

MOUNT EVEREST 1938

H. W. TILMAN



Looking westward from Camp V (25,600 ft.): (Pumori prominent in middle distance). Early onset of monsoon clouds. Panoramic with photo on p124.

MOUNT EVEREST 1938

H. W. TILMAN



TILMAN

First published 1948 by Cambridge University Press
This edition published 2016 by Tilman Books
www.tilmanbooks.com
a joint venture by
Lodestar Books www.lodestarbooks.com
and Vertebrate Publishing www.v-publishing.co.uk

Original text copyright © Simon Heyworth Davis 1964
Additional material copyright © the contributors 2016

Cover design by Jane Beagley
Vertebrate Graphics Ltd. www.v-graphics.co.uk

Lodestar Books has asserted their right
to be identified as the Editor of this Work

Series editor Dick Wynne
Series researcher Bob Comlay

The publisher has made reasonable effort to locate
the holders of copyright in the illustrations in this book,
and will be pleased to hear from them regarding
correct attribution in future editions

All rights reserved

A CIP catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-909461-26-0

Typeset in Baskerville from Storm Type Foundry
Printed and bound by Pulsio, Bulgaria
All papers used by Tilman Books are sourced responsibly

Contents

	Foreword – <i>Steve Bell</i>	9
	Preface	13
I	Introductory	15
II	Preparations at Home	28
III	Preparations in India and Departure	41
IV	The March to Rongbuk	54
V	On the Glacier	74
VI	Retreat and Advance	89
VII	Advance and Retreat	104
VIII	The Western Approach and Defeat	115
IX	Attempt to Reach Summit Ridge	134
X	Last Days and Reflections	144
	Discussion	166
	Anthropology or Zoology, with particular reference to ‘The Abominable Snowman’	180
	Use of Oxygen on the Mount Everest Expedition, 1938	194
	Geological and Some Other Observations in the Mount Everest Region	200

Photographs

Looking westward from Camp V	2
Upper Sikkim: Early snow	49
Gayokang: Last halt on Sikkim border	52
On trek to Sebu La: Kangchenjau in background	52
The fortress of Kampa Dzong	59
Kampa Dzong: Gyangkar Range in distance	60
Collecting yaks for the day's march	63
Ploughing in Tibet	63
Natural warm spring near Jikyop	64
The route to Shekar Dzong	67
View of plains from battlements of Shekar Dzong castle	67
The approach to Shekar Dzong	69
The Gompa of Shekar Dzong	70
Transport negotiations at Shekar Dzong	72
Outer courtyard of Rongbuk Gompa	72
The Holy Lama of Rongbuk Gompa	75
The Base Camp in Rongbuk Valley	75
The party	77
Angtharkay and a younger brother	77
En route from Base Camp to Camp I	78
Eric Shipton near Camp I	81
Alpine choughs on a glacier table	81
Eastern descent from Lhakpa La	92
Amid the pinnacles of the East Rongbuk glacier	92
Khartaphu from the Kharta glacier	94
Everest from the Lhakpa La	96
The Kharta valley	98
Rest camp in Kharta valley	98
Negotiating the descent from Lhakpa La	101
Gorge of the Arun river	101
The Chorten on the track over the Doya La	102
Approach to eastern face of North Col	105
The western face of the North Col	116
The Camp on North Col	118
Chang Tze and North Col from Camp V	118
The Traverse and final climb to North Col	119
The climb to Camp V	119
Cho Oyu and West Rongbuk glacier from Camp V	123

Looking east from Camp V	124
Looking eastward from near Camp VI	125
Sherpas on the north ridge of Everest	127
Sherpas on the north ridge of Everest	127
Camp VI	128
Camp VI, and peak of Everest	131
F. S. Smythe at highest point in 1938	132
The Tigers of 1938	146
Assisting Pasang to Camp IV	146
Pinnacles of Rongbuk glacier, 1938	209
Sun-blade structures, Kharta Valley, Tibet	209

Maps

1	The route to Rongbuk	55
2	Mount Everest: The northern approaches	56

Figures

1	Section through Mount Everest and Chobuk	204
2	Section through Mount Everest and Makalu	205

Still, I think the immense act has something about it human and excusable; and when I endeavour to analyse the reason of this feeling I find it to lie, not in the fact that the thing was big or bold or successful, but in the fact that the thing was perfectly useless to everybody, including the person who did it.

