

tory by means of lively sketches. He has a great sense of humor and real love of humanity; his descriptions of dropping bundles of hay for starving chamois and other animals during the severe winters show him a true friend of animals, and some of his rescue work makes very exciting reading. Here is a real personality; a man who has created his own life work and who loves every aspect of it. The book will appeal not only to flyers and mountaineers, but to anyone who loves adventure.

URSULA CORNING

Abode of Snow. A History of Himalayan Exploration and Mountaineering, by Kenneth Mason. 372 pages; illustrations and diagrams. London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1955. Price, 25 shillings. New York: E. P. Dutton Co., 1955. Price \$6.50.

No one is better qualified to write a history of Himalayan exploration and mountaineering than Kenneth Mason. For more than forty years he has had intimate, on-the-spot knowledge of the range, its inhabitants, and its explorers. He was a member of the Survey of India as far back as 1909 and throughout many years conducted surveying expeditions in the remote areas; he was one of the founders of the Himalayan Club and the first editor of *The Himalayan Journal*; he has known practically every climber of Himalayan peaks in this century; finally, he has held the distinguished position of Professor of Geography at Oxford University. Much is to be expected of such an author, and an abundance has been given. Professor Mason's book immediately takes its place as the unrivalled authority in this field.

History and geography are admirably combined to present a comprehensible background against which one may place the almost overwhelming flood of accounts of recent climbs of the great peaks and the complicated journeys through gorges and across passes. At the very beginning Professor Mason breaks down for us the vast chain into its principal districts. He presents a diagram of the entire area, followed by individual sketch maps of the sections: Punjab, Karakoram, Kumaun, Nepal, Sikkim, and Assam. The main body of the book consists of five historical parts in which the principal explorations and climbs of each era are described. For instance, in Part V (1929-1939), we find: Kangchenjunga 1929, 1930, 1931; Kamet and Nanda Devi; Everest 1933-1938; Nanga Parbat 1932, 1934; Nanga Parbat 1937, 1938, 1939; Karakoram Exploration: Gasherbrum, Masherbrum, and Rakaposhi; K2; Kumaun Himalaya; Sikkim and Assam Himalaya; a summary of the inter-war period. These accounts

are not merely abbreviations of the original narratives, but woven in are critical analyses and expressions of opinion. As an example, in writing of the 1934 Nanga Parbat expedition, Professor Mason says: "So ended this attempt—in the greatest mountain disaster of our time. It is easy to look back and criticize. But it must be realized how little was known about the rapid deterioration of strength above 23,000 feet, especially under storm conditions . . . But there was also great heroism. Climbers and porters alike freely gave of their lives for one another." Of the 1938 K2 expedition he remarks: "Gambling on fine weather they could have gone higher and might just possibly have reached the summit, but they would never have returned and they wisely withdrew . . . Houston's decision . . . was wise. A great mountaineer, he knew when to turn back." But there is not always praise. By way of contrast we quote from the account of the K2 expedition of the following year: "(The leader) now made the fatal and almost inconceivable decision to go on, regardless of the consequences. . . . It is difficult to record in temperate language the folly of this enterprise. . . . Each day added to the errors of judgment. The weather was never to blame. The one redeeming feature was the heroism of (the Sherpas)." Almost every episode is summed up with similar discerning and often pungent remarks.

Among the many features of the book that make it indispensable to anyone, whether climber or reader, interested in the Himalaya are the appendices in which are to be found a table of the great peaks, showing their position, altitude, and the system, section, and group to which they belong; comments on the determination of Himalayan heights; a chronological summary, with references to pages in the text of the book; and a short bibliography.

In London last December I asked Professor Mason about the pronunciation of the name *Himalaya*. "Don't try to conform to someone's theory of its derivation," he said, "just use *Him-a-lay-a*."

FRANCIS P. FARQUHAR

Ascent of K2. By Prof. Ardito Desio. Translated by David Moore. 239 pages, 57 illustrations, 3 maps in text. London: Elek Books. Printed in Holland, 1955. Price 21 s.

The most massive assault on any major peak in the history of mountaineering, hindered by worse than average weather, barely succeeded in putting two men on the summit of K2 late in the afternoon of July 31, 1954.

The English translation of this readable book is adequately illustrated. There are brief appendices at the end, a diary covering the period of organ-