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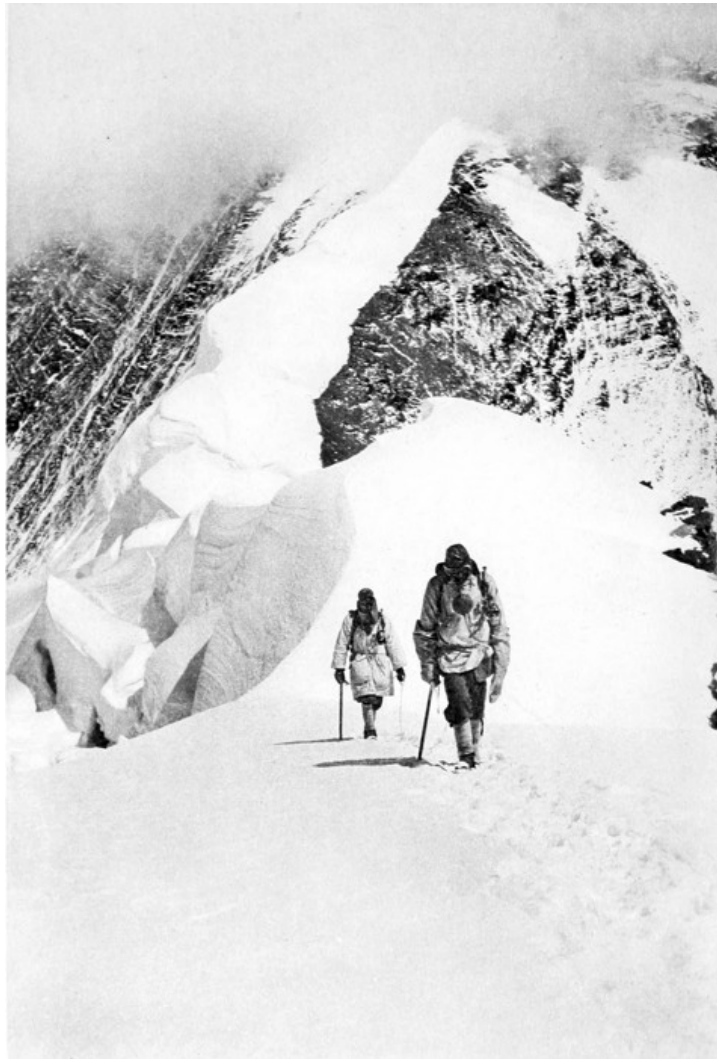
**THE ASSAULT ON
MOUNT EVEREST. 1922**
C. G. BRUCE

The Assault on Mount Everest, 1922

C. G. Bruce

PREFACE

The Mount Everest Committee desire to take this opportunity of thanking General Bruce, Mr. Mallory, Captain Finch, Mr. Somervell and Dr. Longstaff for having, in addition to their labours in the field, made the following contributions to the story of an expedition whose chief result has been to strengthen our confidence that the summit of the highest mountain in the world can be attained by man.



*The Second Climbing Party
descending from their record climb.*

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INTRODUCTION

By

SIR FRANCIS YOUNGHUSBAND,
K.C.S.I., K.C.I.E.

INTRODUCTION

Colonel Howard-Bury and the members of the Expedition of 1921 had effected the object with which they had been despatched. They were not sent out to climb Mount Everest. It would be impossible to reach the summit in a single effort. They were sent to reconnoitre the mountain from every direction and discover what was for certain the easiest way up. For it was quite certain that only by the easiest way possible—and only if there were an easy way—would the summit ever be reached. In the Alps, nowadays, men look about for the most difficult way up a mountain. Hundreds every year ascend even the Matterhorn by the easiest ways up. So men with any turn for adventure have to look about for the difficult ways. With Mount Everest it is very different. The exhaustion produced from the difficulty of breathing in enough oxygen at the great heights is so fearful that only by a way that entails the least possible exertion can the summit be reached. Hence the necessity for spending the first season in thoroughly prospecting the mountain. And this was all the more necessary because no European so far had been within sixty miles of Mount Everest, so that not even the approaches to the mountain were known.