G. K. CHESTERTON

Foreword

Steve Bell

STILL REELING FROM THE GREAT WAR, the world in 1938 was blindly rushing into another awful conflict. The fervour of nationalism reached into unlikely corners, fuelling the dream of conquest in whatever form it could find. During this dark period sandwiched between the bloodiest conflicts in human history, mountaineering was one of those corners. While the British obsessed on Everest, the Germans eyed Nanga Parbat; and, to Hitler's delight, four of his *master-race* 'conquered' the North Face of the Eiger.

The 1938 expedition was to be the last of the pre-war Everest expeditions. Thus far the mountain had thwarted all attempts to climb it. Previous expeditions (1922, 1924, 1933 and 1936, all British) had involved large cumbersome teams with a military style of leadership. They'd failed, so for 1938 a different tactic was employed.

Bill Tilman was selected by the Mount Everest Committee to lead Britain's fifth expedition. He was a hard man in a harder world, a veteran of the Battle of the Somme where 57,000 young Britons perished on its first day; over the following months, a million more were to follow. After the war, Tilman sought adventure in other theatres. By the time he sat down to write about the 1938 expedition, he'd fought in another long and terrible war.

Climbing a mountain, even one as high as Everest, would have been a picnic compared to what he and his comrades experienced in battle. 'We should not forget that mountaineering, even on Everest, is not war but a form of amusement whose saner devotees are not willing to be killed rather than accept defeat.' The enemy—avalanches and crevasses, cold and storms, sickness and thieves—would have seemed a relatively benign foe to them, yet the hardships they faced would make most modern climbers choke on their energy gels. Despite not reaching

the summit, what they and the other pre-war climbers achieved leaves the present day Everest summiteer wanting.

Yet in other ways there are surprising similarities to the modern era. Tilman's observations and opinions on the media, publicity and diet apply equally today. But most striking is his adherence to the concept of light weight, low cost expeditions. He and his companion Eric Shipton were the original exponents of the light weight, low impact ideal that has been so readily embraced in the modern mountaineering ethic. With similar prescience, Tilman decries the notion of mountain tourism:

'... these protests have been written in the hope that promoters of Himalayan expeditions will think twice about the use of innovations designed to soften the rigours of the game or lessen the supremacy of the mountains. Of the many strange tricks that man plays before high heaven that would be one of the strangest, one which if it did not make angels weep would strike moralists dumb, if our efforts to subdue the mightiest range and the highest mountain of all should be the means of losing us our mountain heritage.'

As the leader of Britain's first commercially guided ascent of Everest (1993), I have to admit that Tilman's sentiments sit uneasily with my conscience. But the world is now a very different place to what it was between the great wars of the twentieth century, and Everest has changed too. Although its unclimbed lines still present great challenges, its formerly unreachable summit has become a destination for high altitude tourists.

Tilman and his contemporaries will forever be part of our mountain heritage. The lessons they learned set the stage for the first ascent of Everest, which blazed the trail that so many now follow. It is perhaps a kindness that the taciturn and ascetic Bill Tilman is no longer here to see the circus that Everest has become; his angels might weep indeed. But we must remember that whatever the future holds for the world's highest mountain, it will never diminish the mighty endeavours of its earliest explorers. We are fortunate that they included gifted writers and chroniclers, who provide us with a precious glimpse of Everest when its summit was still untrodden.

