

movement and urgency runs throughout the book. Even while he enlivens the narrative with sprightly episodes and vivid touches of scenery, and with quick characterizations of the climbers and Sherpas, he always keeps the story moving.

While *Coronation Everest* presents us with a lively review of the whole Everest story, it is not for that alone that we find it an indispensable addition to the saga. Its main theme, after all, is the method by which the news of the spectacular success was sped to London by an almost incredible combination of ingenious planning, cunning contrivance, bold execution—and a seasoning of good luck. The correspondents of other papers, Indian as well as British, were striving and scheming to be the first to get the news. And when at last it came—by radio from Namche Bazar to Katmandu—the correspondents to a man fell for Morris' despatch: *Snow conditions bad stop advanced base abandoned yesterday stop awaiting improvement*. Decoded, this message reached England on the eve of the Coronation as: "Summit of Everest reached on May 29 by Hillary and Tenzing."

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Clarence King: A Biography, by Thurman Wilkins. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1958. ix, 441 pages; ill. Price \$7.50.

Clarence King was one of the pioneers of American mountaineering, and as such deserves a proper place in our annals. He climbed not one, but a number of peaks at a time when the mountains of Western United States were practically unknown. Some of them were pretty good ascents, too, especially when judged by the standards of the times—Brewer, Tyndall, the false Whitney (now Mount Langley and an easy walkup), the true Whitney (after certain "fishermen" had made the first ascent and shown up King's error), Mount Clark (above Yosemite), and Shasta. He also climbed in the Uintas of Utah. He was an honorary member of the Appalachian Mountain Club and of the Sierra Club, and might well have been a member of the A.A.C. had it been established earlier. There can be no doubt of his ability and of his remarkable endurance in rough country. But unhappily the very book, *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada*, that made him famous has also impaired his reputation as a good mountaineer. By his own testimony he seems to have been a genius at finding the worst routes and his failures on certain climbs that we now consider easy are hard to account for. However, there is a great deal more to Clarence King than appears in his writings. For a proper evaluation one needs to examine the circumstances of his activities and the qualities that made him one of the most remarkable men of his day. It is not to be overlooked that King was

only thirty years old when *Mountaineering* was published and only forty when he was selected, ahead of some very distinguished scientists, to be the first Director of the newly formed United States Geological Survey.

From time to time a number of people have set out to write a biography of Clarence King, only to be discouraged by the unexpected scarcity of material for certain critical periods as well as by the undeniable fading away of the qualities of distinction and greatness that were so apparent in the earlier years. Thurman Wilkins has succeeded in overcoming these handicaps to a remarkable degree. There is abundant evidence of indefatigable search, and what Wilkins has failed to find is not likely to be discovered by anyone else. King's early days and his experiences in the western mountains are adequately presented and the period of his geological surveys is covered with great clarity. But it is in the period of King's decline that the author has been most successful. It is a period that interests us least as mountaineers, but it is necessary to pursue it if we wish to know the man, for it reflects back to some of the incidents in *Mountaineering*. It would not be worth while to follow a shining hero into the mists and shadows of disintegration had not King been such an extraordinary man. But one cannot read the whole book without realizing that we are dealing with a truly tragic hero, in the sense of Aristotle's definition: "One highly renowned and prosperous, whose misfortune is brought upon him by some error of judgment or frailty."

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