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ANANAPURNA 1
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France as a nation is still young in Himalayan experience, having launched only one expedition prior to 1950. This was the Karakorum venture of 1936 under M. Henry de Segogne. The C.A.F. and the F.F.M., both under the Presidency of M. Lucien Devies, agreed that this must be remedied and decided to organise an expedition for 1950, with the object of conquering, for the first time in history, an 8,000-metre peak. A strong Himalayan Committee was formed, including of course M. de Segogne, and a team was picked from the cream of French mountaineers. Practically the whole inception had been that of M. Devies, and he was the obvious choice as leader, but he had, apparently, determined from the beginning that he would be in a stronger position to obtain all that was required and generally to be able to further the interests of the expedition if he delegated the executive command to another. He picked the right man in M. Maurice Herzog.

During the three months of preparation careful study was made of the methods employed by thirty expeditions in High Asia. The committee formed the opinion that, in the past, too much time had been spent on the mountain itself, so they decided that the high camps must be pitched, the attempt made, and the evacuation completed with the least possible delay. They hoped in this way to minimise the adverse effect of foul weather, and that the physical and moral deterioration inseparable from waiting at high altitudes could be avoided. Under M. Herzog this plan was carried out with true French élan. The actual time taken over probably the most rapid attack ever made on a mountain of comparable height was only six days. The only shadow cast on this splendid achievement is that so heavy a price was paid by the two who reached the summit: M. Herzog has lost all his fingers and toes, and M. Lachenal all his toes.

The Alpine Club sent a message of congratulations to M. Lucien Devies and the members of the expedition on this great achievement.—Editor.

The Himalayas: the highest and loveliest mountains in the world! To us they were a dream unattainable and therefore always to remain a dream—and then an expedition was agreed on and equipped and we were asked to take part in it.

As our plane took off from Le Bourget my companions and I, in spite of the sadness of leave-taking, felt a sense of relief, for the last-minute preparations had been exciting and harassing. We had only

1 Based on a translation by Barbara Tobin for which we are indebted to Lt.-Col. H. W. Tobin, D.S.O., O.B.E., and the Himalayan Journal, and also the substance of a talk given to the Alpine Club on Tuesday, October 16, 1951.—Editor.
one thought in mind, to sleep and recuperate from the strain of the last few days. Oudot, I remember, slept the whole way from Le Bourget to India. We stopped at Karachi and Cairo, and on arrival at Delhi were welcomed by M. Daniel Levi, the French Ambassador to India, and his staff.

On Monday, April 4, 1950, our equipment, thanks to the intervention of the Indian Foreign Office and the efforts of the Embassy, was cleared through the Customs and taken to the station at Old Delhi for transportation to the railhead at Nautanwa. This job was handled by Schatz, Lachenal, and Terray, who spent a long tiring day at Old Delhi Station surrounded by a crowd of dirty porters wearing a sort of uniform, once white but now ranging from grey to black, with red turbans.

The rest of the expedition left next day by air for Lucknow. When I saw three tall, proud, bearded Sikhs enter the D.C.3 I could hardly believe that they were the crew, but I soon found that, trained as they were by the R.A.F. with whom they fought during the war, their standard of flying left nothing to be desired. At Lucknow we rejoined our friends and arranged for all our gear to be taken by coolies to the narrow-gauge railway which runs to Nautanwa, terminal of the Indian Railway and only a few miles from the Nepal Frontier. It was here that we first met the stocky little men with the yellow faces and iron muscles, the faithful Sherpas who were to link their fates with ours for several difficult months. Handshakes—smiles—their acquaintance was soon made.

Preparations were made here to cross the Indian-Nepalese Frontier, an imaginary line at the foot of the Siwaliks, first foothills of the Himalayas, and in jeeps and command cars we covered the wild malarial region where no native can live. We were much impressed by the magnitude of the forest fires we saw, and the indifference with which they were treated. In France they would have been national calamities—here they were absolutely nothing! In Butwal, at the foot of the hills, we were taken to an enclosure surrounded by leafy huts especially prepared for us by the Nepal Government. Among the authorities I noticed a man who spoke a few words of English and politely offered his umbrella to the ‘Burra Sahib.’ He wore a cap with a red band on it, and his shirt outside his shorts according to the custom of the country; his eyes were alive and sparkling with energy, and his face very pleasant.

