CRESCENDO
1939–1956

By A. K. RAWLINSON[1]

I

In this latest epoch in the story of mountaineering two themes prevail. First, after the interruption of the war, comes the surge of exploration and achievement in the remoter mountain regions of the world. A century after the Alpine Golden Age has followed the Himalayan Golden Age; the highest mountains of all have been climbed, and also many of the lesser peaks as more and more parties visit this greatest of ranges. Similarly, in the Andes and other distant regions the list of first ascents has lengthened annually.

The second theme is the ever-increasing popularisation of mountaineering. This has been the constant feature of mountaineering history over the last hundred years, and especially between the wars. But since 1945 it has developed to a new degree, and in many countries. It has produced not only increasing numbers of climbers, but a general rise in the standard of technical achievement. In mountaineering, familiarity breeds both ambition and competence.

Let us first consider climbing in the European Alps between 1939 and 1956, then, more briefly, in the other main ranges of the world, and finally in the Himalayas.

II

Standards of difficulty and climbing technology are not the most important elements in mountaineering. But because, more than other elements, they change, they must engage the attention of the historian, especially in mountains like the Alps, where a long history of intensive climbing has so narrowed the field for new endeavour. In the Alps the nineteen-thirties saw a definite advance in rock-climbing technique. In some of the famous climbs of the period danger was as important as difficulty, and certain of these, like the Matterhorn Nordwand and the Eigerwand, retain their attraction as recognised feats. But the climbs which today stand out as influential for subsequent history are rather

[1] I am indebted to the following for kindly sending me information about North and South America, and Africa: Mr. T. Crombie, Mr. Francis P. Farquhar, Dr. G. H. Francis, Dr. J. de V. Graaff, Mr. J. W. Howard, Mr. Maynard M. Miller. But they have no responsibility for the way in which I have used their material.—A. K. R.

those which exemplified a new standard of rock technique, like Allain and Leininger's North face of the Petit Dru (1935). This was in the main a free climb, in which pitons played little part. But in the Dolomites a more sustained pitonnage was being developed ; Comici, one of the grand masters, and the Dimai brothers climbed the North face of the Cima Grande in 1933.[2] In 1938, applying their Dolomite training in the Western Alps, Cassin, Esposito and Tizzoni climbed the Walker Spur of the Grandes Jorasses.

Since then there has been but one major technical development, and that within a specialised and narrow field. This is the procedure of continuous pitonning and multiple bivouacs used for the West face of the Petit Dru in 1952. For the rest the standard set in the 'thirties has endured. The Walker is still ranked as the greatest climb in the Alps. Many new routes have been done, but nothing significantly harder than the hardest routes of the 'thirties. When Gaston Rébuffat, who must have the finest record of great Alpine climbs in our period, selects seven for description in a book, none is a first ascent.[3] From 1939 to 1952 the highest standard of difficulty does not advance, but there is an increase in the number of climbs which require it, and the number of climbers who do them.

For the techniques developed by the best experts of the 'thirties opened wide possibilities for exploitation in the next ten years, both new routes and repetitions of old routes hitherto considered exceptional. The war withdrew most climbers from the Alps, but some climbing continued, by the Swiss, and a few French and Italians. Gervasutti, prince of rock-climbers, continued to make great routes : the Pillars of Fresnay (1940) and the East face of the Grandes Jorasses (1942). There were also Carrel's exploits on the Matterhorn, the Furggen direct, and, of more limited appeal, the Girdle. But the climbs which set the pattern for the immediate post-war era were the many ascents, new and old, in the Chamonix Aiguilles. The Geneva group were prominent, Dittert, Marullaz, Lambert and others, and the new young guides of Chamonix, Terray, Lachenal, and Rébuffat, none of whom was a native of the valley. In Switzerland, too, Roch, de Rham and others were doing rock climbs of similar standard ; and the guides Alexander Graven and Alexander Taugwalder began to make repeated ascents of some of the harder routes around Zermatt which had previously been considered exceptional.

With the end of the war came the invasion of the Alps by the many. To cope with the crowds new huts have been built, new guide-books

[2] The contemporary comment on this climb in *A.J.* 45. 374 is an interesting period piece.

[3] *Etoiles et Tempêtes* (translated under the title *Starlight and Storm*), by Gaston Rébuffat.

published, and new clubs and training organisations have proliferated. More hotels have been opened, but these are more for the general tourist and for the winter season ; mountaineers are more often found in the innumerable tents that disfigure the woods and open spaces round Alpine centres.