Bill Tilman was reputed to be a reserved man of few words. In this book, his words spill onto the page like a stream that flows from the heart of a glacier. For anyone with the vaguest interest in Everest and exploration, it is wonderfully invigorating.

Steve Bell
March 2016

Preface

THIS ACCOUNT OF THE 1938 MOUNT EVEREST EXPEDITION is published with the consent of and on behalf of the Mount Everest Committee, but for the views herein expressed the author alone is responsible. Some questionable publicity recently given to new methods to be applied to the problem of Mount Everest points to the need for the plea which is made here for sanity and a sense of proportion.

The plates are from photos taken by members of the party. I have not attributed them individually, but the majority, and certainly those of outstanding merit, may be safely regarded as those of Mr F. S. Smythe.

I have to thank Dr T. G. Longstaff (President of the Alpine Club) and Dr R. J. Perring of Ryton for reading and criticizing the first draft and R. T. Sneyd, Esq. for correcting the proofs. The maps are copies of those published in the first place by the Royal Geographical Society.

H.W.T.

Wallasey

February 1947

INTRODUCTORY

The sight of a horse makes the wayfarer lame.

BENGALI PROVERB

THE LAST BOOK WRITTEN about Mount Everest by Mr Ruttledge, the leader of the 1933 and 1936 expeditions, was aptly named *The Unfinished Adventure*. This present account should be read merely as yet another chapter in this adventure story, possibly one of those duller chapters from which even the best of adventure stories are not always free. In the twenty-five years which have elapsed since the first expedition went out the story has lost the gloss of novelty. The approach march and the establishing of camps have become almost a matter of routine which with luck and judgement should be devoid of incident. Misfortunes and hair-breadth escapes, suffering and hardship, are the making of an adventure story, but from all such a well-found expedition blessed with a fair share of luck should be exempt. Here I have no hardships to bemoan, no disasters to recount, and no tragedies to regret.

Some day, no doubt, someone will have the enviable task of adding the last chapter, in which the mountain is climbed, and writing 'Finis'. That book, we may hope, will be the last about Mount Everest, for we already have five official accounts, besides a few unofficial, and no one can tell how many more will be written before the epic is complete. Apart from reasons of continuity in the record of this unfinished adventure, the story of the fifth abortive attempt to climb the mountain is only worth relating because a fairly drastic change was made in the methods used. That is to say we broke away from the traditional grand scale upon which all previous expeditions had been organized, and to that extent the story has novelty. But we made no change in the route taken or the tactics employed on the mountain, which are the outcome of the judgement and hard-won experience of some of the

best mountaineers of recent times, whose achievements are a guide and an inspiration to all who follow where they led.

It is difficult to measure that margin in terms of additional effort (it may be greater than we think), but in view of the apparently narrow margin by which two of the earlier expeditions failed, it may seem presumptuous to imagine that any change of organization should be needed. So before recounting our experiences of 1938 I feel it is due to those who sponsored the expedition, the friends who backed it, and to the many mountaineers interested who may sympathize with some of the views here expressed, to attempt some explanation. The expeditions of 1924 and 1933 seemed to come so near to success that few if any thought of questioning the soundness of the methods employed, at least for the getting of someone to the top of the mountain; for long before then mountaineers had begun to dislike the excessive publicity which was a direct consequence of the scale of the expeditions and the large amount of money needed to pay for them. But after 1933 criticism began to be heard—Mr E. E. Shipton was possibly one of the first to doubt that in mountaineering the great and the good are necessarily the same—and the unfortunate experiences of 1936 when, through no fault of those concerned, but little was accomplished, had the salutary effect of rousing doubts in others. What had happened once might happen again. For financial reasons, if for no others, it seemed the time had come to give less expensive methods a trial.

