

MOUNT EVEREST, 1938

BY H. W. TILMAN

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AN account of the 1938 expedition would be of little interest were it not for the fact that a departure was made from the methods considered by many to be essential for the conduct of an Everest expedition. For some time past a few had criticized the large expedition on the grounds of efficiency, expediency, and economy. In 1936 these criticisms gained force from the success of a comparatively small party on Nanda Devi and the failure of that on Everest—a failure, by the way, which was no fault of those concerned and which would have overtaken any party, large or small. But it was made plain that numerical strength and lavish expenditure counted for little in the face of adverse conditions ; and since such conditions are the rule and favourable conditions the exception, it was at least prudent to reduce the stakes. As is often the way, the financial argument carried most weight.

The tide was running strongly in favour of the small expedition when news came that permission for another attempt had been granted by the Tibetan authorities. Obtaining permission is still one of the major difficulties in the way of climbing Everest, and if it is true that they regard the mountain as sacred, then the attitude of the Tibetan authorities is understandable ; the attitude of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey might easily be the same if the Alpine Club asked for permission to climb that. My own opinion is that the Tibetans are still suspicious of our motives ; and when we add activities which are seen by all, such as surveying or collecting stones, to mysterious activities on the mountain which are seen by none, this suspicion is reasonable. To the Tibetans the hammering of rocks or collecting of stones is open to more than one sinister interpretation, however guileless or godlike may be the aspect of the geologist who thus offends their susceptibilities.

Having been appointed leader and given a free hand, I invited the following to come : E. E. Shipton, F. S. Smythe, N. E. Odell, C. B. M. Warren, Peter Lloyd, Captain P. R. Oliver. Each contributed money according to his means, but far the greater part

of our needs was contributed by generous friends and well-wishers. We budgeted for a cost of something like a quarter of that of previous expeditions—£2500—and actually spent about £2350. I thought it right that each member should subscribe because it acts as a slight incentive to economy; and although such an expedition is not everyone's idea of a climbing holiday, which should be paid for, it is a valuable privilege. I hoped to do without newspaper support because, as all will agree, the publicity concerning Mt. Everest becomes more and more objectionable. But since news will be published, whether paid for or not, it would be quixotic to refuse an offer; moreover, it was necessary to have some official news channel, and some of our subscribers very rightly hoped to be paid back. A satisfactory arrangement was made with *The Times*, who treated us generously, and who, through an unfortunate incident, had good reason to complain of our treatment of them. There have been complaints of the scanty news sent; but we meant to send as little as possible, and the popular Press made good our shortcomings with the usual quantities of surmise, sensation, and ballyhoo.

Estimates of equipment and expenditure had been drawn up by Shipton after 1936. We fed and equipped ourselves reasonably and economically, and the fact that no hardships were suffered, and that we felt as fit as can be expected on the mountain, shows that the feeding and equipping while done economically was done well. Much has been said about our food, or rather the lack of it, and I should like to correct some false impressions. Travelling light does not imply inadequate or indifferent feeding. Indeed, the more restrictions are imposed by considerations of weight, the more care is needed in the selection of food. I agree with Dr. Johnson that the man who does not mind his belly will not mind anything else. But 2 lb. a day is enough for all except gluttons; the art lies in securing most value for weight. Of course Everest expeditions are on a different footing from small private parties, because more money is available and because the transport problem is so simple. There is therefore no need for rigorous cutting of weight. In consequence, we did ourselves pretty well; but much depends on a man's standards of living. If a man expects to have a choice of three or four kinds of marmalade for breakfast it is a disagreeable surprise to find none at all. There was ample food this year; the supply of candles may have been short, but we were never reduced to eating them.

The principle applied in the selection of food was simplicity and the avoidance as far as possible of tinned food—sameness, staleness, weight, and cost, all seem to me to be against its use.



Expedition Photo.]

SOME OF THE PORTERS AT RONGBUK.



Expedition Photo.]

LEFT TO RIGHT: WARREN, LLOYD, TILMAN, OLIVER, SMYTHE, ODELL, SHIPTON.
Party at Rongbuk.