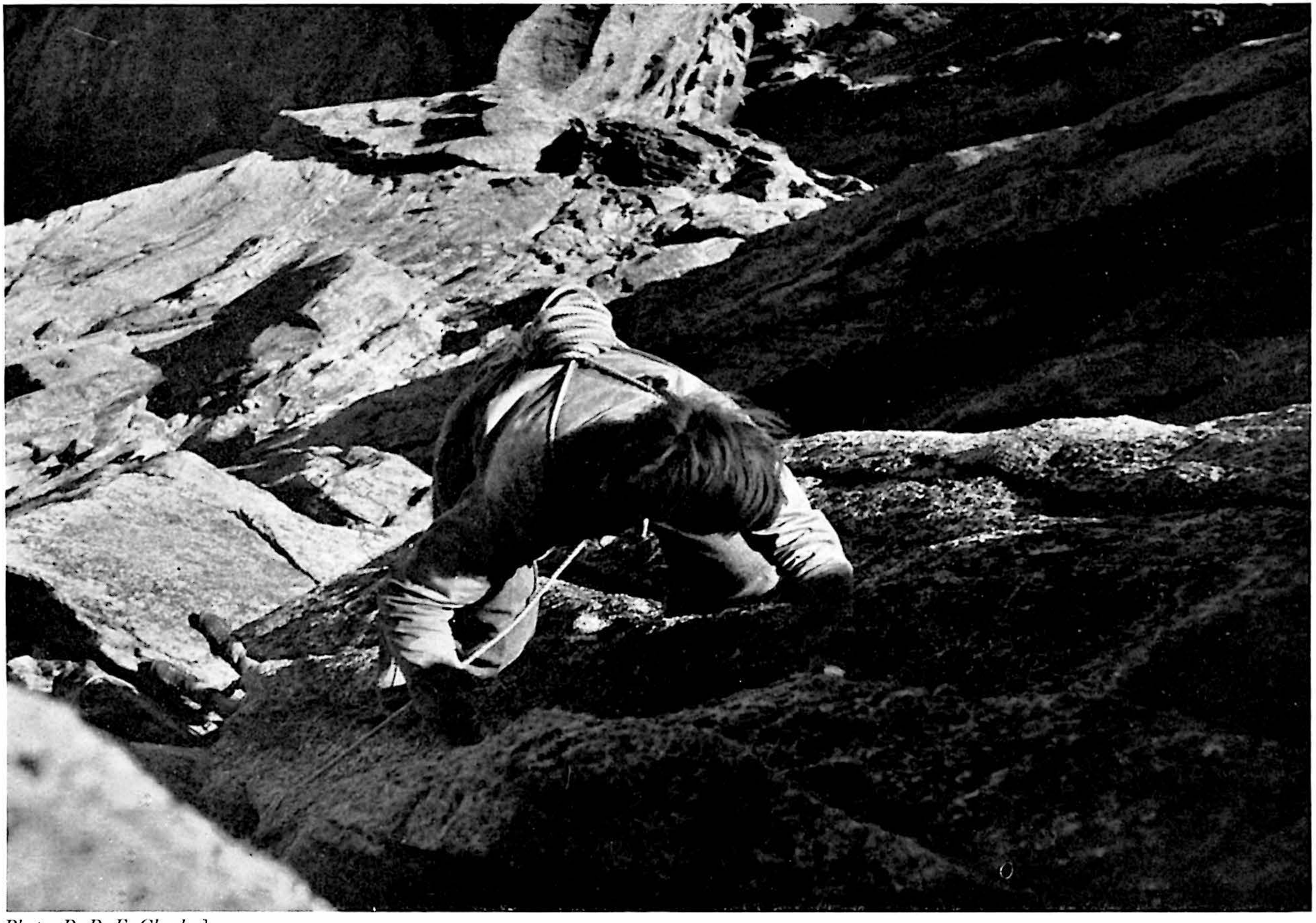
The invasion has been in summer and winter alike. As well as downhill ski-ing, ski-mountaineering, and also winter climbing, have become increasingly popular, and winter ascents of routes considered hard in summer offer a new challenge lately becoming fashionable among certain experts.

Winter climbing is, however, still a specialised field, into which relatively few enter. In summer the theme is numbers. Parties have multiplied on routes of all standards. But it was not until 1952 that the climb was done which marked a climacteric in Alpine history. In 1938 the Walker had been the product of Dolomite piton technique in the Western Alps. In later years pitonnage had been yet further developed in the Dolomites, but though inspired by the Dolomites, the technique used by Magnone, Bérardini, Dagory and Lainé to climb, in two stages, the West face of the Petit Dru in 1952 had been practised on the Saussois cliffs near Paris. Their 175 m. of continuous pitonnage and multiple bivouacs were something new on a major peak. The number of large rock faces which invite this mode of climbing is limited, so far as major peaks are concerned. It has, however, opened a new series of ' last problems ' to the eye of faith. An astonishing later exploit in this *genre* was Bonatti's *solo* ascent of the South-west pillar of the Dru in 1955.

The West face of the Dru is the great single event of post-war Alpine climbing, for it created a new category of expedition. But the outstanding post-war trend has been the rise in the average level of achievement, and in the number of parties doing hard routes. Climbs reserved for the élite not so very long ago, like the Mer de Glace face of the Grépon, the Ryan-Lochmatter route on the Plan, or even the North face of the Dru or the South ridge of the Noire, have become standard routes, constantly repeated. In 1952, a propitious season, a dozen parties were reported to have done the Walker, though in other years the rarity of suitable conditions keeps this an unusual feat.