During 1921, under the leadership of Colonel Howard-Bury, this reconnaissance was most thoroughly carried out. Mr. Mallory found what was quite certainly the easiest—indeed the only practicable—way up the mountain, and Major Morshead and Captain Wheeler mapped the mountain itself and the country round. They brought back also much valuable experience of the conditions under which a definite “all-out” attempt to reach the summit might be made. Ample data were therefore now at the disposal of the Mount

Everest Committee for organising an expedition to make this attempt.

And first the question of leadership had to be decided. This was a definitely climbing expedition, and a climbing expert would be needed to lead it—and a climbing expert who had experience of Himalayan conditions, which are in so many ways different from Alpine conditions. The one obvious man for this position of leader was Brigadier-General Hon. C. G. Bruce. He could not be expected at his age to take part in the actual climbing. But for the command of the whole Expedition no better could be found. For thirty years he had devoted himself to climbing both in the Himalaya and in the Alps. He was an expert climber, and he knew the Himalayan conditions as no other man. And, what was of scarcely less importance, he knew the Himalayan peoples, and knew how to handle them. Any climbing party would be dependent upon the native porters to carry stores and equipment up the mountain. But climbers from England would know nothing about these men or how to treat them. It was essential, therefore, that there should be with the Expedition some one who could humour and get the best out of them.

This was the more necessary as one of the chief features of these expeditions to Mount Everest was the organisation of a corps of porters specially enlisted from among the hardest men on that frontier for the particular purpose of carrying camps to high altitudes. This idea originated with General Bruce himself. So far Himalayan climbing expeditions had been dependent upon coolies collected at the highest villages and taken on for a few days while the climb lasted. But this was never very satisfactory, and coolies so collected would be of no use on Mount Everest. General Bruce's plan was very different. It was, months beforehand, to select thirty or forty of the very best men who could be found in the higher mountains, to enlist them

for some months, pay them well, feed them well and equip them well, and above all to put into them a real *esprit de corps*, make them take a pride in the task that was before them. But to do all this there was needed a man who knew and understood them and who had this capacity for infusing them with a keen spirit. And for this no one could be better than General Bruce himself. He had served in a Gurkha regiment for thirty years. He loved his Gurkhas, and was beloved by them. He spoke their language; knew all their customs and traditions, and had had them climbing with him in the Alps as well as the Himalaya. And Gurkhas come from Nepal, on the borders of which Mount Everest lies.

For organising this corps of porters, for dealing with the Tibetans, and, lastly, for keeping together the climbers from England, who were mostly quite unknown to each other, but who all knew of General Bruce and his mountaineering achievements in the Himalaya, General Bruce was an ideal chief.

This being settled, the next question was the selection of the climbing party. General Bruce would not be able to go on to the mountain itself, and he would have plenty to do at the main base camp, seeing after supplies and organising transport service from the main base to the high mountain base. As chief at the mountain base, and as second-in-command of the Expedition to take General Bruce's place in case of any misadventure to him, Lieutenant-Colonel E. L. Strutt was selected. He was an Alpine climber of great experience and knowledge of ice and snow conditions. But for the actual effort to reach the summit two men were specially marked out. One, of course, was Mr. George Leigh-Mallory, who had done such valuable service on the reconnaissance of the previous year; and the other was Captain George Finch, who had been selected for the first Expedition, but who had, through temporary indisposition, not been able to go with it. Both of these were first-rate men

and well known for their skill in mountaineering. These two had been selected in the previous year. Of new men, Major E. F. Norton was an experienced and very reliable and thorough mountaineer. He is an officer in the Artillery, and well known in India for his skill and interest in pig-sticking. But in between his soldiering and his pig-sticking and a course at the Staff College he seems to have found time for Alpine climbing and for bird observation. A man of high spirit, who could be trusted to keep his head under all circumstances and to help in keeping a party together, he was a valuable addition to the Expedition. Mr. Somervell was perhaps even more versatile in his accomplishments. He was a surgeon in a London hospital, who was also skilled both in music and painting, and yet found time for mountaineering, and, being younger than the others, and possessed of exuberant energy and a fine physique, he could be reckoned on to go with the highest climbers. Another member of the medical profession who was also a mountaineer was Dr. Wakefield. He was a Westmorland man, who had performed wonderful climbing feats in the Lake District in his younger days, and now held a medical practice in Canada. He was bursting with enthusiasm to join the expedition, and gave up his practice for the purpose.

