four men to 27,500 feet? Between 23,000 and 26,000 feet the strength of an assault group thins out like the point of a pencil: but our will remained intact. It had been with us for so long, anchored at the bottom of our spirits, which it moved obscurely, almost unconsciously, despite our fatigue.

At ten in the morning, after the three Sherpas had vanished beyond the hump above the Col, we set out on two ropes of two men each, Aubert and Flory, Tensing and myself, carrying one tent and food for one day. As soon as we left the zone of ice and stone, we broke into sheets of crusted snow. We made towards the base of the south-east ridge, at the foot of a large rock buttress. The weather was clear, the intensity of the wind had diminished, as if it concentrated its anger upon the Col itself.

Having reached the foot of the buttress, we were disillusioned. It was too steep. The rocks that overlooked us were undoubtedly negotiable at 13,000 feet, but not at 26,000 feet. Flory and Aubert pushed on a further hundred yards to make sure that the eastern

face offered no way out, and they ran up against a slope of more than 60 degrees, which vanished into the sky.

So we returned in our steps, moved along the base of the large buttress and attacked the couloir which runs down it. The snow was good and the ascent easy. We made steps between the snow and the rock. We constantly relieved each other in the lead, we gained height quickly and the tents on the Col already seemed small. Soon we reached the top of the couloir but the dry rocks allowed us to continue by moving over to the right. We waited for Aubert and Flory while taking oxygen like some precious liqueur; then we continued the climb straight up.

Suddenly I emerged on to the ridge above the large buttress and there discovered a new world, the whole eastern face of the mountain, plunging for more than 16,000 feet to the Karta valley and Tibet. And in the mist, on the far horizon, other chains of mountains broke through. Behind us the summit of Lhotse had fallen away; it was now no more than three or four hundred feet above us. We were at about 27,500 feet.

It was fine and there was no wind. Both of us were fit. Should we sleep there without a primus and without sleeping-bags? Perhaps the next day . . . ? Tensing interrupted my reflections.

'Sahib, we ought to stay here tonight!' He indicated the tent he had been carrying since the start. I smiled, for our thoughts had been pursuing the same course.

Flory and Aubert joined us. Like us they were in good shape. They too might stay and try their luck the next day. This is doubtless what they desired. But there was only one tent and very little food. We had only set out to make a reconnaissance and to fix the site of Camp VII. In an undertaking like that, the party matters more than the individual; the individual is nothing without the party. In order that the privileged pair should have not only a chance of success but a possibility of returning, it has to be supported at the last camp by the second pair. Though its task might appear to be less brilliant, it needs men who are just as determined and in equally good physical shape—perhaps in better shape, since they should be capable of going to seek and

bring back, whatever the risk, those who have taken their lives in their hands.

To all who are familiar with the history of the Himalaya, the effort put up by Odell all by himself, in supporting Mallory and Irvine, seems more extraordinary than the legendary exploit itself. Alone at Camp V at 26,280 feet, because he had had to send back his sick porter; alone at Camp VI to which he had climbed on the 8th June, taking food for those who were never to return; going beyond that camp in squalls of wind, hoping to make contact with those whom he had glimpsed for a moment before they vanished into cloud; descending again to Camp V to leave room for Irvine and Mallory, who would have no need of it, and ascending the next day with porters to Camp V, where he slept, and then going on alone the next day to Camp VI, which he found as empty as he had left it; and then, having signalled with the sleeping-bags according to an agreed code that all hope was lost, he took Mallory's compass from the tent and descended. The energy expended by Odell during these three days never ceased to cause wonder amongst those who understand what it entailed. Of all those who have attacked Everest so far, Odell the geologist was, I believe, the best equipped.

Between the four of us there was no argument. Aubert, who was one of those who found and saved me in the Combe Maudite in 1938, and Flory, reliable, cautious and determined, agreed to leave us. 'You two stay. We will wait for you at the Col.'

We watched them move off, growing smaller and ever smaller down the slope, until they reached the Col an hour later. Now we were only two! How many men and how much effort had been necessary to bring us to this farthest point of the expedition!

We pitched our tent with great difficulty. The altitude and the wind made our movements awkward. Our legs would not obey us and our brains scarcely functioned. Our hands were more skilful without gloves, but to take them off would cost us dear. The sun had gone down behind Nuptse and the temperature fell instantly. We took a last look towards Kangchenjunga and Tibet. Tensing extended an arm westwards, pointing to a disquieting sea of clouds. The horizon reddened.

In this improvised bivouac there were no sleeping-bags, no equipment, no primus. Only a tent which slapped in the wind like a prayer-flag. It was a glacial night. The whole being curled up as if seeking to create a mattress of air between its skin and itself. Our muscles stiffened and those of the face became fixed as if from an injection of anaesthetic. Slowly the cold penetrated the bones themselves. There was no question of sleep: the wind and the growling avalanches kept us awake. Which was just as well.

We were overtaken by a consuming thirst, which we could not appease. There was nothing to drink. An empty tin gave us an idea: a fragment of ice and the candle-flame produced a little lukewarm water. The gusts of wind made our heads whirl; it seemed to us that we took off with them into space, like those houses one thinks one sees moving when watching clouds in flight. To resist this vertigo, I tried to fix my thoughts on the next day's attack, and I mused on those who at all the stages were thinking of us: Aubert and Flory at the Col, Dittert at Camp V, Wyss at the base camp. In a state of semi-hallucination the entire expedition seemed to me to be a stretched bow and ourselves the arrow. A poor blunted arrow at that. Could it reach its target?

This was the boundary between waking and sleeping. I dared not sleep, must not sleep. Tensing shook me and I awoke, and I shook him in my turn. Amicably we beat one another and pressed close together throughout the night. In the sky the stars were so brilliant that they filled me with fear.

The shadows became clearer. The shape of Tensing, rolled up like a ball, began to stand out from the background of the tent-cloth, which gradually grew lighter. Dawn entered the half-open tent and with it came anxiety. The wind hurled a handful of ice-needles into my face. Nevertheless, we had to open our eyes. The weather was not reassuring, for the sky was clear to the north, but very dark to the west and south. The summits of Lhotse and Nuptse were hidden in a mass of dark clouds, and the valley was drowned in fog.

What should we do? We looked at each other, undecided, but once more we understood each other without speaking. I indicated

the ridge with a wink and Tensing answered by nodding his head. We had gone too far to give up. Our preparations were quickly made, for we had worn everything, except the crampons, from fear of frost bite. They took long to put on again, for our numbed hands were clumsy and bending over literally took our breath away. Laden with the last three canisters of oxygen, sufficient for six hours, we set off below the ridge on sheets of snow broken by bands of rock. One step, three breaths, one step . . . when we rested for a moment, we slobbered at the inhaler; it could only be used during a halt because the resistance of the valves was too great for our lungs when the effort of moving was added. At about every twenty yards we relieved each other in the lead to economise our strength and in order to inhale while letting the other pass. When the slope steepened we advanced like dogs following a scent, sometimes on all fours.

But the weather grew worse. Waves of mist passed, carried along on the south-west wind. Showers lashed at us in passing, leaping over the crest. Then the sun reappeared and reassured us. We rose slowly, terribly slowly. Nevertheless, we still rose. In the clear intervals Lhotse emerged from the storm clouds and it was already below us. The whole landscape and all the summits fell away. The peaks which had seemed monstrous from the lower camps had lost their splendour; they became hills, like the Verte or the Jorasses, seen from Mont Blanc. But the clear intervals did not last; the dense fog, filled with a drift of frozen snow, enveloped us again. All our vital functions were slowed down. There was a confused impression of being on some other planet. Asphyxia destroyed our cells and our whole beings deteriorated.

At about eleven o'clock we came out again on to the ridge, sinking deeply into the wind-crusted snow. There were no technical difficulties; the slope was rather easy and not too steep. We were rather fearful of the cornices to our right and we instinctively kept our distance.

Our pace became still slower. Three steps, a halt, oxygen. Three steps, a halt. Then came a clearing and we saw that the south summit was at least two hundred metres (*c.* 650 feet) above us. Three steps, oxygen. I watched Tensing. He seemed well but

at moments he swayed a little, trying to find his balance. I tried to keep a watch on myself and asked myself: 'How do you feel? All right, quite all right.' This was euphorie, the worst of all dangers. I remembered the fifth and last bivouac on the Aiguilles du Diable: there, too, I felt well. How did Mallory and Irvine feel when they dissolved into the rarefied air of the north ridge? Was this not the reason why they did not return?

Granulated snow struck our left cheeks increasingly hard. The wind became more evil. The south summit was so close: just this band of rock where we were now engaged, the last; just that snow crest. But no; it was impossible to go on. This was the end. We had taken five hours to gain two hundred metres (*c.* 650 feet).

Once more the decision was taken without words. One long look and then the descent. Was it an altitude record? No. Failure. That is what we thought. But did we think? Our bodies were of lead, almost without spirit. There was no trace of automatism, for our muscles no longer obeyed our orders. Pick up your left foot and put it in front; now the other. Our tracks had almost entirely vanished. We stopped as often as on the ascent.

We passed the tent. The wind had begun to do its work; it was torn in two places. Would it last till the others could occupy it?

'Leave it there. Perhaps they will have better luck than us.'

And we went on, kept in motion only by the will to resist the lethargy that was invading us. We crouched as we dragged along, descending the couloir and the slope towards the Col.

From the Col to the tents there were a dozen yards uphill, an insignificant hummock of snow. We could do no more. Flory and Aubert dragged us into our tents, inert, at the limit of exhaustion. Tensing sank into a deep sleep and did not move until the hour of departure. For us the adventure was ended. The next day we were to take the road for Europe.

CHAPTER VIII

The Second Attempt

(René Dittert resumes the narrative)

May 25th.

For us the difficult wait began. Our turn would come only after three or four days had passed. Above us a drama was taking place of which we knew nothing, but our imaginations returned to it again and again, like a mill grinding at nothing. But for me there were these burning questions: Had I been wrong? Was I justified in arranging the attacks one after the other? Would I have done better to have launched more men at the Col? Had I been wrong to make safety arrangements, to assure the bases and the supports? Had I done right? What should I have done instead? But these questions were without answer. Only the future would tell. One thing was certain: I had done all I could to lessen the terrible risks, so that I should not have to reproach myself with being responsible for one of those catastrophes that strike at an over-adventurous expedition in a matter of seconds or during a night's bivouac. However vital the stake might be, in my view mountaineering should remain a sport in which there is no desire to gain at the cost of avoidable accidents. Any serious accident would irremediably lessen for me the joy of victory.

As if drawn by a magnet, our glances ceaselessly searched for our comrades climbing on the upper slopes of the Eperon. Before noon, Ajiba had already returned alone and in a very low state. He was suffering from a feverish attack of malaria and had not climbed even as far as the rock islet. At the beginning of the afternoon enormous clouds invaded the far end of the Cwm, boiling and whirling about above Camp IV. But with us the weather was calm and the sky serene. At about 4.00 p.m. we descried two roped parties very high up and seemingly quite close to the ridge, in the

combe to the right of the Eperon. Suddenly Chevalley, who had scarcely put his glasses down for a single moment, called out to me:

'Two of them are coming down!'

'Only two?' We had in fact arranged that four of the seven Sherpas would descend from the Col that day.

'Yes, two. They have certainly not reached the Shoulder.'

In fact, these were Dorje and Norbu who had been prevented from continuing the climb by the altitude. Was this true exhaustion or was it fear? It was difficult to tell, but in any case, they were descending quickly. When they arrived they said little, but we understood that they had turned back at a considerable distance from the Col. They did not think the others could arrive there without a bivouac. The wind had risen again and the thought that our friends were perhaps about to improvise a bivouac on the slabs of the Eperon made us anxious and prevented us from sleeping. What could we do? Nothing but wait.

Fortunately, at Camp V the night at least was calm and the day that followed was one of the finest we had had. There was no plume on Everest; the daily barrier of cloud closed the Cwm and tongues of mist sometimes came up as far as the camp. The glacier glistened in the sun, and the green of the hanging ice of Nuptse was more striking than ever. Was this at last the short series of fine days that precede the monsoon?

A visit from Zimmermann, our botanist, freed us for a few hours from our obsessive desire to know what was happening up above. It is always good to see a happy man, and Zimmermann, from all the evidence, is of that now rare species. However, he was short of breath and he found Camp V too high for his taste. Yet he had succeeded in dragging Hofstetter out with him that morning, he had toiled over the moraines above Camp IV, he had been persistent enough to reach the rocks that descend from Everest, and in two fissures sheltered from the wind but well exposed to the sun had found a tuft of androsace and a little saxifrage. He had not yet identified them precisely, but they were flowers and his good humour was a pleasure to see. He was very anxious to climb higher, but his equipment would not permit him to attempt the Eperon des Genevois and we promised that we would keep a

close look out on our way up and pick him a little bouquet if we found something. This androsace at 21,000 feet—a record height—stirred me as if it were a portent, for all my climbing life had been passed under the symbol of this plant.

Hofstetter was in such obviously good form that I asked him to go up with me and Asper the next day as one of the second assault group and he agreed.

May 27th.

Another fine day, and the last before we went into action. Towards midday Hofstetter and Asper arrived, followed by three Sherpas, Thondup, Aïla and Ang Dawa, who were climbing with disquieting slowness. Stopping repeatedly, they seemed to drag their way along with difficulty. The majority of the Sherpas were worn out, a fact which worried me. Only Mingma Dorje and Sarki were prepared to climb to the Col and stay there to support us. The others were willing to climb as far as the Depot or higher in order to carry and to relieve us, but they refused to go on to the top. Above 23,000 feet the purchasing-power of the rupee rapidly diminished and the promised bonuses had lost their attraction.

The sahibs were another problem and a more difficult one to solve. With regard to Chevalley, Hofstetter and myself there was no hesitation, for we were in quite good shape for continuing. But although Asper had partly recovered, he was still suffering from the results of the excessive effort he had put up on the 19th, and the two doctors, Wyss and Chevalley, thought that it would be a mistake to send him higher than 26,000 feet. Roch was still suffering from the rib he had been unlucky enough to break a week before leaving Europe; and he had long and painful fits of coughing, too, that made him groan and left him shattered. Quite certainly, it would be wise to leave them at Camp V. But they wanted to go up and had lived in that hope. They told me so, and they were my friends. It was a cruel decision to have to take. Nevertheless, they risked overloading the column to no purpose and might even prove a hindrance. But the contrary was also possible. Asper's youth was a handicap, but youth has strange resources, while Roch, the old fox, has an exceptional Himalayan

experience. In the end friendship prevailed and I could not prevent them from realising their dreams of climbing to 26,000 feet.

At noon, through glasses, Chevalley descried three figures descending—much more slowly than the three Sherpas had ascended a little while ago. Their slowness was terrifying. In what sort of condition was the South Col sending back the first group to have climbed there? Who were they? What about the others? We were filled with anxiety. Throughout the afternoon we watched them descending, while preparing our equipment and the loads we would take up with us the next day. At last, towards evening, Phu Tharke, Pasang and Da Namgyal arrived, stricken with altitude sickness, not ill, but inert and stupefied. They brought a note from Lambert, scribbled at the South Col. 'Had to bivouac below the shoulder. Not good. Reached the Col. Exhausted Sherpas returning. Will push higher tomorrow. Regards. Raymond.'

We decided to leave very early the next day, so that we might perhaps avoid the forced bivouac. That evening there were fifteen men at the camp. For hours, fits of coughing, often followed by groans, were heard in the night.

May 28th.

At four o'clock I heard Dorje stirring in his tent beside my own. Good old Dorje! He was preparing our breakfast. To avoid losing time in equipping ourselves, we had slept—or tried to sleep—in jackets, anoraks, and boots. But we had an unpleasant surprise: the weather had changed. Long orange clouds were trailing across a veiled sky. We hesitated for a long time. Like Lambert and his party a day or two earlier, this was our bad day, and now I reproached myself for having welcomed him so badly on his return. The wind had begun to blow again. Was this already the end of the short spell of fine weather that precedes the monsoon?

We abandoned the idea of setting out that day and postponed our start till the next. If the bad weather was returning, it would be from Camp V that we could most usefully organise ourselves for an ascent to the assistance of those at the South Col. The day slipped by, slowly and sombrely. Would they come down that day? We could not know. Waves of mist passed by: the Col was lost in the

clouds and the valley was completely filled. It was not very cold: just about freezing point. The falling snow was damp. At the beginning of the afternoon the blinding light of the sun pierced the layer of fog and in a moment the temperature became suffocating.

In their tent Pasang and Da Namgyal had remained prostrated since the day before, without moving or eating. They were feverish and their pulses were very rapid, but arterial pressure remained good. Today we would send them down to Camp IV with Aïla and Phu Tharke, and the next day they would go on towards the base camp.

At the end of the afternoon the weather cleared and seemed to become fine again, but there was no news from above. Doubtless they had been blocked.

May 29th.

At dawn it was very fine. We equipped ourselves in our tents and waited for breakfast, which was late, for the Sherpas had remained asleep. All the better for them. At 7 a.m. we were ready to leave.

Asper and Roch started out first, followed by five Sherpas and ourselves bringing up the rear. For the last time we set off on the long and tiresome ascent to the Eperon. The void slowly increased below us, while the wind-blown snow passed horizontally. Then came the ropes, the depot and the sun. It was a very slow, but regular ascent, despite the too heavy loads and the rope that caught on to everything, got on our nerves and wearied us. From time to time I watched the slope above us. The descending party should not be very long delayed. In fact, at about noon we suddenly saw them, some 300 feet above us.

At this encounter, however much it was expected, we were seized by a violent emotion and tears were not far from our eyes. I noticed with terror the havoc that had been wrought by altitude and effort. These men were at the limit of their resistance. Tensing was moving with extreme difficulty and had to be assisted. Aubert's eyes were sunk in their sockets and he seemed extenuated. All of them were lined, emaciated, consumed by fatigue to an unrecognisable state. It was a pathetic meeting.

In brief, clipped phrases, Lambert told us about the first

bivouac in two tents pitched in darkness, the wind at the Col, Tensing's shuttle-service, Camp VII, the tent at 27,500 feet, and the spearhead pushed by Tensing and himself to 28,200 feet and stopped by the previous day's bad weather and by attrition. Lambert explained it all and gave us his advice.

'The party that climbs to the summit must be supported at Camp VII by men who are quite fresh. Be careful. Strength fails you. Flory and Aubert had to drag us into the tents. There were thirty feet uphill and we couldn't do it. Take care.' But he was still confident. 'If you have good weather you will succeed, you can succeed, you've got to succeed. We will wait for you at Camp V.'

We embraced before parting. They resumed the descent and we continued the climb. During our halt the Sherpas had gone on ahead. Soon we rejoined them; they were seated on slabs, waiting for us to take the lead in order to make the track. In their eyes we could clearly see that their desire to continue was not very strong. Two of them begged that they be allowed to go down. I quite sharply ordered them to follow and they shut up. Below us, Asper and Roch were toiling; we were all toiling. Hours passed and our breathing became shorter and hoarser. At each halt we hoped for a real rest, but each time it was the same disappointment. Halting we felt better and our hearts grew calmer; but when we continued, in less than thirty seconds we were suffering as if we had not halted at all. Our wills were our only help.

We made another halt. This time three Sherpas persisted in their wish to go down. Ang Norbu put his hands together and indicated his aching head. Without speaking, I pointed to the Col. It was too late to descend; the two tents at the Col were now closer than Camp V. Ang Norbu yielded and started off again, bending under his load. His steps were short and jerky. I no longer recognised the brisk, lively, happy men whose vigorous gait had amazed me among the Khumbu séracs and in the Western Cwm. As for ourselves, what had we become under the influence of the altitude?

At last we reached the tent abandoned by the first party on the morning of the 28th. We had to recover it. It was hard work, for they had not folded it; it had collapsed and the snow had filled and

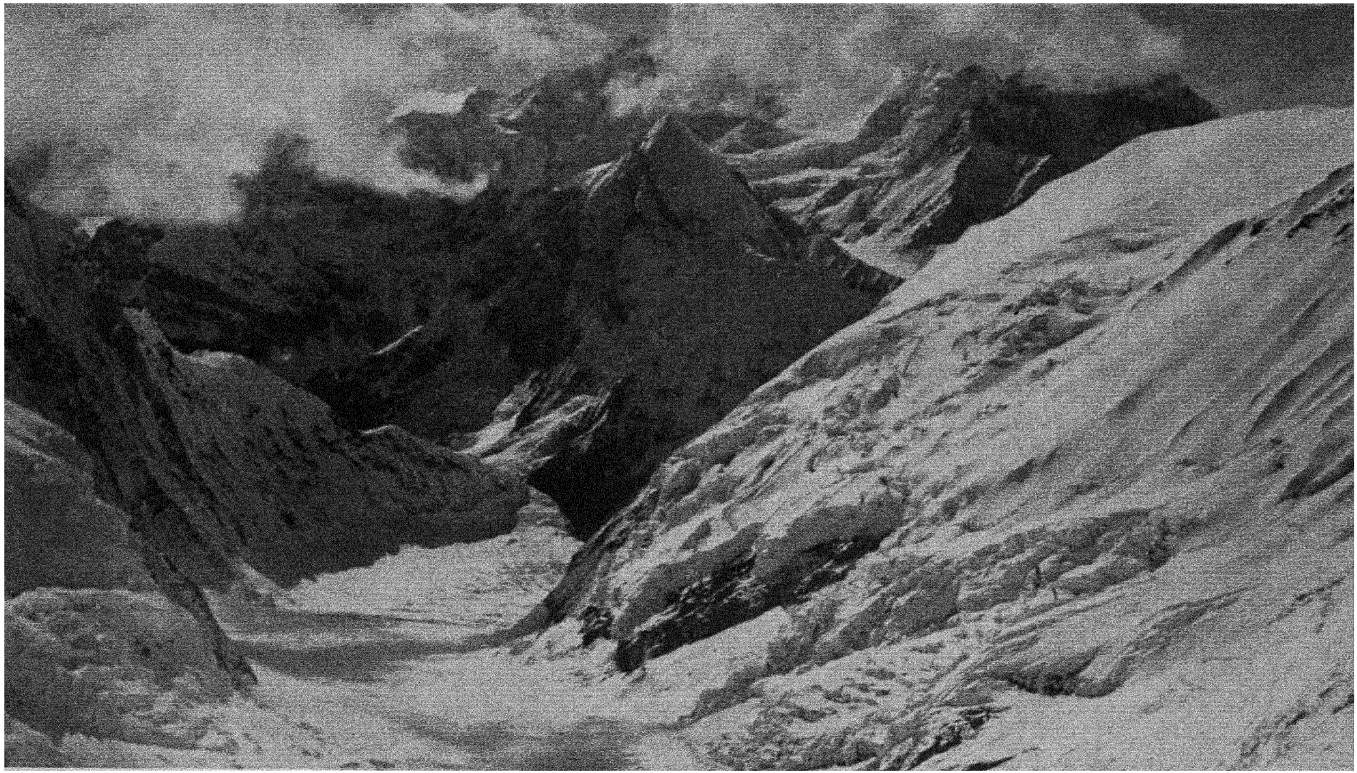
half covered it. We freed it with great difficulty, cleaned it a little and rolled it up. Mingma Dorje, who had been lightly laden to this point, tied it to his load and we set off once more. It had taken us almost an hour to complete the task. In front of us the Sherpas turned round at every moment to see if we were coming. Like children they had put all their faith in us and their lives into our hands. The responsibility was great, for at that stage an indisposition would be fatal. Each man was alone: each had strength only for himself. Impassive, the gigantic face of Nuptse, its coloured rocks gilded at the summit by the sinking sun, seemed so indifferent to our efforts. But we had ceased to be receptive to the beauties which it spread before us. Like automatons, caring only to avoid the least false step which would cost six, seven or eight jerky breaths, we gained ground.

The slope eased off a little; the wind-blown snow, into which our steps trod well, firmly but not too deeply, facilitated our efforts, and the well-imbricated rocks were safe too.

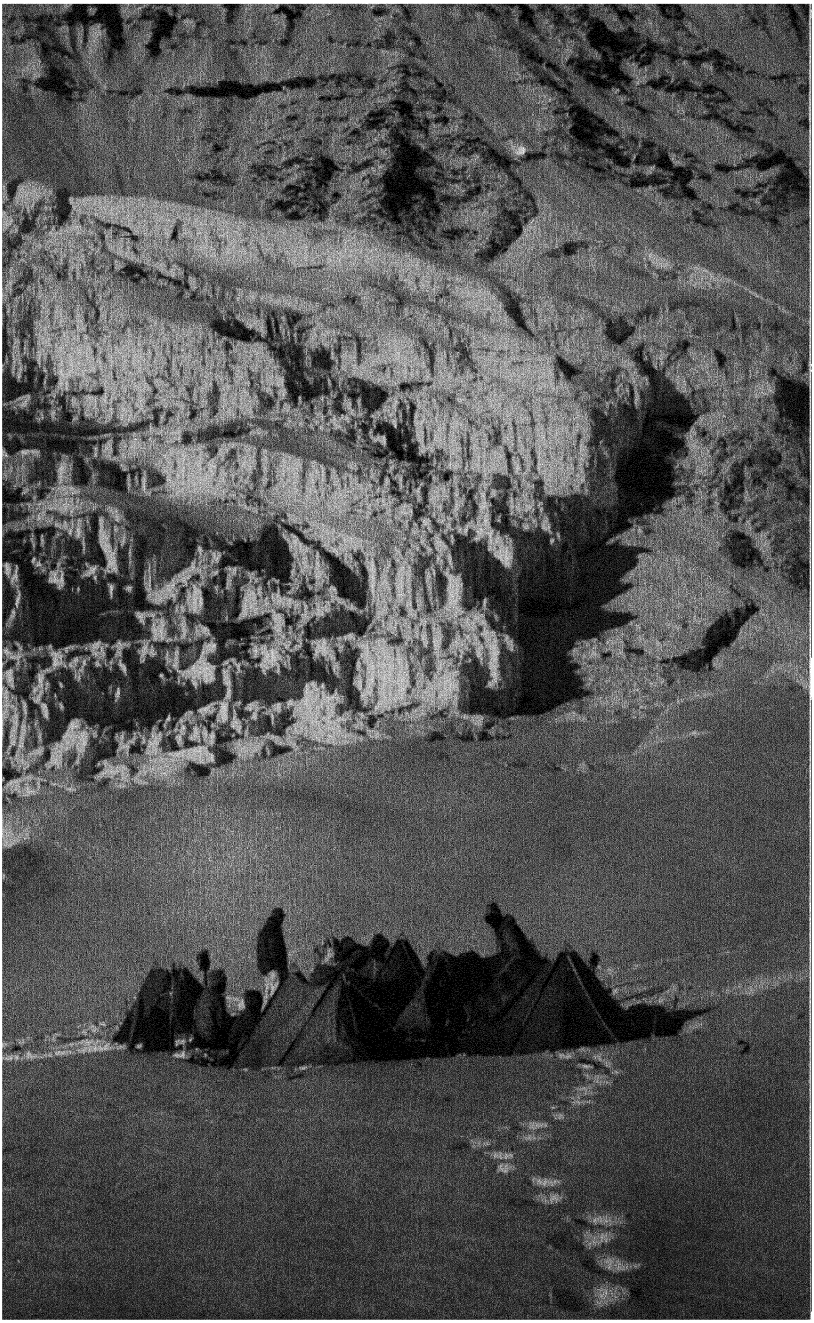
At 5.30 p.m., more than ten hours after leaving Camp V, we emerged upon the crest of wind-torn rock and ice. We were higher than 26,250 feet. A few paces north and some 300 feet or more below us, the South Col spread broadly out, a plateau of stone, ice and wind, in which the tents showed up as two yellow spots. Before starting again we waited until we could see Asper and Roch, who were more than an hour behind us. As for Roch, he was still able to find the will to film a few shots, the highest ever. Then we made the oblique descent over the uncrevassed glacier. The tents shook frenziedly in the fierce south wind. But the Sherpas could not be seen; having arrived before us, they had rushed into the only good tent, where they were now pressed tightly together. In the violent wind, I shouted at them savagely.

