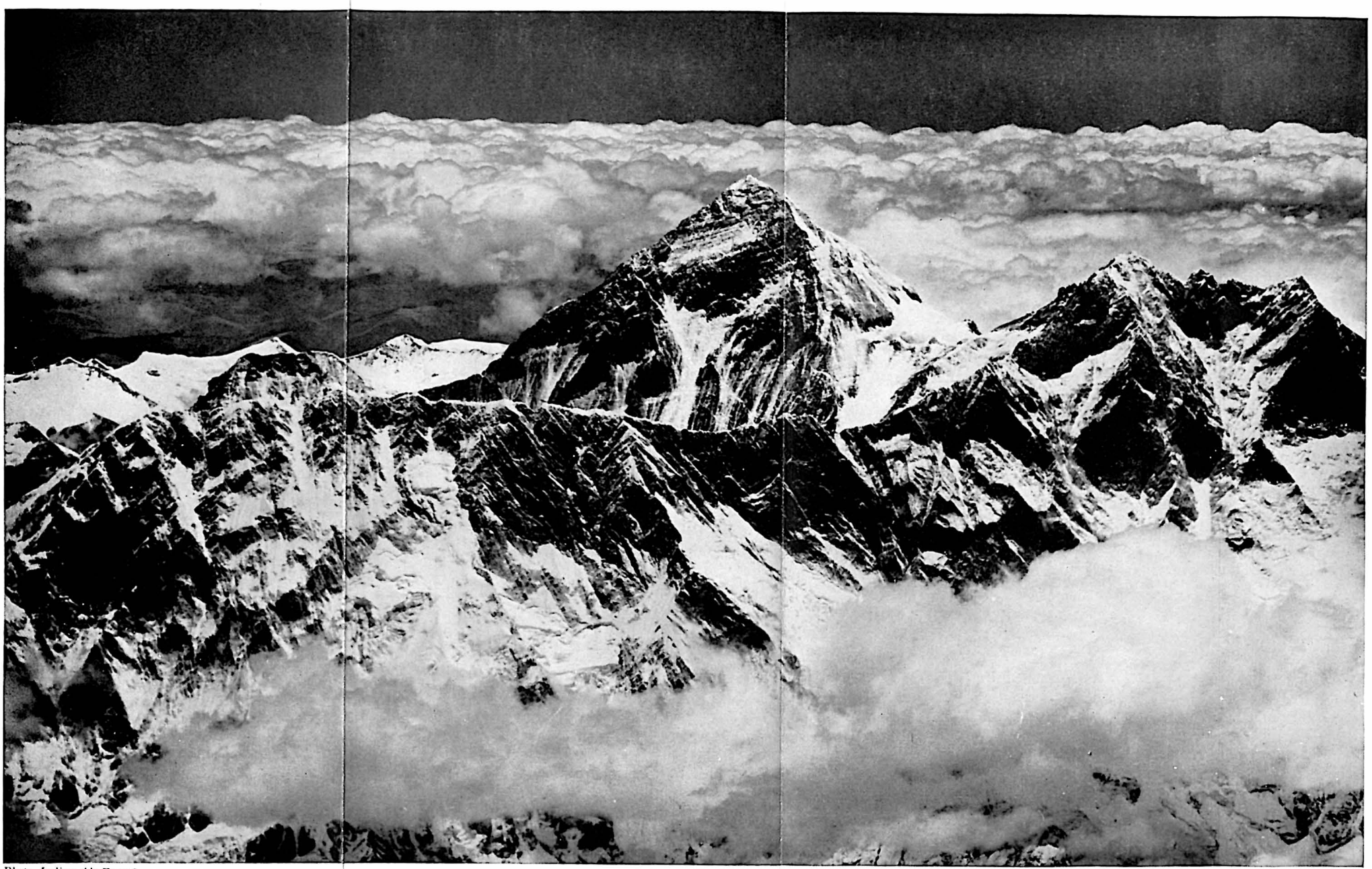

Photo, Indian Air Force.]

