

BOOK REVIEWS



Five Miles High: The Story of an Attack on the Second Highest Mountain in the World, by Members of the First American Karakoram Expedition. Edited by Robert H. Bates. 8 vo.; xii + 381, with 38 illustrations from photos, 1 chart and 2 maps. New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1939. Price \$4.00.

There is scarcely a single mountaineer or climbing enthusiast who has not marveled at the beauty of Vittorio Sella's Himalayan photographs. One of the most impressive of these pictures is his superb study of the E. face of K2, second highest mountain in the world, seen across the deep gorge of the Godwin-Austen Glacier.

When, in the spring of 1938, the first American Karakoram Expedition sailed for India and announced this peak as its objective, experienced alpinists the world over shook their heads in knowing disapproval. Any mountain declared impregnable by the Duke of Abruzzi and his seasoned guides was no fit place for a party of youthful Americans to test their mettle. *Five Miles High* is the story of this assault on the 28,250-ft. monarch of the Karakoram Himalaya. It is a clear, brilliant account of one of the greatest assaults in the annals of mountaineering. Its sheer simplicity of description, which in places borders on understatement, carries the reader from the trials of the initial food-tasting in New York to the struggle for the last icy pyramid of K2 in far-off India.

The various chapters of the book have been written by four different members of the expedition, each tackling the part of the tale which he is best qualified to describe. The straightforward, informal style of all four authors has made the book interesting and easy reading. Robert H. Bates has not only written five engrossing chapters, but he has also done a most able job as editor of the entire volume. Its literary and dramatic peak is unquestionably reached in the closing pages of Charles Houston's chapter "Five Miles High"—I feel it unfortunate that the last two chapters could not have been used as additional material to supplement the already unusually complete and interesting appendices.

It is truly refreshing to read a book on Himalayan adventure the greater part of which has not been devoted to a lengthy and verbose account of the approach to the mountains. This is a pleasant sur-

prise, especially when one recalls that K2 is one of the most remote peaks in the entire Himalaya, being situated a good deal more than twice as far from civilization as Mount Everest. In his treatment of these early chapters Bates has used a light, jovial style, bubbling over with enthusiasm for the fascinating country on the long route to the Karakoram.

Especially to the mountaineer, the description of the actual reconnaissance and assault on K2 is intensely absorbing. This is the first account ever published of an expedition which has encountered difficult rock climbing at excessive altitudes. With a coolness and determination that can easily be read between the lines of *Five Miles High*, Houston's party reconnoitered K2, and finally attacked it by a route so difficult that the guides of the Duke of Abruzzi did not feel it even worth consideration thirty years ago.

In order to effect the epic ascent of this Abruzzi buttress, seven camps were placed on ledges and snowdrifts even an alpine chough would have found it difficult to alight upon. Living for twenty-three days above 16,000 ft. on the face of K2, sleeping in the tiny tents secured in place by pitons and rickety foundations of loose rock, the four members of the climbing party succeeded in overcoming a series of climbing obstacles, many of which would be considered exceedingly difficult even at lower altitudes.

An unavoidable shortage of food and waning good weather, on account of the length of a careful reconnaissance, were the only two factors which kept this courageous group from reaching the actual summit of K2. The resourcefulness and wisdom of Houston and his comrades are constantly apparent as one turns the pages of *Five Miles High*. It is a splendid account of a magnificent adventure.

B. W.

A Climber's Guide to the Rocky Mountains of Canada, by Howard Palmer and J. Monroe Thorington. Third edition. 12 mo.; xviii + 275 pages. New York: The American Alpine Club, 1940. Price \$3.00 (\$2.50 to A. A. C. members).

The third edition of this handbook of mountaineering in the Canadian Rockies, which has proved its worth during the twenty years since it first appeared, is the authors' final endeavor to correct and amplify the work already recorded, their personal observation form-