Although our expedition of 1938 was the seventh to visit the mountain it was only the fifth to attempt the ascent. The first, and in many ways the most interesting, expedition was the reconnaissance of 1921 during which, of course, no attempt was made on the summit. Until 1921 no European had been within ninety miles of the mountain and the first party had to find the best approach and then a likely route to the top. Both these difficult tasks and much additional work were successfully accomplished at a cost of about £5000—a figure which is not unreasonable considering the complete lack of previous experience, the time spent in the field, and the amount and importance of the work done. But the first attempt on the summit which took place the following year cost more than twice as much, and set standards in numbers, equipment, and cost, which until 1938 were equalled or even exceeded by all subsequent expeditions excluding only that

most interesting and significant expedition of 1935 which was again a reconnaissance.

Late in 1934 the Tibetan Government unexpectedly announced that they would allow us to send an expedition in each of the following years, 1935 and 1936. Time was short, for in those days the gestation period for a full-blown expedition was, suitably enough, like that of a whale or an elephant, about two years; but so that the benefit of the surprising gift of the extra year should not be lost, Mr Shipton was hastily appointed to organize and lead a small, light expedition in 1935. Their main task was to try out new men and equipment for the full-scale attempt the following year; other tasks were the examining of snow conditions on the mountain during the monsoon and the survey of glaciers north and east of the mountain. At a cost of only £1500 a large area of country and the North Face of the mountain were surveyed, and twenty-six peaks of over 20,000 ft. were climbed. In the course of these operations the North Col (Camp IV) was occupied, and it became plain that, had conditions warranted and had a few more tents been available, then a serious attack on the summit could well have been launched. This should have opened everyone's eyes, especially as the expedition had been sent out so that its lessons might be of use to the all-out attempt of the following year. But this example of what could be done with a moderate expenditure was ignored and the expedition of 1936 saw no diminution in scale, either of men or of money. Twelve Europeans, including two doctors, a wireless expert, over a hundred porters, three hundred transport animals, and some £10,000 were employed, and the North Col was the highest point reached.

It is not easy to see either the origin of or the reasons for these unwieldy caravans organized on the lines of a small military expedition rather than a mountaineering party. Were it not that the pioneering days of Himalayan climbing were past one might find a parallel in the earliest days of mountaineering in the Alps, when numbers were considered a source of strength and not the weakness they usually are. For de Saussure's ascent of Mont Blanc in 1787 the party numbered twenty. The elaborately organized expedition of the Duke of the Abruzzi to the Karakoram in 1909* was the original Himalayan expedition in the

* 270 persons (12 Europeans) and 95 baggage animals crossed the Zoji La.

grand style, but before and since that time many private parties had climbed and explored with a minimum of fuss and expense—notably those of Mummery, Conway, Longstaff, Kellas, Meade, to mention a few.* Of course the means must be proportioned to the end; there is a difference between rushing a moderate-sized peak and besieging one of the Himalayan giants, but any additional means we think we need for the more formidable task ought to be taken reluctantly and after the severest scrutiny. Anything beyond what is needed for efficiency and safety is worse than useless. In 1905 Dr Longstaff and the two Brocherel brothers, with no tent and one piece of chocolate, very nearly climbed Gurla Mandhata, a peak in Tibet north of Garhwal, 25,355 ft. high, a practical illustration of the application of that important mountaineering principle, the economy of force—an imperfect example, perhaps, because one might argue that with a tent and two pieces of chocolate they might have succeeded. But away with such pedantic, ungracious quibbles. Did not Mummery, who more than any one embodied the spirit of mountaineering, write: ‘... the essence of the sport lies, not in ascending a peak, but in struggling with and overcoming difficulties’?

Though all mountaineers will agree with Mummery, it is no use concealing the fact that most of us do earnestly wish to reach the top of any peak we attempt and are disappointed if we fail: especially with Mount Everest parties where the desire to reach the top is supreme. No one would choose to go there merely for a mountaineering holiday. It is not easy therefore to criticize men for taking every means which they consider will increase the chances of success. It is a matter of degree, and on any expedition, even the most serious, the tendency to take two of everything, ‘just to be on the safe side’, needs to be firmly suppressed, for a point is soon reached when multiplication of these precautions, either in men or equipment, defeats its purpose.