EVEREST, 1953.

Frontispiece.

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EVEREST

WHEN the news of the ascent of Mount Everest was first published on Coronation Day this summer, the way in which it was acclaimed throughout the civilized world was a tribute, not just to a notable landmark in our narrower story of mountaineering, but to the final achievement in one of the great quests which have happened from time to time to capture the imagination of the peoples, and have enlivened the pages of their wider histories.

There are perhaps a few men still alive today, a very few men, who were born at the time when the crews of the *Erebus* and *Terror* completed the last link in a North-west Passage, then first discovered ; and a few more of our living veterans may have been born before the crew of the *Investigator* (but not its ship) had actually passed through a North-west Passage from open sea to open sea. These were the virtual endings of perhaps the greatest of all the quests which, later to become international, have stirred British adventurers, and have been so remarkable a feature of our history during the past two centuries and more.

Each quest was a search for the answer to a question beset with known and unknown obstacles which would test courage, endurance, and wit—obstacles which threatened defeat and were, or might be, even so grave that the chances of death and disaster had knowingly to be braved. What urged the adventurers themselves were the challenge of the difficulties and risks, the excitement of discovery, and, doubtless, the fruits of possible success, which might in some endeavours bring great material reward, but in others fame alone—for the goal was often no more than a symbol, as was the exact location of the North Pole on an ever-drifting sheet of ice. But there might sometimes chance to be no answer at all to the dominant problem of a yet unfinished quest—

no North-west Passage or no North-east Passage there for the finding ; and what caught the fancy of the nation at large was not the material worth of the end, but the question whether it could be reached—the romance of man's strife against Nature.

It is not too far-fetched to trace a curious progress in the history of these quests, a progress proper to sea-faring nations, but with phases which overlap and intermingle here and there. Earliest voyages to discover unknown lands were followed by bold endeavours to find and open the most direct waterways from sea to sea, and then by deliberate explorations of the oceans themselves. Later, the great but untrumpeted Admiralty surveys of the coasts of the continents charted the boundaries of the seas, and land was penetrated up unknown rivers, at first to open trade routes by water, then for the sake of discovery itself. The advantages of transport by boats over transport on land would in any case have led naturally to the choice of rivers and coastal waters as highways of adventure, well instanced by the earliest explorations of the northern rivers and the Arctic coast-line of Canada ; but we may in fancy discern a sort of reluctance to abandon water for outright travel on land. Even when popular interest had turned to land travel, water seems still for a time to have kept its old lure with the romantic prospects of mythical ' central seas ' perhaps to be found in Australia and Africa, or (less to the present point) an open sea around the North Pole ; and, as a sort of last relic of sea-faring, we may recall how the earliest African explorers navigated the land with chronometer and sextant.

With the ever more detailed explorations of ever smaller areas of unknown country, the mappers of the continents have spun their triangulated webs over most of the world until there now remain to us for discovery little more than the ice-clad wastes within the two Polar circles and the ice-clad heights of land on the continental watersheds. As it were, the limit of minute geographical knowledge has crept farther and farther from the sea, but only for us to find beyond it the threat and attraction of the ancient lure in another physical form. Apart from still unknown regions in the far north and the far south which promise the wider sort of discovery, the mountain ranges of the world alone (or almost alone) offer a field for quests which, circumscribed as each may be, are nevertheless as urgent with the unknown to be faced, and as challenging with difficulties to be overcome and with dangers to be out-witted, as any famous quest in the long history of exploration.