As medical officer and naturalist of the Expedition, Dr. T. G. Longstaff was chosen. He was a veteran Himalayan climber, and if only this Expedition could have been undertaken some years earlier, he, like General Bruce, would have made a magnificent leader of a climbing party. As it was, his great experience would be available for the climbers as far as the high mountain camp. And this time it was intended to send with the Expedition a "whole-time" photographer and cinematographer, both for the purpose of having a photographic record of its progress and also to provide the means by which the expenses of this and a future expedition might be met. For this Captain J. B. Noel

was selected. He had made a reconnaissance towards Mount Everest in 1913, and he had since then made a special study of photography and cinematography, so that he was eminently suited for the task.

The above formed the party which would be sent out from England. And subsequently General Bruce, in India, selected four others to join the Expedition: Mr. Crawford, of the Indian Civil Service, a keen mountaineer, who had long wished to join the Expedition; Major Morshead, who had held charge of the survey party in the 1921 Expedition, and now wanted to join the present Expedition as a climber; and two officers from Gurkha regiments, to serve as transport officers, namely, Captain Geoffrey Bruce and Captain Morris.

This completed the British personnel of the Expedition. It had been my hope that a first-rate artist might have accompanied it to paint the greatest peaks of the Himalaya, but the artists whom we chose were unable to pass the medical examination, though the examination was, of course, not so severe as the examination which the actual climbers had to pass.

While these men were being selected, the Equipment Committee, Captain Farrar and Mr. Meade, were working hard. Taking the advice of Colonel Howard-Bury and Mr. Mallory, and profiting by the experience gained on the previous Expedition, they got together and had suitably packed and despatched to India a splendid outfit comprising every necessity for an Expedition of this nature. The amount of work that Farrar put into this was enormous; for as a mountaineer he knew well how the success of the Expedition depended on each detail of the equipment being looked into, and he spared himself no trouble and overlooked nothing. The stores were of the most varied description, in order to meet the varying tastes of the different members. The tents were improved in accordance

with the experience gained. Most particular attention was paid to the boots. Clothing and bedding, light in weight but warm to wear, were specially designed. Ice-axes, crampons, ropes, lanterns, cooking-stoves, and also warm clothing for the porters, were all provided, and much else besides.

But about one point in the equipment of the party there was much diversity of opinion. Should the climbers be provided with oxygen, or should they not? If it were at all feasible to provide climbers with oxygen without adding appreciably to the weight they had to carry, the summit of Mount Everest could be reached to a certainty. For the purely mountaineering difficulties are not great. On the way to the summit there are no physical obstacles which a trained mountaineer could not readily overcome. The one factor which renders the ascent so difficult is the want of oxygen in the air. Provide the oxygen and the ascent could be made at once. But to provide the oxygen heavy apparatus would have to be carried—and carried by the climbers themselves. It became a question whether the disadvantage of having to carry a weight of at least thirty pounds would or would not outweigh the advantages to be gained by the use of the oxygen.

And the Mount Everest Committee were warned of another feature in the case. They were told that if by any misfortune the oxygen were to run out when the climbers were at a considerable height—say 27,000 feet—and they suddenly found themselves without any preparation in this attenuated atmosphere, they might collapse straight away. It was a disagreeable prospect to anticipate. But Captain Finch, who was himself a lecturer on chemistry at the Imperial College of Science, Mr. Somervell, and Captain Farrar, pressed so strongly for the use of oxygen, and Mr. Unna was so convinced he could construct a reasonably portable apparatus, that the Committee decided that the experiment should be made. The value of using oxygen

could thus be tested, and we should know what were the prospects of reaching the summit of the mountain either with or without its aid. Captain Farrar, Captain Finch, and Mr. Unna therefore set about constructing an apparatus which would hold the lightest procurable oxygen cylinders, and which could be carried on the back by the climbers.

