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THE LURE OF THE HEIGHTS.

In the field of human endeavour, mountaineering, especially in its present highly developed form, holds a place all of its own. It is more than a sport or a pastime; it is almost a cult in whose service the highest qualifications are called for. Its devotees must be endowed with exceptional physical fitness and strong nerves, mentally alert, and able to endure appalling hardships, apart from having to face the ever present danger of injury or death. Their reward lies in the satisfaction of having achieved the seemingly impossible, in the thrill of conquest, in emerging victorious from an unequal struggle: that of puny man against the forces of nature.

The art of climbing has undergone great changes since the conquest of the Alpine peaks was first attempted. Modern improvements in technique have converted it into a science, yet the human element is still the dominant factor, and personal courage, skill and stamina remain its first requisites.

Mountaineering has inspired an extensive literature. The latest publication, issued under the auspices of the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research, is an English version, edited by Malcolm Barnes, of *The Mountain World* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd, price 25/- net), the fourth volume in the series.

It is a richly illustrated, well-printed book of 244 pages, 64 of which are photographic plates of breath-taking beauty. It also contains a number of maps and sketches; unfortunately an index is missing.

The text consists of a collection of reports on climbing exploits in many parts of the world, written by men who themselves took part in them. The reader is taken to the Swiss Alps and the Dolomites, to volcanoes in the heart of Africa, to the difficult and almost inaccessible peaks in Alaska — Mount Kinley and the University Peak — and finally to the Himalayan giants, some over 8,000 metres high — Everest, Kanchenjunga, Makalu, Lhotse. In addition there are technical studies on the history and behaviour of a glacier.

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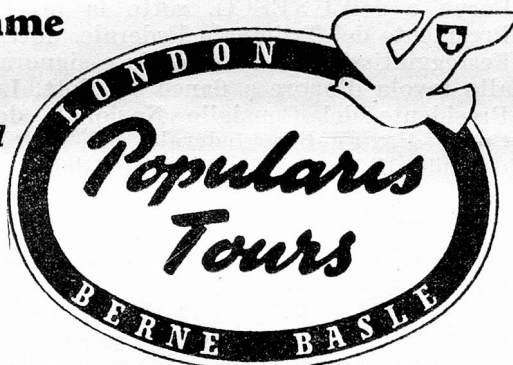
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The Alaska and the Asian expeditions are dealt with at length. For the latter, British, French, German and Swiss organisations were responsible, the Alaska peaks, the highest in North America, were conquered by American teams.

To the Swiss reader the most interesting account is probably that dealing with the ascents of Everest and Lhotse, successfully accomplished by a Swiss expedition in May 1956. It will be remembered that an earlier attempt on Everest by a Swiss team led by Lambert had to be abandoned when within a short distance from the peak. This was in 1952; the following year Hillary and Tenzing, members of the British team led by John Hunt, reached the summit. In 1956 the Swiss renewed the attempt, this time with success. After incredible efforts Schmied and Marmet succeeded in planting the Swiss flag on the world's highest peak, Everest (8,848 meters). Schmied's moving description is modest and restrained but he lets himself go when he comes to the end: "We were seized with tremendous joy," he writes, "and we embraced each other again and again. Tears of joy ran unseen behind our masks and our five-months beards".

The while Schmied and Marmet were struggling on the icy windswept slopes of Everest, their companions Reiss and Luchsinger attacked its repellent southerly neighbour Lhotse, the fourth highest summit in the world (8,501 m.), a mountain not conquered before. Immense difficulties confronted them and the climb was extremely dangerous. They were fortunate in reaching the summit, exhausted, out of breath and affected by the frost. It is impossible to read Reiss's account and that of Schmied without a feeling of awe, and admiration for these gallant men and their associates. Who said modern youth is getting soft?

No less exciting are the accounts of the other explorers, British, French and German, whose exploits are included in the book. All of them had to contend with terrible conditions imposed on them by the high altitudes. They had to overcome the handicaps of crevasses, avalanches, blizzards, hailstorms, gales, sub-arctic temperatures, frostbite and lack of oxygen, the whole defensive armour in fact of the mountains they attacked. One of the most remarkable ascents was that of Kanchenjunga (8,579 m.) by a British team. This Himalayan peak, though slightly lower than Everest, presented problems and dangers greater than any. For many years it had attracted climbers like a magnet; eleven parties had attempted it since 1929 and eight men had lost their lives on its approaches. The native population in the foothills held it sacred and believed a powerful god dwelled on the summit. The leaders of the British expedition which finally achieved its conquest had to give the headman a pledge before they were allowed to proceed, that they would not set foot on the highest point. The promise was scrupulously kept.

How the French conquered Makalu (8,470 m.), and the Germans the peaks around Chogo Lungma, the highest of which is the Spantik (7,027 m.), is also vividly described.

This fine and well-produced book with its wonderful illustrations will delight all mountain-lovers; it will also afford enjoyable reading to many who have never climbed a mountain in their lives.

J.J.F.S.