IN THE COURTYARD OF RONGBUK MONASTERY.

Expedition Photo.



CAMP AT ENTRANCE TO ARUN GORGE.

Expedition Photo.



An exception was a case of tongue presented by a member of the Club whose accompanying offer of a case of champagne was sternly, perhaps unwisely, refused. At any rate the presence of this would in every sense have cut the ground from under the feet of the sybarites. We took plentiful supplies of ham, bacon, cheese, butter, pemmican. Eggs could be obtained on the march, while for use on the mountain we had six hundred preserved in water-glass, so that that breakfast fetish of bacon and eggs was eaten almost every day, even on the North Col. By means of an Easiwork pressure cooker we ate normal food like meat, rice, lentils, vegetables, and potatoes, right up to Camp 3. With dried yeast we made excellent bread and scones from the local flour or *atta*—very unlike the anaemic spongy stuff sold as bread in this country. This meagre diet, which might be well enough for the ascetically inclined, was eked out with additional items—milk, porridge, jam, honey, dried fruit, sweets, chocolate, sugar, glucose, dripping, biscuits, soups—but several of us were mightily relieved to find at Rongbuk a large stock of 1936 supplies, including nourishing food like pickles, and liver extract, of which there were several cases. It is above 23,000 ft. that food becomes a problem for which no satisfactory solution has yet been found. This admission may please the ‘caviare and quails in aspic’ school of thought, but the simple reason is that it is impossible to eat sufficient of any kind of food at those heights. Various foods have still to be tried, but I do not think the solution will be found in any attractively labelled tin or jar, though the shelves of all the grocers’ shops in England be searched. The eating of a cup of pemmican soup at 27,200 ft. by Lloyd and myself may find more admirers than imitators. It is an example of what can be done by resolute men with strong stomachs; and when all is said, it represents an intake of a paltry 4 oz. of food. Sugar and glucose are valuable auxiliaries, but a meal of neat sugar hardly gives one the comfortable sensation of having dined.

We left Gangtok on March 4 with 12 Sherpas and 60 mules, but on reaching Tangu, this side of the Tibet border, we were held up for a week while a track was cleared for the mules through deep snow. Some of this time was devoted to shikar with an old cross-eyed carbine and twenty cartridges. Oliver, representing the Army, fired seven ineffective shots, a feat which evoked murmurs of ‘Thank God, we’ve got a Navy!’ Angtharkay, our Admirable Crichton, brought down a bharal with the last round. On the 18th we crossed the Sebu La into Tibet in bitter weather. It was on this march that Odell went astray, his prolonged absence causing such uneasiness to those who had not

travelled with him before that search parties were organized. He cast up in the evening, when the Sherpas unkindly suggested he had spent the afternoon at a neighbouring nunnery or *ani-gompa*.

This was the only severe weather we encountered during the march. Subsequently we enjoyed bright sunny days, marred only by the violent wind which blew most afternoons. The tedium of the march was exceeded only by the tedium of the halts, but I should not have cared to miss the halt we made at Shekar Dzong, where the Dzongpen made us his guests. Tibetan hospitality is warm, beginning usually before midday and continuing without any perceptible pause until long after dinner. Feeble folk that we were, like the conies, we pleaded for a break in the session ; so when a brief lunch was over at 4 o'clock, we adjourned to our tents for a rest before facing the music again at 6 o'clock. The mainstay of a Tibetan feast is the chang girl, or girls, whose job it is to see that the guests drink up and that their cups are always full of Tibetan beer or chang. This is brewed from barley and has been likened to 'slightly alcoholic barley-water.' But at the evening session of the feast in question, the drinking of innocuous chang was superseded all too quickly by that of arrack, a spirit distilled from the chang, very like bootleggers' whisky. The Governor of North Carolina would have had no cause for complaint—there was no time at all between drinks. In order to make time we took advantage of a Tibetan drinking custom by which, if the guest challenges the chang girl, she is debarred from filling the cup until she has sung a song. But there is a local by-law of which we were unaware, which is that after the song has been sung the guest is obliged to drain the cup at one draught. We were hoist with our own petar. The songs were all improvised. That in response to Odell's challenge likened him to a god ; Warren was told that the females of the household were in no immediate need of his services ; and the response to the address of Karma Paul the interpreter is unprintable.

