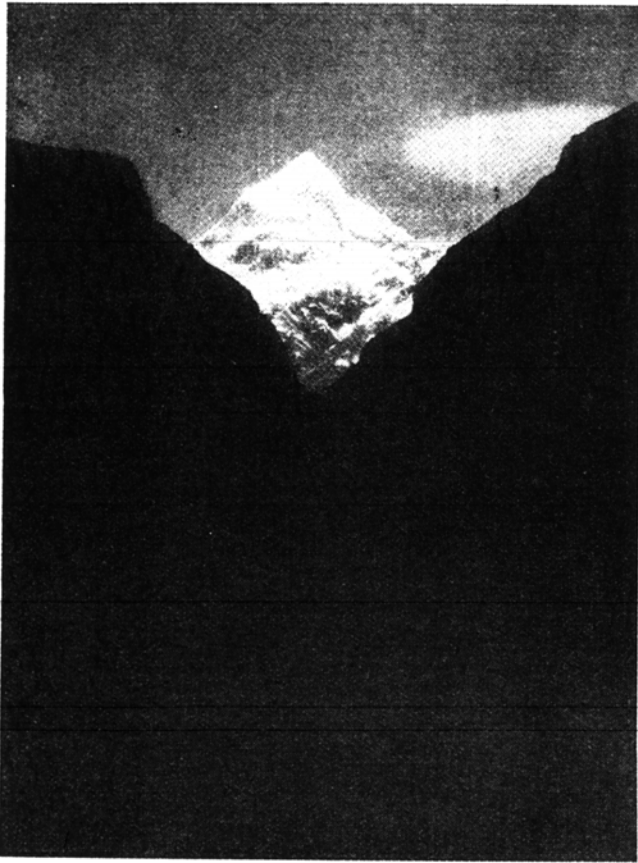


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An Himalayan Peak by moonlight

THE peak of Kamet, in the central Himalaya, is 25,447 feet high, a vast and terrible pyramid of ice and snow which had never been trodden by man until the evening of June 21, 1931, when three Englishmen, gasping for oxygen, pushed forward a Darjeeling porter to the summit, urging him to be the first to set foot there—"it was the least compliment we could pay to the work of those splendid men—our porters, to whom we owed the success of the expedition."

The following day, as though to fling defiance at Kamet, two Englishmen and a porter named Kesar Singh made a second ascent, Kesar Singh having performed the astounding feat of climbing from 20,600 feet to the summit in two days without pausing for acclimatisation. The whole expedition must have gained a rich pleasure from the thought of this second ascent.

The party had worked their way up from the foothills through the early summer, a party of six Englishmen, some Darjeeling and other porters, and a native cook named Achung, who by his appalling culinary performances threatened from time to time to ruin the whole enterprise.

The objects of the party were to conquer Kamet and thus ascend higher on earth than man had ever ascended before, and to explore the sources of the Ganges. They succeeded not only in doing both these things—and one triumphantly—but in bringing back valuable data for future Himalayan expeditions, such as reports on weather, acclimatisation, food, portage, a fascinating account of the native flora, and some account and a map of the intricate and unknown region above the sources of the Ganges.

From first to last they enjoyed the most extraordinary luck. Beyond the minor stomach ailments caused by the

oxygen, the slope sheer above them like a wall of ice. The slightest slip would have been disaster, but their luck persisted, they gained the summit ridge and sat there briefly to survey the world.

"One's eye passed almost contemptuously over mighty range upon mighty range to seek repose in the violet hazes of illimitable horizons. Even the turreted thunder clouds, sun-crested above, purple-shadowed below, could not attain to our level. The breeze fanning us was deathly cold, the silence and sense of isolation terrible. There were no green valleys; all about us were peaks of black rock and glaring ice and snow, frozen outposts of the infinite."

From this passage one may gather some idea not only of the quality of Mr. Smythe and his companions as mountaineers but some notion of Mr. Smythe's own qualities as a writer. It is curious that the pedestrian writer should feel it necessary to break out from time to time into the purple passage, the moving scene, the sunset peroration.

Mr. Smythe is a pedestrian writer, honest, plodding, unable to detect himself in the act of writing a cliché or an unnecessary phrase, and his weakness for the purple passage is evident, if not on every page, certainly more than once in every chapter.

Much of his writing is superfluous luxury—but one ought not, perhaps, to expect too much simplicity and self-denial from a man who considers it necessary to take "various delicacies, such as *pâté de fois gras*, tinned cod roe, etc.," on an expedition to the world's highest mountains. Mr. Smythe might also have restrained himself from expressing his views on the Indian question. What he has to say on that complex problem is neither very illuminating nor profound.

Mr. Smythe's achievements as a mountaineer cannot be overestimated;

HIGHEST CLIMBED BY MAN

H. E. Bates *reviews F. S. Smythe's "Kamet Conquered"*
(Gollancz, 16s.)

constant changes of elevation, an occasional loss of baggage, a dispute among the porters, some frost-bite and a broken rib to Smythe, they went from the foothills to the last bleak and terrible inch of Kamet without hindrance or misfortune.

Not that they ascended with the comfort and pleasure of men walking before breakfast up a Derbyshire peak: the whole ascent was hazardous and the last 5,000 feet dangerous and pitiless.

During the final stages of ascent they climbed at only 100 feet per hour, gasping desperately and pausing every second or two for

he is, by his achievement on Kamet alone, entitled to be called a great explorer; but the great explorer and the great writer do not often go together. The best that may be said of *Kamet Conquered* is that it is readable.

To future expeditions in the Himalayas it may very well, however, be invaluable, since various members of the expedition have written appendices on weather, food, equipment, photography and the medical aspect of high climbing. There is also a charming chapter on Himalayan flora.

Unfortunately Holdsworth, the botanist of the party, brought back no new species, and even his known rare species perished, so that he has given us nothing of Himalayan flowers except a charming chapter on them. He excuses himself gracefully—but when next he accompanies an Himalayan expedition he would do well to remember that perhaps more of his fellow men will thank him for bringing back an unknown primula than for climbing the most difficult unknown peak. More than that, he may have the satisfaction of giving his name to a flower—most charming fame!

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