'We are not animals. There's a tent to put up. Come out!'

One after the other they made an appearance and set about the job. As darkness fell, arched against the fearful wind and half-frozen, six of us were not too many to raise the torn tent, which was as stiff as board. Hofstetter and Chevalley brought a little order to the third, which was in an incredible mess. The snow



17 *Looking* ***down into the*** *Cwm from high on the* ***flank*** *of Lhotse*



18 *Camp IV (21,162 feet) at the foot of the Lhotse flank*

had torn it up; bacon was mixed with meta fuel and the primus was upside down; however, it was made habitable.

Roch and Asper appeared on the crest and arrived. A moment later and we were all hidden and moved no more: four Sherpas in one tent, Roch and Asper and Mingma Dorje in another, Hofstetter and Chevalley and myself in the third. Six square metres for nine men. There was no question of sleep. Jammed tightly together and incapable of making a movement, we waited for the hours to pass. The wind whistled as it tore across the crests; it never paused; it was a wind without break or weakening. It seemed as if it might be the very song of space itself, endless and without intermission. It gave neither respite nor hope. We wanted to drink, but in that tiny space, hardly sufficient for two, it was not possible to light a primus. We had to endure and wait. It was a very bad night for us all.

At last the dawn of May 30th came. I half-opened the tent to find that the sky was clear. But Everest had its bad-weather plume, a cloud of ice crystals leaning over towards Tibet like a huge and living cornice, clinging to the crest at about 28,200 feet, turned back like the smoke of a steamship in a storm. The sky above us was blue, but the violence of the wind had increased and the cold prohibited any attempt. A few minutes outside were enough to congeal the blood in our hands and it took a long time to restore the circulation. On the Shoulder I caught sight of the tent abandoned by our comrades. That day we could only try to rest, but we knew well that the body does not rest above 26,000 feet. On the contrary. Add to the height the cold and a gale-force wind and a man deteriorates at an accelerated rate.

Three Sherpas had left at daybreak without our having seen them. They were no doubt in process of descending the Eperon. However, it had been arranged that they would go down again from the Col at once, so they had not failed in their undertaking and deserved the 'Tiger' title which all the Sherpas who pass beyond the 8,000 metre level acquire at a stiff price. Despite everything, I had the feeling that it was their deep instinct which had dictated this rapid retreat. They had faith no longer. They knew that the efforts of the last fifteen days had been very severe,

that the ascent from Camp V to the Col was too long, that it consumed our strength and that those who made it, incapable of an effort the following day, forced to camp twice at over 26,000 feet before going on, could not amass sufficient physical—or even perhaps moral—resources. The most terrible obstacle to the conquest of Everest from Nepal lies in the impossibility of establishing an intermediate camp between 23,000 and 26,000 feet. This is the most important difference between it and the Tibetan route. On the latter the camps are established at 21,000 feet for the advanced base, 23,000 feet at the North Col, 25,250 feet (Camp V) and 27,000 feet (Camp VI), whereas in Nepal Camp V is at 22,650 feet and Camp VI at 25,900 feet, with a crossing of the Shoulder at over 26,250 feet.

In speaking just now of impossibility, I was wrong. Nansen says somewhere that the impossible is that which demands a great deal of time for its accomplishment. I think that those who follow us will succeed in establishing an intermediate camp, perhaps on the Lhotse glacier or perhaps on the Eperon itself. Either that, or they will have effective oxygen apparatus: one of these will suffice, together with the factors that have always controlled the fate of all attempts—the health of the participants, fine weather and absence of wind.

Cowering in my tent, living and thinking in slow-motion, I drew up the balance of our chances. They were slender. Three Sherpas had left us, and of the two that remained, Mingma Dorje and Sarki, the former was still trying to melt some water in order to do a little cooking, while the latter had not moved from his sack since the previous evening. It was certain that the victorious struggle for the Col had eaten into our strength and our chances. The weather, the violent wind and the cold excluded any immediate attempt, yet we could not delay at 26,000 feet with impunity.

Our human potential had had to make too great a contribution. We were not numerous enough for the struggle. We had presumed upon our strength and on that of the Sherpas. Twice as many Europeans and Tigers were really necessary. Of our fifteen Sherpas, who had been carrying since the beginning of May, seven had climbed to the South Col with four tents, provisions, oxygen and equipment totalling about 200 lbs., an extraordinary

performance after so thankless and arduous a task as that which had already been accomplished.

Nevertheless, hope did not yet surrender. We made our decisions. That evening Chevalley and I were to sleep in the same tent; the rest would crowd together in the other two, three in each, so as to assure us a little more rest. The next day we would climb to Camp VII, following the tracks of Lambert and Tensing, and all those who could would help us in carrying as high as possible. But I felt in all my being that each passing hour was consuming a little more of our chances.

The wind had the upper hand of us. We were not the first, nor would we be the last, to experience its cruelty. I think that, despite rest, deterioration in the confinement of a tent is more rapid than in action. Movement, in fact, keeps one's defensive resources more alive and one's judgment more alert, so that a man may judge his own condition and the resulting danger. But in a tent the hovering dangers against which one is badly defended make themselves felt: apathy, inertia, euphoria, somnolence, prostration. The reflexes no longer act with sufficient strength against this kind of unconscious suicide, this slow and perhaps gentle death.

We were all very fatigued by the week's efforts, by the ascent of the previous day, by hunger and thirst, and by the fierce and unrelenting wind. When we left our tents, we were as if drunk, staggering and unable to stand properly on our legs. We tried to eat. Above all we wanted to drink, but the water took long to melt and Mingma Dorje's furnaces were refractory. We breathed a little oxygen, squatting like Arabs with a narghil. It gave us energy; if only it could have been taken while moving, many things might have been different.

The risk of falling asleep was not great, for though the need of sleep might be imperious, it could not long resist the slapping of the tent. Few hours passed without the necessity to go out and refix a tent pole that had been bent by the gusts, or to moor a rope that had slipped from its heavy stone, or to drive in a peg that had been torn out. Outside one had the strange impression of being the sole living creature in a desert of wind-swept stones and ice.

May 31st.

Another night had passed. Chevalley and I had slept little, but we had slept nevertheless. Despite the wind, still as fierce as ever, and despite the fatal plume on Everest, we wanted to try and go higher. We didn't want to admit that we were beaten. But our strength had diminished since the day before. Roch was in an extremely nervous state and coughing; he had not struggled with impunity against an injury and an illness that were not properly cured. Asper was overwhelmed by an irresistible drowsiness. The two Sherpas could not go up to Camp VII, lightly loaded though they were. And as for ourselves, the three sahibs—Hofstetter, Chevalley and myself—what could we do, left to our own resources? Had we still any reserves, or only this desperate desire not to give up? We had ventured terribly far. The fierce south wind was the forerunner of the monsoon, and in one day, in two days, perhaps even in an hour, it would descend upon us and everything would be finished. It was difficult to make a decision. For a long month our whole beings had been stretched out towards this ultimate attack in order that it should surrender without a struggle. If only the wind would stop!

Roch wanted to go down. Hofstetter, less enthusiastic than us and more lucid, reckoned the game played and lost. He decided to accompany Roch, but Roch now struggled with himself; a little oxygen had revived his courage. At last he gave up. So Hofstetter and he were going to descend that day and we would do so the next with the Sherpas. Even should the weather be fine on the morrow, we knew that three nights at over 26,000 feet had made it impossible for us to spend another at an even greater height, to climb to the summit and descend again to 26,000 feet. We knew it. Everest had said 'no', but as yet we did not want to understand the word. So we would remain one day more, we thought, and one more night, in the absurd hope of a miracle. But there were no miracles.

The only possible miracle was that the wind would cease, and it did not. However, towards midday Roch and Hofstetter prepared to depart, but they left camp only at 2.00 p.m.: two full hours to prepare a sack, pull on their boots and rope up. It took them an

hour to reach the Shoulder. Then, just as we expected to see them disappear in the direction of the Eperon, we saw them coming back. It was 3.30 p.m. Hofstetter had not wished to involve himself so late in the interminable descent of more than 3,000 feet to Camp V. He reckoned the pace too slow and foresaw the inevitable bivouac, and refused to go on. Roch's anger was not disarming; having started, he did not want to stop. Hofstetter remained calm under the storm.

There is no reason to hide the fact that we were not saints. All of us are impassioned and hardened men. Exhaustion draws everything out of one, even one's injustice and violence, which proves nothing except that one is human. Solidarity does not always express itself courteously and the members of an expedition can, at certain exceptionally difficult moments, cordially detest one another, without ceasing to esteem and to love one another. In this instance, a good inhalation of oxygen quietened the angry spirits; Roch and Hofstetter made their peace around a litre of oxygen.

June 1st.

We had passed our last night on the Col. The wind was less strong. Everest was free for the first time, but it was too late, for there was now no question of attack, only of retreat. The orange had been squeezed.

Our imaginations and our wills had received a violent reverse. Hitherto they had been reaching out towards the summit; they were now fixed upon Camp V, and it would not be easy to reach. Sarki was ill. For two days and three nights he had not moved; prostrate and motionless, he was the victim of the altitude. Indifferent to everything, he resisted our efforts to free him from his utter inertia, and left to himself he would have let himself die where he lay. We had to shake him and treat him roughly to get him out of his sleeping-bag and force him to put on his boots and equipment.

At last we were ready, after more than three hours of preparations. The tents were abandoned where they stood, with all the useless material. A first party consisting of Dorje, Roch, Asper and Hofstetter began the ascent of the Shoulder. Roch was so exhausted

by his cough that we relieved him of his sack, taking the essentials and leaving the rest. Sarki was at the end of his strength; he had not covered twenty yards before he collapsed, vomiting. His suffering was hard to watch, but this was no time for pity, nor for gentleness. We helped him to get up again; we abandoned his sack and his equipment and supported him. Life was the first consideration. If the weather had not changed and if the wind had not ceased, I do not think we would all have returned unharmed.

Every hundred paces Sarki collapsed in a heap and the slight slope between the Col and the Shoulder seemed endless. Had there been a gale, this paltry obstacle might well have become impassable and have settled the fate of the party by enclosing it at the South Col as in a trap. At such altitudes one lives on the edge of tragedy. A little less wind, a little less cold, and all goes well. A little more wind and it turns out badly. The wind is the master of these regions and of the men who adventure into them. Those who have named Everest the Goddess-Mother of the Winds are not mistaken.

We came to the Shoulder at last. I exchanged glances with Chevalley, and there was no need for words. I looked at the great and shining mountain for the last time: it was serene and victorious. Its summit seemed quite near. Its south-eastern ridge was not steep. Indeed, it was easy. My glance ran over the whole of it in the dim desire to engrave for ever in my memory its two converging lines, the clean spring of a ridge of rock and a ridge of snow, with their meeting place a sharp point—like a claw fixed in the breathless blue of the sky.

Lambert's and Tensing's tent had vanished. The solitudes had resumed their rights.

When the hump had been crossed, we were almost certain of escaping safe and sound. Sarki seemed to recover a semblance of strength. He no longer sank down at every thirty yards; now, at every two rope's-length, he whistled and we stopped. Even if he had not whistled we would have stopped often, so great was our fatigue. The descent that day exhausted us even more than the ascent had done three days before. We had eaten almost nothing, drunk almost nothing, and our bodies had burned up their muscular tissues.

The hours passed. The slope descended endlessly, an inexhaus-

tible reservoir of bands of rock and bands of snow. The summit of Nuptse was still below us and Camp V, right at the bottom, was as if seen from an airplane. And the sun pursued its course, the obedient shadows extending ceaselessly.

It was nearly seven in the evening when we reached the depot. Sarki was at the limit of his strength. One might as well bivouac there on the narrow platform which was the only one we had been able to discover in the course of our reconnaissances. To spend the night at over 24,000 feet without shelter was not without danger, but our Tiger's condition obliged us to do so.

Hofstetter, Roch and Mingma Dorje continued to Camp V. The clear weather and the moon made it possible for them to complete the descent despite the darkness which soon fell. Asper decided to stay with us. He unroped himself and I trembled as I watched him, visibly exhausted, climb the seventy feet which separated him from us.

The weather was so calm—almost warm—that this open, improvised bivouac gave us nothing to fear. The mountain that day was kind and had mercy upon us, as one spares those one has injured. Now it seemed that she wished us well. She could well do so. Concern for the vanquished? Irony? If only she had shown this face a week before!

Yet it was perhaps only one of those passing calms that are frequent in the first days of the monsoon; it was of no consequence, for we had no choice. Sarki could do no more. Our preparations were rapid: we had simply to slip into our sleeping-bags, lie down and wait. Chevalley, with the patience of a physician watching a case, melted snow in his flask over the flames of two lighted candles which he shielded with his hand. Our throats were so dry that as we swallowed it the liquid burned like acid.

Sarki fell asleep at once. He did not move but his breathing was hurried and wheezy. We turned and turned, vainly seeking a position less painful to our backs and hips, bruised as they were by the stones. Darkness had fallen and the last gleams were extinguished on the silvery walls of Nuptse. Then the horizon darkened in its turn. The great dim ridges stood out, inky-black, against a sky in which the stars blazed with a brilliance intensified by the total absence of breeze, vapour or dust. When you fix your eyes for hours

on these numberless constellations, you become slowly aware of their imperceptible movement. Just as by fixing your eyes upon the hand of a clock you become aware of its movement, you become aware too of the movement of the stars and of the earth by experiencing it physically. I had experienced this revelation long ago, and at every bivouac I await it with a sort of impatience.

Late in the night, low down at Camp V, some Bengal lights were lit: our companions no doubt had safely arrived. And in my turn I fell deeply asleep until daylight.

The weather was fine. It was not cold. In recent days the wind had exhausted its violence. There was no hurry and we waited for the sun before folding up our things and completing the descent. Suddenly, without having seen them come up, Ajiba and Dawa Thondup appeared before us. They had taken two hours to ascend from Camp V and they had moved so quickly that they stood panting for a long time. But their refreshed faces contrasted impressively with those of my companions, emaciated and hollowed, like faces consumed by agony. We swallowed the tea they brought us greedily, like shipwrecked mariners.

We entrusted Sarki to them and enjoined them to look after him well. He crawled out of his sleeping-bag with great difficulty and set out, still staggering but supported by his two strong companions. We waited for the sun before we too set out. But it was thin sunlight. The mists rose out of the Cwm and we descended in that blinding light of clouds which filter the rays while leaving them all their strength. The heat was intense, suffocating and humid, giving one the impression of a Turkish bath. It was a long and monotonous descent. Our joints twisted and our muscles ached. Our balance was unstable; the rope pulled one from in front or it pulled one from behind. One could see no more than ten yards ahead through mist like cotton-wool and whiter than the snow. As we passed the fixed ropes our hands had difficulty in gripping them firmly. At last came the final rocks, the couloir and the slanting traverse. Two shadows emerged from the fog and took shape: Phu Tharke and Ang Norbu, as lithe and quick as we were stiff and slow, brought us flasks of fruit-juice. They greeted us by taking our outstretched

hands in both of theirs and bowing. How vulgar is our European handshake compared with this Tibetan greeting in which trust, respect and friendship are combined. It is not our race that has kept the secret of grace and distinction.

These guides that came up to meet us were like a living sign of the contact that had been re-established between our party, the last to push towards the summit, and its supporters at the camps staged between 16,500 and 23,000 feet. Like the travellers of old, we were going now from one relay to another. No more problems, no more questions, no more decisions to take. A track to follow; a weariness to endure. There was an extraordinary restfulness of spirit after weeks of concentration, reflection, hypotheses and hopes, an extraordinary restfulness of will after weeks of extreme tension. I already felt begin in me a strange relaxation, a sensation of currents brought back to normal.

Phu Tharke and Ang Norbu, having relieved us of our packs, plunged once again into the fog, at a speed which was doubtless normal but which seemed to us quite giddy. We followed them and the tents of Camp V soon showed up. Another thirty paces and we let ourselves tumble down in fatigue. In a second our wills deserted us. Twenty-one days at 23,000 feet, three days at over 26,000, the cold, a furious wind and a virtual absence of oxygen had taken toll of our strength. It was eleven o'clock.

But at 23,000 feet the body already begins to recuperate. A few hours' rest and we made arrangements for evacuating the Cwm. They had to be made quickly, for if the monsoon descended upon Everest before we were out of the séracs, things could go badly with us. Once again we were thinking of séracs, of avalanches falling from Nuptse and the western shoulder of Everest. Despite the tremendous effort he had put up on the 28th May, Lambert had not wanted to leave Camp V before our return. He had remained with the Sherpas, ready to climb up again if it proved necessary. He is one of those who does not regard himself as free while there is still work to do or while someone might still need him. Now he could go down; he was at peace and was going to descend that day as far as possible, while we would follow him the next.

CHAPTER IX

The Return

June 3rd.

The calm of the previous day did not last. Having risen early, it was in grey, cold weather that we broke camp. The tents were solid with ice and were difficult to take down, while the two terraces on which they stood, now robbed of their familiar outlines and strewn with debris of every kind, had a sad and derisory appearance. Below them the slope was littered with all the empty boxes we had been throwing away for twenty-one days. The trails which men leave in their passing are not beautiful to behold.

The column was heavy and slow. Five terribly laden Sherpas formed one rope, each carrying about 110 lbs., and we too had our share. That morning Sarki was another man and his gratitude was to be seen in his eyes. He well knew that had we not given him all of the will-power that remained to us, he would now have been sleeping a sad sleep at the South Col.

It was ten o'clock when we set off, determined to leave as quickly as possible that narrow prison where, without diversion or relaxation, we had conducted a bitter struggle for too long. The weather was breaking and once more the blizzard whipped us, hindering our progress. Ten white phantoms slipped down through the upper Cwm, leaning against the hellish wind which seemed as if seeking to test its strength for the last time. I was the last on the rope and I turned round from time to time to see the Sherpas appearing and disappearing in the whirling snow.

We made a short halt at Camp IV, where we found that four Sherpas had ascended to help us with the evacuation. There we left a torn tent, some provisions and material, and resumed our zig-zag march towards Camp III. The snow was falling and piling

up. The track had disappeared; visibility was nil and we progressed from one stick to another. Hofstetter, who had ruled over Camps III and IV for a long time, had arranged things well. Old slalom-runner that he is, he had staked the route so thoroughly that we ran no risk of losing ourselves as we manoeuvred blindly between the crevasses. But the snow increased in depth. Another few hours and the avalanches would begin to roar everywhere, and their cross-fire would block the exit. At Camp III we had a rapid discussion amid the squalls. Roch proposed that we should cross the crevasse and the dangerous couloir that very day. The old fox sensed a trap and would not let himself be caught. He was right. Despite the enormous fatigue involved in a descent from Camp V to Camp I in a single day, there was no opposition. On the contrary. We all of us wanted to finish once and for all with these silent threats, to put behind us the last objective dangers against which we could do nothing, and to be able to breathe freely, free from fear. For no one can live a day in the Western Cwm without fear, having the Khumbu séracs ahead.

We made up the loads, already heavy. Bent under their weight, the Sherpas completed the descent with a sureness and a mastery at which we marvelled. Before we set off, as we could not carry everything, we indulged in a frantic banquet: it was an orgy, a prodigal revenge for the severe economy to which we had been condemned until then. Tins of tunny, sausages and fruit-juice were attacked by a band of vandals: it was a feast of madmen with empty bellies.

We then made off and there followed the last 'Tyrolean' across Asper's crevasse. The loads went over first, then the men. The ropes were still intact. The two young Sherpas who had maintained liaison through the séracs took the lead and conducted us with sureness through a world they knew but which we no longer recognised. The snow-bridges were dangerously worn, the crossings were more exposed and more hazardous than ever. It was an indescribable labyrinth of fallen séracs, of avalanche cones and of new crevasses. The route, at certain points, diverged from the original track by more than a hundred yards. It was a miracle

that men had passed through it every day for a month without mishap.

Camp II, which we passed without stopping, was now an island from which there was no exit except by leaping an immense crevasse. How were the Sherpas able, with their huge loads, to perform such a leap and gain a footing, more than three feet below, on the narrow and glassy lower lip? Of Camp II there remained only a torn and shapeless tent; we left it to its fate.

Further down, the flow of the glacier, the crumbling of the séracs and the heat had completely changed the route. For us it was a new glacier, strange, decrepit, eaten away and dotted with icicles; in fact, a menacing ruin. Weariness and the too heavy loads made us clumsy. Exasperated by the endless sequence of corridors, channels, bottle-necks and chutes and by the cruel dragging of the rope, and with our legs weary from leaping or stepping over crevasses, we dragged ourselves as darkness fell down the last foothills of ice and stone leading to Camp I.

After a descent that lasted ten hours, we got there at 7.30 p.m., only to be disappointed, for the camp had already been evacuated and no one was there. But for myself no disappointment was possible that day. We were all out of the Khumbu and we were all unharmed. We were out of the trap. On our way we had left tents, ropes and provisions behind, but nothing else, and that night I breathed freely.

It was no longer snowing. The Sherpas pitched a camp and we squatted with them around a great fire. We were warm and we had something to drink and we joyfully burned our last reserves of wood. It was good to be prodigal again when we had lived so parsimoniously for more than a month. For long hours we watched the flames twisting in the breeze; I looked, too, upon the faces of my companions—how thin they were, how hollowed and burned! In the depths of the enormous orbits their eyes glittered, but already their looks had changed; for that hunted anxiety of the unpleasant moments could no longer be seen, nor could that hostility and resentment produced by excessive fatigue. We had already begun to forget our sufferings. Unfaithful memory had begun its strange work, sorting out the good and

the bad and casting the worst into that great fire at the foot of the Khumbu séracs. Later, in order to write this story in a truthful fashion, I had to reread my daily notes, and was incredulous.

Chevalley interrupted my musings: 'Are you satisfied?' he asked.

'Yes,' I replied. 'And I'm not the only one. Look at them all.'

'Do you regret not reaching the summit?'

'Not yet. I think we have done some good work. On Everest one expedition climbs upon the shoulders of the other. We climbed upon the shoulders of Shipton. He climbed on those of Houston. Those who come after us will climb on ours. It's only right.'

'The southern route is now open.'

'Yes, but it is difficult. There will have to be an intermediate camp for reaching the South Col. We were already beaten by those 3,000 feet and by the wind.'

'How about oxygen?'

'Oxygen? I don't know yet. Anyway, our apparatus did not do what we expected of it. Perhaps 28,000 feet is a physiological limit, though Raymond and Tensing had the wind and the snow against them too. Remember the weather at Camp V on the day they went up!'

'Then you don't find our experience conclusive?'

'No. With the wind and the snow nothing is conclusive. But I think that in order to reach the summit three things are necessary, which we lacked: an intermediate camp between V and the Col, at least three days without wind, and sufficient oxygen so as not to deteriorate during the three days required for the final attack.'

'They will also need Sherpas like those we have had.'

'Certainly. Without them no one could go far. I don't know where they get their incredible resources and reserves from. Did you see them coming down today, with over 100 lbs on their backs?'

'They have more endurance than we have.'

'Never a complaint. When they can do no more, they just fall.'

'That's because they are attached to us. We did well to treat them as brothers. They didn't take long to understand that we were their friends. This is what made it possible for them to put up, between the sixteen of them, one of the biggest efforts ever made in the Himalaya.'

On June 4th we were awakened at dawn by the chattering of the coolies. Thirty men and women arrived from the base camp to evacuate Camp I, a godsend to the Sherpas and ourselves, who would not have to play the stevedore upon the long moraine. The weather was fine again: Pumori, Changtse and Nuptse were clothed in fresh snow, and glittered in the sunlight. At noon we set off, passing once again along the corridor of the ice-pinnacles before leaving the glacier for the base camp.

Our eyes sought the verdure and our feet the soft earth. The sound and taste of spring water were physical pleasures after forty days of snow, rock and ice. This meagre verdure, which was still brown and would not turn green until after the monsoon, and the pale androsaces that hid among the mosses, seemed to us quite as luxuriant as in the parks of Europe.

In the afternoon we reached the base camp, a veritable village where Dr. Wyss, whom I had not seen for a month, welcomed us warmly after his long solitude and daily cares, waiting for the infrequent news. It was a feast day. Then and for many days thereafter the appetite was to be a considerable personality, exacting and insatiable, determined to take the leading role from morning to night and awakening sometimes in the night demanding to be served. All of us had lost about twenty pounds and we were not exactly covered in fat when we left. Anyway, Dr. Wyss had arranged things well. He had sent a runner into the valley to bring back eggs and he had collected twelve dozen. Sherpanis had come from Namche Bazar with wild spinach. Flory was already watching over roasting legs of yak, and Pansi was happily busy, having got back to his real base, for he had had quite enough of the discomforts of Camp I, where he had been sick with pneumonia and an attack of malaria.

On June 6th, on the clearest of days, escorted by some sixty

coolies—men and women from Namche—we took the valley road and paid our last farewells to the Khumbu valley. The summits were softened by mist, their high crests seeming lost in the blue heaven. We marched away over the springy grass and among the first flowers, the dwarf violet rhododendrons and the primroses. But we marched laboriously, so deep was our fatigue. It had penetrated to the depths of our muscles and our cells. Our toes were painful, numbed and sensitive at the same time: undoubtedly, despite the admirable protection of our boots, the frost had in the long run affected the circulation of the extremities. Although the first stages were painful, everything soon returned to normal and the toe-nails which came off as a result of superficial frost-bite were quickly replaced.