We reached Rongbuk on April 6, ten days earlier than the earliest of our predecessors. After the awful warning of 1936 we had taken trouble to be there early ; those with a very keen sense of humour will appreciate the fact that after all this forethought we were caught out by a still earlier break in the weather. In spite of the mild conditions of the march, wind and dust had taken their usual toll. Oliver and Lloyd had colds, Odell a bad cough, Warren went to bed with influenza, and Shipton with colic. On the 7th, 45 men came over from Sola Khumbu with 1300 lb. of food, and the following day was devoted to ceremony

at the Monastery. The old abbot seemed pleased to see us again. He gave us a large meal, his blessing, and some advice. It was thought likely that an earth tremor, which had been felt there in February, might have affected the mountain, so we were warned to be careful, especially Lloyd, who in spite of his superior beard was thought too young. The mountain was quite black, but so severe was the cold and the wind that there was obviously no hurry to commence operations on the mountain. We therefore reduced our porter strength to 31, the remaining 30 being dismissed. These consoled themselves for their disappointment by taking five of our thirty precious pairs of boots—a serious and unexpected loss, for theft on that wholesale scale by Sherpas is unusual. In consequence of this boot shortage a regrettable incident took place. Angkharma, Odell's servant, had been speechless with laryngitis for the past fortnight, so that it seemed advisable to send him home. But although we wanted to be rid of him, we badly wanted his boots which we had issued to him and which were then of more use to us than he was. But with these he resolutely declined to part. There was a scene in which Angkharma lay on the ground making what noise he could, naming in a hoarse whisper such a stiff price for the boots that he easily won the day, and we got neither the boots nor a better porter.

Each camp up the glacier now necessitated four relays. No one could have accused us of lightness or mobility. There was a disgusting amount of stuff to shift. The slogan 'No damned science,' if raised at all, had evidently not been heard by Odell. We had amongst our scientific equipment our old friend the glacier drill and a machine which, in return for the slight trouble of winding up, recorded the relative humidity. The results were so varied that one concluded the thing was only guessing. Then we had batteries of thermometers, and they were all needed; for to register impressively low temperatures they have to be whirled at the end of a piece of string, and naturally a lot of them flew away. Our library alone was a weighty affair. Shipton brought the longest novel that has been published in recent years. Warren had a 2000-page work on Physiology, and, appropriately enough, a treatise on Tropical Medicine. Odell may or may not have had a book on Geology, but he daily wrote the equivalent himself in what he humorously called his field-notes. Oliver possibly had Clausewitz on the Art of War and Lloyd a text-book on Inorganic Chemistry, but I had carelessly omitted to bring the *Badminton Mountaineering* or even the Guide to the Everest region which the Climbers' Club hope to publish shortly.

On April 8 we occupied Camp 2, where I at once went to bed with

'flu. We were now recording temperatures of 46 and 47 degrees of frost at night. We sent the porters down to Rongbuk for a rest, whence they returned on the 22nd, on which day I went down to recuperate. Before I left we discussed plans ; or rather the others discussed while I listened, for I had now lost my voice and remained more or less speechless for the next month. Whether the others noticed any departure from the normal I cannot say. The decision reached was that the North Col slopes should be examined and that then Shipton and Smythe should go down to the Kharta valley, leaving us to carry on if conditions warranted. The reason for this was that Shipton and Smythe were considered our most likely pair, and their opinion was that the end of May was the most promising time for an attempt and they were both strongly averse from making an earlier one.

