

Book Reviews

K2—The Savage Mountain, by Charles S. Houston, M.D., Robert H. Bates, and members of the Third American Karakorum Expedition. 334 pages, 27 photographs, with map and line drawings by Clarence Doore. 7 appendices. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1954. Price, \$6.00.

This book is the well written story of the third American attack on the second highest mountain in the world. Although the party did not reach their goal, which has since been attained by the Italians under Professor Desio, the story of human courage and endurance recorded in these pages will undoubtedly become one of the classics of Himalayan climbing. Together with Paul Bauer's account of the retreat down the northwest ridge of Kanchenjunga in 1931, this record of "overcoming almost impossible problems of survival will continue to give strength and encouragement to mountaineers in perils on the high peaks," to quote from the preface by William P. House.

The first hundred pages describe the careful preparation for the assault, the journey to India, and the march to Base Camp. Following this, the story unfolds until eight men are assembled at Camp VIII (25,500 ft.), ready for the final assault. At this point misfortune strikes, turning the attempt on the mountain into a bitter life-death struggle for sheer survival. A ten-day blizzard sweeps over the mountain, in the middle of which Art Gilkey develops the comparatively rare disease—thrombophlebitis—serious even at sea level. By August 10th Gilkey's condition is so desperate that evacuation is ordered, despite the continuing storm and avalanche danger. Dehydrated from days of storm that almost prevented use of the stoves for melting snow for drinking purposes, blinded by the buffeting wind, the party nevertheless

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attempts to lower Gilkey down a ridge that is safe from avalanches but away from the route they had used on the ascent. Having no choice in the matter, they plunge almost blindly down the steepening ridge, belaying Gilkey on an improvised litter as they go. Almost inevitably under the circumstances, one man slipped and soon five others are pulled from their footholds and begin to slide down the mountainside.

That all but one of these men are alive and well today can only be regarded as miraculous. A clear description is given, supported by a diagram, of the now famous accident in which three separate ropes somehow became entangled with that belaying Gilkey's litter. How Schoening could hold the weight of six climbers under these conditions is difficult to understand, but he did succeed in doing so. The 7/16-inch rope stretched until it looked like a 1/4-inch line. How seven men collected themselves after the accident, treated their injured, and made camp in the continuing blizzard is told in unemotional detail that is all the more effective for its restraint. Nowhere is it explicitly stated that without the avalanche which carried Gilkey away shortly after the accident, none of them would be alive today.

Viewed in retrospect, several points are interesting to consider. The gradual deterioration of the party during their week at 25,500 feet (the height of the summit of Nanda Devi!) undoubtedly contributed to the desperate conditions of the forced descent. The partial failure of the stoves to function adequately under these admittedly extreme conditions indicates a need for further developmental work on their design. These and other technical problems are thoroughly discussed in seven appendixes by various members of the expedition. The crucial problem of the expedition, however, lay in the incapacitation of a member at extreme altitude, where evacuation was almost impossible and then only at the risk of the loss of the entire party. Indeed they would have perished here except for the providential tangling of the ropes and the subsequent avalanche that made further evacuation unnecessary.

This problem is one that future expeditions may well study carefully. No easy solution is available; each individual happening must be considered in the light of the circumstances then prevailing. Certainly the problem is not unique to climbing, for it

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arises from time to time in all dangerous undertakings, whether in peace or war, and one might almost say that the weather is always at its worst when such a problem is at hand.

W. FARNSWORTH LOOMIS

K2 Troisieme expedition americaine au Karakorum. Charles S. Houston, M.D., Robert H. Bates and George I. Bell. 100 pages, including 70 full-page photographs, 10 in color and a 20-page resumé by Charles S. Houston, M.D. Paris: Arthaud 1954.

This paper-bound volume recounts the story of the 1954 expedition to K2 in a brief but moving resumé in French by Charles S. Houston, followed by a dramatic series of photographs by all members of the expedition. The accident and descent are illustrated by one sketch and one photograph taken at Camp VII.

W. F. L.

Nanga Parbat 1953, by Dr. Karl M. Herrligkoffer. 192 pages, with 78 black-and-white photographs, 9 colored photographs, maps and plans. München: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1954. Price, D. M. 16.80.

Nanga Parbat, by Karl M. Herrligkoffer, translated from the German and with additional material by Eleanor Brockett and Anton Ehrenzweig. With a foreword by Brig. Sir John Hunt. 260 pages, with 56 photographs and 6 maps. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954. Price, \$5.00. English Edition: 254 pages, with 67 black and white photographs, 9 colored photographs, maps and plans. London: Elek Books Ltd., 1954. Price 21/—.

Im Banne des Nanga Parbat. 80 pages of photographs, with foreword by Dr. Karl M. Herrligkoffer. München: J. F. Lehmanns Verlag, 1953. Price, D. M. 7.50.

Das Buch von Nanga Parbat: Die Geschichte seiner Besteigung 1895-1953, by G. O. Dyhrenfurth. 197 pages, with 133 photographs, 2 maps. München: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1954. Price, D. M. 6.80.

The ascent of Nanga Parbat, July 3, 1953, was given comparatively few headlines in the world news. In spite of its being the highest mountain ever climbed and most frequently attempted,