This higher general standard has been partly the result of improvements in equipment. Nylon and other synthetic fibre ropes, down bivouac gear, better shaped rucksacks, neater and lighter boots, have all helped the climber to go faster or more lightly or more conveniently, and so widened his scope. The vibram sole has facilitated and speeded rock-climbing. So has the general use of pitons. Not only do many modern routes require fully artificial climbing, with pitons for direct

[*To face p.* 100.



Photo, R. R. E. Chorley]

THE LAST 10 FT. OF THE MER DE GLACE FACE ROUTE ON THE AIGUILLE DU GRÉPON. THE EXIT FROM THE KNUBEL CRACK, FROM THE SUMMIT BLOCK.

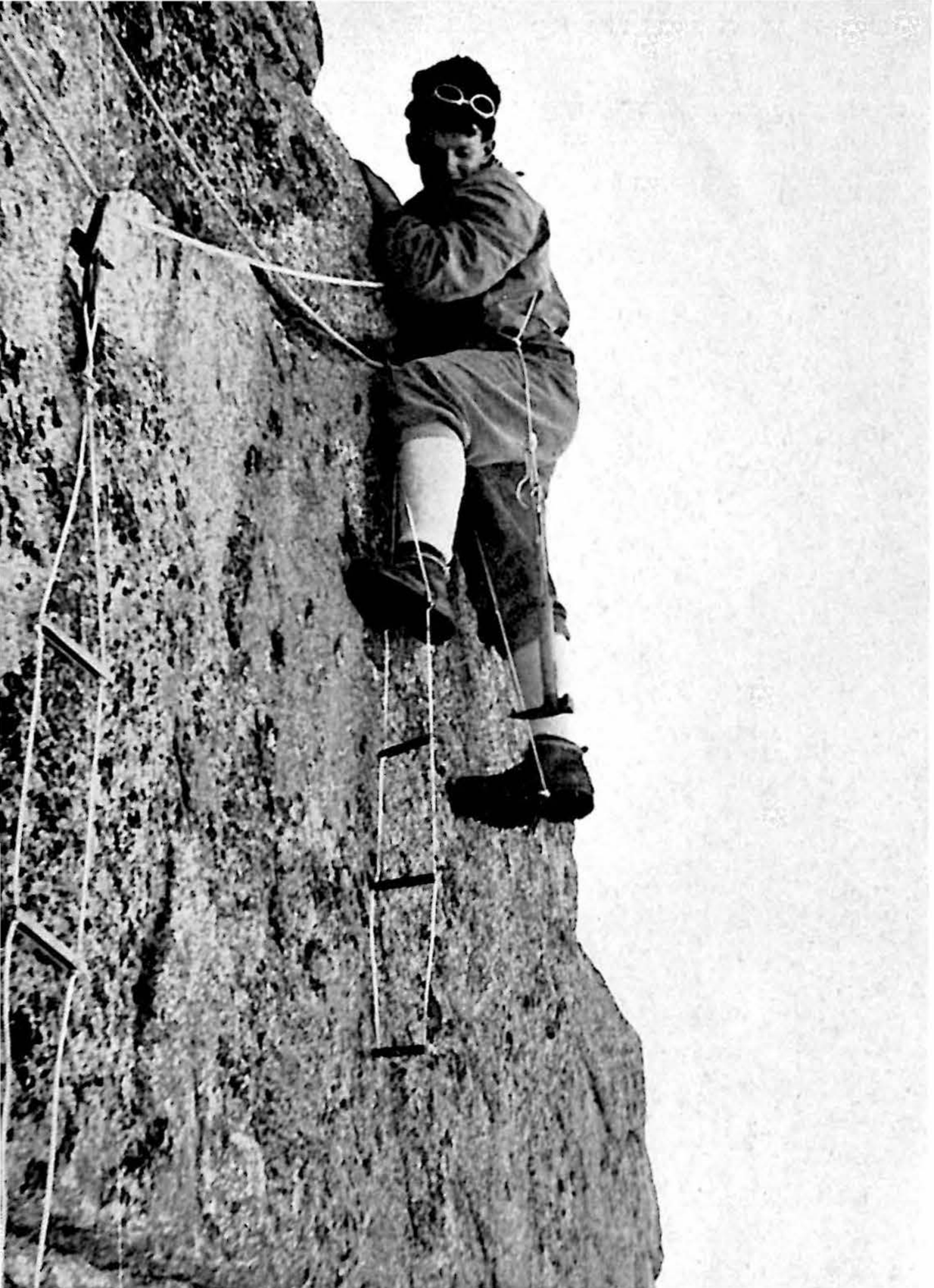
On the following page : ON THE EAST RIDGE OF THE DENT DU CROCODILE (*photos, R. R. E. Chorley*).