He turned out to be G. B. Rana, the Nepalese officer who was to accompany us there and back; in this country no introductions are made—it was thanks to his umbrella we made his acquaintance!

The equipment was quickly distributed and an inventory taken, and then the long caravan of 160 coolies, 8 Sherpas, 9 Frenchmen, and 6 tons of equipment set off for Tansing. Lachenal and Terray had set off ahead of us on two very sorry horses, but a few hours later we saw their Rosinantes furiously galloping back to their stables—their riders informed me flipantly that being mountaineers they preferred to walk. Behind me was the picturesque convoy belonging to G. B. Rana, who
was on a spirited little horse, his violin- and umbrella-carrier, his stable boy, his sergeant, his orderly, and finally his cook. When he felt so inclined he would take the precious instrument from its case, and while the unfortunate boy ran alongside his horse with the umbrella to protect
him from the glare, he would play us popular Gurkha tunes with a quick rhythm, the charm of which we can remember still.

According to the Survey maps it is possible to see the Himalayas from the hill above Tansing, so we climbed it in all haste for our first glimpse of the peaks before the clouds covered them. We had heard so much about the Himalayas—our compatriots with the 1936 expedition had described the grandeur and beauty of these extraordinary mountains—and we had learnt a lot from Himalayan writers, with detailed and accurate descriptions. But they far surpassed all we had imagined; far away, emerging from the mists, was this magnificent wall of sparkling, glittering, icy peaks, and the unique sight thrilled us and sped us on our way.

For two days our caravan wended its undulating way towards Tukucha. One day we came upon a Nepalese wedding; while the friends of the groom pretend to carry the bride away in a litter covered with rich red and green brocade, the bridegroom dances a few yards away to the wild, rhythmic clamour of the local band—he dances for hours, until the spectators leave or he falls to the ground, tired out!

On April 22 we came to the immense alluvial plain of the Kali-Krishna-Gandaki which winds through a positive desert of stones, a parched but picturesque locality. Here we saw, for the first time, the awe-inspiring slopes of Dhaulagiri, a superb pyramid towering above us. Knowing we had come to try to conquer it, I hardly dared look it in the face. We sighted Tukucha from afar, a flat, apparently deserted village—as we approached we could see hundreds of prayer-flags flying. After a rapid tour we decided to pitch camp near the Buddhist Temple.

We now gave ourselves until the 15th May as an outside limit to explore and reconnoitre, and to assess the possible routes in both the Dhaulagiri and Annapurna massifs. We were still overwhelmed by the immense scale of the mountains, as the fantastic and inaccessible 4,500-m. faces of the Nilgiris were towering above us. The smallest reconnaissance would take several days and would almost be an expedition in itself, so we decided to visit the massifs in groups of two or three, and thus during this first somewhat thankless period, which was nevertheless rich in results, we managed to explore the north and east flanks of Dhaulagiri and the north and east flanks of Annapurna. During the next week we reviewed our discoveries: an unknown valley spread out before us north of Dhaulagiri; the high valley of Miristi-Khola, key to the approaches of Annapurna; the double col of Tilicho, embracing, like Mont Cenis, a 5-km. long lake—in the end we had a fair idea of the district. The topographical information had been very vague and in some cases inaccurate so we were really exploring new ground. The possibilities, according to my friends, were far from good; as the day passed we were nearing, at what seemed an incredible rate, the fateful day of June 5, the normal start of the monsoon, which would put an end to all activities.

On May 14 we held our council of war, and each man expressed his
own personal opinion of the possible routes he had seen. The decision was left to me. Dhaulagiri offered some possibilities of success, but even the Tibetan Lama advised us not to consider it but to try the other side. Responsibility for the lives of the party withheld me from exposing them on the tremendously long and jagged ridges where retreat would be impossible in the case of accident or bad weather. As to Annapurna, we knew the northern slopes were accessible, but apart from that, although we had hopes, we could not be sure that the Expedition could find a way up: we thought there were three possible routes—but in actual fact only the glacier route proved practicable. Anyway, Annapurna seemed to offer a chance of success, so we decided to make that our goal, and, as we did not want to put all our eggs in one basket and send the whole expedition off on what might prove disappointing, we compromised on a well-equipped reconnaissance which could, if necessary, become an actual attempt. The first party, Lachenal, Schatz, and Terray, therefore set off immediately along the Miristi-Khola for Annapurna, to be followed next day by Couzy, Rebuffat, and myself. The third party consisted of Ichac and Oudot with supplies of food and stores, and the fourth party were to leave only upon my orders if we decided to make an actual attempt.