The party moved on to Camp 3, where I joined them on the 26th. They reported that there was much ice on the North Col slopes, and opinion was against doing anything more yet on account of the severe wind and cold. Nor was any one of us really fit, except perhaps Shipton. Coughs, colds, sore throats and the remains of 'flu were our complaints, for which the only remedy is to go down ; for such complaints, drugs are as useless on Everest as they are anywhere else. On the 27th, Shipton, Smythe and Oliver, with 9 porters, crossed the 22,000-ft. Lhakpa La, bound for the Kharta valley ; and two days later, the wind and cold showing no signs of abating, we four followed with 13 porters. The remaining porters went down to Rongbuk with orders to meet us at Camp 3 about May 15. Owing to its low altitude (11,000 ft.) the Kharta valley was the place where we should most quickly throw off our infirmities ; the alternatives to this plan were to go down to Rongbuk or to stay at Camp 3 and carry on. I had been warned by General Norton from his own experience in 1924 against committing the party too early, with the possible result of putting most of us out of action with frost-bite, and at that time conditions were such as to render this less of a possibility than a certainty. Rongbuk was nearer to the mountain but less beneficial to health, and as things turned out mere proximity to the mountain would have availed us nothing. The wind and cold continued unabated until May 5, when snow fell heavily and continued to fall daily for the next week. After that date the mountain was never in climbable condition, and the lull on which everything depends between the cessation of wind and the first monsoon snow never occurred.

Before leaving home a candid friend had advised me that whatever happened I was not to blame the weather too much. It

sometimes occurs to me that laymen, or even mountaineers who are not conversant with the conditions, may think that we submit too easily and that a sufficient show of resolution would enable us to surmount adverse conditions. It is platitudinous to say that the mountaineer must himself judge what is possible and what risks are justifiable ; and although on Everest the prize is great, we have to remember that mountaineering, as yet with us, is not war but a form of amusement in which most of its devotees are not willing to be killed rather than accept defeat.

No one but an Esquimaux could have failed to respond to the change from the harsh rigours of Camp 3 to a pleasant camp amongst grass and trees at the head of the Arun gorge. All enjoyed their stay there except myself, who went to bed with a recurrence of 'flu immediately on arrival and only left it to begin the walk back on May 10. Travelling by the Doya La we reached Rongbuk on the 14th, taking five days instead of the usual four owing to my feebleness. Shipton and Smythe were to return by the Lhakpa La, meeting us at Camp 3 on the 20th.

Our first sight of the mountain was a severe shock. It was white with snow and a cloud plume was blowing from it in the reverse of the usual N.W. direction. But none of us was really convinced that this betokened the monsoon, or believed that we should not still be given a chance. On reaching Camp 3 on the 18th the drastic change in conditions was even more evident ; a foot of snow now covered the ice of the glacier, and water lay in pools ready to hand where before we had had to melt ice.

When clouds poured over the Rapiu La from the S. early next day another nail was driven into the coffin of our hopes. But after a short tour of inspection Odell and Oliver reported the snow of the lower slopes in good condition. Lloyd was sickening for his turn of 'flu, but on the 20th four of us and four Sherpas set out to prepare the route to the North Col. Oliver got off first with two men, the rest of us following an hour behind owing to some indecision about taking up loads. A heavy fall of séracs just to our left at the foot of the slope reminded us that delay is sometimes dangerous. Our route lay slightly to the right of the centre of the snow cirque forming the approach to the Col, and though it was rather too well adapted to act as an avalanche chute the snow was good and the climbing easy until within about 300 ft. of the top. Here a sudden steepening in the slope forced us out to the left on a long traverse before an easier angle allowed us to climb up directly. Oliver and his men, who had done all the work so far, were suspicious of the snow on the traverse and waited for us to join them before they embarked on it, carrying

a rope for fixing. A short way out they got bunched and the snow avalanched. The Sherpa who was in front was clear of the cleavage, which was about two feet deep, and the light line for fixing which we were paying out got mixed up in their rope, so that we easily held them. As the incident was not serious I did not report it at the time, but the popular Press got wind of it and passed it on to readers with their usual happy accuracy. Meteorologists must have been interested to hear that we had been 'carried away by the monsoon,' and glaciologists that the party had been 'nearly caught by the tail of the glacier,' both these nasty mishaps taking place on the 'North Column.'