This final question having been settled, all the stores and equipment having been purchased, packed, and despatched, the members of the Expedition left England in March. But before I leave General Bruce to take up the tale of their adventures, I must say yet one word more about “the good” of climbing Mount Everest. These repeated efforts to reach the summit of the world’s highest mountain have already cost human life. They have also cost much physical pain, fatigue, and discomfort to the climbers. They have been very expensive. And there is not the slightest sign of any material gain whatever being obtained—not an ounce of gold, or iron, or coal, or a single precious stone, or any land upon which food or material could be grown. What, then, is the good of it all? Who will benefit in the least even if the climbers do eventually get to the top? These are questions which are still being continually asked me, so I had better still go on trying to make as plain as I can what is the good of climbing Mount Everest.

The most obvious good is an increased knowledge of our own capacities. By trying with all our might and with all our mind to climb the highest point on the earth, we are getting to know better what we really can do. No one can say for certain yet whether we can or cannot reach the summit. We cannot know till we try. But if—as seems much more probable now than it did ten years ago—we can reach the summit, we shall know that we are capable of more than we had supposed. And this knowledge of our capacities will be very valuable. In my own lifetime I have seen men’s knowledge of their capacity for climbing mountains greatly

increased. Men's standard of climbing has been raised. They now know that they can do what forty years ago they did not deem in the least possible. And if they reach the summit of Mount Everest, the standard of achievement will be still further raised; and men who had, so far, never thought of attempting the lesser peaks of the Himalaya, will be climbing them as freely as they now climb peaks in Switzerland.

And what then? What is the good of that? The good of that is that a whole new enjoyment in life will be opened up. And enjoyment of life is, after all, the end of life. We do not live to eat and make money. We eat and make money to be able to enjoy life. And some of us know from actual experience that by climbing a mountain we can get some of the finest enjoyment there is to be had. We like bracing ourselves against a mountain, pitting our mettle, our nerve, our skill, against the physical difficulties the mountain presents, and feeling that we are forcing the spirit within us to prevail against the material. That is a glorious feeling in itself and a real tonic to the spirit—even when it does not always conquer.

But that is not all. The wrestling with the mountain makes us love the mountain. For the moment we may be utterly exhausted and only too thankful to be able to hurry back to more congenial regions. Yet, all the same, we shall eventually get to love the mountain for the very fact that she has forced the utmost out of us, lifted us just for one precious moment high above our ordinary life, and shown us beauty of an austerity, power, and purity we should have never known if we had not faced the mountain squarely and battled strongly with her.

This, then, is the good to be obtained from climbing Mount Everest. Most men will have to take on trust that there is this good. But most of the best things in life we have to take

on trust at first till we have proved them for ourselves. So I would beg readers of this book first trustfully to accept it from the Everest climbers that there is good in climbing great mountains (for the risks they have run and the hardships they have endured are ample enough proof of the faith that is in them), and then to go and test it for themselves—in the Himalaya, if possible, or if not, in the Alps, the Rockies, the Andes, wherever high mountains make the call.

THE NARRATIVE OF THE
EXPEDITION

By

BRIGADIER-GENERAL HON. C. G. BRUCE,
C.B., M.V.O.

CHAPTER I

TO THE BASE CAMP

The precursor of the present volume, *The Reconnaissance of Mount Everest in 1921*, sets forth fully the successful and strenuous work which was accomplished in that year and which has rendered possible the Expedition of the present year. The whole of our work lying in country which had never previously been explored by Europeans, it was rendered absolutely necessary for a full examination of the whole country to be made before an attempt to climb Mount Everest could possibly be carried out. We have to thank Colonel Howard-Bury and his companions, especially his survey officers, for their important work, which rendered our task in arriving at our base comparatively simple.