Owing to the frequency of Alpine huts the longest climb in the Alps requires no more equipment than can be carried on the climber’s back; while for numbers, although two are adequate and move fastest, three are no doubt safer. Any additional members usually lessen the

* The Norwegians, C. W. Rubenson and Monrad Aas, who nearly climbed Kabru (24,002 ft.) in 1907 must not be omitted.

combined efficiency of the party. In the Himalaya the peaks are twice as high and the climber has to provide his own hut. The climbing of a peak of, say 21,000 ft., will require a tent of some sort to be taken up to at least 17,000 ft. From a camp at this height a peak of 23,000 ft. has been climbed (Trisul by Dr Longstaff), but most people would prefer to have a second tent at some intermediate point from which to start the final climb. Obviously for higher peaks more intermediate camps are required and it becomes necessary to employ porters to carry and provision them. These porters will mean other porters to carry up their tents and provisions, and so it grows snowball fashion until in extreme cases like that of Mount Everest you have to find food and accommodation for at least fifteen men at 23,000 ft. in order to put two climbers in the highest camp at 27,000 ft.

It should be clear that the fewer men to be maintained at each camp and the less food and equipment they need, the easier and safer it is for all concerned. I am not advocating skimping and doing without for the sake of wishing to appear tough, ascetic, sadistic, or masochistic, but for the reason that no party should burden itself with a man or a load more than is necessary to do the job. If this principle be accepted and applied all along the line from the highest camp to the starting-point—London—the more likely will the expedition be economical and efficient, in short a small light expedition. The unattainable ideal to be kept in mind is two or three men carrying their food with them as in the Alps. How far this can be done has not been discovered—probably not very far—and there is the complication of supporting parties which though desirable are perhaps not essential. If the highest party is unable to get down on account of bad weather, the party below is not likely to be able to get up to help them—as happened on Masherbrum in 1938. Support or not, the importance of not being caught short of food reserves in the highest camp is obvious.

Between the two wars many small private parties, refusing to be frightened by the portentous standard set by the Everest expeditions and strenuously maintained by German and French expeditions,*

* International Expedition to Kangchenjunga, 1930: Europeans, 13; porters, 300. German Expedition to Nanga Parbat, 1934: Europeans, 14; porters, 600. French Expedition to the Karakoram, 1936: Europeans, 11; porters, 500.

accomplished much in the Himalaya, demonstrating that for peaks up to 24,000 ft. nothing more was needed, and thus keeping alive the earlier simple tradition of mountaineering with which the big expedition is incompatible. This was readily accepted, but the question of whether for the highest peaks the grand-scale expedition was either necessary, efficient, or expedient, was debatable. Every one recognized that an extra four or five thousand feet in height necessitated more camps and more porters, and although Nanda Devi (25,660 ft.) had been climbed practically without the help of porters it was admitted that similar methods would not work on Everest—the difference of 3500 ft. in height between the two mountains is no adequate measure of the difference in degree of accessibility of the two summits. But if the provision of two more camps entails more equipment and more porters, it need not entail a small army with its transport officers, doctors, wireless officers, and an army's disregard for superfluity.

Then if the big expedition is unnecessary, is it efficient? In view of what was accomplished by the four expeditions up to 1933 it would be impertinent to say they were inefficient, but I believe the same men could have done as much, perhaps more, at a quarter of the cost, using methods more in keeping with mountaineering tradition. It is possible to argue that with less impedimenta to shift, fewer porters to convoy, and fewer passengers to carry, the strength of the climbing parties when it came to the last push would have been greater than it was. Theoretically the extra efficiency of the large party consists in having a reserve of climbers to take the place of those put out of action by sickness or frost-bite. Of the first four attempts of 1922, 1924, 1933 and 1936, the numbers taking part were thirteen, twelve, sixteen and twelve respectively. From these have to be deducted the supernumeraries such as non-climbing leader, base doctor, transport officers, wireless expert, leaving an effective strength of eight, eight, ten and eight. In 1938 there were seven of us. But we were all climbers and we carried only one-fifth of the gear and spent only a fifth of the money of previous expeditions.