We descended to meet the spring. Shrubs soon succeeded to the dwarf flowers, a whole vegetation increasingly rich in colour and with scents so strong that they heightened the feeling of slight dizziness and vague instability accompanying the return to more human altitudes and to an atmospheric pressure to which we were no longer accustomed. At Melingo, on the second stage, we camped in the midst of birches, eglantine and tree-rhododendrons with vanilla flowers. At the home of Ang Tchumli's parents there was great rejoicing and they welcomed us with Tibetan hospitality.

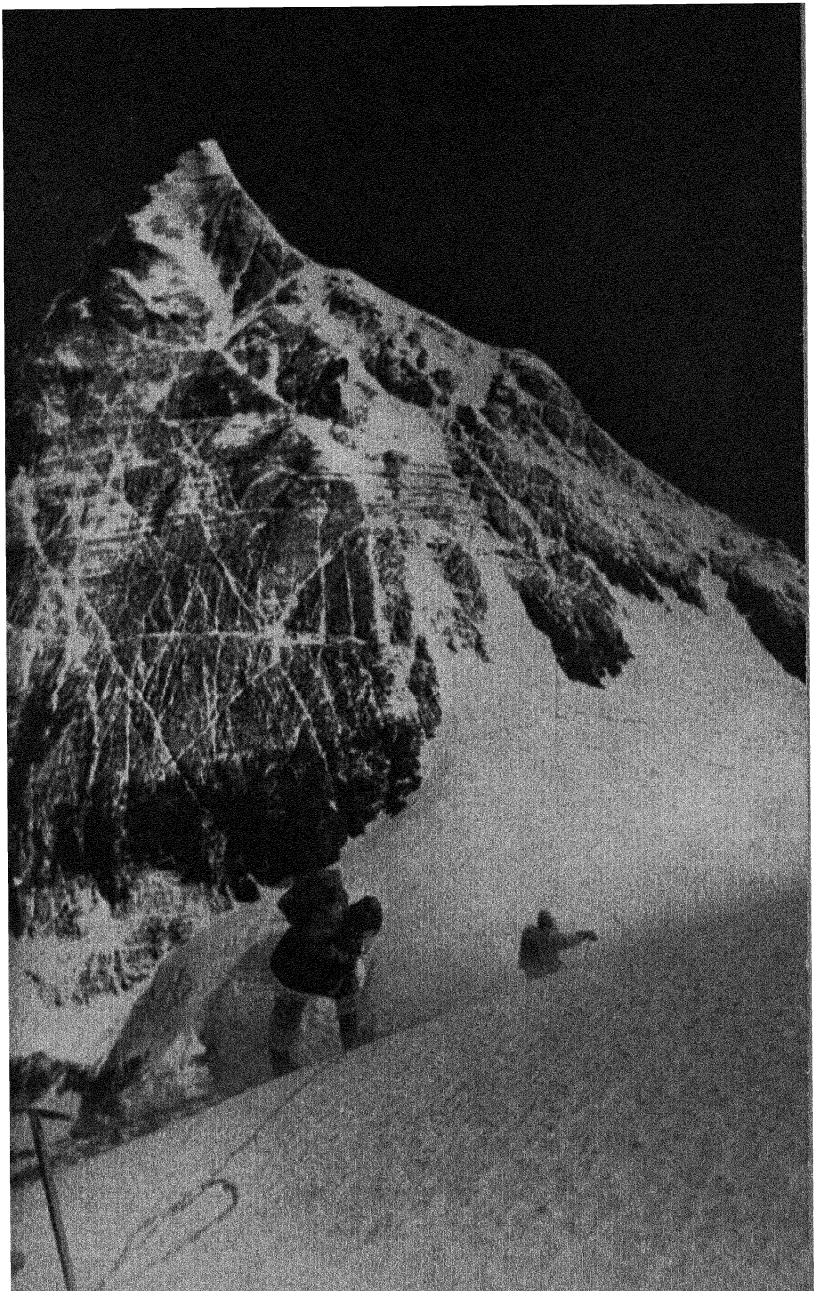
The little oil lamps scarcely lit the faces of my companions who were seated on the floor. Before us were marvellous porcelain bowls filled with chow-chow, the traditional dish for honoured guests, and Chinese chop-sticks to eat it with. In a second bowl was grated, bitter-flavoured radish, enhancing the flavour of the principal dish. We were not familiar with the use of chop-sticks but our hosts were patient instructors. They had dressed for the occasion in sumptuous costumes of iridescent hues and we learned to eat while swallowing those formidable drinks, *chang, arak* or *rackchi*. The rejoicings stretched out late into the night, while the Sherpas came and went. We could hear them dancing and singing outside and they did not stop until it was day.

On the following day, at Thyangboche monastery, where we were welcomed by the Grand Lama, whose deep voice and

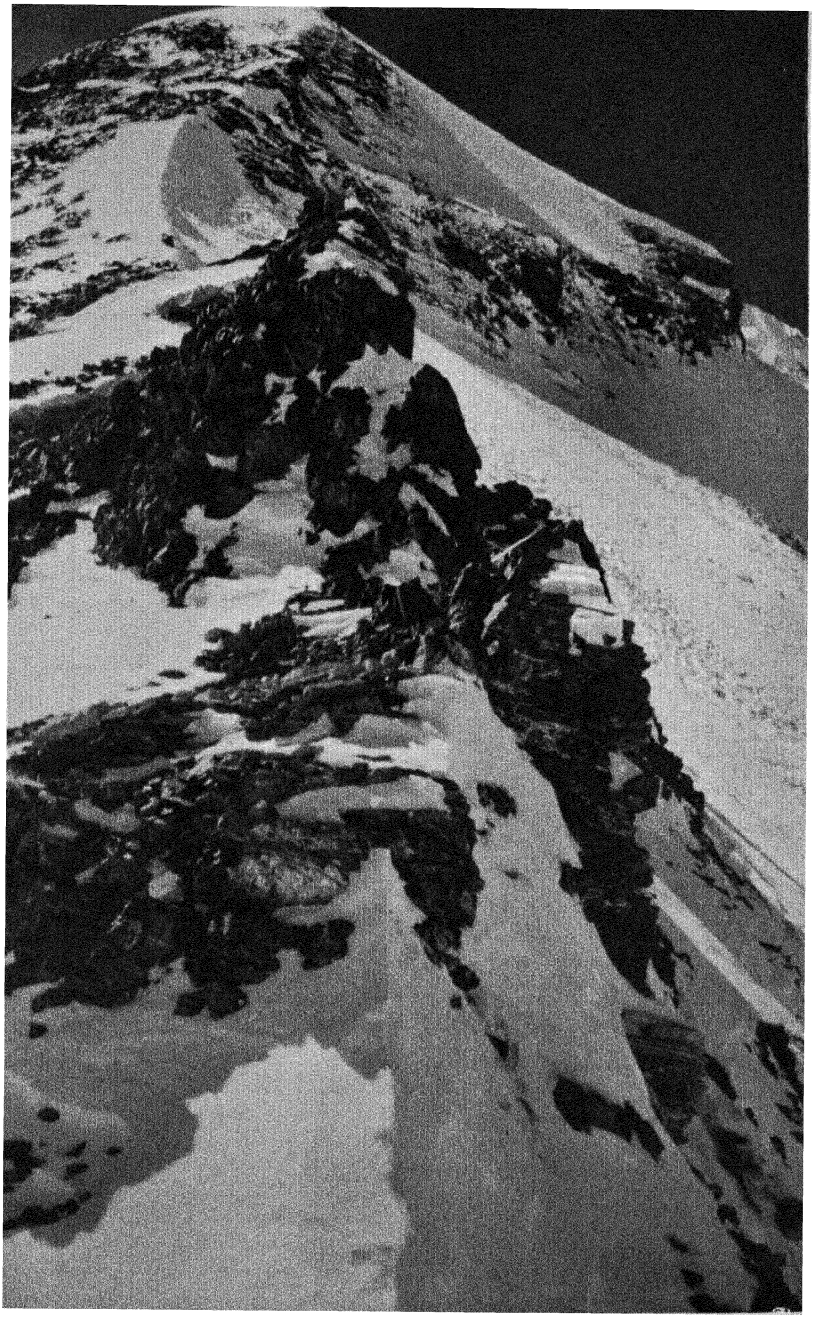
pointed beard strangely recalled Don Basile of *The Marriage of Figaro,* we found some of the members of the British expedition to Cho Oyu awaiting our return: Shipton, Gregory and Bourdillon. Although, true to their British ways, they did not show it, we sensed that they were curious to know the reasons for our failure and the nature of the difficulties that awaited them, since it was to them that the luck of diplomacy had given the right to make the attempt on Everest the next year. They were especially interested in our closed-circuit oxygen apparatus, of which we had expected much but in which we had been disappointed, for although the apparatus weighed only 5¼ lbs., and it was extremely easy to change the parts, its resistance to breathing was such that practically none of us had been able to use it while on the move above 23,000 feet. On the other hand, we sang the praises of the reindeer-skin high altitude boots inspired by the footwear worn for a long time by people obliged to struggle against the cold—Eskimos, Laplanders and Tibetans—and used for the first time in the Himalaya. The results had been beyond dispute, since we had not had a single serious frostbite despite open bivouacs above 24,500 feet and in particularly bad conditions.

At Namche Bazar we made a two-day halt. For the Sherpas it was a two-day festival. Some of them had not seen their families for several years, so the meeting was celebrated with *chang,* which flowed in torrents. It is difficult to say whether it was the monsoon or alcohol that drowned the village. Namche Bazar lived well up to its name. Everyone from the village and its surroundings brought us something to sell: *tombas,* churns, medallions, knives, prayer-wheels.

Two days later, at Namche, we saw our British friends again, together with Hillary, who had returned from the Khumbu glacier. When I told him, before we left, of the difficulties almost all of us had experienced in freeing ourselves from our professional obligations for four months, he answered with a smile, that it was no problem for him because in New Zealand he had thousands of workers so conscientious that they required no special supervision and worked perfectly well in his absence. Amused by my questioning look, he said, 'I have a lot of bees who do very well



19 *Everest from a point at over 26,000 feet, before the descent to the South Col. On this south-east ridge Camp VII was pitched at 27,560 feet*



20 *The south-east ridge of Everest, looking towards the South Summit from Camp VII*

without me for a few months.' We separated, wishing each other well in our future undertakings.

On June 11th there was a great commotion. Tensing assembled the eighty-three coolies. Ajiba called each of them by name and they fell upon the lined-up loads to choose the best among the casks, boxes and tents. A last drink of *chang,* a last farewell between the Sherpas and their families—for who knows how long—and the column moved off.

At the village of Ghat we took a new route. The monsoon forced us to leave the main valley, its enormous river and its unusable bridges, to cross the mountains and reach Ringmo in three rough stages. There were no inns, but there was hospitality everywhere. You may stop at every house: shelter is for every passer-by, and the food for every traveller. If you have the means you leave a few coins when you leave; but if you have not, no one will look displeased.

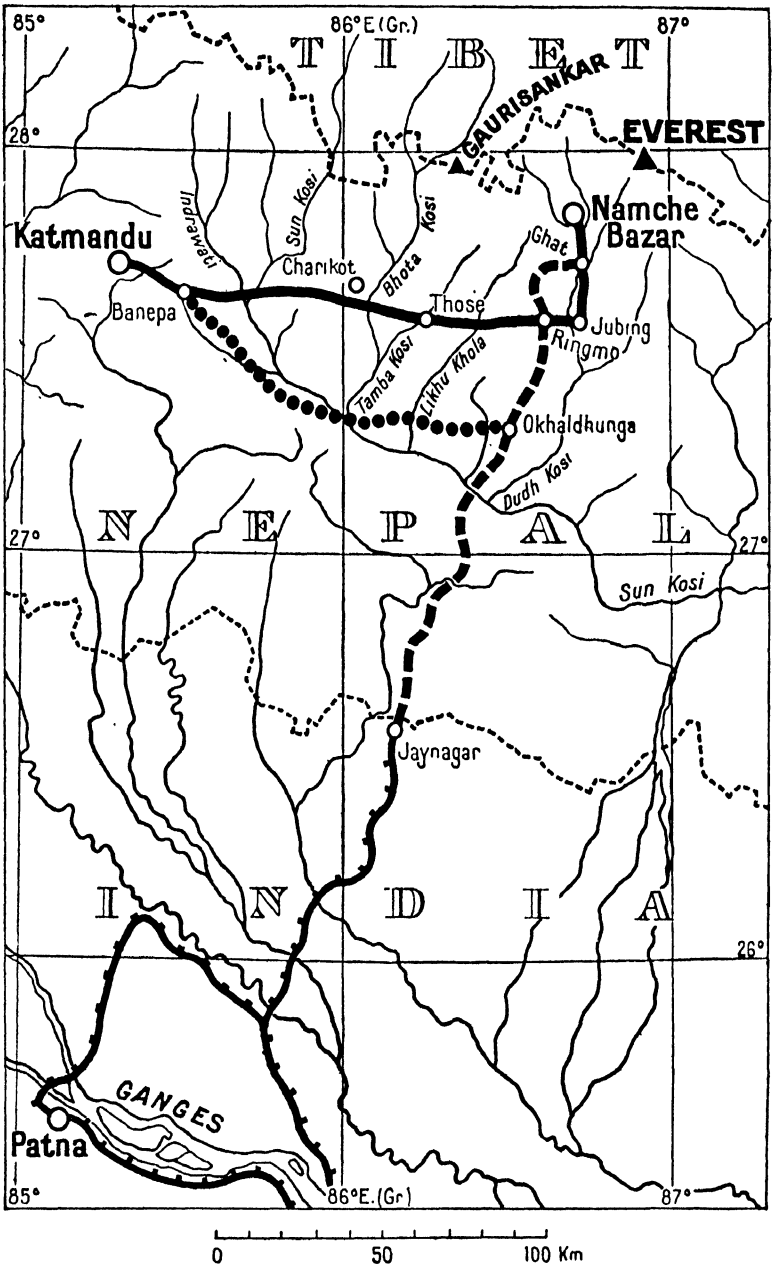
From a few scattered dwellings that are the village of Täte, a rock staircase leads straight up to a first pass at 11,150 feet. The vegetation was rich. The Himalayan cedars raised their pyramidal tops to a height of 160 feet. Some were lying prone and rotting, for the lamas think that one day such a tree, by giving its life and its death, will become again a living being. More numerous were the pine-trees which resembled our arollas, though their cones were nearly eight inches long, and the firs with purple-blue cones and short branches. At last we emerged from the thick undergrowth and reached a wind-swept crest, licked by tongues of mist. We made a short halt, then plunged into a mad descent which stopped only at the edge of a tumultuous torrent that rolled its troubled waters under the foliage.

We would have liked to have camped there, but there was no space, so we attacked the other side of the ravine, which was also steep. These changes of pace were a hard trial for our muscles. Higher up we waited for a long time for the coolies, who were tired and determined to stay beside the torrent. Minute mosquitoes, as voracious as they were small, gave us some bad moments while Tensing used all his eloquence to induce the coolies to start again. He succeeded and slowly, one by one, in scattered fashion,

they reached the tiny clearing of Chechingnalsa. There was little room for the tents and little room for the men, but we crowded together and at nightfall everyone was stowed away. Numerous coolies had found shelter beneath blocks of rock; they had left their ill-humour beside the torrent and were chattering like birds. Fires of juniper wood and pine wood were lit everywhere and a soup of flour, *tsampa* and peas was soon ready.

The next morning there were long preparations. The air was saturated with vapour, our bodies were clammy, and at six in the morning, before the sun had risen, our shirts were already sticking to our skins. Before us lay a crude staircase, but the route was well arranged in quite regular steps. For hours we proceeded with our noses to the track. We were, however, on one of the great arteries between Nepal and Tibet and every now and then we passed men bearing heavy loads of paper of from 130 to 170 lbs. The traffic is heavy at this period of the year. On this paper, made in Nepal from vegetable fibres, the Buddhist prayers are printed. These coolies were going to cross the Nangpa La at over 19,000 feet to reach Tingri Dzong in Tibet. Over there these sheets would be printed with complicated and graceful signs from engraved plates. Brought together in loose leaves, stowed between two boards, sometimes richly carved, they would become those voluminous books of prayers which are to be found in the lamas-series and in the homes of the rich.

We resumed our climb, leaving these paper-carriers to continue their journey. They greeted us graciously as they rested their loads. While we continued the ascent we moved into the mists. The slabs were slippery and everything was humid. The undergrowth was dripping and drops shone on every leaf; mosses hung from the trees and the trunks were often worm-eaten; this forest was characteristic of the monsoon regions. The earth was covered with leaves which every year renewed the humus that favoured a semi-tropical vegetation. As we rose the vegetation changed with astonishing rapidity. Soon, to the plants and trees of the humid regions there succeeded the tree-rhododendrons with bare brown trunks and rare flowers. Their blossoming was reaching its end, but we were still able to admire the clusters of richly-coloured



The Route of the Return Journey

blooms. First came the ivory rhododendron; here and there, no longer able to resist the damp, petals were strewn upon the earth. Higher up, hidden below the densely-foliaged trees, were the rose-coloured rhododendrons, and lastly, richer and more beautiful, the late flowering pure white and mauve-white. On the crest, at 12,850 feet, before descending to Tanga, where that evening we pitched our camp, the flora recalled that of the Alps, though its colour was more varied. Mauve, violet, white and rose were grouped in beds and it was across this blossoming garden that we descended towards our camping-site, a small pasture, itself strewn with flowers.

On June 14th, in order to reach Ringmo, we had to ascend to 14,270 feet. We marched all day through a vast flowering forest before reaching the village where the routes for Katmandu and Okhaldhunga diverge. A halt in a pasture gave us the opportunity to regale ourselves with a glass of fresh yoghourt. Some of it we took along with us to eat with wild strawberries for our evening meal.

From Ringmo we reached Okhaldhunga in three stages; it is the chief place in the province and the seat of the Governor. They were eventless and varied stages, through a rich country with stylish houses of stone almost buried in fine crops of maize. During the journey Chevalley distributed medicines and gave consultations in exchange for eggs, vegetables and the inevitable chicken, and at the meal that followed we devoured the doctor's fees!

Okhaldhunga was all rain and mud, and our difficulties began. For three days we strove to find the sixty coolies we required for carrying our loads. Despite the help of the Governor we did not find the men easily; it was for them a time of heavy work in the fields and therefore a matter of life. The rice and the maize that they won in a few months would permit them to live through the winter and it seemed that, contrary to the dwellers in the higher country, these people made few reserves. For them a bad monsoon, due to dryness or to floods, meant famine.

We struggled and we brought pressure upon the authorities. At last, in the evening of June 19th, we counted some thirty men;

we paid them for this first day so that they would persuade their comrades. While we were busy in this way, Wyss, Flory, Roch and Hofstetter were already on the road to Katmandu. In fact, we had to split up; certain formal obligations and the personal baggage which remained in the capital, made this long detour to the west necessary. The route our comrades followed at first crossed the hills south of Okhaldhunga and afterwards reascended the Sun Kosi, the big river that drains the waters of the whole region. In seven days they were at Katmandu; from there they would be taken to Patna by air and there we would regroup.

On June 20th, having risen at dawn, ready to depart, we awaited our porters. In vain! Nine o'clock came, then ten, but no one appeared. It seemed that in the village the men were taking their first meal. Without waiting further, I went with Lombard to the Governor. He received us very amiably and with the help of an interpreter we exchanged a few cordial words and explained the purpose of our visit. Without further ado, he agreed to go down and take charge of the situation. He was ready in less time than it takes to write.

Under a makeshift cover our loads were still waiting. A few porters were there; the Governor addressed them and asked them to fetch their comrades. The intervention of 'authority' had rapid results and soon, one after the other, the coolies presented themselves and got busy. At eleven o'clock the loads were shared out. Every man had to sign, with a thumb-print, the undertaking to carry our loads to Jaynagar, the first railway station on the Indian frontier, at the normal tariff of 3 rupees a day. For our part, we undertook to pay this salary half in Nepalese and half in Indian rupees. Before we left, the Governor addressed a few more words to the coolies, begging them to respect their engagement. At midday, when the sun was blazing and when the air was motionless and heavy, we set out for Manebhanjyang. We trotted rapidly through increasingly numerous crops of maize. Everything was green and not a patch of this stony earth was unused. Here and there were villages—that is, two or three houses grouped together, the others being distributed over a radius of several kilometres. These very simple thatched houses, built of dark

ochre mud, stood out warmly from the verdant hillsides. Hills and ridges extended to the limits of vision.

It was six in the evening; when would we get to Manebhanjyang? The clear blue sky was laden with heavy black clouds through which filtered the rays of the setting sun. Low down, in the depths of the valley, a river ran southwards, its waters flashing like a mirror. It was a strange spectacle, this tangle of hills and valleys, like a complicated map stretched before our eyes and losing itself beyond the horizon. Everything faded into the dusk while in the east the stars already shone: it was the abrupt twilight of the tropics.

Darkness had come, but no coolies, no tents, no sleeping-bags, no pneumatic mattresses! Pansi espied a house and asked hospitality for the night and the right to cook in the courtyard. The owners, a family with eight or nine children, agreed with good grace, and we spent the night on the terrace. Pansi busied himself with the meal, bought a hen, a little rice and some *chang*. An hour later we regaled ourselves, eating with our fingers or with spoons cut in the woods. Some Sherpas joined us with a little equipment, but the coolies did not arrive that night, for they had stopped in the preceding village, nearly three miles away.

A steep slope of over 3,000 feet separated us from the Sun Kosi, the great river that rolls its turbulent waters towards the Ganges. On a little beach were the native ferrymen who manipulated a dug-out canoe. When the canoe was full they ascended the current beside the bank, where it was weak, then they pushed it out into the current; the canoe acquired a great speed, the men paddled with all their might and reached the further bank almost facing us. It was a fine sight to watch. The trip there and back lasted about twenty minutes, so that in five hours, without a false manoeuvre, they transported all of us and all our heavy loads.

The chief of the coolies then declared that his men would push on to Balarte that evening. This region is torrid and infested with malaria, and they did not wish to delay there. Something had changed in the attitude of our new men, who had been recruited with such difficulty. They had understood that we did

not wish to rob them and that we would stick to our promises. So, abandoning the too short stages, they began to move off and to lead us along a new arid valley which we ascended by following the stony bed of the river.

Balarte lay at 2,850 feet. We were gradually losing height. Finally, the plain succeeded to a last eminence, and stretched endlessly from east to west, the little hills being covered with very dense forest. Southwards it stretched into the distance, bounded only at the horizon by the chain of the Siwaliks, the last fold of the earth's surace before the Indian plain.

The terrain was now flat and we advanced over sandy soil. The going was arduous. The river sprawled out and its numerous windings forced us to cross it several times; we passed through abundant grass that was more than six feet high, from which at times the black or grey herons would fly up. It was also a paradise for the rhinoceros.

The last stages were dealt with briskly; our coolies marched better and better. After Belsot came Phulbari, where snakes are so numerous that they no longer worry the inhabitants. They live in their company and seem to get on happily together. At Phulbari we hired ponies to cross the plain which now stretched before us without a single obstacle: this was the great plain of India, with its crops of rice and sugar cane. At Kalinpur we pitched camp for the last time; the next day we would be at Jaynagar.

June 26th and the last stage. All was flat as far as the eye could see. Rice grew everywhere. Crossing a river broke the monotony of this journey on pony-back; they were lazy ponies that had to be driven continuously with cries of 'hot' and heavy blows with a stick. Then on the horizon lay a cloud of dust and a few high chimneys: this was Jaynagar and we arrived there at noon.

Three endless days began in this small, filthy and dusty town. For Lombard, who had to bring us Indian rupees from Shira, where he had gone to change our Nepalese money, had not obtained satisfaction. What were we to do? Our sixty coolies were waiting and every day that passed added to their pay. Lambert and Chevalley set out for Patna in the hope of finding the

precious money there. Lombard went up to Shira again. Zimmermann and myself went off to Laherc Sarai to try and change our dollar travellers' cheques into rupees, but there we suffered a further refusal from the manager of the Imperial Bank who, despite all the guarantees we gave him, did not think he ought to advance us the necessary 2,000 rupees. In the evening Zimmermann and Asper went to Patna; we telegraphed right and left, and finally, completely 'broke', we borrowed 100 rupees from a moneylender, for we had to eat. He demanded 10 rupees interest a day and we agreed to the bargan with gratitude!

But everything came to an end on the 28th, at six in the evening, when two young men presented themselves with an envelope containing 1,500 rupees. The Jesuit fathers of Patna, learning of our difficulties, had sent us the sum required to free us of our obligations. Aubert hurriedly helped me to prepare the coolies' pay; they had not lost their faith in us and were waiting patiently. Half in Nepalese rupees and half in Indian rupees, as stipulated in our contract, we gave to each a tidy little sum and a packet of cigarettes. The next day they would all return along the track to their native village.

At 1.45 a.m. the first train for Patna at last bore us away. We left this miserable spot without regret. A few days later, at Patna, where we were the guests at St. Xavier College of the Rev. Father Niesen, we watched our Sherpas leave, perched upon three calashes.

The adventure was ended. The party was breaking up. It was sad. But the southern route had been discovered.

PART TWO

Winter Above 26,000 Feet

Autumn Expedition: August 28th–December 31st, 1952

Gabriel Chevalley's Journal

Decision and Preparations

Before our arrival at Patna, when we were returning from the first expedition, Father Niesen guardedly mentioned the possibility of an autumn expedition to Everest. At first we looked upon the rumour as a journalistic fancy, but Father Niesen thought it contained an element of truth. However that may be, our first reaction, after the severity of the pre-monsoon assault, was to consider a post-monsoon attempt as scarcely a reasonable proposition. We had had enough, or rather, we thought we had had enough. But at Geneva we met Oskar Weber, who said that he was ready to organise a new expedition, and he asked which of us would like to go again.

Certain Himalayans had for a long time considered the post-monsoon as very favourable. It would therefore be worth trying, if only to see what the conditions were really like. On the other hand, the results of the first expedition, which had surpassed all anticipations, quite naturally encouraged us to seize the opportunity that offered itself, since the authorisation for the autumn seemed certain.

Some ten days later, Dittert was in Zürich; the Foundation had now made up its mind, but Dittert, alas! would not be free. Therefore, I was myself entrusted with the leadership of the expedition. Lambert and I were the only two members of the first expedition who were able to start again. We were joined by a cinematographer, Norman G. Dyhrenfurth, and four climbers, Arthur Spöhel, Gustave Gross, Ernest Reiss and Jean Busio, all of them with brilliant climbing careers.

We had scarcely more than a month in which to prepare the expedition, which was to be appreciably heavier than the first.

Showing remarkable decision and speed, the Foundation got together to beat all records. It is fair to say that the second expedition benefited enormously by the preparations of the first and was, moreover, carried along to some extent by its momentum. Nevertheless, in each case it was a matter of decision and not of reflection or long meditation.