The weather was bad and we marched for four days through cloud and snow over slippery ground, through wild vegetation where the Sherpas had to cut paths for us. We then reached Miristi-Khola where Schatz came to meet us; Lachenal and Terray were trying out the northwestern spur of Annapurna. That evening they returned, tired but enthusiastic and encouraged by their day's work, which had reminded them of their successes in the Alps. They were convinced that the spur offered a reasonable chance and proposed to install several camps and attack at once. I calmed down this enthusiasm a bit and decided the Base Camp should remain where it now was, nevertheless we carried three light camps when the six of us, next morning, set off to make a definite decision. Technical difficulties in the form of acrobatic rock-climbing soon started to worry me—the rocks could, of course, be roped so that the loaded Sherpas could pass, but I foresaw further difficulties, identical to the problems on Dhaulagiri. Rebuffat and Lachenal descended quickly to reconnoitre the north glacier, while Terray and I continued along the spur to satisfy ourselves that there was no possibility at all there. At 6,000 metres after a difficult slope of ice thinly powdered with snow, we decided against it, and descended the dangerous slope *en rappel* using our pitons and our 5-mm. 5-nylon rope. Once on the easier slopes it was a race against time to get back to camp before dark, and plan an attack for next day by the other route. The evacuation of camp, gear, and stores was completed next morning by the members of the expedition and the Sherpas Sarki and Arjeeba, after which Terray and I, with Sarki, left to join Lachenal and Rebuffat who were investigating the northern glacier. A quick climb along the right-bank moraine and the flanks of the Great Barrier brought us to the higher plateau. Suddenly at the foot of an ice-cliff we saw our future
Camp I, where our friends were impatiently waiting for us. From here the mountain looked terrific—a mass of precipices, immense icy walls, and sharp ridges converging at the summit ridge. We were overwhelmed by this marvellous but awe-inspiring sight—tiny as we were, we proposed to scale these tremendous heights. The avalanches rumbling continuously and the grandeur of what we called the Great Barrier added to the impressiveness of the scene. We were decided as to the best route, all four of us preferred the one which took us to the summit most quickly; the probable route was as follows: a large plateau, several kilometres wide, a spine of mixed rock and ice which appeared to lead to another small plateau (which was actually much larger than it appeared to be from below)—from there the best possible route across the very steep crumbling snow slopes, a labyrinth of ice-walls, large transverse crevasses, and ridges where we anticipated we should find difficulties, and then finally, the tricky glacier, shaped like a sickle, which led to the highest summit yet reached by man. Now all that remained was to put our plans into practice.

I sent an order back to Tukucha: 'We have a chance of success if we do not waste a day, or even an hour.' This was explained to Sarki in sign language. He was the strongest, most faithful and devoted of all our Sherpas. He knew well that four days separated us from Tukucha, but he realised the need for haste—indeed on Sarki largely depended the success of our plans. With a broad grin he assured us he would do his best and we were sure of it. I learnt afterwards that instead of taking four days to cover the distance, he had only taken a day and a half, for he had run day and most of the night the whole way to Tukucha. The Expedition was extremely grateful to him, and we were able to show our gratitude when he returned to Darjeeling.

We had no time to lose, and by common agreement set off at once with loads of 15 to 20 kilos each to establish Camp II with two tents and a certain amount of stores at about 6,000 metres at the foot of Annapurna. Spread out in single file across the vast plateau of the northern glacier we sweltered and felt stifled; in the centre of this circus the sun shone straight down on us, and the rays seemed to strike the snow-walls around and then glance back to concentrate on us. I can still feel that heat! Lachenal, who was very ingenious always, made two white hoods from a bag and he and Rebuffat looked like members of the Ku Klux Klan. They assured us that these did protect them. Terray and I preferred a thick coating of anti-sunburn cream. There seemed to be no air in this furnace and we longed to gain height and leave our Turkish bath. At 6,000 metres our loads seemed terribly heavy, and it took all our will-power to overcome lassitude. We had no Sherpas, for we had advanced too quickly for them to have reached us from their camp yet, but we all felt that on our efforts that day largely depended the success of the expedition. The monsoon was approaching relentlessly, and each day was of utmost importance—what mattered our efforts if we could win in the end?