Part of the traverse having thus been made safe, Odell and I took over the job of cutting and stamping a track in the steep, soft snow and fixing a rope. It was so hot that we did not do very much before returning to camp at 4 P.M., where we found Shipton and Smythe who had crossed the Lhakpa La that morning. They had watched our performances and were relieved to see us coming down. It snowed steadily that evening for several hours, and the roar of avalanches was heard throughout the night. This heavy snowfall, accompanied as it was by muggy weather, gave rise to fresh discussion of plans. It seemed that the slopes would now be unsafe for three or four days, and that if the west wind, on which our main hopes depended, came, the probable formation of wind-slab on the lee side might make them dangerous for an indefinite period. From now on, the risk of an avalanche in one form or another was always at the back of our minds. Well aware of the queer behaviour of these slopes in other years, we began to turn our thoughts to a route up the W. side which had been warmly recommended by the 1936 party,¹ who, however, did not go up it. We decided that Shipton, Smythe, and half the porters should go round there. We did not know that it would go, and the old route might still be used if caution was exercised; but although the contemplated division left both parties weak in porters it did promise that one or other would reach the Col.

A cold, windy night followed by a bright cloudless day made us drop the plan for the moment, and an examination of the slopes next day showed that their condition was good enough to warrant another start. On the 24th all the Europeans (except Lloyd who went down to recuperate) and 26 porters went up to the Col. Shipton and Smythe finished the remainder of the route, the others fixed ropes, and by midday all were up. Loads were dumped on the site of the 1936 camp, where the apex of a Pyramid tent just

¹ *A. J.* 48. 231, *H. J.* ix. 13.

showed through the snow. Next day Smythe and I, starting early, took 15 more laden porters up, reaching the dump by 10 A.M. We sat there for a little, glumly noting the significantly adverse features. The mountain was white, heavy clouds billowed up on either side from the Loh La and the Rapiu La, the air was still, and the snow underfoot deep and soft. Even so, we were not quite convinced that the monsoon was established; as with a man marrying for the second time, hope triumphed over experience. After more discussion it was decided that Shipton and Smythe should withdraw to Rongbuk to await better conditions, and that we others should occupy the Col in order to examine the snow higher up. Uncertain whether the W. side route would go, we were reluctant to commit ourselves to it until forced; meanwhile it was no use keeping more people at Camp 3 than necessary. Nevertheless, when more snow fell the following afternoon we reverted to our first plan and on the 27th those two, with 15 porters, went down to Rongbuk, intending to return by the western route when conditions on the mountain improved. A day later Odell, Oliver, Warren, myself and 13 porters went up to occupy Camp 4. It was hot and muggy, and taking every precaution we crossed the traverse one by one. The eight porters who went down were instructed to come up next day if no snow fell, but as a foot of snow fell that night nothing was done. More snow fell on the 29th, but on the 30th we had scrambled eggs for breakfast and sprang into activity. Oliver went off to examine from the end of a long rope the snow at the top of the western side, and the rest of us began ploughing up the N. ridge in knee-deep snow. Before starting we saw the porters leaving Camp 3 to come up, but a prolonged bellow from us was heard by them and acted upon with almost indecent haste. They returned to camp.

Warren gave the 'closed' type oxygen apparatus a trial with unlooked-for results. As it seemed bent on suffocating him, he did not wear it long. This type weighs 35 lb. and pure oxygen is breathed by means of a mask. In the 'open' type weighing 25 lb., of which we had two, a tube in the mouth supplies oxygen; and air, such as it may be, is breathed through the nose. It was on the sole advice of Finch that I took the latter type, and though neither type is pleasant either to contemplate or to wear, the comparative success of one and failure of the other was instructive. Accompanied by a Sherpa I pushed on to about 24,500 ft., but it was clearly no use trying to occupy Camp 5 yet. When we retreated next day a suggestion that two of us should go down by the W. side was not popular, owing to Oliver's account of the snow.