One of the reasons for our early hesitations had been the fear of cold. We knew that it would be more intense than in the spring, but our faith in our reindeer-skin boots and our clothing was so great that we went off without fear of frostbite.

The suppliers of our spring equipment got the new material together in less than a month. The twenty-five Sherpas were to have the same equipment as ourselves, and amongst the changes we made in the equipment were bigger and longer anoraks, boots that opened in front and not at the side, gaiters that enveloped the whole boot, lighter marching boots, and felt boots for all Sherpas and special porters as well as the climbers; but we did without the Fox receiver-transmitters and also the closed-circuit oxygen apparatus, which had proved unsatisfactory, taking instead some 30,000 litres of oxygen in bottles of 400 and 600 litres. For provisions we used the spring lists adapted to longer duration and to a greater number of persons. On the other hand we envisaged a greater quantity of European foodstuffs for the Sherpas, who were fond of it at high altitudes. We also arranged for additional European foods for the approach march and a considerable quantity of fruit-juices.

The six tons of equipment were transported entirely by air from Zürich to Katmandu, and to this figure must be added a ton and a half of Indian provisions purchased at Katmandu.

As a comparison, the following figures may be given:

	1st Expedition	*2nd Expedition*
Equipment ..	5 tons (metric)	7½ tons (metric)
Coolies ..	163	251
Sherpas.. ..	14	23
Porters for the séracs ..	2	10

During the autumn expedition the number of porters between Namche and the base camp rose to 290.

September 10th. Katmandu–Banepa.

I arrived at the airfield with Aufschnaiter and Tony Hagen. The 251 coolies, their leader Harkaman and his six corporals were there. They set out at ten o'clock. We left a few loads of equipment and provisions for Dyhrenfurth. Ang Dawa was to wait for him for a fortnight and join us alone if Dyhrenfurth did not secure his visas. Four of us went by taxi to Banepa. The Katmandu plain and its ricefields were magnificent, but the road was dreadful. Hagen left us at Banepa. It began to rain while we were setting up the camp.

September 11th. Banepa–Dolalghat.

There was heavy rain during the night. It was dull. The first coolies were ready to depart at 6.30 a.m. Traffic on the road was heavy: wood, fowls, paper. We bathed in a stream in the valley of the Chola Kola. Our new comrades were astonished by their unusual thirst. At 3.15 p.m. we reached a village on the right bank of the Indrawati and there bought an enormous quantity of bananas for two rupees. There was no possibility of camping on the shore of this right bank as we did before. We crossed the bridges over the Indrawati and Sun Kosi, and took another bathe in a bay on the left bank of the latter, where we arrived at 4 p.m., somewhat tired but less so than formerly. It was less hot, for the weather was dull. The water was good and fresh.

The coolies arrived late and the rain began. We did not dare to pitch the camp and pile the loads on the shore for fear of a sudden rise in the river, and at nightfall we erected a few tents on the road. The last of the coolies did not join us this evening, but in spite of all these inconveniences we have ended the day by eating a chicken and potatoes with an excellent sauce. The violent rain ceased and we went to bed quite damp; but it is still warm at this low altitude and it is better not to be in sleeping-bags.

At one in the morning Tensing heard a loud and unusual sound: the river! Tensing took down the two tents in sixteen inches of

water, but we had luckily removed what had been in them, including a case of cigarettes.

September 12th. Dolalghat–Chyaubas.

The first coolies left by 5.45 a.m. The mists dispersed and the great ascent of more than 4,000 feet was done almost entirely in sunshine. Shade from trees was rare. The humidity of the air was such that the sweat streamed down us and our shirts were soaked as if we had been in water. We had to make fans from the young leaves of the Bengal palm so that we could fan our faces by a slight flick of the wrist. On the ridge there was at last a little breeze. We pitched our camp below Chyaubas on a spacious grassy shoulder, a magnificent belvedere overlooking a very wide sector traversed by the valley of the Sun Kosi.

At this season the whole of this panorama is sumptuously green. The picture has scarcely any resemblance to that of the spring; everything then was red, arid and dry. But the men have not changed and the traffic is intense; porters carrying fowls pass us in groups every now and then. This evening, for the first time, it is really fresh.

September 13th. Chyaubas–Lichanku.

For the most part our coolies are Tamang and Buddhist. Tamang is the name of a tribe. They too are of Tibetan origin but from a more distant locality than the Sherpas. They have settled deeper in the valleys and their Mongol type is much less obvious. Their language is different from that of the Sherpas. Their homes are in the country we are crossing, but they go to Katmandu to seek work just as the Sherpas go to Darjeeling.

This stage was pleasant and attractive. For a long while we followed a crest between 6,500 feet and 7,200 feet, sometimes bare and sometimes wooded. Below were very sequestered and tranquil valleys where we could see a few huts amid crops of maize bordered by thickets of sub-tropical vegetation. It was good to walk along this track in such cloudy but rainless weather. Naturally, the rhododendrons no longer bore their magnificent scarlet blooms. With Tensing and Spöhel I walked peacefully

and in silence at the tail of the column; the clay path was as slippery as a skating-rink and we sometimes fell.

On the second half of this stage we descended again into a valley, with rice-fields and wet once more. We have camped at Lichanku, in front of the lamassery, and have paid the coolies an advance of five rupees.

Ang Tsering, our cook, is the brother of Ajiba; he is a good cook, although I have had to ask him to go easy with the spices. He lost his toes on Nanga Parbat, as did Lambert on the Aiguilles du Diable, but his walk is supple nevertheless. He is obliging and amusing; when he is perplexed he pulls at the two or three hairs of his moustache with the same gesture as if it were a large *moustache gauloise*.

September 14th. Lichanku–Manga Deorali.

While ascending the valley towards the Manga Deorali pass I walked naked to the waist, since the sky was clouded over and my shirt was soaked. My white torso made all the people laugh. Then on the final rise the sun came out, and with the humidity it was like an oven. In addition the heat was reflected by the stone steps and the forest was too stunted to shade the road. But it was vibrant with the sound of the cicadas. Noon: the mountains before us were covered with a dense jungle of deep green hue, and there was yet no trace of autumn yellowing in the vegetation; a river foamed whitely in the depths of the valley.

Great storm clouds formed over the wide Charikhot valley and the Manga Deorali camp went up under a deluge of rain which continued into the night. Around the tents we floundered in mud. The last of the coolies who had left at 7 a.m. arrived after dark. The loads that could not be sheltered under tarpaulins—which were the great majority—were protected by the umbrellas of plaited leaves with which the porters had provided themselves, a sort of stiff mat a yard square, folded in two and worn like a small ridged roof over both the man and his load.

September 15th. Manga Deorali–Kirantichap.

This morning was dull; not cold, but there had been rain on the

heights. Of Gaurisankar we could see only the base. Instead of covering a long, hard stage to Namdu, followed by a very short one to Jacksa, we stopped at Kirantichap at noon and this time the camp was up before the rain, which burst upon us in the middle of the afternoon and lasted until evening.

We have prepared the mail which is to leave tomorrow. I bathed with Spöhel and we shaved, except for Gross and Reiss, who declared that in all the literature of the Himalaya no case can be found of a man who has not allowed his beard to grow.

September 16th. Kirantichap–Yaksa.

In the depths of the valley the river was enormous, an impressive mass of water. The whole hillside of Namdu was still in shadow, but it felt warmer in the shade than in the sun, for the humidity was extreme.

We had remembered the Namdu-Yaksa stage as a very short walk, but it proved much longer than we thought; and now that all the crops in the Charikhot valley are rice, the road is almost everywhere an irrigation channel and unpleasant to follow. When at last we had crossed this incline, stretching over an endless hillside exposed to the burning sunlight, and drew near to the upper levels, with a more mountainous and less cultivated appearance, where the brown maize was still standing, we discovered a further hillside of which we had remembered nothing at all. Once the camp was set up, the rain—partly monsoon and partly storm—returned.

September 17th. Yaksa–Those.

This was an attractive stage and, as the sky remained cloudy, the temperature was pleasant. It is a very varied route. After the wooded pass at about 7,900 feet, came the descent to Sikrigaon, where we picnicked at an early hour, and then a long and quite wild glen leading to the wide valley of Those. The river in this glen was swollen, but luckily its waters were not icy as in the Alps, and Buzio, Lambert, Spöhel and a few Sherpas got soaked in the current which boiled up to their hips while they helped the coolies to cross with their loads, one after the other. Since there

are 250 men, it took quite a time! Their boots were thrown from from one bank to the other. The Sherpas with their usual vitality went to it with a will and all of them gambolled and amused themselves and laughed. Even the most morose of the coolies reacted and smiled, either before or after having crossed the water, while the crossing itself required an additional effort, and they tightly grasped the hands held out to them to avoid falling into the stream. However, several coolies reached Those lame and Tensing had to replace three of them on the last stretch. A fourth will not be able to resume the journey tomorrow. All the sodden tents were put up, hoping to dry them, but this evening there will be more rain.

September 18th. Those–Chyangma.

The Hindu village of Those resounded to the hammers of the smiths in the numerous forges where they work the iron extracted from the mountains. These fires are stirred by enormous leather bellows, worked by a system of levers, and the cinders are strewn over the road.

The ascent to the Chyangma La (at about 8,500 feet) is easy and crosses a fine landscape of rich and varied vegetation. Nests of wild bees hang from the top of a rock; the flight of these insects, in abrupt waves outside the nests, make them look like dark brown cakes.

We passed the Governor of Okaldhunga on his way to Katmandu with an escort, which comprised a brown horse, a man armed with a hunting gun, a scribe and five or six other persons. I recognised the Governor at once; happy at this encounter, we greeted one another and exchanged provisions; then the Governor provided us with an official letter of recommendation.

At Chyangma we camped in the courtyard of the lamassery in front of the two chortens overgrown with grass and moss, only to suffer at once a massed attack of leeches, which surged from the grass in all directions. These disgusting creatures stand upright on one of their suckers in the middle of a path in order with the other to lay hold of any creature that passes, or they remain hidden in the grass or among the leaves. They are everywhere,

like shiny and gluttonous pirates, always ready to attack swiftly, silently and with persistence. They most often present one with a *fait accompli,* for one feels nothing when they bite; only a slight tickling very soon reveals that they are already bloated with blood. They are filthy creatures! Luckily their crime is perfectly painless and asceptic and leaves no irritation. But it is none the less very exasperating because so repugnant, persistent and offensive, and because of the continuous watch that has to be kept on one's boots, socks, legs and even the rest of one's body.

There was more rain at the beginning of the afternoon, before the camp was up. A real deluge fell from the great grey and whitish clouds and from the mists which trailed along, emptied themselves and reformed. This lasted until evening and through the night. We struggled desperately against the flooding of the tents and to safeguard the loads of equipment and provisions, about the fate of which we were anxious. The mess-tents and the six high-altitude ridge-tents have shrunk, so that we can no longer use the ridge poles, with the result that they are badly stretched and therefore as water-tight as a strainer.

The whole camp rapidly became muddy. The mess-tents were quickly invaded by the water and we had to give up the idea of sleeping in them; they did not resist the rain, their surfaces dripped and the sides streamed. The kitchen tent has been erected in the deep excavation surrounding the chorten and suffers from enormous streams of water. The tattered coolies are still coming in, sheltering themselves and their loads under their roof-like umbrellas, and floundering in the mud. The Sherpas, completely sodden, move to and fro to protect the loads and drain the camp.

September 19th. Chyangma–Setha.

A melancholy stage. The monsoon, which is near its end, has dealt us a last blow that is singularly hard to bear and has complicated many things, for there is no question of watching the rain fall as the natives and the water-buffaloes do, but of moving on with seven and a half tons of equipment. The skill of the packers and the courage and ability of all the men, has made it possible for us to get through nevertheless.

Setha is a hamlet, a few houses perched on an immense jungle hillside. Having descended a long way to the Donra bridge and having then floundered for some miles to mid-calf along a road that had become either a mud-pit or a stream, we found a camping site at last on three narrow, sloping terraces, where we could set up the tents obliquely and pile the equipment. Rain, mist, cloud, mud; even our spirits are becoming damp in their turn.

September 20th. Setha–Jumbesi.

The whole troop ascended in good fashion the 3,000 feet to the pass (11,150 feet), where heavy rain set in. After the descent we halted for a long time in a house. We dried ourselves beside the fire and were offered some boiled potatoes. The arms and hands of one of our Sherpas were ice-cold.

At Jumbesi we have been fortunate enough to instal ourselves in the monastery. There was thus no need to put up the tents and the equipment is sheltered in the galleries which surround the inner courtyard. We have paid the coolies an advance of 10 rupees, since this is a better market than Ringmo and they must buy their provisions for the three-day crossing from Ringmo to Täte, which offers no opportunity of revictualling. Pasang has been given an injection of penicillin, for he has a severe attack of bronchitis. One load of sugar has suffered a little from water.

September 21st. Jumbesi–Ringmo.

The monastery courtyard presented this morning an extraordinarily medieval picture, filled with people, animals, spectators and idlers—as lively and noisy as you could wish. Gradually the loads left the dark wooden galleries and the *parterre* of the courtyard.

By 1 p.m. we were at Ringmo and we were able to erect our damp tents, to air and dry them. Lambert taught the newcomers and the Sherpas to put them up correctly. There was no sun, but the light and intermittent rain did not arrive until the end of the afternoon.

We thought of taking a day's rest here before the great crossing to Ghat through the mountains that overhang the right bank of the Dudh Kosi, for the normal route via Taksindhu and Kharikola

is impossible for lack of a bridge over the swollen river. But we are going to continue tomorrow, because otherwise the coolies will have nothing to eat. Moreover, what is the good of a rest day if it is raining? Pasang is better.

September 22nd. Ringmo to 11,090 feet

We left at 7.30 a.m. It was not long before it began to drizzle and then to rain. We left the Taksindu road on our right. For Raymond and I this spot was decidedly familiar, since this was the third time that we had passed that way. On the camp-site we were able to use the trenches dug for the tents on our return from the last expedition; then, too, it had been raining, at the beginning of the monsoon, but at that time there were thousands of strawberries and orchids. There had also been a number of little mosquitoes there to bite us, but their place has now been taken by the leeches.

This has only been a very short stage of only two hours, just in order to shorten the ascent to Tanga through the 14,370 foot pass, which would be too long for a single stage. The high valley of Ringmo is beautiful on account of its forests—dark, dense and primitive high-altitude forests where, besides the rhododendron, the Himalayan cedar and a fine species of blue fir grow. It is in surprising contrast to the monotony of the great bare hillsides and the forests of stunted oaks.

In a wild clearing were three houses where the coolies took shelter; two of them without roofs. In the forest they quickly built shelters of fir branches cut with a kukri, beginning at the tops of the trees. Many trees were condemned to death in a few minutes. Then the fires were lit and their blue smoke mingled with the mist. The fine drizzle did not stop, and the cold rain transformed the camp into an offensive mud pit. Fortunately the Sherpas are tough and work regardless of being soaked.

The tents are sodden, mildewed and mud-soiled; the piled loads are among the bushes; it is a hard task to go and find one and remove all its carrying ropes in order to open it. We ourselves are wet, especially our boots, and in this sodden state we cannot even grease them. We are becoming morose.

Tensing tells me, as if excusing himself, that he cannot under-

stand why the monsoon does not end quickly, though it is true that it was late in breaking.

September 23rd. Camp below the Pass at 13,450 feet

Events have taken a very unexpected course.

It was raining, even as it had done all night. Everyone started out as usual. I was not very well, suffering from neuritis and influenza. We dressed ourselves warmly, left with the last of the troop and marched at the pace of the coolies so as not to get into a sweat, though we could not avoid this since the humidity of the air in the forest was very great. We gained height as we passed along a crest that was exposed to the wind, which swept the rain along. When we no longer had the protection of the forest, at close on 13,000 feet, in the wind and the wet, we began to feel the cold. Under a rock I saw a coolie who was trembling like a leaf, with his teeth chattering and his face contorted in agony. I went up to him. His limbs were icy cold, he had no pulse, his face was terrified and his lips blue, and his whole body trembled as if with an attack of malaria. Looking fixedly before him, begging for help but rooted to the spot, which was not even sheltered from the wind, he was unable to move. I passed him my wool shirt, my pullover and anorak. Spöhel gave him some trousers. We chafed him and stretched him out in a more sheltered spot. A little later the trembling died down and we were able to encourage him to resume the march without his load.

This coolie would quickly have died of the cold if he had stayed where he was. I did not then suspect that a little further on all the others had likewise stopped, crouching and trembling under their umbrellas. We had to shout at them and shake them to make them start again. Further on, before reaching the pass, they refused to go any further. I decided to send them all back. The next day we would hand over their pay to their leaders who would remain with us, and in order to continue we would summon porters from Namche. This bad weather may go on for some days, and the Katmandu porters will not be any better able to cross the pass. Reiss, who then came back from the pass, informed us that some coolies had gone up that far and were in distress in

the fresh snow; two were dying. A party of Sherpas had crossed the pass and descended to Tanga. I again called out that the men should set off at once for Ringmo. Some porters returned from the pass dressed in jerseys taken from the loads! I was myself beginning to freeze, having no more on my back than a light shirt and a cape, and Lambert made me take shelter under a tent.

The two unfortunate coolies died; the icy rain and wind got the better of them.

September 24th. Camp below the Pass.

It rained all night. Bad weather; sickness; fever. We collected the scattered loads. Ajiba went off to Namche to fetch porters, while we paid off those from Katmandu. Tomorrow the leader of the coolies, Harkaman, will set out with a telegram. Cases of death are not provided for in the code fixed at Zürich, so I wrote: 'Two coolies chilled into Nirvana.'

September 25th. Camp below the Pass.

Ill and feverish. 120 porters have arrived from Ghat and 50 from Ringmo.

September 26th. To Tanga (12,140 *ft.*).

It is still raining. We crossed the pass to Tanga. This morning, I thought that I was better, but I have a violent pain all along the right leg: an infection resulting from a leech bite at the ankle which had gone up to the groin. I have been limping badly. This evening Lambert has given me two injections of penicillin.

September 27th. To Täte.

More rain. A further party of porters arrived from Ghat; two coolies were provided for carrying me. But I am better. The route is a switchback: and ascent of 500 feet is followed by a descent of 4,000 feet, then another ascent of 2,000 feet and a further descent of 1,300 feet.

September 28th. Camp beside the Dudh Kosi, upstream from Ghat.

An improvement. Is this the end of the monsoon? Our luck is

changing. Over the valley the sky was blue and the fine weather continued all the day. To the south there was no longer that accumulation of greyish and diffused clouds that invades the sky in a few moments; the vapour produced by all the dampness condensed and vanished. For a long time we could enjoy the sight of the peaks on the left bank and Taweche to the north. Down below flowed the Dudh Kosi, frothing and grey-blue. It was a light-hearted and happy walk along the track that descends towards Ghat down a steep, high hillside. Our sacks had been given to the porters and we all enjoyed the beautiful sunlight and the magnificent view of the valley. The type of inhabitant is changing, for we are passing from the district of Solo to that of Khumbu and leaving behind us the Caudine Forks of the passes and ravines of the Tanga road.

September 29th. Arrival at Namche Bazar.

The weather is fine again. Raymond, Gross, Tensing and I moved rapidly along, followed by the porters carrying our sacks and the money. We wanted to prepare the wages so as to discharge the coolies the same day.

We were in a hurry also to see Everest, and at 8.15 a.m. it came into view, rising from behind the barrier of Nuptse. The view appeared at the far end of an immense gorge, in all possible shades of green, with the pale pines predominating, and with all the hues of plants which at this height are already turning yellow and red. Fifteen miles further off and 20,000 feet higher than ourselves, alone in this expanse of wild slopes and fine and sumptuous verdure, clearly outlined upon a blue sky, and all white from the monsoon, Everest was flying its plume of snow.

We resumed the ascent, with white peaks springing into view on all sides, and came to Namche. At 9.30 a.m. we were on the hillock that overlooks the village. The grass and the bushes had an autumnal tint, and we found there a number of little gentians and edelweiss. A primitive tent had already been erected and a fire was burning; Ang Norbu, Nuri, Mingma Dorje, Gyalzen, Sona and Mingma Tensing were awaiting us.

Along the whole periphery of the projected camp we planted

stakes and arranged ropes to prevent its invasion by sightseers. Stretched out in the sunshine, which for moments was obscured by the mists that were accompanied by a strong and quite cool wind, we waited for the porters. They arrived at the end of the morning and during the afternoon. For the first time since Katmandu, the camp was orderly and really looked very well.

When they had all at last arrived, at about 5 p.m., we began to pay them off. With those from Katmandu it was simple, for the total sum was handed over to their leader; but here each received his part direct on showing a little chit signed by Tensing when he took up his load in the Tanga jungle on the morning of the 27th. That made 255 shares of fourteen rupees each; then 103 of them—men, women and even children—received a supplement of two rupees for the half-stage on the 26th between the camp at the pass and the camp at Tanga. The operation was carried out in silence around a little chest on which the rupees were piled, and we were a little tense, fearing possible trouble; but everything went off well and all of them took their wages with marked pleasure. Our satisfaction was the greater when they all made for the houses of Namche, where they will drink and dance throughout the night before returning to their villages.

I have decided to stay at Namche for two clear days, and this will not be too much for a rest, for checking the equipment, stretching out the things that are still damp, repairing the tents, equipping the new Sherpas, preparing the new loads, making various purchases, settling the lists of material and foods for the high-altitude camps, and writing letters that we hope to be able to give to the first courier to catch up with us, which he should do while we are at Namche. I shall include a report to the Nepalese government about the two coolies.

September 30th and October 1st. Namche.

I am ill again with a fever and neuritis in the shoulder and arm. I can do nothing and that makes me unhappy, and anxious lest it does not improve in a few days. The others have done all the work. They have equipped the new Sherpas, retrieved the boots from the old ones, as well as several pairs of trousers. They have un-

packed the felt boots, which are so big that they are comfortable with two pairs of stockings and the wadded slippers. Loads have been prepared. The first mail has arrived from Katmandu, and with it the good news that Dyhrenfurth is on his way.

October 2nd. Melingo.

The loads were rapidly distributed among the porters, of whom there are 271. I feel better, but I breathed heavily on the ascent to Thyangboche. We took tea with the Lama and then pitched our camp at Melingo on the meadow belonging to Ang Tchumbi's mother. From here there will be twenty additional coolies for the large lengths of timber which will be cut here for use as bridges over the crevasses. Thus about 325 porters will ascend the Khumbu glacier. It was cold in the afternoon and evening.

This is the plan for the next few days: in seven days from Namche everything, including wood, will be at Camp I, and we reckon to occupy that camp on the 7th October.

We prepare our mail for tomorrow: this will be the last to leave for Katmandu, for the next will go down via Jaynagar to Patna, since the rivers of the plain will be uncrossable.

October 3rd. Phalong Karpo (13,800 *ft.*).

A magnificent stage, flaming with vegetation. Sparkling summits of fantastic structure spring up on every side; savage and sharp-edged, they rise quite close to the stone channels and the screes, without preliminary glaciers. Their rocky framework, of Gothic proportions and upward surge, is covered with shining ice. Their breastplates are flawless on every side.

We passed a herd of yaks descending with extraordinary agility. They are sensitive to music, and the herdsmen drive them on by whistling little tunes. We found that the pastures of Pherice and Phalong are inhabited, and we have decided to stay here for two days rather than at the base camp, for we have the advantage of a magnificent camping site, plenty of room, a level field for unpacking our material and making up the high-altitude loads. Moreover, it will be better to do all this at 14,000 feet than at 19,000 feet, and the halt will help us in our acclimatisation.

During these two days the porters will carry 250 loads of wood to the base camp.

This evening, by the camp fires, the dancing and singing of the porters are fantastic. They form three groups, from the villages of Namche, Themi and Khumjung: three large circles, with the men one side and the women the other. The song is repeated indefinitely. Feet stamp on the earth in three time; occasionally it speeds up and the circles contract: they sing in unison and hold the long notes with a powerful sonorousness. It is a moving sight to watch in the mists under the full moon.

October 4th.

Sun and fine weather, with mists and a quite cool breeze. I have worked painfully at my pharmacy. Lambert, with the help of Gross, has settled the lists for the composition of the high-altitude units and is today directing the enormous task of reorganising them.

October 5th.

A fine day, clear, without clouds or mists, and less cool and windy than recently. I feel better and have worked the whole day with Pasang, completing my high-altitude pharmaceutical requirements. The others have been painting the numbers on all the units in red and blue. The sacks have been sewn up again. It was an excellent idea to do this work here.

The coolies, who came back at about 3 p.m., have refused to go up to the base camp tomorrow on the ground that it is too far. This is quite understandable. They will go only as far as Lobuje. Everyone has been given an injection of vitamin B.12 and the beginning of a Ferro-Redoxon course.

October 6th.

We ascended to Lobuje in three hours; the weather was very fine and cloudless. We have had a demonstration of the oxygen apparatus.

October 7th.

An excellent night: 9 degrees of frost (F.) at 6 a.m. We

reached the base camp in three hours under a veiled sky and sunshine. The lake beside the camp is intensely blue.

October 8th.

I remain with Reiss and Tensing at the base camp while the others have gone up with several Sherpas to instal Camp I and sleep there.

October 9th.

A film of snow fell in the night. The weather has been either slightly sunny or dull, windless and mild. The coolies have taken up all that remained. They came back early from Camp I and departed after receiving their wages, which was carried out calmly. They received pay for eight full days, with three days at half-rate for the return. Tensing has kept about ten particularly robust porters who want to remain with us to act as special coolies through the icefall.

We set out at 1.45 p.m. and reached Camp I in an hour and twenty minutes. Camp I consists of a crowd of tents facing in every direction and placed at all levels on the thin bed of gravel covering the glacier. Yesterday the coolies built the walls for the kitchen at top speed. Shortly after 3 p.m. Lambert, Buzio and four Sherpas came back from their reconnaissance of the séracs: in places the snow is very deep, but they have opened a track to Camp II. The séracs are clearly easier and less dangerous than in the spring. The surface is smoothed by melting and welding; there are fewer holes and fewer ice chimneys. There are also fewer threatening pinnacles.

The ten auxiliary porters have been equipped. Camp II will be completely established to-morrow and Gross, Spöhel and Tensing will occupy it with three Sherpas. The day after that they will seek the route to Camp III. Because of the increased danger of avalanches from the western shoulder, they will try to pass up the very centre of the glacier. The auxiliaries, led by the Sherpas, will carry loads to Camp II and return. The temperature was mild this evening. Tonight there are about forty men at Camp I and after supper we drank a glass of cognac with Tensing to celebrate a successful day.

The end of the afternoon and the evening were heavily clouded. It alarms me to see the weather break, perhaps seriously. Aufschnaiter told us that autumn is magnificent, but that there can be heavy snowfalls in October. The opinion of local people is that the weather will not seriously deteriorate because of the enormous rains which marked the comparatively late end of the monsoon.