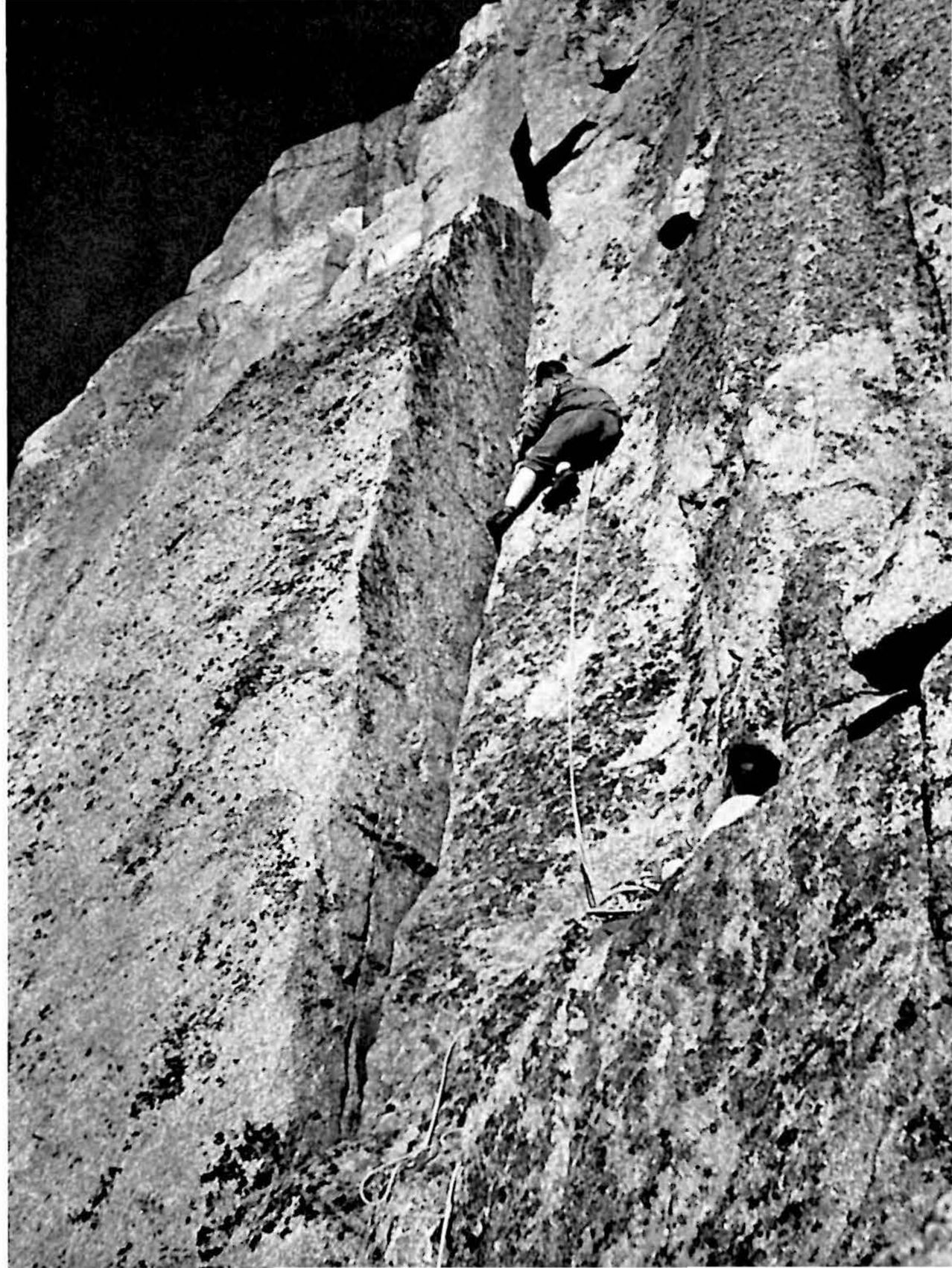
aid in at least some passages, but to a party who carry pitons many climbs which would otherwise remain beyond their competence are open with a reasonable safety margin, even though the pitons may rarely be used. But the main reason for the general improvement in technique has been that, as always, such improvement is infectious, being disseminated by emulation and by the atmosphere of increasing familiarity with the harder routes. The populousness of 'ordinary' routes has also encouraged those who can to go elsewhere. There has been a common preference for rock, and the advance in rock technique has been more general. But there has also been, perhaps among a more select band, a parallel advance in ice technique, based on a bold and studied use of crampons. The vibram sole may have had something to do with this, for by compelling the more general use of crampons on ice and snow it stimulates the study of crampon technique. This in turn has contributed to the convenience of equipment for rock-climbing, for those who rarely cut steps can carry a short or folding axe.