On June 1 we were at Camp 1, and the following morning

Oliver and I walked up to Lake Camp, two miles up the main Rongbuk Glacier, where Shipton, Smythe and Lloyd now were, on their way to the W. side. The weather had changed ; for 48 hrs. a strong W. wind had been driving low clouds before it, and through breaks in the flying scud we could see snow being whirled off the N. face in a very cheering manner. A wind like that threatened to form wind-slab on the lee slopes, so bowing to Smythe's reiterated warnings we decided to concentrate on the W. side. Shipton's party, which I now joined, was reinforced to a strength of 17 porters, and the others were to follow us as soon as some necessary loads had been brought down from Camp 3. After one intermediate camp at the corner we marched up the short glacier leading from the main Rongbuk Glacier to the foot of the W. side of the North Col. The height of this West Camp 3 must be about 21,500 ft., the same height as Camp 3 itself. The wind was still blowing, though less strongly, and the rocks of the Yellow Band high above us on our right looked hopefully free from snow. That their appearance from below was deceptive we were about to learn.

As we walked up to the foot of the slope next morning, the most phlegmatic might have found himself remarking on the fact that the way led over the débris of an avalanche of no ordinary magnitude. It was recent, possibly having fallen on the day when I expressed an earnest wish to descend the W. side, and the immediate result was to leave the first 500 ft. of our route bare ice. Having cut up this we had to cut across it to the left on a traverse that allowed little safeguard for the porters ; beyond it we reached snow which was still in place and might at that early hour remain there if our pious hopes were fulfilled. On the whole, I see little cause for surprise that other parties have not made use of this route. We reached Camp 4 at 11 A.M. after a long plug up snow that continually let us through. A sun surrounded by a double halo peered wanly through a glassy sky, but no violent weather followed these alarming signs.

Next morning, June 6, we started for Camp 5, Lloyd wearing the ' open ' type apparatus. The snow on the lower part of the N. ridge was now board-hard, thanks no doubt to being wind-swept, but in spite of the good going two of the porters succumbed to altitude at about 25,000 ft., and the others seemed far from happy. While yet some 300 ft. below the Camp 5 site (25,800 ft.) they were so affected by a sudden snowstorm that they wished to dump the loads and go down. After much talking better feelings prevailed and by 4 P.M. all were up. Leaving seven porters with Shipton and Smythe, Lloyd and I took the rest down. The two



Expedition Photo.]

W. SIDE OF NORTH COL, SHOWING DÉBRIS OF GREAT
AVALANCHE.



Expedition Photo.]

SMYTHE AT FOOT OF YELLOW BAND.

[To face p. 12.]



Expedition Photo.]

UNNAMED PEAK ON MAIN RONGBUK GLACIER
OPPOSITE CORNER CAMP.



Expedition Photo.]

CAMP 6 AND SUMMIT.

abandoned loads were brought up that evening by two of the Camp 5 party—a very fine piece of work.

Nothing was done next day owing to wind, but on the 8th Camp 6 was occupied. It was gruelling work making a route up fairly steep rock, mostly snow covered. The climb of 1400 ft. to 27,200 ft. took 8 hrs. and the seven Sherpas, who stuck nobly to their task, only got back to Camp 5 very late and very tired. Shipton and Smythe started next morning, but they were out too early and had to go back to the tent to warm up. When they finally left the scree patch on which the tent was pitched they found themselves almost at once in thigh-deep powder snow. The futility of persevering was only too plain, so they returned to camp and thence down to Camp 5.

After an off day Lloyd and I took three sick men down by the W. side, and then, on the day the first pair were coming down, we started up with six porters, one of whom gave in halfway. From the N. ridge we watched Odell, Oliver, Warren, and two Sherpas coming up the W. side and met the seven porters returning from Camp 5. It was like Snowdon on a bank holiday. We were a queerly assorted pair because Lloyd was using the 'open' type apparatus, but there were not enough cylinders for two of this kind to be used throughout, as Lloyd was doing, and the 'closed' type was useless. At 3 P.M. we reached Camp 5, where Shipton and Smythe were, on their way down. Their account of conditions higher up put the summit out of the question, so we decided to go for the summit ridge and to work along it as far as we could, if possible to the Second Step. Two of our porters were persuaded to stay, the rest went down. A gale in the night made the double-skinned Pyramid tent flap so furiously that sleep was impossible.