Lambert and I have noticeably less difficulty in breathing than during the spring marches. Is this the remains of acclimatisation? Meanwhile, the others are also less tired than we had been, and this perhaps is due to the days spent above 13,000 feet at Tanga and to two days at Phalong Karpo. On the other hand, from Pherice to Camp I the journeys were much easier because there were no long reconnaissances this time and because the tracks were visible on the moraines. The team is excellent: agreement and cohesion are very good. Everyone is happy; there are no jealousies, vanities or competition.

October 11th.

A cold night, with 20 degrees of frost (F.); the morning was very fine, with a thick covering of hoar-frost. Ang Nima and Ang Thari, the couriers, have left for Patna; they reckon to reach Jaynagar in ten days.

The porters got themselves ready before sunrise. Two ropes of three went off with two lengths of timber. I admired the way they managed with their timber, the rope and their crampons, all with skill and courage. These people continue to astonish us. The brilliance of their clothes, yellow, scarlet and sky-blue, gives a festal appearance to the whole of this restless band.

October 12th.

A very fine day, with a quite strong breeze. Lambert, Reiss and Buzio have left for Camp II and the coolies have gone off with three further lengths of timber. I stay here alone, for I feel less well than yesterday. I cannot do any serious work. At the beginning of the afternoon Spöhel arrived; for two days he has been incapacitated by vomiting. Later it will be the turn of Gross and Tensing. Today they advanced into the Cwm as far as the site of

Camp III, further on than the old one, no longer to the right but near the middle. Two or three snow-bridges will have to be strengthened with timber. On the whole, they did not meet with any great difficulties, and the route, passing much more to the right than that of the spring, is not exposed to avalanches. On their left they saw the rope-bridge still in its place but deeper in the crevasse because of the summer's snowfall.

Thus the route is now in being from Camp I to Camp III, it is more comfortable and less dangerous than in the spring. As to Camps II and III, their sites are more spacious and comfortable. We are advancing rapidly. Up above, the spearhead parties had to plough through snow that was powdery or crusted according to exposure. The slopes of the South Col have been seen, deep in snow on the lower part. At Camp I, during the evening, there were numerous avalanches from the Khumbu La, Khumbutse and Nuptse.*

October 13th.

An excellent night. I rose at 6.30 a.m. and with Tensing prepared the departure of the Sherpas and porters. There was little frost. Unit 1 for Camp IV was sent up. The route from II to III was improved with timbers at two or three fragile snowbridges. A message arrived from Lambert who was very satisfied with the route from II to III. Ang Norbu has come down with a great inflammatory swelling of the cheek, probably of dental origin. He has been given penicillin. Spöhel is on a diet; his stomach is better, but he is subfebrile, has headache and mastoid pain. He was given penicillin this morning and this evening feels better and has had another dose. Little Nima Temba, sick yesterday, is better and has to some extent recovered his voice.

I myself feel well and worked all the morning, sending up a pharmaceutical case, with boxed units for Camps III, IV and V. When the material for all the camps is at Camp II, the coolies will leave Camp I empty, take the loads from II to III and descend to sleep at I; they will thus consume neither the high-altitude provisions nor the petrol and this arrangement will also economise

*Better known to English climbers as Lho La, Lho Peak and Nuptse.—*Tr.*

in high-altitude tents. We have equipped them with boots, gaiters and crampons; some of them have also received trousers and pullovers, and others complete anoraks, waistcoats and goggles. On their first ascent they learnt the use of crampons and the rope, and on the second day they took the timbers up to Camp II! I was anxious to see their departure and with great admiration I watched them preparing themselves resolutely and skilfully to the grating of their crampons and amid the complications of roping up. As soon as they had set off, they struggled over the glacier with the rigid timbers which halted them very soon; but they started off again, two of them carrying the timber, with the third in reserve. On returning to camp at about 1 p.m. they bade us 'salam' and went to their quarters on the stony hillock on the far side of the fault which has developed since the spring across the basin occupied by Camp I. Our own tents, the majority of those occupied by the porters and our kitchen are on this side but further down. Seated all over the slope, and looking rather like a flock of birds of prey that had settled on the earth, they relieved themselves of their equipment. They keep themselves a little apart and as a family party. They do not bother us and they all sleep together in one of the mess tents.

From the bend of the glacier, of which we are at the middle, we can look upon the whole of the icefall, wild and exuberant in all its shattered chaos and whiteness. Downstream, for three miles, are cones of ice against the light and hundreds of ice-waves, packed one behind the other, and formations like saw-teeth or lacework, each of them decorated in the grey shadow by a thin fringe of light.

October 14th.

I decided to accompany the porters and climb perhaps as far as Camp III to see Lambert and assure myself about the state of the route and the camps. Goundin, at the head of the rope, moved off at top speed, making no difference between the ascent and the level. When I loitered, he dragged on the rope like a railway engine. I was not at all pleased, so I went in front. We passed some porters who were not roped; they were severely cautioned.

The route is magnificent compared with that of the spring. There are fewer obstacles and dangers, and almost no passages exposed to falling séracs or pinnacles of ice. A process of melting, filling-up and welding has been in our favour. The windings still exist, certainly, and the route is broken by short descents.

We were at Camp II in an hour and fifty minutes, where nine tents stand in a better situation than previously, when the camp was cut in two by a yawning crevasse and closely surrounded by other crevasses. I found Reiss and Buzio there.

Close to the top, too, the picture has changed a great deal: there are no couloirs ascending to the left, and to the right the pile of large ice blocks has greatly diminished. We went on; the track passes towards the centre of the glacier and tacks about; it is a little more difficult here because the snow is drier and the path not so firm. Near the top progress became cautious among the large crevasses. Two of them were crossed on a bridge made of two lengths of timber laid flat. The first is the more alarming: it is scarcely more than two yards wide, but the chasm is terrible and the two timbers are very narrow, while our gaitered boots were large and the points of our crampons held us up a little as they dug into the wood. We will have to put down a third length of timber.

Beyond the top of the icefall we zigzagged for a long time and after an hour and twenty minutes from Camp II we found Camp III, pitched in the middle of the glacier, distinctly further off than before, in a depression beyond a crest which hides it until the last moment. Its height must be about 19,700 feet. I took the occupants by surprise: Da Namgyal, Pasang, Nuri and Lambert, whom I was happy to see again. We talked things over for an hour and found that our views were in complete harmony.

The weather was dull and grey. We observed a large avalanche, as previously, in the great couloir immediately to the left of the Lhotse séracs. The rocks of the Eperon des Genevois are deep in snow. I shook hands with them all and made a rapid descent: forty-five minutes to Camp II and fifty minutes to Camp I. I arrived tired and in a sweat, for it was a long trip and one measures the length of a trip best on the descent.

October 15th.

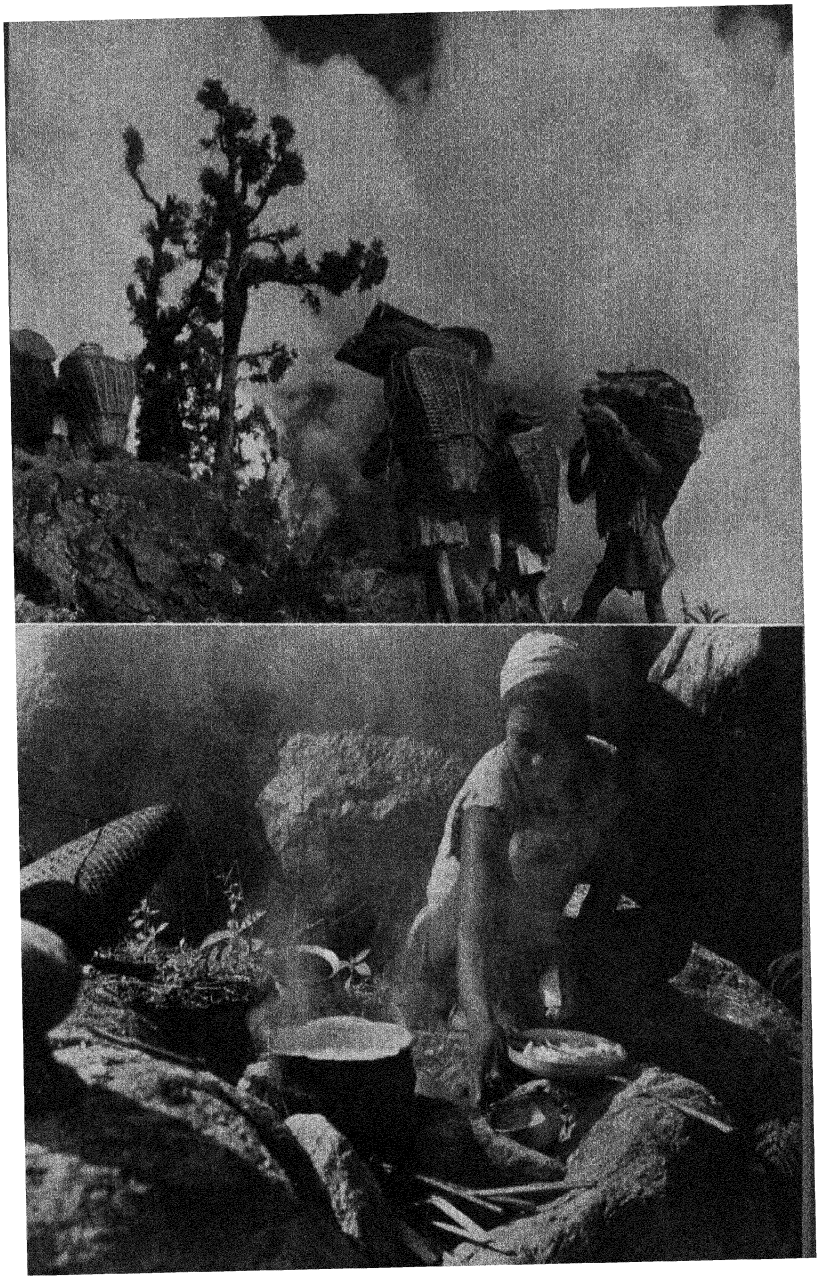
Gross left for Camp II and Reiss came down. Buzio went up from Camp II to Camp III. Meanwhile I counted our money: 1,205 rupees in cash. A further 2,800 rupees in notes of 100 and in bad notes of 5 are unusable. Spöhel feels better but still suffers pain from otitis, so I have given him penicillin.

The whole day has been dull, mild and damp. Great clouds have been coming in from the south-west, but nothing has fallen. After yesterday's efforts I slept like a log all night and could well have slept all the morning.

October 16th.

An excellent night. Yesterday evening I felt a gust of wind against the tent and in the night I heard a large avalanche. Furthermore, smaller avalanches fall constantly here and there, from Nuptse, the Khumbu La (Lho La), Lingtrentse and Pumori, and they are much more numerous than in the spring. It has been milder recently—a sort of *föhn*—and the glacier creaks much less, but avalanches are more numerous; they fall especially at the end of the afternoon, in the evening and at night. One becomes used to them like one does to the arrival of trains in a big station. Another noise that we have heard for the last forty-eight hours, day and night, is that of the wind, very high up on the ridges, roaring continuously. This morning we noted the presence of some dust on our tents, and the snowy flanks of Lobuje Peak and Pumori were tinted yellow below a definite line. We also saw some smoke rising against the face of Lho Peak, where a great landslip had occurred during the night, so that its dust had been projected along the wall of Lobuje Peak and Pumori and by a return movement had reached Camp I. We watched this phenomenon all day. The ascending current lifted the yellow dust of the landslip (its origin was hidden by a crest) to the summit of Lho Peak, where the snow was coloured yellow in its turn.

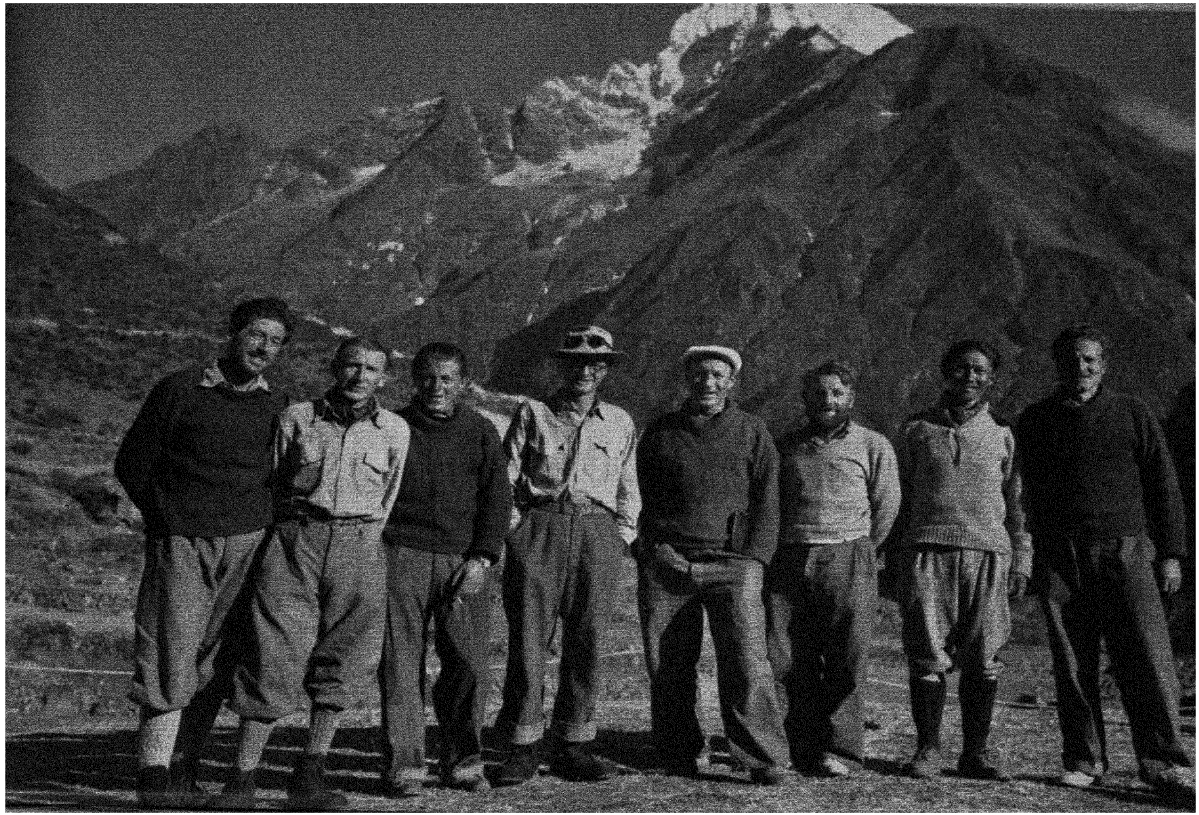
The ten coolies and two Sherpas, Goundin and Ang Temba, set off as usual. Almost all the loads for Camp IV have gone and we will begin on those for Camp V tomorrow. We received a message from Camp II to the effect that Lambert and his party have



21 (top) *Porters of the autumn expedition; monsoon clouds*

(bottom) *The coolies' kitchen*

22
The members of the autumn expedition: (left to right): Reiss, Buzio, Gross, Chevalley, Lambert, Spöhel, Tensing, Dyhrenfurth



staked out the route to Camp IV. The movement of the loads is going on at a very satisfying pace and progress is rapid.

I am kept here by various cares: the preparation of the next mail and the supervision of the departure of the consignments. I am also waiting for Dyhrenfurth, who may arrive tomorrow, and above all, I have to look after my two invalids. However, for the moment we are not all necessary at the upper camps: Gross is at II, Lambert and Buzio at III, and Camp IV will be established in two days. With Lambert forging ahead and with his knowledge of the places and the problems, with the very favourable conditions we have experienced so far and the adequate tactics that result from our experience, progress towards Camp V is brisk. Acclimatisation at Camp I is good; personally, I have suffered a handicap due to my days of illness, but now I am quite well; I have never slept so well at high altitude and my appetite is improving.

This afternoon I gave Spöhel his sixth injection. I have been very anxious about his mastoid, but now I think it is going to be all right. Ang Norbu has had an enormous swelling of the neck; he was very ill and groaning. He was feverish in spite of the penicillin and the swelling was increasing. From his jaw—which he could scarcely open—it extended towards the cervical region, where it gave very great pain and fluctuated a little. I decided to open it. I enlisted the aid of Spöhel and Reiss and turned my mess-tent into an operating theatre. The table was made of two layers each of four cases. I gave the patient an intra-veinous anaesthetic. The incision was deep and out of it came half a small basinful of nauseating pus, smelling of colibacillus, and blood. Ang Norbu was a little agitated. I saw that my two comrades and Tensing had had a bad moment; Spöhel's eyes—he had been holding the patient's head—were starting out of his head; Reiss and Tensing, who had been holding the arms, turned away so as not to see. However, once the intervention was completed—which was quickly done—there was an extraordinary relaxation, a satisfaction and a gaiety which continued into the evening.

The greyish weather, which gave us the impression of threatening instability, and a whole variety of clouds that were pushed along the higher levels by a strong wind that was not blowing

below—blackish skeins of cloud and thin trails, tattered fragments of thunder-cloud and iridescent veils, all of which in the Alps would have warned us of imminent bad weather—progressively dispersed and became clear. A very fine sunset, with magnificent reliefs on the ice, was followed by a moonless night filled with stars.

We had a little to eat after washing our hands like real surgeons. The instruments were afterwards washed in the stream below the kitchen and boiled. Six coolies have arrived with provisions and some precise information, at last, concerning Dyhrenfurth: he was seen at Ringmo some days ago and perhaps will arrive about the 20th. For the evening meal we gathered in my mess-tent—a bedroom, pharmacy, operating theatre and dining-room all on the same day.

October 17th.

Very fine. Eleven porters and two Sherpas have ascended to Camp II with Unit 5 for Camp IV and Unit 1 for Camp V. Ang Norbu is no longer feverish and has much less pain. He is on his feet.

The whiteness of the scene is dazzling, the sky is deep blue and there is a little breeze.

October 18th.

Very fine again. Yesterday, I received an important message to the effect that the route between II and III had been cut the previous night at the level of the first wooden bridge, the crevasse having opened up. But the track was deflected to the right and re-established the next morning. On the other hand, a fissure developed the same night across Camp II and Gross had to move two tents. By coincidence, in the message I had sent to Gross I asked him to inspect the foundations of Camp II closely and to look out for crevasses. The push for Camp IV is soon going to begin. In a few days all the loads will have left Camp I and we are faced with the problem of utilising the special coolies at Camp II. I therefore went up to Camp III with Tensing to ascertain the situation and to discuss everything with Lambert who has, moreover, informed me of his plan of advance; but it would be pleasant and very useful to settle things together, especially to decide,

together with Tensing, the question of how to allocate the Sherpas and special coolies.

At Camp II I found Gross in excellent condition. The fissure does not seem very serious, but we will be glad to be able to reduce this camp considerably at an early date. Just now it consists of nine tents with a dozen occupants.

Between Camp II and Camp III the track passes further to the right and then descends to the bottom of a large subsidence and up the other side; timbers serve for crossing a crevasse at the bottom. Certainly, the track passes well below some threatening bastions, but the risk is very small, for almost all the collapses take place in the night. Thus the probability of an accident is really small. Further crevasses are opening up and bridges are weakening, and in this shifting zone between Camps II and III the glacier shows quite a strong tendency to split. But we will always be able to take warning and change the route. So far as the Sherpas are concerned, experience shows that altogether they possess much sureness and instinct on the glacier, as well as courage.

At Camp III I found Lambert and Buzio in excellent form; also Da Namgyal, Pasang, Kirken and Ang Temba, the latter replacing Nuri who has been eliminated by the effects of altitude. There was also a whole party descending, but they turned back when they saw us coming; these, too, appeared happy and were in good form.

We decided that five or six special coolies should occupy Camp II in two days from now: actually the journey from Camp I to Camp III will be too long for the porters. Nemi will remain there as the camp's chief, entrusted with sending up the loads. No more than three tents will stay there; a mess-tent for the coolies, a Wico kitchen tent for Nemi and a French tent for those in transit. The other ten Sherpas and Gross will ascend to Camp II. I shall keep Goundin and Mingma Sitar at Camp I, while waiting for Ang Norbu and Nuri to recover. We will then have a strong and continuous chain of porters from Camp I to Camp IV. Camp V will soon follow, with an immediate exploration in the direction of the Eperon.

The snow slope looks good, but the Eperon itself is very deep

in snow. We have further settled who shall be the Sherpas in the advance guard and which will be spared as far as possible. We named them in this order: Dawa Thondup, Ajiba, Da Namgyal, Mingma Dorje, Goundin, Ang Temba, Mingma Sitar, Ang Nima. Pasang (who is not good at high altitudes) will act as assistant sirdar. Nemi, too, who knows a little English.

A magnificent day. A little wind in the Western Cwm. We descended quietly, making a short halt at II in order to give directions to Gross and Nemi. We took two hours to Camp I. From the top of the séracs Tensing saw that the number of tents at Camp I had increased: Dyhrenfurth had arrived at last with Ang Dawa and thirteen porters from Namche. I was so pleased to see him that we embraced. I had some difficulty in following his explanations, I was so surprised by his wanderings since Byratnagar.* But here he is, with his apparatus, with provisions and news, a little mail and some money. But he has been rather sorely tried by all the vicissitudes of an arduous and difficult journey, and he still feels weakened by a cold and bronchitis.

October 19th.

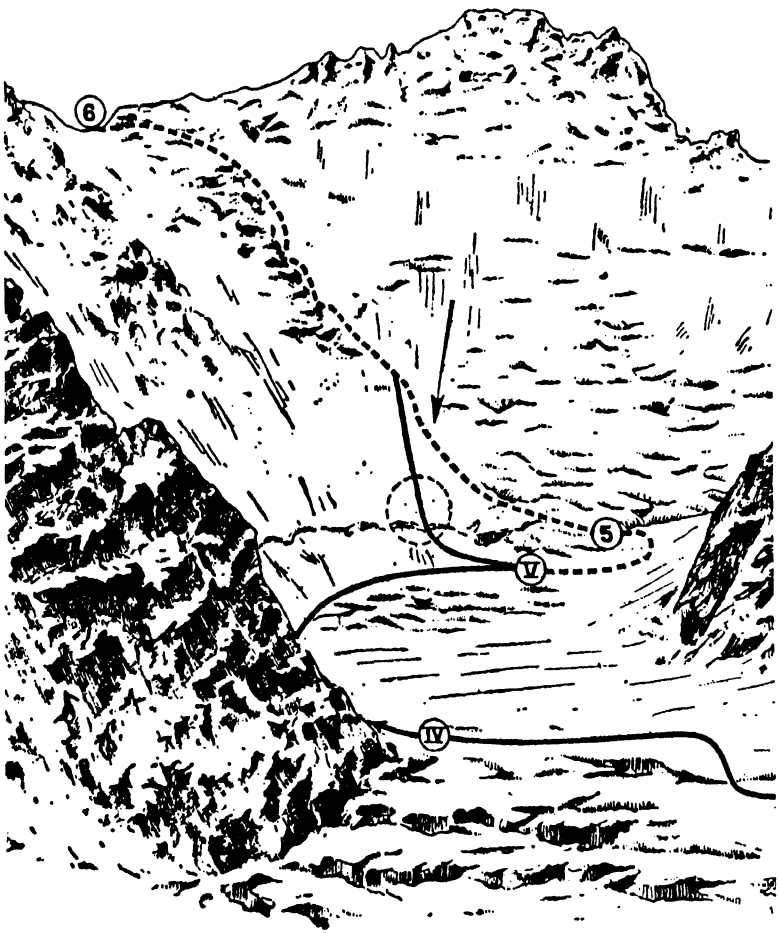
Very fine. I have sent Gyalzen, one of the local coolies, to Katmandu to change 2,970 rupees in unusable notes and to get 7,000 rupees. He should return about November 20th, and until then we have about 3,000 rupees available.

Ang Norbu's abscess is going on very well. Spöhel's otitis seems to be quietening down. Reiss will go up to Camp III tomorrow.

October 20th.

Superb weather. This has been the day for reorganising Camp II. Six of the coolies have left to occupy it with Nemi; ten Sherpas, as well as Gross and Reiss, are leaving for Camp III. The five coolies remaining at Camp I will sleep in the kitchen, for the mess-tent is going up to Camp II. Ang Tsering will remain in charge of Camp I and I have decided to send Nuri as far as Okhaldunga, if necessary, to seek two or three loads of petrol. Ang Norbu will

*A town in the Ganges plain. In fact, in the end Dyhrenfurth had not been able to travel via Katmandu.



▪▪▪▪▪▪ Route of the Spring Expedition, with Camps 5 and 6.

——— Route of the Autumn Expedition, with Camps IV and V.

———→ Direction of falling ice on the upper part of Lhotse.

The circle marks the point of the accident to the two Sherpa parties; the crevasse is visible in the lower part of the circle (see page 223).

The Accident to the Autumn Expedition

resume carrying tomorrow, while Goundin, who has developed a boil on the back, will be replaced by Nima Tempa, 'the little King'. Spöhel will accompany the porters to Camp II and back.

October, 21st.

Our two couriers, Shita Sherpa and Tsingh Tarkay, have departed. The former has a brother in the service of the Dalai Lama and he himself was at the school for Lamas at Lhassa. They are two of our special coolies. First I gave them the locked postal bag; next an envelope containing a carton on which was written Father Niesen's address; and then an envelope containing a 'to whom it may concern', a letter of recommendation which they may only show if obliged to do so, for their instructions are to proceed without a word to anyone, to pass through Jaynagar unobtrusively and take the train. They have been given their wages to date and twenty Indian rupees.

With a broad smile and their hands together, they gave us their salute, then another in military fashion, picked up their slender personal baggage and made off at a supple and extremely quick pace. We really had the impression that we could count on them to the end.

We are very secluded at Camp I, on the glacier right at the bottom of the Lobuje valley. But the expedition produces a continuous coming and going, and it may be said that the whole valley is in this business. Moreover, for these people distance is of no account. A mutual confidence prevails between us. These are real men: rough, merry, good, simple and direct. We pay them, and they serve us, but in what good measure! If you say to them: 'You will sleep at Camp II, in the middle of the séracs, in order to carry loads to Camp III', they answer, 'Certainly. Tensing says it will be all right.' There has been no need to intervene, or to use special arguments to convince them. We have brought them a deal of money, but between these people and ourselves a relationship has been clearly established that is something more than a material contract. These men are 'engaged' also in the moral sense of the word, and they bring us not only their muscles, but also their willingness, their pleasure and their participation, in return for a

stated sum—for deep within them is a taste and an aptitude for exceptional activities. In the evening some of them recite and sing their Buddhist prayers, but they are not burdened by superstitions about mountain demons. In any case, even if they know of them, they do not seem to fear them. They are an extraordinary people and we are very lucky to have had the opportunity to know them.