At last we came to the plateau which we had seen from below: it
ANNAPURNA

was broad and roomy. It was hard to find a site completely sheltered
from that perpetual Himalayan danger, the avalanche, so for that night
we contented ourselves with comparative security. We put down our
load. The view was really indescribable. Lost in the middle of ice and
snow, amid the perpetual thundering of avalanches, we were surrounded
by an extraordinary circle of peaks and ridges of over 7,000 metres.
Close at hand was a jagged arete which we christened the ‘Cauliflower
Ridge’—then the north-west spur which we had tried out a few days
earlier; in the distance, Dhaulagiri, a powerful pyramid, towering
above the surrounding mountains; nearer, the inaccessible Nilgiris,
their icy heads held high; farther to the right, the Great Barrier which
I had already seen on a previous reconnaissance, the sides of which drop
perpendicularly to the basin of the upper Miristi-Khola and our Base
Camp; behind us, although the bad perspective was not flattering,
Annapurna in all its majesty.

Camp II was quickly pitched. It was to be the advance Base Camp
for the attacking parties, for it was only above it that any technical
difficulties started. The plan of campaign had now to be settled and
was not easy. I had to consider the gear at hand, the problem of
health, the difficulties and dangers, and above all the very limited
time at our disposal. Our best manner of splitting forces seemed to
be into three groups. Terray and two Sherpas, myself and two Sher-
pas, and thirdly Couzy, Lachenal, Rebuffat, and Schatz. While Terray
and myself, with our Sherpas, went up and down, carrying and pitching
the camps which were now at Camp II, our four friends were to go
from camp to camp without Sherpas installing at each _stage the gear
they had themselves carried. This seemed to me the quickest and
surest method.

In four days the camps were pitched, although the slopes turned out
steeper than we had thought and the seracs were so close together
and on such a large scale that we often had to climb over them. Hand-
holds, steps for our feet in the vertical, sometimes overhanging ice-
falls; this was a technique with which we were all familiar, but of
course it took a lot of time and at this height a lot of effort too. Nylon
ropes fixed at these difficult passages helped the Sherpas along with
their loads. Conditions were not out to help. We sank into the soft
snow to our waists and it took hours to gain 100 metres, pulling each
foot out in turn with our hands, before we could make the next step
forward. Ice-axes would hardly hold in the soft snow. We led through,
and our great annoyance was that the weather deteriorated about
2 o’clock every day, and the snow nullified all our efforts. Terray’s
endurance was quite remarkable. He was the strong man of the party
and very popular with the Sherpas. We felt our stock with them was
very high—we were always in the lead and they would only take over if
we ordered them to—we once asked Pansy if he would like to scale an
ice-wall, but he smiled broadly and said politely: ‘No, thank you, for
Sahib only.’

At Camp III, pitched in a crevasse blocked with powder snow, the
parties arrived exhausted. The Sherpas, though accustomed to high altitudes, always had bad headaches over 6,500 metres. The Sahibs reacted in different ways, according to temperament. Some spent restless feverish nights with shocking headaches which we soothed with medicine Oudot had distributed. Camp life is hard. We spent the afternoons pitching camp and deciding what we would take with us the following day. Appetites fell and it took all our will-power to make ourselves eat a little. In the evenings we took an incredible number of pills, vitamin B, vitamin C, aspirin, and sedative; with this assortment in my stomach I felt I had done my duty, and made sure my friends had taken all theirs too! In the higher camps Terray and I distributed pills to all the Sherpas, for they had even worse headaches than ours and could swallow nothing.

Returning to Camp II for the second time I decided that Lachenal, who was improving every day, should come with me, and that Rebuffat, who had a touch of the sun, should wait one day for Terray. Couzy and Schatz would follow the day after that. At last this was real assault. The first rope available, Lachenal and myself, left for the summit. Couzy, Rebuffat, Schatz, and Terray were to be in support. It took a whole day to go from one camp to the other, so if all went well, June 3 would be the day. Angtharkay our faithful Sirdar, and his pupil Ang Dawa accompanied our rope. It seemed to me that the Sirdar's place was with the leading party; his experience would be invaluable if any big decisions had to be made. His courage and perseverance were indisputably in his favour. He and Ang Dawa, the favourite and the smallest, who had been very valuable during previous reconnaissances and who looked up to Angtharkay as to a god, were the ideal Sherpas to accompany us. Rebuffat and Terray had the Sherpas they knew best—Pansy, who after Angtharkay had the most experience, and his brother Aila.

