

BOOK REVIEWS



The Naked Mountain, by Elizabeth Knowlton. vii + 355 pages, 34 illustrations, diagrams and index. New York and London. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1933. Price \$5.00.

This book, devoted to the assault on Nanga Parbat (26,620 ft.) by the German-American expedition of 1932, breaks new ground in the field of mountaineering chronicles. Discarding the methodical narration of facts and events that has been hallowed by tradition, the authoress adopts a subjective treatment which delineates the fortunes of the expedition from the standpoint of the collective morale and emotional reactions of the participants. This innovation we welcome and commend. It enables the reader to absorb the spirit and atmosphere of a big Himalayan expedition quickly and effectively. And he gains a good insight into the epic psychology which impels puny man to pit himself against these gigantic manifestations of nature—a matter that only a gifted talent for the pen can make at all comprehensible to the layman.

But the method is not without its drawbacks. At some points we are conscious of a certain vagueness regarding the whereabouts of the party on the mountain; and at others the narrative loses in force and detail when filtered through another's personality. A more regrettable defect is the rather casual handling, or complete omission, of figures of elevation for camps and other points attained. Seven such camps were occupied on the mountain, ranging from 10,000 ft. at the base camp to 23,000 ft. for Camp VII, but we did not notice elevations for Camps III, V and VI, and IV was given variously as "over 19,000" and "almost 20,000." But perhaps this is due to the disclaimer of scientific aims: "No, we shall *not* survey, or map or geologize or study climate or plant life" (p. 16). The expedition was solely a sporting proposition and it was felt that mountaineering justifies itself without more. To this dictum we cannot subscribe unreservedly. We feel that much of the richness of mountaineering appeal would be sacrificed were it to be generally adopted, and we deem it an agreeable inconsistency that the authoress saw fit to include valuable appen-

dices on geology, weather, diet, equipment, etc., which we would not willingly have missed.

There were seven in the climbing party, one of whom—Rand Herron—was an American. Miss Knowlton, the other American, “had been brought in at the last moment to handle the English-speaking newspaper work” as well as “all sorts of other jobs.” Possessing considerable mountaineering experience, she spent over a month in the high camps on Nanga Parbat, though not actually attempting the peak. One wonders whether a typewriter altitude record was not made on this occasion, for its use is hinted at in Camp IV at “almost 20,000 ft.”?

As the expedition has been the subject of two articles in the *Journal* (Vol. II, pp. 18, 32) we omit reference here to its vicissitudes and accomplishments. The book is charmingly written and contains many finely drawn descriptions of native life and scenery. The format is most attractive and the illustrations are capital—although we would have welcomed more of them—especially in a volume selling at this price. “Naked Mountain” is unquestionably the best book on Himalayan climbing written by an American since the war and deserves a place on the shelves of every mountaineer.

H. P.

Mont Blanc Sideshow, The Life and Times of Albert Smith, by J. Monroe Thorington. 8 vo., 255 pages including appendices, bibliography and index, containing twenty-nine illustrations. Philadelphia. The John C. Winston Co., 1934. Price \$2.50.

The author has written a biography of Albert Smith, set in the society and time in which he lived. The research evidenced, the picturesque flow of the narrative and the reproduction of interesting old prints leaves the reader feeling himself in the “Roar of the Crowd.”

The short outline of Smith’s life in the Foreword is an admirable “prologue to the omen coming on,” while the opening chapter contains the charming story of the childhood of “the boy who never grew up,” enthralled by dreams of romantic adventure and particularly by that vision which became the keynote of his life—the Great White Mountain.

The hero’s connection with Punch, his relations with Leech, Jerrold, Dickens, Trollope, Thackeray, P. T. Barnum and others