The object of the Expedition of 1922, of course, was the actual attack on the mountain in an attempt to climb it; but no great mountain has ever succumbed to the first attempt on it, and therefore it is almost inconceivable that so tremendous a problem as the ascent of Mount Everest should succeed at the very first effort. In fact, I myself am more than satisfied, almost astounded, at the extraordinary success attained by my companions in this endeavour. The problem that lay in front of us, I think, should be first explained.

Mount Everest, as all know, lies on that part of the Himalaya which is narrowest. It is, therefore, exposed very rapidly to the first assaults of the South-west monsoon, and this monsoon advances up the Bay of Bengal at an earlier period in the year than that of its Western branch, the Gulf current. It is this fact which supplies the greatest difficulty to be faced in an attack on any of the great peaks which lie in

this region, giving one an unusually short season. However, to a certain extent this is counteracted by the fact that the winter climate in this portion of the Himalaya is far drier than it is in the West. There is less deposit of snow on the mountains in this section of the Himalaya than there would be, for instance, in the Kashmir mountains, and this, to some extent, makes up for the early advance of the monsoon, and consequent bad weather, which renders any exploration of the great heights during the time that the monsoon blows an impossibility.

Towards the end of May the monsoon arrives in Darjeeling, and then, according to the strength of the current, quickly approaches the Southern faces of the Himalaya, and, as the current strengthens, drifts across their summits and through the gorges and over the lower ridges. The problem, therefore, of any party exploring in these mountains resolves itself into the rapidity with which they can establish their base of operations in a suitable locality to explore the mountains and to climb them. During the period of the very great cold, naturally, the upper heights are impossible, and camping on the upper glaciers is in itself also almost impossible. Travelling across Tibet in March, crossing high passes of over 17,000 feet is such that, although it might be perfectly possible to do, it would be a great strain on the stamina of the party, and likely to detract from their condition. We had, therefore, to adapt our advance into Tibet so as to make it at the latest possible moment, in order to avoid the very worst of the weather, and yet at the earliest possible moment, so that we could arrive at the foot of our mountains with sufficient time to attack them before the weather broke up and rendered mountaineering an impossibility at a great height. It resolves itself, then, almost into a race against the monsoon.

This was our problem, and it is my special province in these opening chapters to show how we tackled it.

During the winter of 1921-2, the Mount Everest Committee, owing to the lateness with which the party had returned after the reconnaissance, had to work at very top speed. They had to collect all the necessary stores for the party, and not only that, but also to select a suitable mountaineering team; this was a considerable difficulty. Finally the party was made up as follows: myself as leader, Colonel E. L. Strutt as Second-in-Command, and Dr. Longstaff the official doctor and naturalist of the Expedition. The climbing party pure consisted of Mr. Mallory (of last year's Expedition), Dr. Somervell, Dr. Wakefield, and Major Norton. We had three transport officers, one of whom belonged to the Alpine Club, and was considered an assistant of the climbing party, Mr. C. G. Crawford, of the Indian Civil Service. The official photographer was Captain Noel. Two officers in the Indian Army were attached to the Expedition as transport officers—Captain J. G. Bruce and Captain C. G. Morris. Later, on our arrival in Darjeeling, the party was further reinforced by Major Morshead, who had been one of the survey party of the previous year, and whose general knowledge of Tibet and of Tibetans was of great service to us; and last, but not least, Captain George Finch, who came not only as a most important member of the climbing party, but also as the scientific expert in charge of the entire oxygen outfit.

This large party was collected in Darjeeling by the last week in March, and in a few days we were all ready to make a start. I myself preceded the party by about a month, arriving in Delhi to interview the Indian authorities about the 25th of February. Through the kindness of the Commander-in-Chief, Lord Rawlinson, we were supplied with four young non-commissioned officers of Captain Bruce's regiment, the 2nd Battalion 6th Gurkha Rifles, and an orderly of the 1st Battalion 6th Gurkha Rifles, and right well all these five Gurkhas carried out their duties. As will be seen later, one of

them, Lance-naik Tejbir Bura, very highly distinguished himself.