We reached Camp III without much trouble by a route which I now knew well, having covered it twice. Camp IV was struck and carried over very steep slopes and along the long sickle ridge. Our Sherpas found it sticky going—we often found patches of sheer ice covered by several inches of rotten snow. The new Camp IV which we called Camp IV bis was pitched in the shelter of a serac at the beginning of the Sickle glacier in what seemed to us the most favourable site. Alas that we could not foresee that the icy wall which protected us so well would prove the disastrous screen on our return which prevented us from finding our tents. We were at 7,000 metres that day and Angtharkay and Ang Dawa returned immediately to the old Camp IV to fetch the one tent left there and come up at dawn. We could then—all of us—spend the night at Camp IV bis or Camp V.

June 2 was fine and we prepared tea and waited for Angtharkay's return—we could eat nothing but nougat, which luckily still tasted good. Our Sirdar arrived late, having had some difficulty on the slope in spite of the fact that it was frozen so early in the morning. Our aim was to establish Camp V half-way to the top by a rocky spine which we
1. Annapurna I (26,504 ft.), from the north. Sickle glacier below skyline, left centre.

2. The Great Barrier.

3. Dhaulagiri (26,810 ft.), from the east.
had noticed from Camp I. The snow was deep and progress tiring; the slope was so steep we were afraid of starting an avalanche at every step. A long traverse to the left which I had planned out, then a difficult climb in a sort of *thalweg* led to the future camp. This *thalweg* had looked fairly easy from below but now appeared horribly steep. Several ice-walls had to be climbed, but they did not need roping, and were surmounted by step-cutting; we gained height gradually. The cauliflower ridge was at our feet—the Nilgiris, until now above us, lay below. Beyond the Great Barrier we could guess at the Tibetan plateau. Only Dhaulagiri looked down on us. We stopped often and took it in turns to lead. Above we could see the rocky spine, our aim for the day: we hoped to find a platform up there large enough to be able to pitch our tent in safety for the night.

At these heights perception loses much of its acuteness. I am very conscious of it personally—I find it difficult to think of several things at once. Therefore I concentrated on one—the sole object—to reach the rocky spine which already seemed so close. But when, more tired than ever before, we reached the rocks, disappointment lay in wait for us; they were very steep and covered with a shell of ice without even a crack in it. No platform, no hope of putting up our little tent, our ‘coffin’—the place was most inhospitable and was to give us some of the worst memories of our lives. However, we resigned ourselves to making a platform in the steep slopes and Sherpas and Sahibs worked together. A great deal of snow had to be cleared and again we wondered at the endurance of the Sherpas. Eventually the tent was pitched on the brink of the abyss, where it collected all the snow which drifted down the slope, and there we had to spend the night, made fast to a piton in the chalky rock. I asked Ang Dawa and Angtharkay if they would like to stay on with us; I felt I could not order them to. There are times when the leader’s authority must bow to human reactions. Angtharkay said that though he would very much have liked to come to the top with us, nevertheless he preferred to return to Camp IV. His feet were a bit frozen and it would take him all night to rub them back to circulation. Soon our faithful Sherpas were but dots on the horizon and we were alone. We made some tea with difficulty and dutifully swallowed our pills—food of any sort was impossible. This was our last night, our vigil before the assault. Fully dressed we slid into our sleeping-bags, taking our boots in with us to keep them supple for the morning.

It was a horrible night. The wind blew and snow drifted, piling up against the tent. As the night wore on I was half buried by it, longing for dawn to escape the stifling mass, and wondering if I could stand it till the time came to start. Lachenal at my side was suffering different torments: he kept thinking that the tent, with us still in it, would be hurled over the precipice, even though he knew well that we were moored fast to the rock. By the time dawn broke at last we were thoroughly exhausted and neither of us felt strong enough to make a hot drink. It took all our will-power to put on our boots which, in spite
of having been in our sleeping-bags, were frozen hard. Before leaving we put a few things in our rucksacks. I took a tube of condensed milk, some nougat, a pair of socks, and my movie camera. (I tried out the latter but unfortunately it would not work, so although we had taken shots up to 7,500 metres we could not cover the rest of the climb in spite of all the care we had taken.)