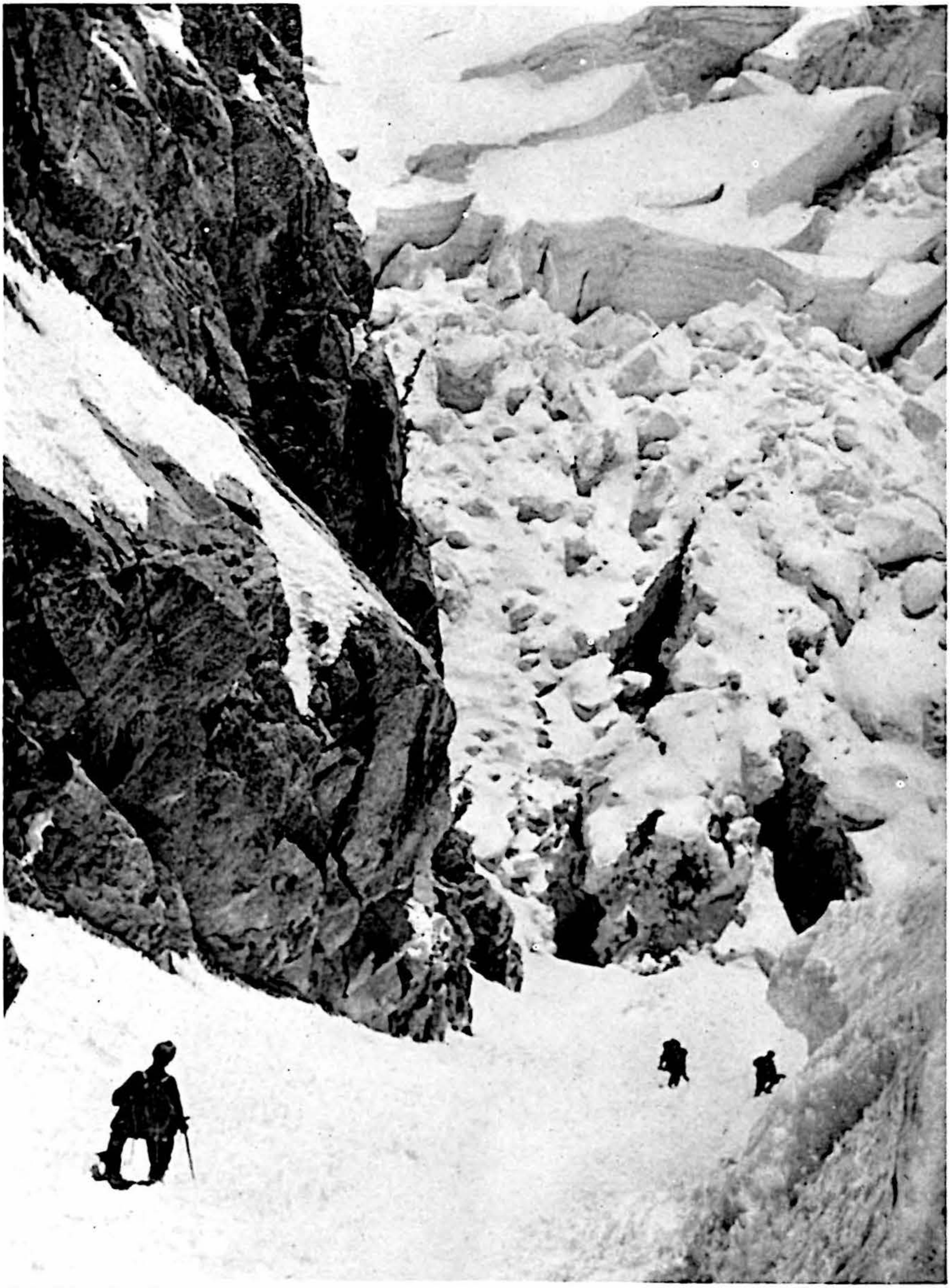
The advance in the average level of competence has enlarged the scope of guideless parties, as it has stimulated their ambition. Guideless climbing is the fashion. But the prestige of the professional stands high, both because many of the leading Alpine climbers of recent years have been guides, and because of the development of training courses and tests for the younger guides. Social and educational distinctions between guides and amateurs are disappearing, and some of the best modern guides began as amateurs and turned professional in order to get more climbing. In raising the general standard of performance the best guides have played a big part by their personal achievements and by studying and codifying technique for instruction at climbing schools, as well as by actual instruction there.

Another influence in raising the general standard has been that of climbing clubs. The Groupe de Haute Montagne, with its stiff qualification and international membership, took the lead, but scarcely less important in their own districts have been small local clubs, whose members all know each other and through which it is easy for one or two outstanding climbers to transmit their skill to a wider circle. The Androsace of Geneva is one of the most famous, but there are many others, like the small Italian rock-climbing clubs, each centred round its hero, Cassin in Lecco, Lacedelli in Cortina, and others. Indeed, one of the features of the popularisation of climbing has been the proliferation of small clubs in all the Alpine countries, and in Britain too.

British climbing in the Alps ceased perforce throughout the period of the war. In addition, the loss on active service of fine climbers like Kirkus and Wedderburn was followed in 1947 by the fatal accidents to







Expedition photo.]

KANGCHENJUNGA 1955. THE HUMP GULLY . . . LOOKING DOWN TO THE UPPER PART OF THE LOWER ICEFALL.

Barford, Kretschmer and Jenkins, three men of experience and influence who might have been expected to lead the renaissance. It was inevitable that British Alpine climbing should take some time to get going again. The break in experience led to some break in tradition. Most of the post-war generation of British Alpinists have believed themselves different in spirit from their predecessors of the 'thirties. They have probably believed themselves more different than in fact they are, for the extreme position taken up in print by certain of the older generation has emphasised dissimilarities and encouraged iconoclasm. But these feelings have aided the emancipation from some pre-war shibboleths which was necessary if British climbers were to retain a place in the Alpine history of the future, and more generally to enjoy the fruits of evolving Alpine technique. One consequence has been that British climbers of the post-war period have become less insular ; they have closer links with leading Alpine climbers of other nations, and more sympathetic understanding of their activities and aspirations than was evident in the 'thirties.