In these foreign expeditions of which the above are fair samples the climbing party usually numbered eight or nine, the balance being scientists, doctors, photographers, secretaries (in one case), and British liaison officers to run the porter corps.

The actual number of climbers taking part does not define the 'big' or the 'small' party, and on this point there is not much in it between the advocates of either. As the best number to take part in the final climb is two, and as the odds against favourable conditions continuing long enough to allow of more than one attempt are high, provision for two attempts is all we need consider. Two parties of two and two spare men, six in all, should therefore be enough. A party of eight has a reserve strength of 100% which should satisfy the most cautious. Most expeditions have had the benefit of a nucleus of three or four men whose ability to go high had already been proved. But if a party was not so fortunate in this respect, as might well be, then allowance would have to be made for a possible failure to acclimatize. The same would apply to the porters, for owing to the war and the lapse of time very few if any of the old 'Tigers' will be available.

With experienced porters such as we had the necessary convoy duties could be done comfortably by six or seven Europeans. Indeed, there is more to be feared from underwork than from overwork on these expeditions. Far too many off-days are forced upon a party and much time is spent lying about in sleeping-bags. Mr Shipton, who has taken part in two of the large expeditions, has remarked that there is sometimes a grave risk of contracting bed sores. I am sure many other climbers will bear me out that the common effect of too many off-days is a feeling of deadly lethargy. The risk of serious illness developing is not great and is over-emphasized. The party are fit men when they start and presumably able to take care of themselves. Coughs, colds, and sore throats seem to be inseparable from a journey across Tibet in the early spring, but their effects are not very grave. Indeed, it seems better to face the possibility of serious illness than the certainty of having useless mouths to feed and men falling over one another for lack of work.

A method is expedient if it tends to promote a proposed object. Whether the methods of these earlier expeditions were the best for the climbing of the mountain is a matter of opinion—I have tried to show that they were not, insomuch as they were wasteful and cumbersome—but I think there is no doubt whatever that they were not those best calculated either to preserve the well-being and goodwill of the peoples of those countries through which the route of the expedition lay

or to maintain the best interests of mountaineering. The first point was raised in several letters to *The Times* in 1936 of which I quote from two, written by men* with Himalayan experience:

Apart from obvious clumsiness and expense, the huge expedition suffers from other serious objections. The first lies in the demoralizing effect which those visitations have on the people of the villages, by upsetting their scale of economic values. The arrival of an army of porters led by Sahibs apparently possessing boundless wealth and wasting valuable material along the route, makes a most corrupting impression. I was conscious of this when staying at the charming village of Lachen in North Sikkim through which several large expeditions have passed. The occurrence of theft in the later Everest expeditions, so out of keeping with the Tibetan character, is probably another case in point. It would be a tragedy if the visits of climbers to the Himalayas were to destroy one of its greatest charms—namely the honest character of the inhabitants and their splendid culture.

And in another letter:

In discussing the demerits of large expeditions a point not yet touched on is the unbalancing effect of the passage of a large transport column on the economic life of the country through which it passes. The part of Tibet traversed by the Mount Everest expeditions is by Tibetan standards and in comparison with the northern deserts fairly fertile. But actually only just enough barley is grown or can be grown to pay taxes and to carry the population through the winter and spring. The flocks of sheep and yaks are just as large as the grazing will permit. When an Everest expedition comes with 300 animals and a horde of hungry porters, reserves of food are broken into and sold: while grass which should have fed Tibetan ponies goes into the stomachs of the visiting yaks. It is true that good silver, British Indian rupees, are given in exchange. But, as a headman remarked to us in 1935 just after receiving Rs. 200, what good will that silver do?