Here is a gracious people, attractive and astonishing: merry men who love you, perhaps out of curiosity at first, but very soon in reality. Simplicity, courage, endurance, friendliness. This is Greek literature come to life. To know these people is an extraordinary experience.

October 22nd.

I have been up to Camp III and back with Spöhel and Tensing. It has been a splendid day again, almost cloudless, and very warm, with intense luminosity among the séracs. But at Camp III the wind was quite strong and cold and we could hear it blowing over the western spur of Everest and against its rocks. We saw a few puffs of snow lifted from below the Lhotse-Nuptse ridge, but none from the slopes of the South Col. At about 5 p.m., as on the last three days, Camp I was covered with a blanket of mist which climbed the valley from Lobuje, bringing both a dampness and an unpleasant chill.

Before reaching Camp II, there is a crevassed and contorted zone, and it is there that the track makes use of two narrow corridors between walls of ice, then crosses an ice wall that has been furnished with a fixed rope. An enormous trench has developed through subsidence, lying along the axis of the glacier, ten yards wide, twenty yards deep and at least eighty yards long. The track crosses this trench on a snow-bridge which will collapse with little strain. To the left is a whole area where the séracs have already tumbled down and where the glacier has subsided, a stretch made up of irregular blocks of ice piled one on top of the other or against each other, and it is there that the direct and safe route to Camp II is to be found.

Between Camps II and III we passed the six coolies who were on their way down again. A load of tsampa, with an anorak and a

pair of gloves had fallen into a crevasse while a bridge was being crossed; the forehead strap had probably broken. Although this route through the centre of the glacier frees us from the risk of avalanches, on the other hand it takes us where the movement of the glacier is greatest and the changes most frequent.

The great convexity which precedes the Western Cwm gave us further trouble. It is there that one finds the crevasse, 100 yards wide, mentioned by Murray. It is a wide transverse area of subsidence rather than a crevasse. The existing track—already a modification of the first—will certainly be broken again. But I am convinced we will always find a way of getting through. At Camp III Lambert and Gross are in good health. We made arrangements for speeding up the transport from II to III. Eight porters will go down to Camp II tomorrow to fetch the loads. In three days everything will have left Camp I. The four local coolies from Camp I will be able to come up and occupy Camp II.

The descent was rapid. Spöhel was in good form. Dyhrenfurth had gone to the moraine under Pumori to make a panorama. Tensing is going to leave in the morning for Camp II and afterwards Camp III. We have spent a pleasant evening around the fire, but the noise of the wind on the heights is enormous.

October 23rd.

Very fine: not a cloud in the whole day. I have been preparing for my departure for the upper camps; Dyhrenfurth and Spöhel, too. It has been colder, with a strong breeze. With a telephoto lens Dyhrenfurth filmed the snow as it was torn from Nuptse by the wind. Spöhel and I feel very well acclimatised and our appetites are improving. This evening there is a crescent moon close to Taweche, and again the noise of the wind is great.

October 24th.

A very cold night. The incessant explosions of the glacier were followed by the sound of a shower of ice fragments. The weather is still fine and cloudless. Today we were going up for good. Dyhrenfurth too, though slowly, because not yet fully acclimatised. Ang Tsering, who stays as chief of Camp II, has

been instructed to bring up another six tree trunks from Melingo as a reserve. Besides Ang Tsering, the following are remaining at Camp II for the time being: Ang Norbu, Nima Temba, Goundin, four special coolies and the daughter of Dawa Thondup.

We did not leave until 11 a.m., and climbed very slowly with plenty of halts. Dyhrenfurth was still short of breath. Altogether the track was hard and excellent, without any difficult passages, and one of the safest and most direct of trips over the debris of fallen séracs. There are a few crevasses before reaching Camp II. Acting on what I said to him two days ago, Tensing has moved Camp II some fifty yards and we have no further anxiety as to its stability; it will be needed for many days yet.

I was pleased to get here: the late start and the dragging pace tired us more than usual. We had lightened our clothing because of the heat, but at Camp II violent squalls of cold wind were blowing down from the Western Cwm and from Everest. We quickly took shelter in the tents, to emerge later, warm again and warmly clad. The wind is almost continuous and strains the lateral fastenings of the small tents. To stretch the ridge to the maximum is the first and absolutely essential operation in putting up these tents; afterwards the four corners of the tent's floor must be spread as widely as possible. Otherwise, the ridge dips, the side pieces sag and give a terrible advantage to the wind. It is true that in such powdery snow it is very difficult to maintain tension at the floor of the tent; as to the moorings, besides ice-axes, stacks of wood serve very well. The big mess-tent has been firmly erected and the loads well arranged in order of their Roman and Arabic markings. The whole camp, which is under Nemi's control, gives a good impression.

Dyhrenfurth is very merry, thus proving that he is not suffering from altitude sickness, for I had been anxious about bringing him up here too soon. He is going to stay here for two or three days.

October 25th.

I slept solidly. Dyhrenfurth, too, passed a good night. This promises well and he prepared for some filming. It was a splendid morning. Spöhel and I made a quiet start at 10 a.m. Our track was

still good. We halted on the great sheet that completes the ascent and overlooks Camp II, catching sight of Dyhrenfurth and his tripod for the last time; thinking that perhaps he was using his telephoto lens, we posed for a moment! Our way lay across the '100-yard crevasse'. A little to our left we observed our first track, now broken in two places by crevasses five to eight yards across, but still marked out with flags.

Kirken was pleased to see us at Camp III, for there were two sick Sherpas: Gyalzen Sona and Pemba Sundar. The latter appeared to have altitude sickness with stomach pains.

Lambert, Gross and Tensing had gone up to Camp IV in the morning. I wanted to get there too, in order to talk things over with Lambert and Tensing, for tomorrow they will establish Camp V, the site for which was reached yesterday by Reiss. Spöhel being in agreement, we set out at 1.30 p.m. The route is shorter and simpler than in the spring, the track is excellent and we made rapid progress through the wind and the shadow of Nuptse. Our eighty minutes from III to IV was a speed record. We saw that the foot of the South Col slope is solid ice!

Camp IV has been shifted to a place more sheltered from the wind, which for the last few days has been terrible. We stayed there for nearly two hours and various decisions were taken concerning the attack and the rear. I am to come up and settle in at Camp IV tomorrow.

Having returned to Camp III, each of us settled comfortably into a well-closed Lyons tent. I find it easier to write here than at Camp I. Very violent squalls, however, are shaking the tent. I am satisfied with the situation and pleased to find myself high up in what seems to me to be good form. Despite the ice, I am confident. We are facing great obstacles, certainly, and Lambert, Tensing and I are well aware of them, but I am still hoping for a fine November. As for the cold, it seems that with our equipment we will overcome it.

October 26th.

Terrible squalls of wind from the north. It flung the wind-blown snow upon the tents and prevented any sleep. Thus it was

quite a bad night, but quite warm in a small and well-closed tent, so that I felt my neuritis much less. It was extremely unpleasant and difficult to leave the tent; the wind gave us no respite. Inexhaustible, insatiable, it harasses us, hurls snow in our faces, covers the loads with powder snow and attacks our morale like a corrosive against which we have little defence, and nibbles at our energies and confidence, producing a paralysis. When it is really violent, there is scarcely anything to do but to stay shut up in the tent; but even then, shaking the tent-cloth brutally, it ironically reminds us of its presence. Add to that a long shower of powder snow and it seems to say, 'You stay inside, for if you come out I'm going to make you dance and freeze just as I please.' In the powder snow it finds a cruel ally, as inexhaustible as itself.

Seven Sherpas left for Camp IV with some loads and my personal baggage. The coolies arrived at noon, with a note from Dyhrenfurth that two loads of oxygen (doubtless the last) and two lengths of timber had come up to Camp II. He again asked me if he ought himself to come up higher. I answered that he should do so if he felt all right; if not, to wait and film the séracs.

I left Spöhel at 1.30 p.m. and with Pasang ascended to Camp IV in eighty minutes, after which Pasang went down again with Gyalzen Sona. At Camp IV I found Buzio and Reiss, Dawa Thondup and Ajiba. Lambert, Gross and Tensing had gone up to Camp V in the morning with Da Namgyal, Ang Temba and Ang Nima. Camp V has been placed lower than in the spring, at 21,300 feet. There has been no wind here today. The temperature at 5.30 p.m. was 16 degrees of frost (F.) outside the mess-tent and 13 degrees of frost within; the sun left us by 2 p.m. At 5 p.m. there was an orange sunset on Everest, and its reflection fell upon the snow around us.

October 27th.

Lambert, Gross and Tensing, with three Sherpas, have made the first attack from Camp V upon the slope leading to the South Col; they attacked it directly below the rock island, crossing the *bergschrund* with ease and advancing at first over green ice. They ascended thus for about 800 feet above the *bergschrund,* cutting

every step and fixing a continuous rope to pitons driven into the ice. They stopped at 2 p.m. and quickly descended the slope, continuing to Camp IV. They were very satisfied with the state of the slope and the safety of the track they had cut and roped. The direct route to the Eperon has thus begun and will be continued the day after tomorrow by another party, whose progress will be quicker since they will no longer be making the track on ice but in hardened snow. Above the rock island, they will have to try and unfasten the old rope. The weather is still set fair and today there has been no wind. It has been the same at Camp III. Nemi has prophesied that the wind would drop one of these days.

My night was not good (a little insomnia and a little rhinopharyngitis) and I hear that Reiss had a bad one too. He was feverish and showed signs of cystitis. His case worries me a great deal. Ought I to send him down to Camp I? There he will be alone and without medical care. Ought he to remain at Camp IV? There he will be exposed to the cold which is so bad for a trouble that is always latent despite several treatments and always ready to relapse. I am much afraid that this situation will prevent him from taking part in future operations and he will find this a very hard and unhappy blow. Moreover—and this is very understandable—the trouble which he is trying to fight and to overcome worries him and affects his psychological condition, makes him nervous and a little shut in on oneself. I have decided to give him a complete rest here and to watch him for a few days.

At noon nine Sherpas arrived from Camp III. Half the oxygen has now reached Camp IV, so further supplies have been stopped in order to bring up the units IV/2 and V/2 during the next two days. I have asked Spöhel to go up tomorrow with Kirken the cook. Dyhrenfurth is perhaps at Camp III or will be three tomorrow.

October 28th.

I slept like a log with the help of one medomine and one aspirin and felt rested. The weather is still very fine, without cloud or wind. Buzio went up to Camp V with Dawa Thondup and Ajiba with a view to continuing the route to the rock island

tomorrow and if possible to the spring 'depot'. Nine Sherpas have reached Camp III; five of them, including young Topkie, have been assigned to stay at IV, while five coolies will instal themselves at III tomorrow. Spöhel arrived in the afternoon with Kirken. As to Dyhrenfurth he will probably join us tomorrow.

Almost the whole day has been given over to an inventory of the oxygen with Lambert and Reiss, to the assembly of the various pieces, and to checking the pressure in all the bottles. One Draeger bottle proved to be empty! All three of us are now familiar with the two systems, the Carba and the Draeger, and with the connections. It remains only to put the two systems to test on a hard and prolonged trip to show us how long a bottle will last in each system, and to what extent our efforts will be effectively eased.

From Camp III Spöhel has had to retrace the route between II and III, which has again been cut, this time by a subsidence in the '100-yard crevasse'.

October 29th.

A bad night, with neuritis and intercostal pain; cold. I got Lambert to give me an injection of penicillin. Buzio and five Sherpas have continued the track and placed the fixed rope in the direction of the rock island; they have made less progress than was expected. Buzio came back to IV in the afternoon. Dyhrenfurth came up from Camp III with Ang Dawa and eight Sherpas, four of whom will remain at IV. If I feel well I will go up to Camp V with Spöhel and five Sherpas tomorrow afternoon. Reiss is much better, happy and relaxed.

October 30th.

Worked well and slept well. Five Sherpas have gone up to settle in at Camp V. Transport between Camps II and III has come to an end; thus about four tons of material have been moved across the icefall. Five coolies are installed at Camp III. We caught sight of a dozen men coming up to Camp IV.

I went with Spöhel to Camp V, carrying the Draeger apparatus. The sun was hidden and the air was very cold. I arrived very

exhausted by my cough. The altimeter at Camp V shows 20,800 feet. The camp is in a perfectly safe situation. Mingma Dorje, Topkie, Da Norbu and Aïla have also come up from IV to V.

October 31st.

A reasonably good night, but very long, for we are obliged to go to bed early, since there is no sun after 2.30 p.m. and no large or spacious tent.

The whole party left at about 9 a.m. to continue the direct track to the rock island and the Eperon, to place the fixed rope and if possible to recover the older fixed rope. By putting a strong party into the line, the work would be speeded up.

I was never very enthusiastic about the immediate adoption of this tactic—the direct route to the Eperon by way of the main slope. It must be said that we envisaged this and adopted it tactically at Zürich and that it was precisely for this route that such a great length of rope had been brought. Nevertheless, the primordial criterion determining the route to follow ought to be the possibility of an intermediate camp, and from the first a route by the Lhotse glacier appeared to me very promising in this respect, as compared with the present one. I regret that my delay did not allow me to proceed, on the spot, to a searching and objective examination of the situation; I also regret having omitted or deferred opening a definite discussion of this subject on my first arrival at Camp IV. Later on, taking into consideration the establishment of Camp V below that of the spring, and in view of the argument for an ascent route effectively secured by step-cutting and a continuous fixed rope, with no real certainty of favourable conditions on the Lhotse glacier, it was difficult for me to bring the operation to a halt, to reverse tactics and seek a new and unknown route. The fact is that, while in the spring the first day's reconnaissance got as far as the 'depot' and that the necessary section of fixed rope was placed in a single day thereafter, two days progress has this time scarcely reached to two-thirds of the distance to the upper rock island which is still well below the 'depot'. There are several reasons for this: we start out from a camp some 500 to 600 feet lower than previously; the base of the slope is sheer ice,

and because of the condition of the snow, safety requires the cutting of steps and the fixing of a continuous rope from the bottom to the top of the slope.

The purpose of my ascent was therefore much more to ascertain the general aspect of this route than to work at pushing it forward; also, if possible to take a look at the Lhotse glacier and its terraces at the closest range and to test the Draeger apparatus on the march.

Spöhel, roped to Dawa Thondup and Ang Temba, was already high on the slope. Two ropes of three Sherpas each were lower down. I myself was roped to Da Namgyal and Ang Nima and had arrived a few yards from the *bergschrund,* with the mask in position and the apparatus on my back. Someone behind me called out 'Sahib!' and I understood that a fall of ice debris had occurred at that moment. We all bent forward. I was protected by the Draeger apparatus and came to no harm. Da Namgyal was a little bruised about the back.

When the ice stopped falling, we saw that the two intermediate ropes were motionless and that one Sherpa in a yellow anorak, Mingma Dorje, was hanging on the slope by his rope and held up by his companions. I hurried to his level and cut a few horizontal steps in order to reach him, for he was some six or eight yards to the left of the steps and the fixed rope. His face bleeding and his goggles broken, he had received the ice fragments full in the face; he whimpered and clung to the rope, without the strength to pull himself upright. Helped and pulled, he succeeded in placing his feet in the steps and I was able to get him across again to the fixed rope. From there, slowly, with everybody helping, we led him to the lower lip of the *bergschrund.*

A number of us were at this point when the party comprising Aïla, Da Norbu and Mingma Sitar, by we know not whose fault, slipped at top speed the whole length of the cone of hard and irregular snow and after a distance of 200 yards came to a stop in a combe below.

The departure from the camp had been at 9 a.m. and the accident had occurred at 10 a.m. The block of ice which had been the cause had come from very high in the right-hand couloir,

having broken away from the marginal séracs of the Lhotse glacier.

The four injured men were laid on pneumatic mattresses and covered up. Mingma Dorje suffered from facial contusions and severe costal injuries; Mingma Sitar had a dislocation or fracture of the left clavicle, costal injuries and contusion of a thigh; Aïla had facial injuries and costal bruising, and Da Norbu costal contusions.

I asked for additional medical supplies and received them at the beginning of the afternoon, so that I was able to give pantopon to the two most seriously injured, Mingma Dorje and Mingma Sitar, and coramin to Mingma Dorje, who was badly shocked and restless. Shortly afterwards, Mingma Dorje died. A very widespread sub-cutaneous emphysema made it possible to diagnose a serious perforation of the lung.

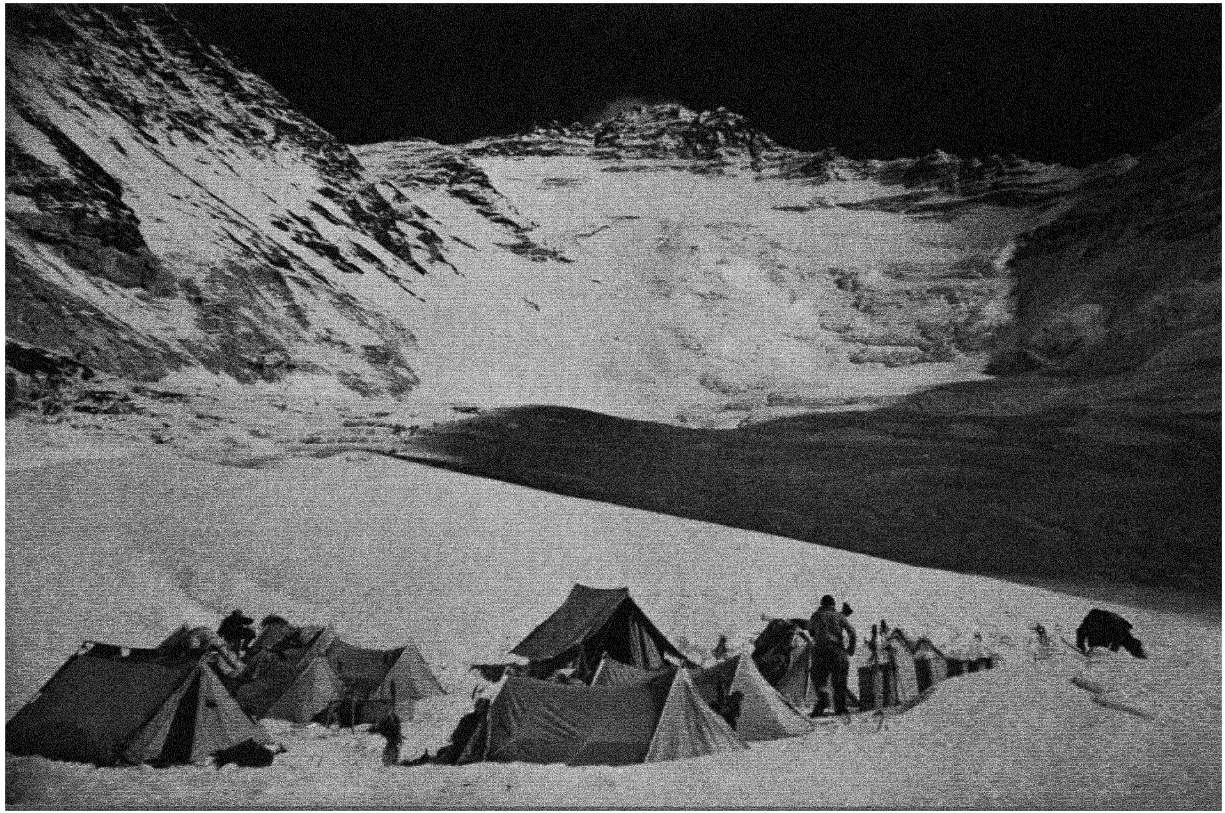
The accident was one of bad luck. Falls of debris and blocks of ice are very rare in this couloir. They come from the edge of the Lhotse glacier to the right, and by aiming at the Eperon one is very soon in shelter on the left of their trajectory. The route itself has been made very safe by the steps that have been cut and by the fixed rope.

The other three injured men are clearly lost to the expedition and it is a pity, for we have none too many of these very good elements for the South Col.

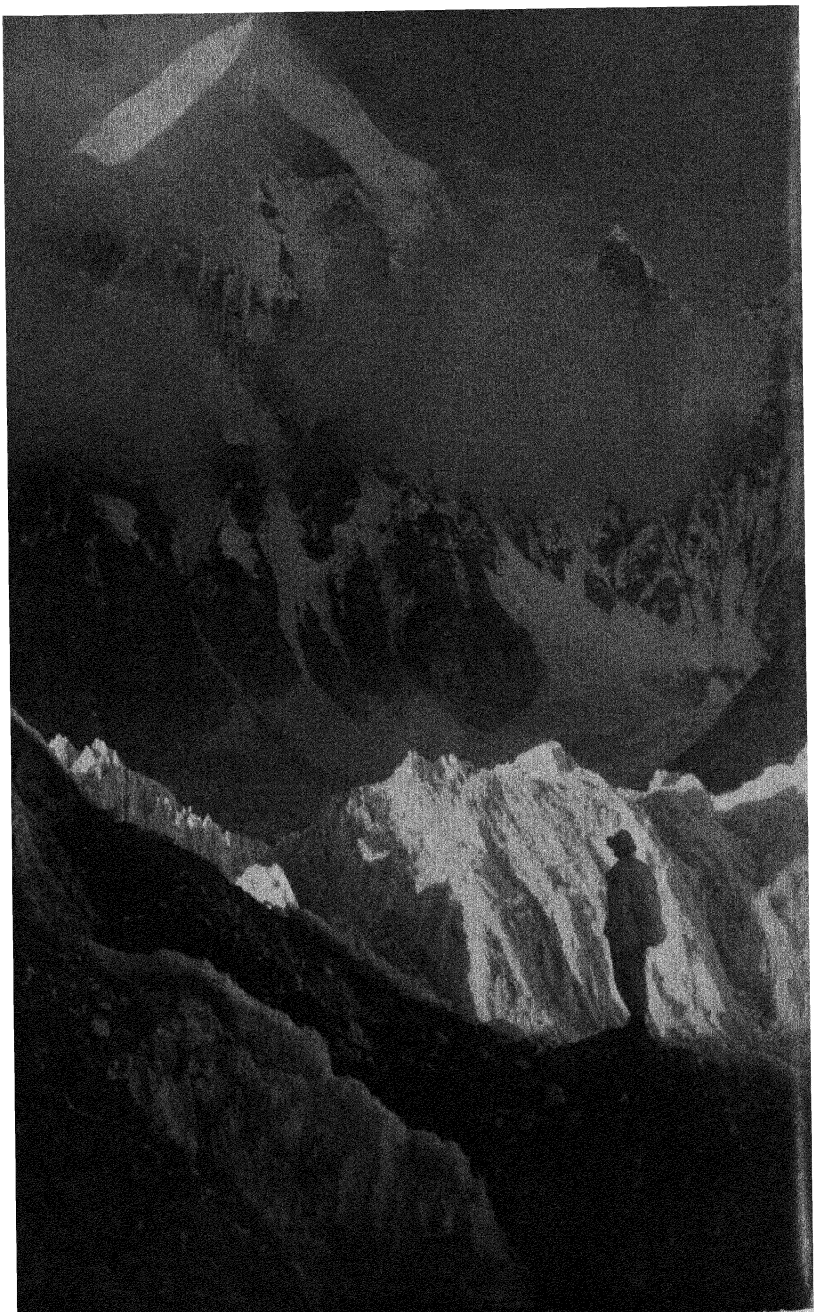
Buzio and Gross came up in the afternoon and went down again. For Spöhel and me the close of the day was melancholy, but for those at Camp IV it was no brighter. During the night we talked and smoked several cigarettes. The injured have been given sedatives and I have not heard a murmur from them. There were a few clouds during the day that hid the sun, and heavy nebulosity enveloped Pumori.

November 1st.

Lambert, Reiss, Buzio, Gross, Dyhrenfurth and Tensing came up early. They were anxious and very grieved. Tensing assured me that the Sherpas understood that the accident was one of bad luck. We busied ourselves at once with the burial of Mingma Dorje. His body was taken from the tent and wrapped in two jute sacks. Then the Sherpas carried him to the moraine at the foot of Everest,



23
The Western Cwm in autumn at 1 p.m.



24 *Site of the autumn base camp at 17,225 feet; view of Lingtrentse (21,730 feet)*

between Camps IV and V. It was a fine and warm day. The Sherpas dug a shallow grave and then above the remains they carefully built a tomb of stones. The last stones were of white granite. When it was complete, a wooden cross was planted at the foot of the tomb with the name of Mingma Dorje and the date, October 31st.

Then we ascended again to Camp V, while Gross, Buzio and Dyhrenfurth made for Camp IV. I gathered my comrades together (Lambert, Reiss, Spöhel and Tensing) and told them that the couloir route must not be used, and I found that this was now the general feeling. Passing to the matter of the accident, which had greatly weakened the porters, both physically and morally, I said that we had to consider the general chances of the expedition and not stake the fate of the entire expedition blindly upon a single throw, that of the direct route by way of the couloir and Eperon. I said that this route, although direct and used with success in the *spring*, would probably end in failure. For, amongst other reasons, but primarily, it would be impossible, if the problem be considered realistically, to pitch an intermediate camp. But even if the conditions were those of the Spring (they are actually much more unfavourable, with ice below and snow on the Eperon itself), it cannot be covered in a single stage because the days are much shorter. So we must now try our luck elsewhere, on the Lhotse glacier. I do not know if it will be very difficult or not, nor whether it will be dangerous or not; but we may very reasonably presume that one—or even two—sites for a camp can be found there. For this reason, indisputably, we must go tomorrow to reconnoitre that route. In the spring I had reconnoitred the whole horizontal traverse between the top of the glacier and the Combe des Genevois; it was excellent and it seems good now too. Moreover, this is no time to be involved in conjecture; the only possibility is to go by the route where we can establish camps.

The weather is fine, with a few clouds and a moderate wind.

November 2nd.

A very windy night and morning. Lambert with Tensing, and Reiss with Spöhel, went off towards the Lhotse glacier. After a

few hours I had the pleasure of seeing that they had crossed the first barrier and that they had risen quite high on the glacier to a small eminence. Then Lambert and Tensing moved along the level to the left so as to reach the top of the fixed rope and recover some rope and ice pitons that had been deposited there; they descended along the rope while the other two came down by the route of ascent.

Meanwhile, several Sherpas had arrived from Camp IV, bearing bad news: the route from I to III had been cut, an avalanche had fallen upon Camp II and some coolies had been injured. We descended together to Camp IV and evacuated the three injured men. Mingma Sitar had to be carried, but the other two could walk. Dawa Thondup and Ang Nima went up again to Camp V and I gave them a note asking that Tensing should come down tomorrow. Then, talking to Pasang, I discovered that things are not so serious after all. The route is not cut, Camp II is not beneath an avalanche, though a coolie has been bruised on the thigh by a fall of séracs and is at Camp I. Neither Buzio, nor Gross, nor myself need go down.