I arrived in Darjeeling with Captain Bruce on March 1, and there I found that our agent in India, Mr. Weatherall, had carried out the instructions which he had received from England in the most efficient manner. The large quantity of stores which we had ordered previously were all beautifully packed and ready for transportation; the tents of the previous year all mended and in good order; the stores of different kinds, such as there were, which had been left also from the previous year, had been put into order; and last and most important, 150 porters had been collected for our inspection and from whom to make a selection. He had also for us a large number of cooks to choose from, a most excellent individual to look after the tents, Chongay, who proved quite invaluable to us, and a local cobbler who had expressed his willingness to come with the Expedition.

Owing to the tremendous hurry in which all arrangements had to be made in England, the stores were forwarded in different batches. On our arrival in Calcutta, we interviewed Mr. Brown, of the Army and Navy Stores, whose work, both for the Expeditions of 1921 and of 1922, has been quite beyond praise. He told us that only one instalment of stores had yet arrived, but that the ships containing the remainder were expected shortly. Luckily for us, we had at the Army and Navy Stores, and acting in the interests of the Expedition, a most capable agent. As the ships containing the stores arrived, the latter were unloaded, rapidly passed through the Customs, and forwarded on to Kalimpong Road, which is the terminus of the Darjeeling Railway and the Teesta Valley. On arrival there they were met by our representative in no less a person than Captain Morris, handed over to the contractors who were moving our stores, and forwarded on to Tibet in advance of the Expedition. This naturally required a great deal of arranging.

I must mention that, shortly after our arrival in Darjeeling, we were joined by Captain Morris, who immediately left for Kalimpong, two stages on our journey, to which place the whole of the outfit of the Expedition was sent. We could not spare the time to wait for the arrival of the oxygen, and therefore, when the party finally left Darjeeling, Captain Finch, the scientist in whose charge the whole of the oxygen and scientific apparatus had been put, remained behind with Mr. Crawford to bring it up. Luckily, the ship arrived in Calcutta just as we were leaving, and therefore the delay was less than we had anticipated.

The people of Darjeeling, both the British and the native inhabitants—whether Tibetans or Hillmen—were all immensely interested in our Expedition, and Mr. Laden La, the Deputy Superintendent of Police, was, if anything, the most enthusiastic of them all. Mr. Laden La has himself rendered excellent service to Government, and has travelled greatly in Tibet. He is himself a Tibetan, and, I believe, is an Honorary General in the Tibetan Army. His influence in Darjeeling and the district is great, and his help to the Expedition was invaluable. He arranged in Darjeeling, both as head of the Buddhist Association of Darjeeling, and in conjunction with the Committee of the Hillmen's Association, that the whole of the party should be entertained by these two Associations, and that the chief Lamas and Brahmins of the district should bless and offer up prayers for the well-being and success of the party. The entertainment went off most excellently, and it was altogether a most interesting function. The Nepalese members of the party were blessed by the Brahmins, but also, in order to confirm this blessing, further received the blessings of the Lamas. I think there is every reason for supposing that this small function assisted in bringing home to all our porters and followers what was expected of them by their own people, and it was very likely a good deal in

consequence of this that they behaved on the whole so extremely well. For it must be understood that all these hill people, whether Nepalese or Tibetan, are very light-hearted, very irresponsible, very high-spirited, and up to the present time prohibition as a national measure is not exactly a popular outlook; in fact, none of them on any occasion, unless well looked after, lost any opportunity of looking on the wine when it is red—or any other colour.

Our cooks had to be chosen with a good deal of care. Captain Bruce and myself took the most likely candidates out into the hills and gave them a good trial before we engaged them. One of them, who was a Nepalese, had been an old servant of my own for many months; he was the only Gurkha among them. The other three (for we gave ourselves an ample outfit of four cooks) were Bhotias (Tibetans). They were the greatest success, mostly because they are hard-working and ready to do any amount of work; but they were good cooks too. Captain Noel also engaged an excellent servant (also a cook), and Major Norton's private servant (another Tibetan) was very capable in the same way; so that we were thoroughly well provided with an ample outfit, and wherever we were we could count on having our meals properly prepared. This is one of the important points in Tibetan travel, from the want of which I believe a certain amount of the illness that was experienced in the previous year was due.