We left at 6 o’clock, Louis Lachenal and I, to launch the final attack on the summit. We decided not to rope up for it would have been useless on the vast Sickle glacier, which, albeit steep, had no crevasses. It was fine but cold. Our very light crampons bit well into the patches of hard snow. Occasionally we broke through the crust and sank deep into very soft powder snow. After several hundred metres I stopped to look at the mountains round us, while Lachenal took off one sock that was making his boot too tight. We were higher than them all, save the gigantic Dhaulagiri. Below us stretched out the land of our reconnaissances which was so well imprinted on our minds. It all seemed strangely unreal and I felt I was living in a private world, although my thoughts were perfectly clear.

We took it in turns to lead, for kicking steps at this altitude was very tiring. We could by now see the summit ridge and could make out a corridor to the extreme right which, although steep, seemed to lead to the top. We made for it. Hours passed, but we were not conscious of the passing of time. We seemed to be making good progress as compared to a man climbing Mont Blanc and my heart was full, for I felt nothing could keep victory from us. Then the last slope neared, as in a dream. It was steep and I was grateful for our crampons, which helped us to march fairly easily over the dangerous terrain towards our couloir—the snow was fairly hard. Lachenal and I, close together, panting and making frequent halts, kept looking up to know how much more of this purgatory had to be endured. The memory of the last hours is blurred and only certain incidents stand out in my mind. I well remember reaching the ridge and, after a traverse to the left, attaining the peak.

It seemed incredible that we were at last treading this snow after all our efforts to get there. Lachenal, in spite of the inner elation he felt but did not show, wanted to descend immediately as he could feel his feet beginning to freeze. We looked quickly down the precipitous southern slopes; I could not see the bottom, for a few clouds were floating several kilometres below us; I hardly knew if I were in heaven or on earth and my mind kept turning to all those men who had died on high mountains and to friends in France. Our moments up there were quite indescribable, with the realisation before us that we were actually standing on the highest peak in the world to be conquered by man. The green valley of Chamonix where I had spent my youth, at the foot of the lovely Mont Blanc massif, seemed far away. In those days the 4,800 metres had impressed me greatly and I revered those who had climbed them as heroes—and now, 8,000 metres! It seemed incredible and yet there I was!
We descended to the highest rocks on the summit, 2 metres below the actual peak ridge, to take photographs of the flags and pennants which we had brought with us. At that time these actions were a tremendous effort—the fixing of the flags was difficult—we could not find stones to make a cairn with—everything was frozen in—the setting of the camera required a great deal of concentration; I hurried on to get it all finished and return to the land of men. Lachenal had already left when I took a little condensed milk and repacked my rucksack. One last look at the summit which represented our joy, our glory, and our consolation, and I hurried to the couloir where Lachenal was—from there it was to be a veritable rush back to Camp V, which we had left that morning. As I left I pulled on my gloves, but suddenly one of them dropped and fell gently but unhesitatingly to the bottom; I watched it helplessly, knowing the catastrophe it meant—unfortunately it never occurred to me that I had a pair of socks in my rucksack. Ice-axe in hand, I lengthened my stride and hurried across the long traverse to try to catch up with Lachenal. The weather had deteriorated and the wind blew hard. Ugly clouds were surrounding us. The monsoon had arrived and our race against death had begun. In the distance in a gap in the clouds I saw Camp V, but the mists soon covered it again. Lachenal, still ahead, could be seen 50 metres in front of me through the mist till he reached the ice-slope just before the tent, and there I lost sight of him. Snow was now falling and it was bitterly cold. I reached camp and was thrilled to see—not one, but *two* tents. Rebuffat and Terray were there waiting for us. I shouted and asked where Lachenal was, but Lachenal had not arrived. . . . Terray shook me by the hand and noticed it was white and hard as wood. I had not even noticed it on the way down. He looked after me like a brother and rubbed it while I told him how sorry I was he had not been with us on the summit, he who had done so much to help the whole expedition; his reply warmed me: ‘You got to the top, Maurice, so we all got to the top.’

There was a shout outside and Terray jumped up and rushed out. It was Lachenal. A quarter of an hour later he brought him in. He had fallen about a hundred yards down the slope and had been very lucky in stopping his fall with his crampons.