This evening Camp IV has been the assembly point of the expedition. Except for seven men still at Camp I, all the Sherpas and coolies are here. Lambert, Reiss and Tensing have arrived, and then, after dark, Spöhel came down from Camp V, for Dawa Thondup and Ang Nima, overtaken by panic, had wakened him and obliged him to leave Camp V and join Camp IV.

The day has been cloudy and this evening an inch or two of snow has fallen.

November 3rd.

Fine, but veiled. Gross and Buzio have gone up to Camp V with thirteen Sherpas. The oxygen check has been completed.

November 4th.

Very fine once more. A special courier has been sent down with a telegram and a report of the accident; seven Sherpas have descended to Camp I, among them the injured Da Norbu as well as Ang Dawa, who is unable to bear the height because of

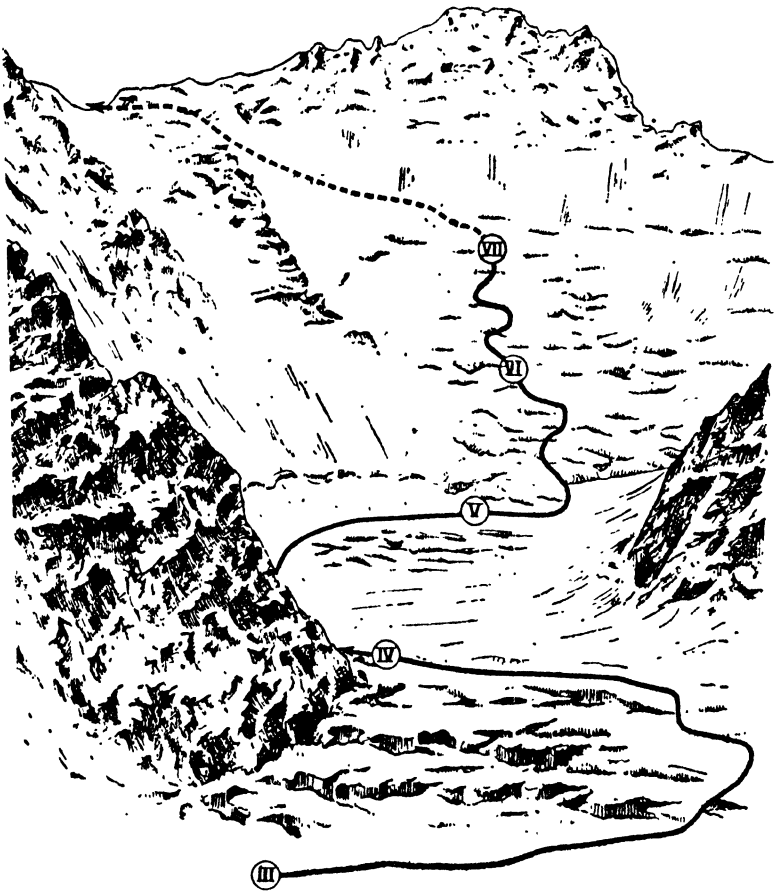
insomnia. Four Sherpas have been to Camp V and back. Dyhrenfurth has also gone up to Camp V. Gross and Buzio have installed themselves in a tent at Camp VI.

November 5th.

Very fine, cold and windy. Lambert and Tensing left for Camp V. They will ascend to VI tomorrow, then they will make the track—or improve the track—in the direction of Camp VII, Lambert using the Draeger apparatus and Tensing the Carba. With glasses we examined the little orange tent of Camp VI on the Lhotse glacier, which the sun is late in reaching. The two occupants emerged, but did not start upwards as we would have liked. Towards noon they descended. Very dissatisfied and anxious, I decided to go up to Camp V with Reiss: we passed some porters who were returning with Dawa Thondup, who was sick. Then came Buzio and Gross, who explained that they had passed a frightful night with intense cold, and that in the morning they had scarcely been able to warm themselves up; the squalls had prevented them from going higher. We went on to Camp V and there exchanged ideas with Lambert and Tensing about the difficulty of our position. We recalled that in the spring we had pushed long and severe reconnaissances towards the Eperon and up to 25,600 feet, leaving early in the morning and continuing till five in the evening, in squalls which lashed our faces with snow. But we had to admit that the cold is definitely more severe now and the hours of sunlight much shorter, the wind more constant, more violent and more general. Tensing assured us of the complete and resolute devotion of the four Sherpas at Camp IV: Ang Nima, Ang Temba, Ang Norbu and Ajiba. Furthermore, we are hoping that the weather will prove cyclic and that calm days will follow the series of painfully windy ones. The sun went down at 2 p.m. and the occupants of Camp V could do nothing but stay in their little tents. We came down again to Camp IV at top speed.

November 6th.

A violent wind all night. We had to close the tent flaps com-



Autumn Route after the Accident

pletely, otherwise the icy draughts would irritate my cough. I had a little trouble in breathing and some insomnia. In the morning it was very fine as usual, but the squalls came straight down from Everest or the South Col and gave us no respite. The mess-tent slapped and shook and this wearied us despite the relative comfort here. We doubted that Lambert and Tensing would leave for Camp VI in such weather. The wind caused waves of snow to roll across the slopes of the South Col and Lhotse and all this surface snow, set in motion and gathered together, afterwards ran like a torrent to the bottom of the great couloir. However, we perceived Lambert and Tensing, together with a rope of four Sherpas, ascending to Camp VI. Everything appeared quiet at that time, then all of a sudden the Lhotse glacier sent up an enormous cloud of snow dust from all its terraces, which was rolled away by the wind and hurled towards the bottom. But the men went on and Lambert and Tensing occupied Camp VI.

The Sherpas returning from Camp V brought me a note from Dyhrenfurth. 'Another night's gale, I don't think I've slept much. Another night like this and I would like to come down to IV for a rest. Raymond, Tensing and four Sherpas set out at about 10.15 in a real gale. I filmed their departure. My hands were almost frozen while doing so. I do not think that anyone but Raymond would have set out today, perhaps not even him! What a man! If these gales continue to increase in frequency and intensity, I fear we may be beaten.'

However, the wind calmed down in the afternoon. At 3.30 p.m. Reiss and Spöhel, carefully equipped and happy, set off for Camp V.

Four special coolies and two Sherpas (Da Namgyal and Topkie) today carried loads from Camp IV to Camp V and are back again.

I have attended to Aïla, whose facial sores and swellings are in good condition, but he is still suffering from a thoracic trouble (bruising) and deep bronchitis. Dawa Thondup is quite ill: nausea, vertigo and a yellow colour. Why should he of all people show such symptoms of altitude sickness? I believe the wind is the cause. A special coolie has been attacked with dizziness and listlessness.

Mingma Sitar is better, came out of his tent for a while and has suffered less since his arm was set.

The sun disappeared soon after 1.30 p.m. We are more or less transfixed with cold the whole time. One's head is warm in a fur cap, but not one's neck; with a sleeved vest, two shirts, a pullover and a wadded jacket, my body is not warm; the wind has brought about a renewal of neuralgia and backache. The ice on which we are living gives us cold feet all the time. We have run out of sugar.

At 6 p.m. it was dusk. The wind revived furiously. By closing everything up, I am quite warm, but the tent is still swept by draughts and violently shaken. I think anxiously of the two men at Camp VI, for whom this night must be distinctly worse than for Buzio and Gross; nevertheless, the fact that they are Lambert and Tensing reassures me a little. This odious wind, despite the fine weather, brings us at the foot of the South Col to the limits of possibility. We will soon have to make some serious decisions.

November 7th.

Goundin, Gyalzen Sona, Pemba Sundar and the coolie Numba ascended yesterday from Camp I to Camp III. All but the first went down again to Camp I, while Goundin has come to Camp IV this morning. Disappointment was great for he brought no mail. The route between Camps I and III is good.

I have sent my hospital down to Camp I: Mingma Sitar (making good progress with his dislocated clavicle, and the bravest of all), Aïla (also in a good way, with multiple facial bruises, but still ill with bronchitis and thoracic contusion), and Dawa Thondup (altitude sickness, weakness, vertigo, listlessness). Goundin and Topkie will accompany them to Camp III today and to Camp I tomorrow, and will return in two days.

Kirken has gone down to Camp III to fetch ten kilos of sugar, three pneumatic mattresses and some tea.

Three special coolies took the oxygen accessories up to Camp V, and also some clothing and provisions. They returned, but will go up again tomorrow to instal themselves at Camp V.

The night was frightful. I was disturbed about those at Camp VI. In the morning the wind calmed down and the magnificent weather revived our hopes. Shortly after the belated appearance of the sun on the Lhotse glacier we perceived Lambert and Tensing on the move towards the top of the glacier and making height at a good pace. Then a party became visible ascending from Camp V to Camp VI.

In the afternoon at Camp IV the wind fell completely. At about 2.30 p.m. Dyhrenfurth arrived from Camp V with Da Namgyal and Ajiba; they are all sorely tried by three nights of gale, of which the last was the worst. Reiss and Spöhel left for Camp VI this morning with three Sherpas. There are undoubtedly five tents (four of them folded) at Camp VI. Certainly the wind has been terrible recently and simply to ascend from Camp V to Camp VI, or to spend a night at Camp VI, is a great performance in such conditions. But what can we do? Carry on as far as possible and hope that this series of gales will end.

I have received a further note from Lambert, brought by returning Sherpas. He had ascended with Tensing as far as the site of Camp VII, where they had left two tents. A good route. Lambert says that he does not give a damn for the wind. Tensing is dissatisfied with his Sherpas, for they are flinching. A windless evening.

November 8th.

Another day of strong winds. I checked and completed the equipment of three special coolies who were about to ascend to live at Camp V. I asked Buzio and Gross to go up and settle in Camp V; they agreed very willingly despite their fatigue. In fact I proposed to bring Lambert and Tensing down. We left at 1 p.m., all three of us, with the three special coolies, Ajiba and Da Namgyal. The wind blew with increased violence the closer we drew to Camp V; it forced us to stop several times and turn our faces away. Camp V is so cruelly exposed to this wind from the South Col that it showed a dramatic aspect. Its occupants were just in the process of changing the position of all the tents so that they should be in the axis of the wind. A further tent was put up for

the coolies, which makes six altogether. I wondered if the site of the former Camp V, higher up on the lower terrace of the Lhotse glacier, is not less exposed. I found Lambert and Tensing in good shape and Ang Nima still smiling. Reiss and Spöhel were high in the couloir of the first route; they had left quite late (about noon) with the intention of bringing back the fixed ropes. Lambert and Tensing were very ready to descend and quickly prepared to do so. I was heavy-hearted at leaving Buzio and Gross in this windy hell, the more so as Gross asserted bluntly that it shatters his nerves. I explained to them that it is necessary to act very systematically, to use all our forces. The weather is set fair, and the danger is therefore not great.

We made a quick return to Camp IV. We were relieved to see Reiss and Spöhel descend below the *bergschrund* before dark. There was a small council of war. I asked Tensing to go down to Camp I to reorganise the rear; he alone can do so. What a loss our troop has suffered! We shall be able to reckon probably on eight men for the camps above Camp V. Tensing himself is bitterly disappointed by his Sherpas. The average *morale* of the whole troop is very low; they think of nothing but retreat and the example of Dawa Thondup decamping from V on the night of November 2nd is typical, though coming from a Sherpa of such worth and experience . . . ! All the invalids and all those inactive at Camp I are to give up their equipment to those in the line of attack. As to provisions, there are plenty at Camp IV, enough at Camp V and much already at VI. The hardest task will be the transport of oxygen to the South Col. The Draeger apparatus has clearly facilitated progress (even accelerated it, as Lambert has observed, compared with Tensing's experience with his Carba, which was out of order) without hindrance from the weight of the apparatus; but oxygen consumption is rapid. It will be necessary to start off from 27,500 feet with a minimum of three large bottles for each man.

November 9th.

The wind continued very strong until 1 a.m. It was an admirable morning and a still one; a real day for the summit. Tensing

left early for Camp I with Da Namgyal. Lambert and I took footbaths in warm salted water. Dyhrenfurth took photographs. Ajiba examined the tents. About 11 a.m. a rope of two and a group of six men were visible on the way to Camp VI. Later three men came up from Camp III, and arrived at 1 p.m.: Nuri (with twenty litres of petrol—twenty more at Camp I—found at Dorpu and Okhaldunga), Mingma Tensing and Ang Namgyal. No mail has arrived and this makes me anxious; have the couriers found trouble at the frontier?

The two sahibs descended again from Camp VI a little after the six porters. It was, however, a fine still day. The porters got down from Camp VI to the lower séracs in twelve minutes, thanks to the fixed ropes.

Reiss and Spöhel arrived at last. They had a very hard job yesterday in completely removing the 450 metres of fixed rope that are no longer required. They might have abandoned the job half-way and returned to camp as quickly as possible, for it was a hazardous task, what with fatigue, the wind, enervation and the late hour. But they got back at 6 p.m., and on arrival at Camp V they found only one cup of coffee for supper, the Sherpas having shut themselves up in their tents. Their night was not too bad and this morning they put the camp in order before leaving. They have accomplished an enormous and very courageous task.

November 10th.

A long night and an excellent sleep. This has been the second day of very fine still weather. Six porters have been up to Camp VI and back. Buzio and Gross, having left Camp V early, have furnished the steepest parts of the route from VI to VII with fixed ropes and returned in the evening to V.

I went up alone to instal myself at Camp V. I dined once more with my comrades, and before leaving them I named Dyhrenfurth as leader of the expedition should an accident occur to Lambert and me.

At Camp V there was sun and magnificent weather, still and luminous. I was pleased to find the six porters there in good

physical and moral shape. Then Buzio and Gross came back from their long and successful trip. Their fatigue was not too great, when the effort and altitude are taken into account. Their *morale* is good, much better than a day or two ago. We all went into the Wico-kitchen for a good warm supper. At 5 p.m. we were in our tents. It is still, but high above us there is a noise like a turbine: the wind. At 3 p.m. the temperature outside showed 36 degrees of frost (F.); the humidity was 38 per cent. To each of the six porters at Camp V I have given a card on which every carry to camps above V will be marked for a corresponding bonus.

November 11th.

Alas! the gale began again in the evening of the 10th, and a furious, icy wind continued. A deafening uproar. At 1 a.m. I took a medomine so as to be able to sleep; but it was a bad idea, for although I slept, in the morning I was completely drowsy. A blue halo showing through the tent-cloth indicated that the sun had risen, but the wind was still howling and it was impossible to move. Gross, who never sleeps well, has gone down to IV in order to try and spend a few better nights. The Wico tents, with their metal ridges, are very strong. The French tents, if they are not properly put up and stretched, perform some mad gymnastics. I tried to restretch one of them, but in a few seconds my fingers were numbed and stiff.

Goundin and three others arrived. They brought some mail with them, but it was less than nothing: a letter of the 21st October, which had left Zürich on the 23rd. The principal mail has been stolen in the train at Darbhanga: it included the letters from the 20th September to the 20th October.

Dyhrenfurth arrived in the afternoon. At Camp IV it had been impossible to judge the wind at Camp V; had Dyhrenfurth known about it he would not have come up, for it was no good either for his work or his health.

He brought me the strange news that some coolies have seen the *yeti* between Lobuje and the base camp. More precisely, one of them, alone and some distance behind the others, has been

attacked by the *yeti,* which fled when the other coolies were roused by the cries of their comrade.*

Goundin, Ang Namgyal and Topkie, as well as Kirken, have come to sleep at Camp V. Four Sherpas remain at Camp IV in order to maintain the shuttle service above and below it. Reiss and Spöhel will probably go up tomorrow, and Lambert and Tensing the day after. Tensing has been able to get the men under control again in a minimum of time. If the weather is still, this will be the push for the South Col, the porters ascending unladen from V to VI and laden from VI to VII.

November 12th.

A dreadful night with Dyhrenfurth; impossible to close an eye. In the morning it continued. No one could start out, nor could we send the porters up to Camp VI in such conditions. And not a cloud! Dyhrenfurth has a severe attack of laryngitis and is going down to Camp IV. There is only one solution: to wait for the wind to drop. While it is so violent, the gate to the South Col is shut in our faces.

November 13th.

The wind, which dropped in the night, was blowing again this morning, but less violently. The porters—nine of them—agreed to ascend to Camp VI. They left at 11.15 a.m. with all that remained of the oxygen; they were already at the site of the former Camp V when I started out. In forcing the pace so as to catch them up I got terribly out of breath; I had forgotten the altitude entirely.

I noted the fine work which had been done to improve the route to Camp VI across the lower part of the Lhotse glacier. Long

*In the spring of 1953 Tensing explained to me that he had been able to obtain from these coolies an account of the incident and a description of the *yeti*. The encounter had taken place on the great moraine facing the base camp lake and therefore in the locality where the tracks were observed in the spring of 1952. This creature stood upright and and walked on two legs; it was small and its height was not more than that of a child of 10 to 12 years. It was very hairy and its coat was brown; it had very wide cheek-bones and lower jaw and a pointed cranium. It stood still for a moment at a very short distance; with lips drawn back and teeth showing, it uttered a sort of savage hiss and then fled. Its appearance would be more that of a monkey than a bear. Tensing added that he regarded the event as completely real and that the existence of the *yeti* is admitted in all the villages of the district and is not in any way the product of the imagination of the inhabitants.

fixed ropes facilitate and effectively assure the first ascent of about 650 feet which at the start makes use of a wide and upright chimney, passes under an enormous nose of ice, alarming but firm, and continues along an oblique track over very steeply inclined slopes. Certainly there are passages clearly steeper than the couloir slope but compensated by gentler parts, and there is none of the deadly monotony and inexorable length of the other route. The 'terrace' of camp VI (23,460 feet) is smaller and slopes more than I imagined. Alas! the tent had collapsed and was damaged. We descended very quickly.

We reached Camp V at the same time as the shadows; then the wind rose afresh. We drank a welcome orange juice that Kirken had warmed up to give us immediately on arrival. Tensing, who had come to bring some order to the camp and check its provisioning, is going down with Buzio and will ascend again tomorrow with Lambert. He has got the Sherpas to agree to ascend again unladen as far as Camp VI, pick up their loads there and carry them as far as VII. I shut myself up in my tent, for intense cold had supervened. Later I heard coughing; this was Reiss and Spöhel who had just arrived; these attacks of coughing begin during the march and last for a long time afterwards. I am amazed at the health and strength of the nine porters of Camp V; they have neither tonsilitis nor bronchitis and I have not heard those coughs and groans that mark out those who are about to break down. I also observe with amazement how, in the strongest of the gales, when we ourselves are installed in relative comfort in the tents, not leaving them for anything, Ang Namgyal or Ang Norbu or Kirken will nevertheless come out to bring us our meals and each time return to take away the dishes and cups, opening and reclosing the tent.

November 14th.

I was asleep when I felt a heavy blow. The metal mast of my Wico tent had broken under the force of the wind and at 11.20 p.m. I was in a tent that was flattened above me. I felt the wind as it continued to press on it. Through the canvas I applied myself to resisting the pressure of the wind with my two hands against an

edge of hard snow. I called out several times, but no one could hear me. Should I get out? No: I could hold on and I could breathe, so I preferred to stay where I was. Meanwhile I was somewhat worried at the thought that this situation would continue for hours until the morning. I do not know when the gale calmed down, but I slept at last, waking in time to see the sunrise on Nuptse! I saw also that the tripod of the large camera, which had been in the apse of the tent, was 200 yards away. Had I left the tent, it would have been blown away too and all my belongings scattered.

This morning, as the weather was still, we were going up to VII with the porters. Reiss had decided to sleep with me at that camp. I was pleased, for this fitted in with my plan to go and reconnoitre as far as the South Col. Lambert and Tensing would economise their strength; the others know nothing yet of the approaches to the South Col and their problems, and several no longer have the keenness required by the coming operations, for the adventure has been so prolonged and the winter climate has consumed so much of our strength. The infernal and deafening uproar of the wind for a whole succession of nights prevents sleep and wearies one's nerves.* Even at Camp IV, if one loiters in the mess-tent, the cold numbs one as soon as the sun disappears at 1 p.m. Despite our abundant provisions, our food is restricted: butter, jam, honey, cheese, always frozen, cannot be as freely consumed as in the spring. There is some demoralisation, some anxiety, a great deal of lassitude, and a very noticeable loss of confidence in success, especially among those who have not been able to appreciate exactly the severity and duration of this undertaking. In these conditions one has to keep the darker thoughts out of one's conversation as far as possible and even out of one's mind. Gross is in a poor way with insomnia and anxiety; Buzio is too euphoric; Dyhrenfurth is ill; Spöhel is depressed; Reiss is enigmatical.

*Extract from Dyhrenfurth's diary, November 11th: 'I cannot remember any moment in my life when I have been so near to madness. From time to time I lit my lamp and the fact of seeing its bright beam on the frenzied tent-wall seemed to bring back a little of reality. But when I played the light up on Gabriel's face, I saw something like madness in his looks, as of a wounded or dying beast.'

I did not see Spöhel this morning; he had slept badly and had told Reiss that he would not be able to go out today. Nevertheless, he later joined us alone. We ascended quickly to Camp VI in an hour and a half. This was my first trip from VI to VII. The track zigzags, taking advantage of the terraces and always tending strongly to the left, close to the couloir. The slope of the track is definitely less steep than below Camp VI, but the sheets of wind-blown snow are dangerous. There is only one fixed rope about twenty yards long.

The wind was blowing hard again. The porters followed us. Altitude slowed down our progress. We had to reach a large mitre-shaped sérac standing up on the slope, with a corridor behind it, in which two tents had already been pitched. A large and easy ramp led to it, running from the edge of the couloir towards the middle of the glacier where the mitre stands. But the Sherpas, doubtless fatigued and anxious because it was so late—it was quite late when we left at 10.15 a.m.—and because the way was new to them, at this moment objected.

The wind was violent; I decided to call a halt at the spot where Gross and Buzio had left a coil of rope and a few ice-pitons. There we erected a tent brought by the porters. Not very pleasant. Reiss exerted himself furiously; as for myself, I left Goundin and Ang Norbu to work. Then Spöhel arrived; he sat down, said nothing, and looked sadly downwards. He had set off this morning so as not to be left behind and had travelled alone. I was very surprised to see him in this state of mind and gave him a friendly embrace to cheer him up. Meanwhile the erection of the tent was completed, right up against a wall of ice; the objects brought up by the Sherpas were still scattered in the snow. The wind assailed us with tiny needles of ice, and such was the speed of these particles that they were felt as pricks through the anorak, the wadded jacket, two pullovers, two shirts and a waistcoat! We were still in the sun, but the grim rampart of Nuptse cast its pitiless shadow over the white valley of the Cwm.

The two Sherpas urged us to descend. Which of us would stay here: Spöhel or myself? In the end I gave way to him, thinking of his effort and his desire to stay, but anxious above all about

Dyhrenfurth's bad health. Ang Norbu went down in front with the sureness and steadiness of a great guide; I made Goundin secure, for he was tottering with fatigue. Tensing and Lambert were very astonished to see me come back to Camp V.

November 15th.

The night was not very windy. I went down to Camp IV. The mess-tent had sunk a great deal. Gyalzen Sona is sick and has a high temperature. Dyhrenfurth is very weak and feverish too; his voice has gone completely, the pharynx being very inflamed. Penicillin for both. The *morale* of all is quite low. At 3.30 p.m. I received a message from Lambert. He wanted to start the assault and was planning to ascend tomorrow to Camp VII with all the Sherpas from Camp V and, the day afterwards, to the South Col with all the Sherpas. This second day's programme worried me. To lead so many laden porters, at this altitude and over a route not yet tracked, is to play a serious and dangerous card. We saw this in the spring. So I went up to Camp V as quickly as possible to discuss the question. On the way, I passed Spöhel and Reiss descending, very sorely tried, from Camp VII, where they had spent a very bad night. I was able to talk for a brief half-hour with Lambert and Tensing. They shared my point of view. In other respects it was a good decision; the wind has died down and time is short, for although the fine weather persists the cold continually increases, so do lassitude and deterioration. It will be difficult to form a party and settle a plan for supporting the ascent, because of the falling off in strength and *morale* and the lack of Sherpas. I came back to Camp IV at nightfall.

November 16th.

A quiet night. After a copious breakfast, I left my companions. Two of them according to their condition, will move up tomorrow: Dyhrenfurth will go down to Camp I in order to get well again and Gross will go with him. Today my progress was difficult. At Camp V I got my things ready for the South Col, if possible; I put special oil on five film magazines and sorted out some accessories for the Carba oxygen apparatus; with the help

of a single Sherpa I shall have to carry it all tomorrow, as well as mattresses and sleeping-bags. I gave my feet a very warm bath and Ang Namgyal with great kindness washed and massaged them.

November 17th.

Another calm night and a calm day. A late start. My sack proved extremely heavy; it weighed more than 30 lbs. A little below Camp VI I could do no more. At that point there is an altitude zone which is terribly hard to pass and a very steep pitch with the steps far apart. I halted there, while Ang Namgyal pushed on to Camp VI, deposited the things which were not to be brought back and returned to me; we made our way back to Camp V, where Reiss and Buzio arrived later. Early in the night Pasang and Pemba Sundar unexpectedly turned up. Pasang brought the mail! At last I received the first letter from home since our departure from Geneva, but the six previous letters have not arrived.

November 18th.

There was wind in the night. Once again the start was late, with Reiss (Buzio had not yet left his tent), Pasang, Ang Namgyal and Pemba Sundar. Once more I felt very tired in the steep passages along the fixed rope. We reached Camp VI in two hours. When we were a little higher up we found that the Sherpas were not behind us. Reiss went down to see what was happening. In the end only Ang Namgyal and Pemba Sundar came on. Pasang was suffering from altitude sickness. I decided to sleep in the tent at Camp VI and look after Pasang. Reiss and the other two continued to VII. Pasang was lying half inside the tent with his legs outside. He was somnolent; I could only rouse him from his torpor sufficiently to hear him complain of a violent pain in the region of the stomach; his pulse was very quick. I thought of giving him oxygen to inhale. There were some bottles in the tent and I had all the Carba parts, but the key was missing. All the keys are already at Camp VII. I hoped that Pasang's condition was going to improve quickly so that he might be able to go down with the two Sherpas. Eventually Kanza and Ang Norbu came down because they could no longer endure Camp VII. Ang Namgyal

and Pemba Sundar stayed there in their place. They gave me a very brief message from Lambert, saying that he is going up to the South Col tomorrow with Reiss and Tensing, seven Sherpas, four tents, some oxygen, a mattress for two and a single sleeping-bag for each man; he further told me not to worry, for they would take care. Pasang, who was better, roped up with Kanza and Ang Norbu and they went off in the direction of Camp V. I did not give them any message, for I did not know what to say exactly to either Buzio or Spöhel.