One kind of link has not, however, been largely renewed, the link of guided climbing. The first big climb after the war by a British climber, Emlyn Jones's ascent of the North ridge of the Dent Blanche in 1947, was in partnership with a guide, but this was uncharacteristic. The renaissance might have come sooner if professional aid had been more widely invoked, as for ski-ing it usually still is, but few of the new generation could afford guides, apart from the currency restrictions, and modern guide-books, by removing most of the difficulties of amateur route finding, made it easy to go guideless from the earliest stage. Among the younger British a significant preference is noticeable for areas covered by such guide-books, if possible in French, since linguistic is rarer than mountaineering accomplishment.

In 1948 and 1949 the Alpine Club for the first time held meets to introduce young climbers to the Alps under the guidance of those with pre-war experience. The second was marred by accident, but they served their purpose in introducing newcomers, among them, in 1948, the man who took the critical lead in the later renaissance, Tom Bourdillon. Although the war had kept British climbers out of touch with the Alps, the advance in rock technique among Continental climbers had been paralleled independently on the crags of Britain. Bourdillon, an expert on British rock, took the lead in attacking modern rock routes in the Alps. His ascent in 1950, with Hamish Nicol, of the North face of the Petit Dru, and other climbs at Chamonix, opened the eyes of other British rock-climbers to what they might do. Moreover, he exhibited a special interest in piton work, which gave a lead against the hostility to pitons in the older British tradition. Cym Smith was another who combined great talent as a climber with the self-confidence

and courage to challenge accepted limits. Others soon followed their lead. In 1952, with Bourdillon as its first president, the Alpine Climbing Group was formed, on the model of the Groupe de Haute Montagne, to link together the new band of young British who went for the harder routes, and to encourage the more ambitious type of climbing. The A.C.G. started to produce English versions of the all-important guide-books. At first, for they were all trained on British hills, there was a tendency to concentrate on rock, and on Chamonix. But in the last year or two British parties have done some of the great modern ice routes as well.

Meanwhile Joe Brown led a new stride forward in home rock-climbing. His specialism in cracks and free use of pitons not only made possible wonderful new feats in Wales, but was readily adaptable to Chamonix. In 1954 Brown and Whillans achieved the third ascent of the West face of the Dru, and, perhaps even more important, made a new route on the West face of the Blaitière. Other British parties had congratulated each other on first British ascents of routes already described in detail in guide-books; but here was a British party making a completely new and important route of the highest modern standard of difficulty. It marked a new stage in the evolution of post-war British Alpine climbing.

These achievements do not stand alone. The rise in the average level of performance which we have noted generally is evident also among the British. Great routes that British climbers have not done are rapidly becoming fewer. The tragic death of Bourdillon in 1956 took from us a champion in the prime of life, but the movement he inaugurated has spread widely, and the future is bright.