Of these mountains, Everest has enjoyed particular fame by reason of its supreme elevation above sea-level, discovered a hundred years since ; and, because of the many gallant failures to reach its summit, the quest for Everest has achieved the same sort of fame as did those for the Northern Passages, for the Poles, and for the Sources of the Nile. What first attracted public notice soon after 1852 was the fact that Everest is the highest known mountain in the world, and what later fired public imagination in and after 1921 were the determined

attempts of men to climb so high in spite of great and peculiar difficulties. It must however be recognized clearly that, as a mountain, Everest is much of a size with Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa when each is measured above its true valley base, and that the difficulties of Everest itself are no greater, are even considerably less, than those which have been successfully overcome on other mountains of the same relative size, but of much smaller absolute height above the sea. Formidable as are the difficulties of rock and ice on Everest, the real difficulty which guarded it for so long was physiological—the effect of the thin air at great elevations on man's physical capacity and on his will to tackle obstacles which would not stop or deter him at lesser heights. The attainment of the summit was due as much to many who worked quietly at home to lessen the physiological difficulty as to the grand efforts of the men who actually reached the top.

When we celebrate the splendid achievement in 1953 of this, the latest of many expeditions to Mount Everest, we must therefore remember with gratitude the selfless work of many men who played no personal part in the final adventure itself, or who, each playing there his essential part, had not the good fortune to stand on the summit. We must remember, then, those who laid the foundations for success in the past or only a few months ago—the strong advocates who first dreamt of the quest fifty years since and brought it to birth in 1921, the leaders and members of expedition after expedition whose frustrated efforts nevertheless built up the knowledge which has now been rewarded, the men who worked quietly at home to improve methods and equipment at each successive stage of the story, and those who, by their labours, advocacy and generosity, made it possible to send out each costly expedition.

The names of our creditors in the past are to be found in earlier volumes of the *Alpine Journal*, and it is possible here to record only those of the present. In doing this we must notice a special feature of the latest event: in the case of a British Everest expedition, there has never before been so whole-hearted a search for the best which scientific knowledge and technical experience could give, that our men might be sent out as well equipped and provisioned as it was possible to send them in the full light of that knowledge. This pressed a very heavy burden on the organizers of the expedition, and it is therefore just to pay a tribute here to the Chairman and Vice-chairman of the Himalayan Committee, Sir Edwin Herbert and Mr. J. M. Wordie, to its members, the names of whom are recorded below, to its Honorary Secretary, Mr. B. R. Goodfellow, and, last but by no means least, to Mr. R. W. Lloyd, its Honorary Treasurer, to whose unremitting labours was due the collection of the funds which made possible the adventure.

The results of that scientific knowledge were used as wholeheartedly by Sir John Hunt and the members of his expedition in their splendid combined operation. When Sir Edmund Hillary and the Sherpa, Tensing, reached the actual summit, their magnificent personal efforts

were crowned with a success which was due to the team as a whole. Each member of it, transport officer and climber, had to play, and did play, his essential part in the outcome, and it is to the whole membership of the expedition that we owe our thanks.

T. GRAHAM BROWN.

The Himalayan Committee

Edwin Herbert, J. M. Wordie, C. A. Elliot, B. R. Goodfellow, L. P. Kirwan, Peter Lloyd, R. Wylie Lloyd, D. G. Lowndes, Clarmont Skrine, H. W. Tobin, L. R. Wager.

The Everest Expedition, 1953

John Hunt, G. C. Band, T. D. Bourdillon, R. C. Evans, A. Gregory, E. P. Hillary, W. G. Lowe, C. W. F. Noyce, L. G. C. Pugh, T. Stobart, M. P. Ward, M. H. Westmacott, C. G. Wylie.

NOTE: We have omitted indications of rank or of special professional service in the above lists as a sort of tribute to the equally essential part played by each member in the successful outcome.

In the following pages we print a narrative of the expedition. the leader's personal journal (which will appear only in the publications of the Alpine Club), and the story of the first ascent of the South peak. We had intended to include Sir Edmund Hillary's own account of the ascent of the main peak. Unavoidable circumstances have, most unfortunately, prevented this, but we hope that it will be available for publication in our next number, in which will appear other articles about special features of the expedition.