Although on the last two occasions I have felt a great deal of fatigue in getting up to Camp VI, I still hope that I shall be able to join my comrades at the South Col so as to support their efforts if possible; I should like to be in a position to give them early attention in the event of frost-bite (I have ampules of novocaine, percortene, etc.): I should also like to take them the parts for the Carba system apparatus (they have the apparatus for the Draeger System, which works very well and is more reliable, but consumes more). I am very pleased that Reiss has been able to join Lambert and Tensing.

Life in the half-collapsed tent at Camp VI is not pleasant. The sun went down shortly after 3 p.m., but luckily I have been able to make myself a good bed. Luckily too, Ang Norbu gave me a box of matches and I have been able to light some meta and prepare a little ovomaltine in an aluminium tin to quench my thirst. For food I have a few tablets of ovo-sport. There is a large piece of bacon, but I have no knife.

November 19th.

I slept badly because of the cold. The sun did not reach me until ten o'clock. My hands were frozen by everything I had to handle without gloves. I left the tent so as to be seen by those below. I saw Dyhrenfurth and Gross leaving Camp IV with three Sherpas. Only at 1.45 p.m. did I start for Camp VII. Once more I was very heavily laden (bedding, camera, film magazines, Foca, oxygen accessories, a few medical supplies, etc.). This load tried me terribly. The compression of the thorax by the straps of a heavy sack greatly increased my breathlessness. Halts became

more and more frequent. In that icy air panting irritated my throat and I broke into very painful coughing at the halts. Nevertheless, I wanted to reach Camp VII and I had time to do so, since the sun did not go down there until 4.30 p.m. Eventually it was about that hour that, coming to the edge of the great couloir, I perceived the South Col party at the top of the Combe des Genevois, slowly approaching the 8,000 metre level (26,250 feet). Shortly afterwards the leading group was silhouetted on the upper boss of the Eperon, from where they were about to descend to the South Col, soon enough to pitch a camp before dark. They still had some sunlight, but once again, how small the margin was!

I started off again, reached the site of the 14th November tent, ascended a few fixed ropes and after several more halts descried at last, behind the mitre-shaped sérac, a brown spot that marked Camp VII. It consists of three tents at an approximate height of 24,600 feet. It was five o'clock and extremely cold. I quickly slipped into a tent containing some provisions and a meta stove. Gradually I was able to warm myself a little and by the light of a candle I prepared some sugared tea, then some soup, and warmed up a little jam. This took a long while, but there was plenty of time now and I was glad to have got here. I found the oxygen key and I inhaled some with the Carba System apparatus. This works very well; at twenty litres an hour I shall have enough in one small bottle for twenty hours.

November 20th.

In the morning my pulse was very fast: 108. I must have had a slight fever with the violent sore throat and laryngitis that I have contracted. The night was very cold. Four millimetres of hoar-frost covered the sleeping-bag. The wind began to blow again in the night, not with extreme violence but enough nevertheless to demolish the apse of one tent. I could do very little. I set about melting some snow to make something to drink, but it was a frightening business as my fingers froze at every contact, and, completely blue, took half an hour to warm up again. Thus I could do nothing for a long time. It was very late when I went out and walked to the end of the strange corridor of ice to see Camp

V, far down below, and Camp IV recognisable only as a dim and tiny yellow patch. My sight was not keen enough to distinguish Camp III.

The rocky mass of Everest stood out this morning in magnificent relief. I would have liked to have taken some colour photographs of Everest, of the great ring of mountains, of Pumori and behind it the incurving West Rongbuk glacier, blue-green and bristling with ice-pinnacles, and further still, Cho Oyu, but how could I do so with fingers so numb? I watched for a sign of life near the South Col. The Eperon des Genevois was frightening. I was a little higher than the spring 'depot', and ice was showing all along the yellow band. A cloud of snow was rising from the south ridge.

At the end of the afternoon I was in the tent and heard steps. This time the sound was more precise than that imitation of footsteps made by the wind when it shifts things on the snow. It was not the Sherpas, but Lambert, Reiss and Tensing! The Sherpas arrived later.

I was not surprised; the cold and the wind have made the South Col untenable. But it was only slowly that I realised the whole significance of their return. More precisely, one thing is perfectly clear from the start: it is simply in order to escape death that these ten men have today returned from the South Col, after having started in the direction of the ridge in order to pitch Camp IX. But the other meaning—the failure of our attempt to ascend Everest—is hard to accept. For a long while I contented myself with believing that we were simply going to begin again a little later; for at the South Col are tents, provisions and sufficient oxygen for a serious attempt, and three inhalers, the principles and mechanism of which seem this time to have solved the physiological problem of Everest. And there is, moreover, the reassuring argument that we can afford to wait because we are not threatened by the monsoon.

My mind seized upon each of these arguments so as to plan a reply to the failure. My conscience, too, was busy: enormous sacrifices have been made for this expedition and much faith and hope has been placed in it. I looked for mistakes, in general or in detail, that we may have made. But is a mistake really a mistake

when one can only judge it *a posteriori*? Could we have been more lightly equipped? No, volume is in proportion to number, and the number is essential in order to obtain the necessary kernel of qualified porters for the South Col. The wind slowed down the establishment of Camps IV and V, and a week was certainly lost in the couloir, but if it were not so, the earliest moment for the assault would have fallen at the very height of the gale.

All this passed through my head during the night. Neither Lambert nor I could sleep much because of the cold which pierced us, although we wore the maximum of clothing in our double sleeping bags on a well-inflated mattress and in a well-closed 'iso-thermic' tent.

I exchanged a few words with him just to learn the broad outline of the events of the last few days. The leading party, comprising Lambert, Reiss, Tensing and seven Sherpas, had arrived on the South Col in the afternoon of the 19th, harassed and jostled by the wind, and great difficulty had been experienced in erecting the tents. After a very hard night, they had set off to pitch Camp IX on the south-east ridge; but it soon became necessary to accept the evidence—it was impossible to live in such wind and cold. Lambert was unequivocal.

Who will go up again? Not the Sherpas, not himself, nor Reiss, nor Tensing . . . Can anyone do so later, after recovering and resting? For that he will have to go down to Camp I; neither V nor IV nor III, all in the shadow and the wind and cold, will provide the conditions. Can one deceive oneself any longer about the climate of the South Col and Everest during the coming weeks? The cold, which has increased so much since October and which has clearly become even more intense in the last few days, will increase further: and the wind at the South Col is at least semi-constant, if not permanent. At this very moment it can be heard roaring with all its strength upon Everest.

Thus, as in the spring, but more definitely so, this is the sudden and extremely rapid denouement. The retreat is not a planned one; it is forced, at once and completely. We are purged from Everest.

November 21st.

An icy wind. The five tents of Camp VII were struck in cold

that was truly the limit for such an operation, for it was quite a task and exposed our hands to the bite of the wind for a long time. My own, with their long, thin, fingers, were unable to bear it. I was scarcely able to do a thing. We were all very worn and so precarious did the situation seem that we were overtaken by a deep agony of mind. What a relief when at last we started down! The descent was accomplished satisfactorily, thanks to all the fixed ropes, though some of the Sherpas, who were carrying heavy loads, had difficulty. The tent at Camp VI was left standing.

As we descended the wind progressively diminished and the sun tempered the air a little. At Camp V, at about 2 p.m., we could at last take some refreshment; Kirken handed us fruit-juice, tea and coffee; we devoured biscuits with condensed milk. Pasang and Ang Norbu were there too. Camp V was struck in its turn and we moved off towards Camp IV, where Buzio and Spöhel were awaiting us. They explained that they had been very anxious, especially because of my solitary and late descent to Camp VII, but also because they had not known what to do. They had tried to join me, going almost up to Camp VI on November 20th. But they, too, had no Sherpas to help them, the assault party having had to take them all for itself. Such are the draconian requirements and the slenderness of the chances on Everest, so often referred to.

When we found ourselves all together in calm weather and in a safe camp—except for Dyhrenfurth and Gross, already down below—we at last relaxed. Nevertheless, this is the retreat, and sadness mingles with our relief at deliverance. This retreat is not degenerating into a rout any more than in the spring; but only the imagination can still contemplate resistance. The Sherpas have instinctively prepared for it; Pasang, so intelligent and rich in initiative, has sent up some Sherpas to help with the evacuation.

November 22nd.

The wind rose towards morning. The Sherpas, under the guidance of Tensing and Pasang, were at work before the sun reached the camp. It was a peculiarly muffled wind that I heard in my tent. Peevishly it pursued the squalls of snow in sudden and irregular gusts that were often prolonged. When I went out I was

surprised to see that it was a great storm. The most terrible plumes were rising on the South Col and on Lhotse, and the whole Western Cwm was seething with wind-blown snow which rose like a curtain to veil the three mountains. This time the mess-tent was completely demolished.

The Sherpas, who had not breakfasted, were preparing their enormous loads. Three red devils came up at top speed from Camp III to take the last three loads. I had insisted that in such a storm one or two tents should be left behind, but all were taken down except the demolished mess-tent.

The blizzard raged with great violence until we drew near to Camp III. I turned round and in the curious white light of the storm the South Col, the Eperon des Genevois and the Lhotse Glacier never looked so immeasurably high as then. The glacier around Camp III had taken on the appearance of sand-dunes, with rounded crests and crevasses filled with windblown snow.

Then came the descent of the séracs. The change was something absolutely extraordinary and quite incredible. We were told about it by the porters but could not imagine it. During the six winter weeks we have spent at higher levels, the sérac zone has been having a sort of summer. We could recognise only fragments of the way. The men lower down have accomplished a magnificent as well as valuable task in maintaining the track through the labyrinth and in constructing as many as nine timber bridges. The glacier was horribly crevassed, disrupted, split, full of troughs, and interrupted by avalanches of blocks. The crossing of several of the bridges was acrobatic; I generally preferred to cross them astride. But although the laden porters had to cross them upright, not one of them fell.

Nothing remained at Camp II and we were all at Camp I before the sun was gone. Our appetites were clamorous. Ang Tsering's supper was ready in the nick of time: potatoes, liver, mutton, beans! Later still, with Tensing, Pasang and Ang Nima, we devoured mutton cutlets roasted over the fire.

This is my birthday. The Sherpas fired Bengal lights and signal rockets left over from the spring.

From the Journal of Raymond Lambert

1st–22nd November, 1952

ON November 1st we laid the body of the Sherpa, Mingma Dorje, at the foot of Everest, on a moraine at about 20,700 feet, and over it the Sherpas who were present erected a very simple but sincere tomb. But we had to continue the struggle against Everest. Spöhel, Reiss, Tensing, Chevalley and I went up again to Camp V.

November 2nd.

Spöhel, Reiss, Tensing and myself left Camp V at about 10.20. The wind was glacial. We wanted to find another route to the South Col by way of the Lhotse glacier. We made our way up towards the site of the spring expedition's Camp V and then climbed straight up among the slightly dangerous first séracs. We found a comfortable route that the Sherpas would be able to follow with the help of the fixed ropes that we set up. At about 23,300 feet, that is, a third of the way up the glacier, we found a spot where tents could be pitched. Reiss and Spöhel went back by the same route. Tensing and I drew off towards the great couloir in order to descend by way of the ropes fixed there earlier and to recover a part of the material for use on the new route. Then we came down to sleep at Camp IV, for Tensing had to strengthen the *morale* of the Sherpa troop. The accident has been a bad blow to our party. Chevalley is caring for the injured as best he can at Camp IV. But the weather is cold and it is not easy. As soon as possible, the injured will go down to Camp I. Since November 1st the temperature has fallen and the sun sinks behind Nuptse at an even earlier hour. Life in Camps IV and V is difficult. On the days when the wind rises our situation becomes uncomfortable and consumes our powers of resistance.

November 3rd.

Buzio and Gross have gone up to sleep at Camp V with Sherpas carrying provisions and oxygen bottles. Four Sherpas will remain with them and their task is to go and place a tent on the Lhotse glacier and to arrange fixed ropes. The weather is still very fine. I remain at Camp IV and Tensing has gone down to Camp I to reorganise the rear. Many Sherpas are sick. He has to find the necessary number to carry to the South Col and he has to restore their courage. This struggle is clearly very hard for everyone. If the spearhead parties make progress, the rear should follow very quickly with the transport of the material.

November 4th to 7th.

Buzio and Gross pitched their tent—which is to be Camp VI—and slept there. The rear followed; the Sherpas and our special coolies carried a great deal between Camps III and IV and a little from Camp IV to Camp V. Camp VI will be light, for it will serve the parties seeking the route higher up on Lhotse and, at the same time, as an equipment depot for Camp VII and the South Col.

But the wind on Everest rose and was icy; in all the camps no one slept; the tents were shaken and the mess-tent at Camp IV was torn. Buzio and Gross came down on the morning of the 5th November without going any higher. Despite the wind and the bad nights, we had to continue. Chevalley, Reiss, Tensing and I went to Camp V to sleep there. Tomorrow I will go to Camp VI to sleep there.

The days pass quickly, it gets even colder and the wind tears the snow from the ridges ceaselessly. Up above, in the direction of Everest, it is like a turbine. But the weather is still fine. Many of us are coughing and the majority are not sleeping at night because of the wind. The days are arduous. But on November 6th Tensing and I, with three Sherpas, left Camp V, fixing further ropes and improving the track from Camp V to Camp VI. We slept at Camp VI at about 23,300 feet. The night was a martyrdom; the wind was ceaseless and blew with violence upon our unfortunate tent; several times we were afraid that we should be hurled into space. On the morning of November 7th the wind was still

blowing and we had difficulty in cooking and in leaving the tent before the sun reached us. But at about 11 a.m. we left and went up to find the route from Camp VI to Camp VII. During this time Reiss and Spöhel were ascending from Camp V to Camp VI with two Sherpas and some loads. Tensing and I went up as high as possible, each of us with a tent on his back, to fix Camp VII at about 24,600 feet. We found an easy track. We will fix further ropes to help the Sherpas to get through. We reached a spot behind a large sérac which we named the Mitre. The view was splendid; beyond Pumori we saw the mountains of Tibet. Camp VII will be behind the sérac. We dumped the two tents and went down again to Camp V. We had to be replaced by others.

November 8th.

We descended to Camp IV. Reiss and Spöhel went to get the ropes left in the couloir; they did a great job there in the wind and returned at night to Camp V. Gross and Buzio are at Camp V. The wind is terrible.

November 9th.

Reiss and Spöhel returned to Camp IV to rest. We are waiting for our mail, but always there is nothing. But we made decisions for the next few days. We must go and sleep at Camp VII, trace the way out from the glacier and make the track to the South Col. But the wind and cold are wasting us from day to day; we find it difficult to start soon enough. The sun reaches us too late and leaves us too early. At Camp IV the sun vanishes behind Nuptse at 1.20 p.m. and the cold descends upon us at once.

November 10th.

The mail has reached us at last but it is very little. The main packet of letters has been stolen between Patna and Jaynagar. We are all very disappointed, but what can we do?

Gross and Buzio left Camp V to trace out and fix the ropes between Camps VI and VII, but they did not reach the top and returned to camp V. Throughout the day the transport has gone on; we no longer have many porters, for many are at Camp I, sick

or injured. Despite this, and thanks to Tensing, the goods continue to go up to Camp VI. There are enough provisions. Only the oxygen remains.

November 11th.

A still day.

November 12th.

In the morning, at Camp IV, the mess-tent was blown down. It has been impossible to move all day. The wind tore out all the tent poles, the boxes were blown away and we had to send the Sherpas out to find them on the glacier.

November 13th.

Slight movement between Camps IV and V, but nothing else to do. The wind continues. Chevalley went up to Camp VI with Sherpas and has come down again to Camp V. We must persist.

November 14th.

I have come up to Camp V with Tensing and Reiss; Spöhel and Chevalley left for Camp VII, but they stopped some 150 feet below it. Chevalley has come down again, for Dyhrenfurth is sick. Reiss and Spöhel are sleeping at VII alone.

November 15th.

Reiss and Spöhel have gone back to Camp IV, sick. Although the difficulties are great, the equipment is going up little by little. We keep up the struggle against the elements in order to reach the point of launching an assault upon the South Col and the summit.

November 16th.

Tensing and I, with eight Sherpas, left Camp V at about 9.15 a.m.; we reached Camp VI at about 11.40. The Sherpas, loaded up with provisions, equipment and oxygen, left for Camp VII, where we arrived at about 1.30 p.m. The wind has dropped and we hope for a lull of three to five days. We have installed Camp VII: six tents. This time we are not going down again before the assault.

November 17th.

Tensing and I have traced the track to the great Lhotse couloir and placed fixed ropes. We have returned to Camp VII. During this time our Sherpas have been back to Camp VI to fetch some oxygen bottles. The sun is late in reaching the camp and the cold is very great—54 degrees of frost (F.) in the night. Everything was frozen and the only thing to do when the sun disappears is to sleep.

November 18th.

We carefully prepared the loads for the South Col, taking only what is strictly necessary, for we have too few Sherpas, only enough for a proper assault on the summit. The wind was still gentle. If this would only last! In the afternoon Reiss and two Sherpas reached Camp VII. Chevalley, who was coming up with them, stayed at Camp VI. I have told Reiss how things stand. Tomorrow we must get to the South Col; everything is ready and, if the wind does not rise, we have every chance. He agrees and will go up with us. There will be seven Sherpas for the South Col, plus Tensing, Reiss and myself: ten men.

November 19th.

We started off at 9.0 and reached the left bank of the great couloir at about 11.30 a.m. Everything went well; our young Sherpas marched very well; Pemba Sundar, Ang Temba, Topkie, Ang Nima, Goundin, Ang Namgyal and Pemba.

Reiss and Tensing went a little in advance to place 200 yards of fixed ropes from the other side of the couloir to facilitate the traverse below Lhotse. During this time I waited with the Sherpas on the final terrace of the Lhotse glacier. The weather was magnificent. Then Reiss and Tensing retraced their steps. We reformed the rope and departed. All three of us had oxygen apparatus to make things easier. We all crossed the couloir and ascended the combe which leads to the *bosse* at 26,300 feet that overlooks the South Col. We progressed rapidly; the snow was good, and our fine Sherpas followed very well; towards the top, we drew slightly ahead, thanks to the oxygen, and at 5.0 p.m. all three of us reached the South Col. It is the same site as that of the spring.

The view is magnificent, but the wind is here too; it has risen again and the cold is intense.

We waited for the Sherpas to arrive before pitching the tents. It was with unparalleled difficulty that five of them were put up. The wind tore them. When two were ready the Sherpas hurled themselves inside; they were weary and cold. Reiss, Tensing and I went on with erecting the other three; darkness came and the wind blew with violence upon our camp at 25,854 feet. The South Col was reached for the second time in a single year, but at what a price.

Nothing to eat; too difficult to boil water. The other foods were too frozen. Reiss and I are in the same tent, with a mattress for two and a wadded sleeping-bag each. Tensing, good as ever, brought us chocolate and an infernal night then began. It is impossible to sleep; the wind shakes the tent, there are 72 degrees of frost (F.) and we are all trying not to freeze. We notice that the strength of the wind increases continually and hope that at sunrise tomorrow it will drop. The hours slip by slowly. I have lit two candles to warm my hands; we talk and wait for day to break. It is a terrible struggle. We call upon our final strength so that tomorrow we may establish Camp IX.

November 20th.

Day broke, but the gale went on. To crown all, the sun did not appear. It passed too low behind Lhotse, and reached us only at about 10 a.m. Tensing came to see us in the tent and we talked. We would be able to start in half an hour, but one Sherpa (Goundin) was sick. We waited for tea and that was all. Eventually we came out of our tents, prepared our sacks and at 11.30 set off in the direction of the south-east ridge to establish Camp IX. But the gale and the cold paralysed us gradually. We painfully crossed the Col and ascended the glacier facing the camp. Flattened by the wind against a wall of snow were the remains of an eagle.

Progress was slow. We felt our noses and the ends of our fingers freezing. We were pierced by the cold despite all our equipment. Tensing was ill in his turn, the Sherpas almost ceased to advance and we halted at about 26,600 feet. It was impossible to go on in such conditions and at such a height.

We left the equipment where we were, with the provisions and oxygen bottles (eight full bottles each of 600 litres) and went down again to the Col, where we abandoned the greater part of the 130 kg. of goods we had brought up. The Sherpas wanted to go down to Camp VII. This was flight. If we had not gone to the aid of Goundin he would have died of the cold in a short while. Reiss, Tensing and I took his load and we placed him in our rope to force him on. The other six had already started on the descent. After great effort we succeeded in passing the *bosse* at 26,300 feet and we began the long descent of the *cirque*. Luckily, our tracks were good, for we were tottering. Men who are fatigued by altitude do not walk well. One slip and a whole rope falls. At last we reached the couloir and the Lhotse glacier, and then Camp VII.

We are all prostrated. Here we found Chevalley, who came up alone in order to be near us. Buzio and Spöhel stayed at Camp V as reserves. Gross and Dyhrenfurth have gone down to Camp I; one of them is sick. The cold at Camp VII is most painful. I share a tent with Chevalley and we have shivered throughout the night. Tensing and Reiss have suffered too.

November 21st.

We had to wait for the sun before we set off. A cup of tea and we folded the tents. The Sherpas could do no more, their hands were frozen. At last, at about 11 a.m., we began the descent towards Camps VI and V. At Camp V we found three Sherpas who had come up to help us; all together we descended to Camp IV, where we found Spöhel and Buzio. The blow has been hard. The fixed ropes on the steeper parts of the glacier and along the upper traverse, fortunately facilitated the descent; there are 600 to 700 metres of rope in all and we have left it where it is. Pasang Phutar, a young Sherpa and a future sirdar, has organised the return very well. The Sherpas who have recovered at Camp I are here to help in evacuating the Western Cwm. We are very wasted by the days we have just experienced.

November 22nd.

The whole of Camp IV was awakened by a formidable gale.

The entire glacier was covered with a cloud of blown snow. It was a spectacle of desolation and destruction; the tents slapped and tore, and the cold was intense. Tensing shouted in order to force and encourage the Sherpas to pack the loads. Everything was flying from one side to the other; it was impossible to breakfast; fingers and ears were freezing. At the end of an hour's struggle in appalling disorder the ropes formed up for the descent. The Sherpas fell down in the snow, blown over by the wind. The stretch from Camp IV to Camp III was hell. At last, at Camp III, we were a little sheltered.

From Camp III began the long and dangerous descent of the séracs. There were nine timber bridges. The risks of falling into the crevasses or of being struck by séracs was enormous. In brief, at about 4 p.m. all the ropes reached Camp I without accident. All our fine Sherpas are exhausted; they did not eat this morning; they have slight frostbite on hands and ears, but luckily it is not serious. We are all glad to be back at Camp I, to rest and relax. But from Everest we have just received a new lesson.

In the spring, when the struggle for victory was immense, the wind and the cold were much less; there was more sun, too, despite the light snowfalls of the afternoon. And we reached 28,200 feet. This time we have had absolutely fine weather, but the sun leaves the camps at about 2 p.m. The wind tears at everything on certain days and every night the cold is killing: there were 54 degrees of frost (F.), and at the South Col 63 degrees of frost at twelve o'clock. Thanks to the equipment and the organisation, we have lived for nearly fifty days above 5,000 metres (*c.* 16,400 feet) and thrust as far as the South Col by a new route, reaching 26,600 feet with the oxygen and the material for an attack. Only a wind of over 60 m.p.h. and from 60 to 70 degrees of frost have forced us to turn back. Had we persisted, there would now be four or five dead men at the Col.

Certainly we have not reached the summit of Everest, but the work and the effort put up by the Sherpas and ourselves has been considerable. To have reached the South Col for the second time in one year is something, and especially to have emerged from the

adventure alive. The accident to Mingma Dorje alone provides a sad note, but that was bad luck.

GABRIEL CHEVALLEY'S DIARY—*continued.*

November 23rd.

A fine calm day. We have been resting. Yesterday morning. Dyhrenfurth and Gross, with Ang Dawa, Nima and Tsin Tarkay went off for the base camp and the southern shoulder of Pumori. They will return on the 25th.

I had reckoned on making the return trip with forty porters, but when I counted the loads—a quantity of provisions remained at Camp I and we shall leave a part behind—I found we should need seventy-five!

November 24th.

Fine, with clouds driving along on a west wind. Over 14 degrees of frost at 6 p.m. The courier, Shita Sherpa, has set out for Patna with a telegram reporting the failure and a story. Pemba has gone to fetch coolies from Pangboche, who are to carry as far as Namche. Ajiba and Kirken have gone to Themi to recruit the porters who are to carry to Katmandu.

November 25th.

Wind. Dyhrenfurth's party has returned from Pumori. He tells me of the magnificent harvest he has been able to make there and of the fantastic spectacle of Everest, with the north ridge and the North Col. They did not reach the shoulder, having been halted a great deal lower down; the views taken did not reach into the Western Cwm and only showed the slopes of the South Col and Lhotse to the level of the yellow band—Camp VII. I have asked him to go tomorrow to the rock spur and am pleased that he showed himself disposed to make this further effort. Gross is enchanted with his trip.

November 26th.

A cold night and wind all day—a whirling wind that strikes the

tents violently on one side and a fraction of a second afterwards on the other. Clouds from the west-south-west moved along at a great speed. The metal mast of the kitchen's awning was broken.

The Pumori party has returned full of enthusiasm. A fantastic view into the Cwm upon the whole face of Lhotse and the South Col. A few coolies arrived this evening.

November 27th.

The coolies arrived and there followed a rush for the loads (about seventy-five) for there were many more men than loads. A great many women were there and even a few babies, who had spent the night at Camp I!

I really had tears in my eyes when I left. The pinnacles of ice were of emerald hue and gleaming like glass; between them were estuaries and cascades of milky ice. From the base camp I ascended with Gross in the direction of the ridge of Pumori, for I wanted to see Everest, but it was too far to climb to the point from where it would be visible with the whole north ridge and the North Col. Nevertheless, the sight was amazing and we stayed gazing at it for a long time.

I am about to take leave of this fantastic corner of the earth and I am sick at heart. I have to remind myself that despite the still blue sky the winter is coming, and to recall all our suffering from the cold, and how when we were in camp we were chilled and wretched when the shadows fell and the winds blew. But the beauty and the grandeur will remain with me. As to the summit that rises to so prodigious a height, a massive cone of black and tawny rock, standing so high above the shining ice of the other mountains, a veritable roof of the world, it keeps it secret and maintains its defiance; but I am happy and proud to know it so well and to have struggled for its conquest to the limit of a man's strength.

December 16th.

The sky is overcast; it is warm, and we have bathed in the Indrawati. About us are the songs of the birds and the sound of cicadas, and there are a few flowers.

THE END