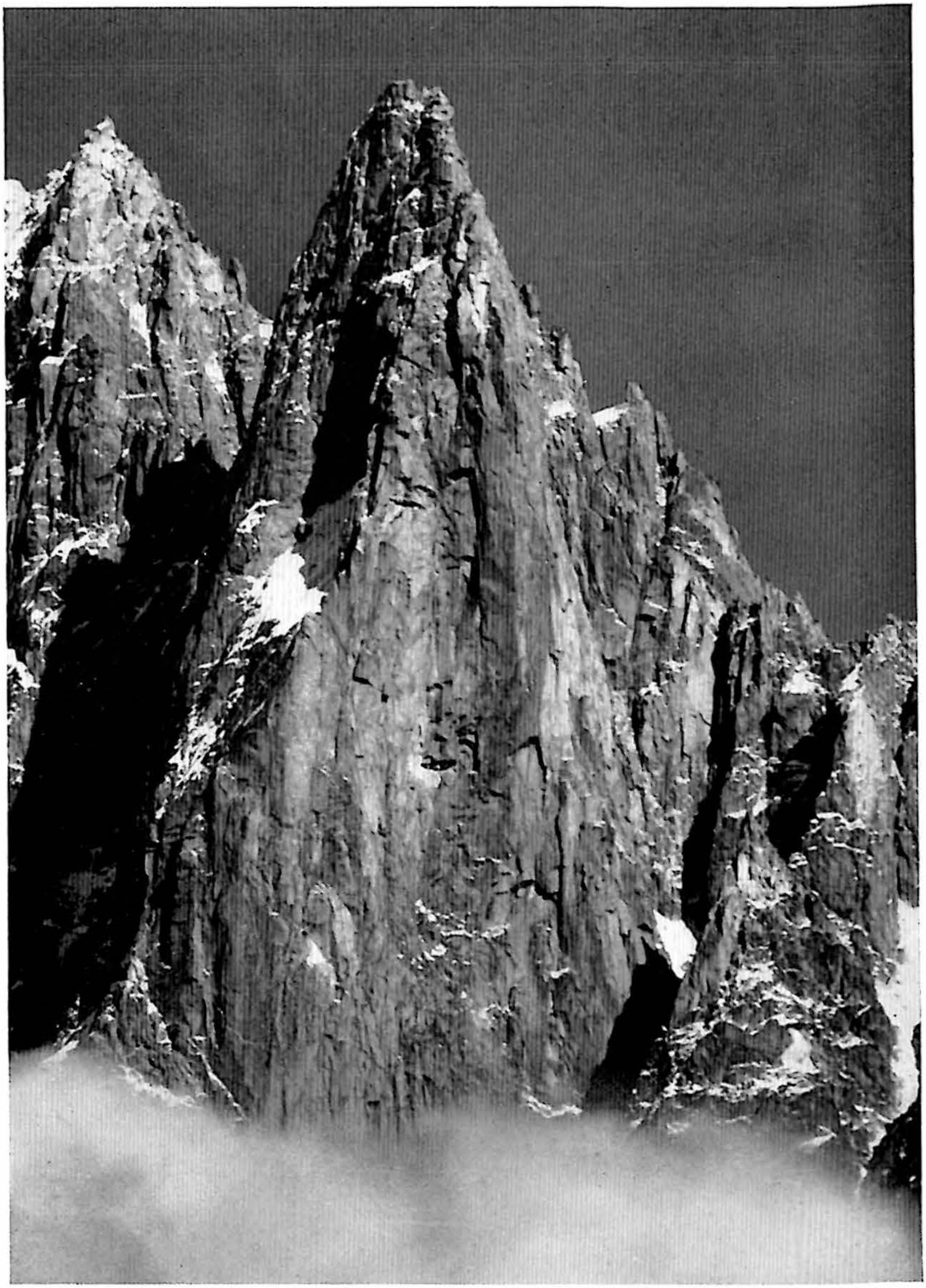
III

Let us leave the Alps for a glance round the other mountain regions of the world. Elsewhere, the popular movement to the mountains has found them in a younger stage of climbing exploitation. In New Zealand, for example, the stage of development in 1939 has been compared to that of the European Alps fifty years earlier. The main peaks had all been climbed, and many of the main ridges, but rarely more than a very few times, and there were many obvious ridges and lesser peaks left virgin for the generation of Ayres, Hillary, Lowe and Riddiford. In the last seventeen years, and especially since the war, full use has been made of these opportunities, within the limits set by New Zealand weather. Mountaineering in New Zealand differs from mountaineering in the European Alps in that climbing, in the narrow sense, occupies a lesser proportion of the undertaking as a whole. Huts are fewer, though more are being built, and many parts of the range are remote of access. Ascents often require expeditionary travel, with

large loads to be carried, and camps and bivouacs made the more arduous by constant bad weather. This training has well served New Zealand mountaineers as preparation for Himalayan expeditions. So has their skill on snow and ice derived from the predominance of snow and ice work in the New Zealand mountains. Very recently more rock routes have been done, and it is reported that more use of pitons is appearing. But one still thinks of New Zealanders as the great ice climbers. It is no chance fashion that a New Zealand ice-axe recalls Alexander Burgener, or that New Zealanders climbed Baruntse.

In Africa our period has seen both a large influx of climbers to the mountains, and a rapid development and exploitation of areas hitherto rarely visited and peaks climbed only a few times. The improvement of roads and communications has facilitated access to all the mountain districts. On the rock peaks of South Africa, the introduction of pitons has permitted new routes of a spectacular kind and more climbers on the old ones. In East Africa the increase in climbing activity is one product of an increase in the European population. During the war the Italian prisoners and internees included many mountaineers; *No Picnic on Mount Kenya* recorded one pleasant escapade. In 1949 Kenya seceded from the Mountain Club of East Africa to form its own Mountain Club of Kenya, and Uganda has also had its own club since 1950. Africans are taking an increasing part in mountaineering. Since before the war there have been African guides on Kilimanjaro. More recently Africans have several times accompanied Europeans to the summit of Nelion on Mount Kenya, though not yet, it is believed, to the summit of Batian. In the Ruwenzori the local Bukonjo have earned a reputation as cheerful load-carriers.

Many new routes have been made on all these mountains. On Mount Kenya only two routes had been made up to 1939; there are now at least four more. Since 1952 the Mau-Mau emergency has curtailed climbing on Mount Kenya, and encouraged East African mountaineers to visit other peaks. Several new routes have been made on Kilimanjaro, although the East face, said to be of Himalayan grandeur, remains unclimbed and scarcely visited. An Outward Bound school has recently been opened in the region, with the chief adventure of the course the ascent of Kibo peak. In the remoter Ruwenzori, Polish and British parties have been active as well as East and South African. New routes have been opened, including some of a much higher technical standard than has been usual in these mountains. The outstanding figure of African climbing during the whole of this period has been Arthur Firmin, the Nairobi photographer, who died in Nepal in 1955 as the result of an accident. In him the East African mountains produced a great mountaineer, whose training and experience was nearly all in Africa.



THE PETIT DRU. A TELEPHOTOGRAPH FROM LA FLÉGÈRE. SHOWING THE NORTH-WEST AND WEST FACE ROUTES.