Leaving at 8 A.M., helped to some extent by the tracks of the first party, though the wind had filled most of these, we reached Camp 6 soon after midday. Lloyd led while I followed, roped with the two porters. He arrived some 30 min. before us, evidently receiving more benefit from the oxygen as we gained height. For the short distance we went next morning he again went better than I did, but perhaps that is no criterion. What I did hope and expect was that the oxygen would give him sufficient 'boost' to climb the rock wall which, as will be seen presently, so easily defeated us. Lloyd is a chemist, so perhaps not unbiassed, but he was satisfied that when using oxygen less effort was required and that consequently he was less fatigued. We sent the men down, collected snow for cooking, and turned in, for the wind was already rising. We ate pemmican with

equanimity if not with gusto. At night it blew hard and again we slept little.

Starting at 8 A.M., fanned by what seemed a gentle zephyr from the W., we had not reached the steeper ground above the scree before my hands were numb and Lloyd complained that his feet were in almost the same state. We retreated to the tent and waited until 10.30 before trying again. As our objective was the summit ridge immediately W. of the N.E. shoulder, we had to climb a steep rock wall some 50 ft. high. Not liking the look of this from closer up, we turned half-right towards an upward-sloping snow corridor, but there a few thigh-deep steps in powder snow were enough to send us back to our first choice. There were three or four possible lines up the rock, all of which we tried with an equal lack of success. Each looked simple enough, but the smooth outward-sloping rock, sometimes snow-covered, easily withstood our irresolute attacks. While I was reconnoitring the fourth and last possibility, which might have 'gone,' though it meant a 'shoulder,' we saw Angtharkay and Nukku approaching the tent with more oxygen cylinders. Had we been short of an excuse for ceasing operations here was one, so down we went. If we had succeeded in gaining the ridge about 200 ft. above us, we should have been 1200 yds. from the Second Step and about a mile from the summit. Progress along the ridge would not have been easy and the Second Step looked most formidable. It will be a lasting regret that neither was tried.

The descent to Camp 5 was unpleasant owing to a blizzard, but when we left Camp 5 at 3 P.M. the storm was over. An inglorious day ended appropriately enough for one of us when Lloyd fell into a crevasse close to camp. As we were unroped, this may evoke neither surprise nor sympathy. I had to leave him there for ten minutes, properly penitent we hope, before the porters arrived and we hauled him out.

Odell, Oliver, and a few porters were now the sole occupants of the Col. Warren had gone down that morning with the others to look after Ongdi, one of our best men, who had developed pneumonia. Pasang, another Camp 6 man, was lying alone in a tent paralysed from face to feet all down his right side. The Sherpas were shocked at this misfortune, regarding it as a judgment for too perfunctory supplications to the gods of the mountain. They showed little disposition to help him.

Oliver was anxious to go to Camp 6, more perhaps for the sake of treading classic ground than for any good he could do. I sympathised, but as we had a sick man on our hands, no hope of climbing the mountain, and some anxiety about the descent, the

prudent course was to go down. To carry a helpless man across the ice traverse of the W. side route was out of the question, so next morning, taking what we could carry, we retreated by the old familiar way. I kept three men back to help Pasang, but after a futile attempt to improvise a stretcher out of tent poles they suggested leaving him to his fate. The mountain was angry with us and claimed a sacrifice, was their notion; if we cheated it of Pasang then someone else would die. One had not to be a great linguist to make them understand that the suggestion was unpalatable. Presently, taking it in turns, they carried him pick-a-back through the soft snow to the place where the fixed ropes depended. There we treated the unfortunate man as we did our loads, lowering him rope's length by rope's length down the snow for nearly 1500 ft. It was a slow job, especially on the traverse, but by midday we joined the others on the glacier, where ready hands soon carried him to Camp 3.

Thus ended the 1938 attempt. There was some talk of coming back in the autumn, but none of the party was available and the chances of finding favourable conditions then seem to me exceedingly remote. Even accepting the very doubtful assumption that by, say, October the snow has been blown off the mountain, the wind and cold are increasing instead of diminishing, the days getting shorter, and the N. face receiving less and less sun.