So began our second night at 7,500 metres. Terray and Lachenal were in the tent we had had the night before, Rebuffat and myself in the other. Another horrible night, though the presence and devotion of our friends was a tremendous comfort. Snow fell again and piled up between the tent and the slope. Half-way through the night I was again buried, my hands over my lungs to give them breathing-room. The weather went from bad to worse, clouds covered us, and snow fell relentlessly. We could not delay. We must get down as quickly as possible to lose height and find our fresher companions, who would look after us. When day came we started the descent. It was of course impossible to find our tracks, and we could only see 10 metres ahead of us. We tried to identify ice-walls and went on down, knowing that
soon we should have to turn left to commence the traverse down to Camp IV. It was still early then, but we searched desperately for the tents for the rest of the day, ploughing our way through snow, waist-deep. Terray, who was the freshest, led most of the way, and in order to see the dangers that lay ahead of us the better, took off his glasses. He paid for it next day by complete snow-blindness.

Night came and we still could not find Camp IV. We seemed to have visited every serac in the region, for it could have been hidden behind any of them. The mist was opaque and snow falling ceaselessly, the ground was always treacherous. Eventually we had to resign ourselves to bivouacking, although all four of us knew full well what a night spent in those conditions would mean. The best we could do was to find a crevasse in which we could shelter. Lachenal went several metres ahead to the end of the rope to search for one, and then suddenly disappeared before our eyes. Worried and alarmed, we approached the hole, when to our relief a sepulchral voice came from below and told us that the bottom of the crevasse, all in all, would be as good as we could find. So in turn we descended into a sort of underground room, several feet square, which was to be our sleeping apartment that night. I felt it might also very probably be our tomb!

It was impossible to eat and we had nothing to drink as we got ready for a terrible night. Lachenal could feel his feet hardening and my four limbs were freezing. Terray rubbed us both hard. Rebuffat made himself as comfortable as possible although his feet were worrying him too. Terray had brought a sleeping-bag which he generously shared with us—six feet fighting for a place in this cramped nest! Rebuffat put his feet on us to try to protect them a little; perched on the little camera I waited for the hours to pass. I did not even shiver. My senses seemed to be clear. I resented the hellish situation we were in, and I thought it very likely that night would be our last.

Dawn glimmered at last through the hole over our heads, to be followed immediately by an avalanche of powder snow which completely enshrouded us. A sinister portent. But it hardly worried us; we were already in pretty dire straits. It was essential we should escape from our prison, and Rebuffat climbed painfully up the gully we had descended the night before, and fixed a rope by which Terray clambered out, followed by the bare-footed Lachenal. I stayed below, for everything had been deeply buried in the snow, and above all we had to find Lachenal’s boots and mine, that had been taken off when our feet were rubbed. Without them this would indeed be our last resting-place. Some of the photographic equipment turned up though the little camera was never found. After a feverish search in the snow, with bare feet and bare hands, for over an hour, I unearthed and sent them up. Then I too climbed out, digging my toe-nails in the walls of fresh snow. Outside it was marvellously fine—our last day was to be fine—the mountain had taken on the strangest, most mysterious colouring—darker than usual and ominously calm. Lachenal wanted to leave at once in his bare feet; he had become feverish and was rambling.
a little. Terray was blind. Rebuffat was blind. Lachenal's feet, and
my hands and feet, were frost-bitten. I looked around and realised
Camp IV was on our left, not on our right, but we could not grope our
way there. To start with we had to get our boots on. Lachenal suc-
cceeded, but even with everybody's help my wooden and swollen feet
could not be pushed into mine. Our last moments seemed to have
come and I told Terray to take the others down. He would not leave
me. We all shouted loudly, hoping to attract the attention of Schatz
and Couzy in Camp IV, but got no reply. With a terrific effort Terray
got my boots on and we were ready to go, although more dead than
alive. Annapurna was avenging its defeat. Mists were covering the
top of the Sickle glacier. Suddenly, only 200 metres from us—I could
hardly believe my eyes—a miracle appeared. Schatz was there, saw us,
and came towards us as quickly as he could in the waist-deep snow. Our
troubles seemed ended with his arrival. He came to us, and without
a word embraced me. I told him we were not up to much but that we
had reached the top. His presence and friendship warmed us, and gave
us back the will to live which we seemed to have lost. The mountain
cleared and became lighter—once again I noticed the sun and the blue
sky. Life had begun again. It was wonderful just to be near Schatz,
who symbolised for me at that moment the need of man for man, the
joy that wipes out misery, the miracle that saves distress. We are too
blind to realise what true charity and humanity mean. I learnt it that
day.