* Marco Pallis; Michael Spender (killed in an accident May 1945).

It cannot buy more corn where there is no surplus, nor will it fertilize the pastures. But it will quite certainly cause the neighbouring headman to be jealous, and enduring quarrels may be started. Where the balance between production and consumption is already precarious and where there are no reserves to draw upon the effect of a large expedition is materially disastrous.

There is certainly something in this; though the people along the line of march who receive good money for services rendered, who 'win' a number of useful articles of various kinds, and who also have their ailments attended to gratis, might take a less gloomy view. The Tibetans are shrewd people and will not exchange food for money unless they see their advantage in it, much less if it spells starvation. Anyhow, the Indian Government is alive to this danger and now only one of what are euphemistically described as 'major expeditions' is allowed to operate in any particular area at a given time. And if the interests of the local inhabitants suffer from the large expedition so do the strangers who come after, who find the market for goods and services in a very inflated state.

Whether we climb mountains for exercise, love of scenery, love of adventure, or because we cannot help it, every genuine mountaineer must shudder involuntarily when he sees anything about mountains in newspapers. As Mr Jorrocks, who consistently refused to be weighed, used to say, when asked to mount the scales, 'his weight was altogether 'twixt him and his 'oss', so is mountaineering altogether a private affair between the man and his mountain; the lack of privacy is disagreeable and particularly so if, as usually happens, the newspaper gets hold of the wrong mountain wrongly spelt, adds or deducts several thousands of feet to or from its height, and describes what the wrong man with his name wrongly spelt did not do on it. Most human activities, especially the more foolish, are regarded nowadays as news, so there is perhaps the less reason to expect mountaineering to be an exception; nevertheless, it is indisputable that it is the big expedition that has occasioned this news value, the reason, of course, being that to finance them recourse must be had to the newspapers. No one bothers about climbers at home or in the Alps unless they fall, or in the Himalaya unless some newspaper is paying for the story. Thanks to

this publicity the interest taken in Everest expeditions is now world-wide; news about them is published whether authentic or not, whether paid for or not; it is therefore very difficult, quixotic in fact, to refuse an offer for the story when a refusal will make not a jot of difference to the sum total of publicity.

The effect of this on the climbers taking part, and on mountaineers generally, should be taken into account. It is considered an honour to be asked to join a Mount Everest expedition; but, human nature being what it is, the exaggerated glamour which now surrounds an expedition of this sort has made the competition for a place even keener, so that much canvassing takes place before the final selection and much heart-burning after. The chosen party finds itself burdened with unnecessary responsibilities; responsibilities to a committee, to a newspaper, or even to the nation as the 'pick of young British manhood', as one unfortunate party was described. A feeling that the eyes of England are upon you may be very bracing before a battle but is not conducive to sound mountaineering.

Finally, it was publicity which engendered a competitive spirit individually and nationally. I think it is true that the big German expeditions received financial as well as moral backing from their governments and certainly the Tibetans themselves are convinced that we are sent to climb Everest at the bidding of our Government to enhance national prestige. One result of this is that mountains tend to become national preserves and the Indian Government has thrust on them the thankless task of deciding whether a party from one nation should be allowed to attempt a mountain that has already been visited by that of another. A question which might easily be settled by a little consideration and co-operation amongst the climbers themselves. The evils are there for all to see, but how or whether they can be abated is less obvious. Probably the phase is only a passing one, born of an age of advertisement. Many mountaineers fervently hope that the big mountains like Everest, Kangchenjunga, K2, and Nanga Parbat, will be climbed soon so that Himalayan climbing may regain the more normal atmosphere of Alpine climbing and cease to be a mere striving for height records. Whether these mountains are climbed or not, smaller expeditions are a step in the right direction which should make even parties attempting the very highest peaks less subservient to publicity

than heretofore, if not quite independent of it. Much will have been gained by that. For men living in India there should be no financial difficulty; but in the nature of things most young climbers in England are not in a position to pay their full share of the expenses of a Himalayan expedition; although, be it noted, two men did find it possible to spend five months in the Himalaya at a cost of £143 each, including passage money both ways. With the money that has been spent in trying to climb Everest a fund could have been endowed, the income from which would have more than sufficed to send a party annually to attempt some Himalayan climb. However, such a fund might have done more harm than good; a man who is bent on getting to the Himalaya will find ways and means.