I hope it will be accepted now that a small party run on modest lines is as likely to achieve success as a large, expensively run party. Two groups of two were in position at 27,200 ft.—three could have been found if wanted—fit and ready to make a serious bid for the top had conditions been favourable. To have reached the top would have been more convincing still, but I think enough was done to satisfy candid people that these methods are sound. To judge by some of the parties at work in the Himalaya this season, the saner methods advocated here are already in vogue—the use of an aeroplane by one party being a startling exception. The Americans began it in Alaska, using aeroplanes to carry men and stores to a base, but in their case absence of porters, shortness of season, and remoteness give some excuse. The Germans went a step further by dropping stores on the mountain itself, and the logical step, which may not be far distant, is to drop men as near to the summit as convenient. It will probably be quicker and safer to climb there in the end, but we must move with the times, and the end—which is certainly not mountaineering—justifies the means. Whatever our disagreements may be, surely we can agree not to drop tins, tents, and possibly men on mountains. Everyday life is sufficiently cluttered up with

complicated gadgets without our wishing to introduce them into such an essentially simple thing as mountaineering. In that we want more simplicity, not less—small parties equipped with bare essentials, not large, over-organized, over-fed, over-equipped expeditions.

One well-known lesson learnt afresh was the impossibility of climbing the last 2000 ft. when there is snow on the rocks. Even if the labour of ploughing through it were not insuperable, there is grave danger of the snow sliding off the slabs. Under such conditions the ridge is obviously safer, but it is not easily reached and there remains the enigma of the Second Step.

The fact that we took no wireless seems to have surprised some, but few I hope would again be in favour of taking a transmitting set such as was taken twice previously, which entails an additional £1000 cost, means another mouth to feed, and adds journalism to the unhappy leader's duties. A small portable receiving set might be useful for amusing the party, or failing them the Tibetans, but how it would have helped us to climb the mountain this year is not very clear. Supposing we had heard a few days before May 5 that a disturbance was approaching, we should not have altered our plan of making our attempt at the end of May because at the time no attempt was possible. Had we been told that from May 5 onwards monsoon conditions would prevail, we should have been well informed, but unfortunately unable to do anything about it.

The 'closed' type oxygen apparatus from which some expected so much was a failure. Its weight, complexity, and the necessity for a mask are against it. In theory it was to have the effect of reducing the climber to sea-level conditions, or rather better, so that had it answered expectations the climbing of the mountain would hardly have been worth the fuss that would undoubtedly have been made. The oxygen enthusiast hopes to abolish fatigue, breathlessness, cold, the numbing mental and physical effects of high altitudes—those things, in fact, which the mountaineer delights to struggle against and which together make the climbing of Everest such a formidable task; but at the same time he considers the climbing of the mountain with these handicaps removed as meritorious as the climbing of it under natural conditions. To my mind there would be no finality about a successful oxygen climb, it would only inspire a wish to do it without. Would the Alpine Club recognize such a climb? Would it matter a hoot, reply the gas brigade, if it did not? They refuse to see any difference between using nailed boots, warm clothing, snow glasses and (*horribile dictu*) sleeping draughts, and the use



Expedition Photo.]

CAMP 5 (25,800 FT.), WITH VIEW ACROSS E. RONGBUK GLACIER TO N.E.

[To face p. 16.



Expedition Photo.]

LOOKING WEST FROM CAMP 4.

of oxygen. If the stuff could be taken as pills, they say, then you would use it quick enough. Perhaps we should ; pills, at any rate, one hopes, would not weigh 25 lb., but in my opinion it would be a confession of defeat. Meantime, until the pills are forthcoming, let us continue being illogical. We are an illogical people, and mountaineering is an illogical amusement which most are content to have as it is. To put the matter on the lowest possible moral grounds, I am not convinced on this year's showing that the advantages conferred by using oxygen outweigh the ethical objections to its use.

No doubt the weather is the all-important factor ; for success, conditions on the last 2000 ft. must be perfect, but only second in importance to the weather is the attitude of the Tibetan authorities. Had the mountain been in British territory I venture to think it would have been climbed before now, but under the present system of attempts at infrequent intervals one begins to doubt if it ever will be.