Saved though we were we still had to be got down. I had to be
towed behind Schatz back to Camp IV, where Couzy was. He tried
to make me eat, but I had only one desire, to get to Oudot at Camp II
and see what he could do to save my hands and feet. On a tight rope I
descended the difficult ice-wall between Camp IV bis and Camp IV.
At that hour of the day the snow was soft, and as my feet were of little
use I let my body scrape through the snow, braking as much as possible.
At Camp IV were our Sherpas, our good Sherpas that we thought we
would never see again. They gave me a hot drink, but all I wanted was
to hurry down. I explained to Sarki and Aila that I was to go down
between them on the rope, that I could not stand properly and that we
must get to the Doctor-Sahib at Camp II. The descent began. We
passed the large crevasse which blocked the whole glacier. The
Sherpas went slowly and I asked them to hurry. We passed the ice-
walls and I had to choose the way down, the way that could be taken
with least risk.

It was midday. The sun was at its height and shone down on all
the snow that had accumulated during the bad weather the day before.
It was truly glorious and the colours were magnificent—but I could
feel that the mountain was ready to crumble under the tremendous
weight of top snow—I seemed to be able to feel it vibrating, shudder-
ing and alive. Climbers often have this sixth sense that warns of
impending danger, and it increased every minute until I could feel it in
every pore. And then what I feared happened. The two Sherpas were
ahead of me (and Rebuffat behind) when suddenly an entire slab fell away under their feet. I could see them being carried away and my instinct was to climb up quickly, quicker than the slab was falling. But it was inevitable, and I got carried away too. I shouted, hit the ice, wheeled round in the air, pirouetted, hit the ice again, shouted once more . . . the rope pulled and dragged me, I supposed to my death. But suddenly, like a condemned man when the platform is taken from under his feet and he finds himself hanging from the end of the rope, I found myself swinging over a vertical shaft of ice, at the bottom of which I could see a dizzy corridor running to the base. Hanging as I was with the rope round my head, arm, and leg, and of course face downwards, I was not exactly comfortable! I tried to improve my position by holding on to the ice where I could reach it. It was nice to be alive, but my left arm was hurt and I had no feeling in my hands; they might even be broken. I was afraid for my friends and shouted to warn them—then I felt something give on my rope apart from the naturally elastic nylon. I lay flat against the wall and looked up, and suddenly the head of Sarki appeared against the skyline. Three minutes later I was on the surface, looking at the mountains again. This time with a different eye. They did not seem to me as beautiful as before!

What ill fortune we had encountered in so short a time; the goddess of Annapurna—'goddess of the harvest'—she doesn't merit her name. She should have been called 'Kali, the beautiful but cruel.'

Rebuffat was unhurt; he only fell about 50 metres.

The descent continued: we reached the ice-walls. I could not stand at all and the question was, how was I to get down without using hands, feet, or crampons? Nevertheless it had to be done. The skin flaked off my hands and stuck to the ropes—my hands were so terrible to look at that I hid them in a scarf. The descent seemed interminable; the Sherpas had not secured me properly and I kept slipping around, for I could no longer grip the ground. Below in the distance I could see men at Camp II and wondered if I could get there. The Sherpas seemed to understand and kept me very close to them. The last ice-slope was reached, and how my companions got down it without being pulled off by me, I just don't know. Two more Sherpas came up to meet us, Ichac and Oudot had sent them from Camp II. They were the good Phu Tharkay and a friend. They gave me a comforting drink and Phu Tarkay looked despairingly at me. I put my arm round his neck and rested my entire weight on him. It was good to know confidently that he had strength to support me. Angtharkay steadied us behind, and so we crossed the last long plateau to Camp II where Oudot, Ichac, and Noyelle were anxiously awaiting us, and I handed myself over thankfully to their care. I was already lying in my tent with my eyes bandaged when the others arrived—Terray, Lachenal, Rebuffat, and the Sherpas. Annapurna was evacuated. No one remained on the mountain. We had beaten it, and I could lie back and think: the job has been finished; the struggle is over.