Books, though they endure a little longer, are a less baneful form of publicity than newspaper articles because few read them. 'No man but a blockhead', says Dr Johnson, 'ever wrote except for money', a remark which is quite true of the writers of Mount Everest books who wrote in the first place to defray the expenses and who must now write to preserve the continuity of the story. Unlike the desert and the sea, mountains have not yet found a writer worthy of them. Perhaps those who could have written in a way that would live have felt about books and publicity as Mallory felt. In his contribution to the 1922 expedition book, which was a hint of his ability in this respect, he makes an eloquent but unavailing plea for silence: 'Hereafter, of contemporary exploits the less we know the better; our heritage of discovery among mountains is rich enough; too little remains to be discovered. The story of a new ascent should now be regarded as a corrupting communication calculated to promote the glory of Man, or perhaps only of individual men, at the expense of the mountains themselves.'

But we protest too much; for at bottom does it matter what is written about that 'considerable protuberance' Mount Everest or any lesser mountain? Let man conquer (revolting word) this, that, or the other, and write volumes about having done so, nothing he does or says will tame the sea or diminish the glory of the hills. The sea, immense and romantic though it is, is a commercial highway; the desert, with toil and money, can be made to blossom; but the mountains, thank heaven, are a sanctuary apart. None of our tricks can change them, nor can

they change that man who looks at them for their beauty, loves them for the way they infect and quicken his spirits, and climbs them for his fun. 'If there are no famous hills, then nothing need be said, but since there are they must be visited.'

But though the mountains cannot change, our approach to them may; and if in this chapter, and the last, the note of criticism and protest appears faintly querulous it must be attributed to a perhaps presumptuous jealousy for all that mountaineering and mountaineering tradition stands for. Mountains mean so much to so many, as sources of comfort and serenity, as builders of health and character, and as strong bonds of friendship between men of all kinds, that any tendency to diminish their might, majesty and power, should be resented and resisted. Well was it said, 'Resist the beginnings', and therefore these protests have been written in the hope that promoters of Himalayan expeditions will think twice about the use of innovations designed to soften the rigours of the game or lessen the supremacy of the mountains. Of the many strange tricks that man plays before high heaven that would be one of the strangest, one which if it did not make angels weep would strike moralists dumb, if our efforts to subdue the mightiest range and the highest mountain of all should be the means of losing us our mountain heritage.

There will be small danger of this happening if we do not treat our highest mountains too seriously, the attaining of their summits as the only end, and an attempt upon them as 'man's expression of his higher self'—whatever that may mean. When our forerunners were busy discovering the Alps, as we are now discovering the Himalaya, I feel sure they did not look upon themselves as so many bearded and be-whiskered embodiments of man's unconquerable spirit striving to attain the highest. In German accounts of Himalayan climbing between the wars one came upon this high-falutin' attitude, and occasionally in reading of Mount Everest one detected a portentous note, as in a dispatch from the front. As soon as we begin to talk or write thus about men and mountains we should remind ourselves of a remark of Chesterton, that cheerful apostle of common sense and paradox: 'Physical nature must be enjoyed not worshipped. Stars and mountains must not be taken seriously.' Which I take to mean that we may enjoy our mountains and love what we enjoy, keeping our passion for them this side of idolatry,

but that mountaineers and astronomers committing their follies shall be viewed by others with the indulgence customary towards foreigners, dons, and the eccentricities of genius, and by themselves with only the very mildest esteem.