We also engaged almost the most important subordinate member of the Expedition—the interpreter, Karma Paul. He was quite young, and had been a schoolmaster in Darjeeling. He had also worked, I believe, for a time in an office in Calcutta. He was quite new to the kind of work that he would have to do. But he was a great acquisition to the Expedition, always good company and always cheerful, full of a quaint little vanity of his own and delighted when he was praised. He served us very well indeed from one end of

the Expedition to the other, and it was a great deal owing to his cheerfulness and to his excellent manners and way with the Tibetans that we never had the smallest possible misunderstanding with any officials, even of the lowest grades, to disturb our good relations with the Tibetans of any kind or class. He also was bilingual, for he had been born in Lhasa, and still had relations living there.

On March 26 the whole Expedition started off for Kalimpong by rail, with the exception of Captain Finch and Mr. Crawford, who remained to bring on the oxygen. Owing to the kindness of the Himalayan Railway Company, we were all taken round by rail to Kalimpong Road free, the whole Expedition travelling up the Teesta Valley in the normal manner, with the exception of Captain Noel, who elected to ride on the roof of the carriages in order to take pictures with his cinema camera of the Teesta Valley. The junction at Siliguri, where the Teesta railway branches off from the main line, is only 300 feet above the sea, the terminus at Kalimpong Road about 700 feet above the sea, and therefore as one dives down from the hills one enters into tropical conditions and passes through the most magnificent tropical jungle and the steepest gorges and ravines. It is a wonderful journey. Even the long spell of hot and dry weather and the heat haze at this time of year were unable to spoil the scenery. And though we saw it almost at its worst time, it remained gorgeous.

At Kalimpong the Expedition broke up into two parties, but before we left we had a very pleasant function to attend. I had been charged by Sir Robert Baden-Powell to deliver a message to the scouts of Dr. Graham's Homes for European Children at Kalimpong. Not only that, but incorporated with these scouts was the first small body of Nepalese boy-scouts. It was a very interesting function indeed, and a most enthusiastic one.

From there we pushed on stage by stage over the Jelep La into the Chumbi Valley. Of course, journeys through Sikkim have often been described. Again we were disappointed. On my first arrival in Darjeeling, the cold weather had hardly finished, but now (March 28) we were well into the hot weather of Bengal, and in consequence we were also in the hot-weather haze. During the whole of our journey we never got a single view of the gorgeous Southern faces of the Himalaya, of Kanchenjanga and of its supporters, and especially of the wonderful Siniolchum peak. This was a very great disappointment, as from several points on our road a view of the Southern face can be obtained. Nevertheless, a journey through Sikkim is always a wonderful experience. The steep and deeply cut valleys, the wonderful clear mountain streams, and the inhabitants and their means of cultivation, are all full of interest. The depth of the valleys is always striking, and can never be anything else. When one thinks that from Rongli Chu, situated only at 2,700 feet above the sea, one rises in one continuous pull to close on 13,000 feet on the ridge which looks down on the Gnatong bungalow, and travels through cultivation and forest the whole way, passing through every phase of Eastern Himalayan landscape, one cannot cease to be continually impressed by the scale of the country. We were too early for the rhododendrons on the way to Gnatong, but there were just sufficient in flower to give us a mental vision of what these wonderful rhododendron forests would be like in another three weeks.

On the way to Gnatong, at a height of 11,500 feet, we came to the little village of Lungtung. Here there was a tea-house kept by some Nepalese. It was spotlessly clean, or at least all the cooking arrangements were, and here, as we came up, we all indulged in tea and the local cakes, and found them both excellent. Not only that, but the little lady who kept the shop was full of talk and full of chaff, and we