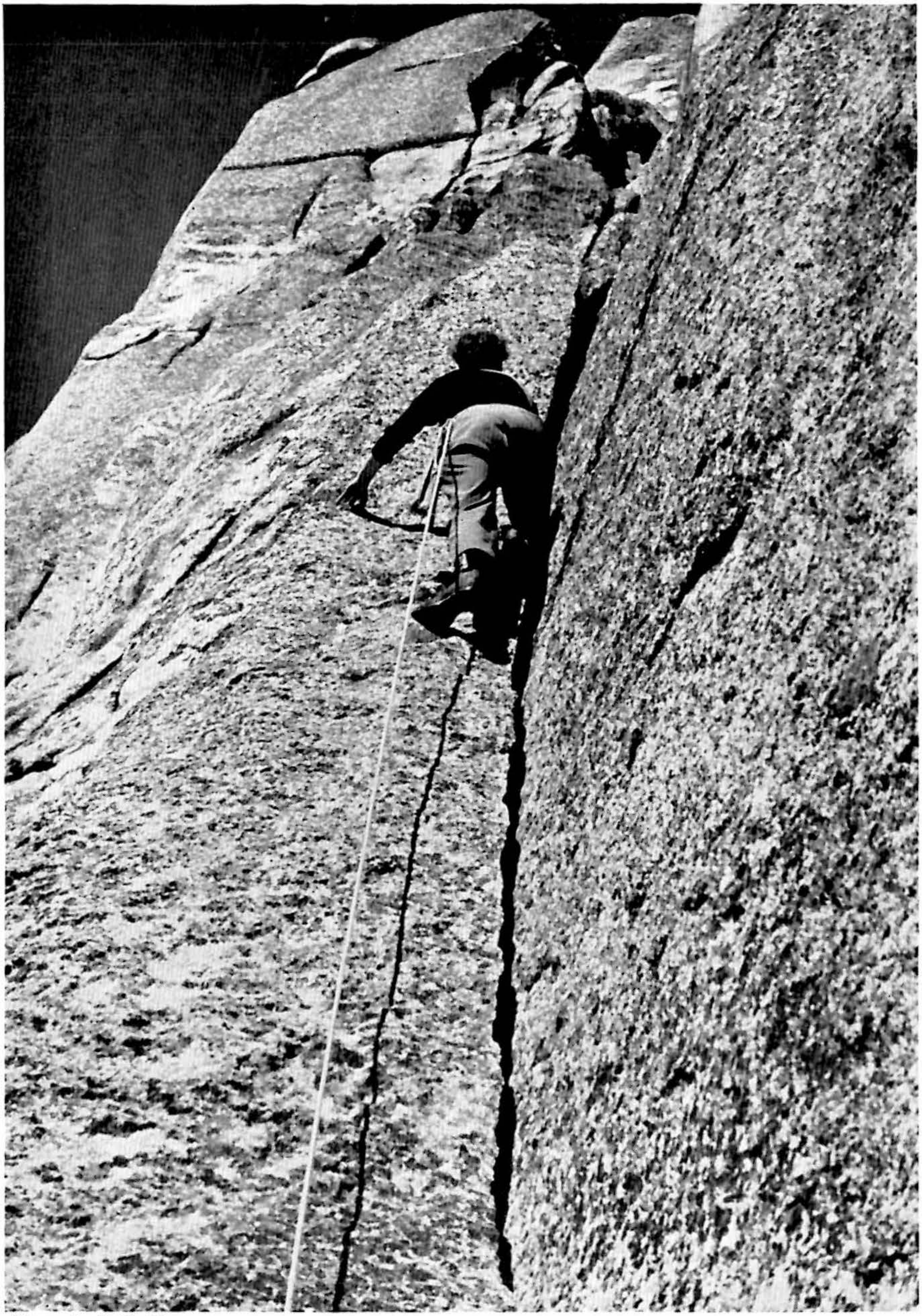
(From a negative in the Club collection. Photographer unknown.
Date approximately 1900.)

[*To face p.* 104.

The mountain areas of the North American continent are larger and more various than those of Africa. They give opportunities for all types of mountaineering, from the short spectacular rock climb near the road to the full-scale expedition to a distant glacier region, where problems of logistics and transport over vast distances are added to the technical problems of climbing. Common to all types has been the same increase in activity that we have seen elsewhere. Clubs and journals have multiplied and older clubs have immensely increased their membership, in some instances more than trebled. Even so, mountaineers are probably relatively less numerous in America than in Europe, and the sport less generally familiar.

During the war, both in the U.S.A. and Canada, the Army organised mountain training of troops. Frank Smythe and others supervised such training in the Canadian Rockies, and in Washington the American Alpine Club was called in to advise both on mountain training and in particular on mountaineering equipment. The American Army established schools both for ski-ing and for rock-climbing. The use of aircraft was developed for supplying parties far distant from their base, setting a pattern for subsequent civilian expeditions. The collaboration of the Army and the American Alpine Club was especially important, not only in the stimulus to the study of equipment, but in creating a fruitful link between East and West in the American mountaineering world. The scientific development and testing of equipment has gone on since the war, and to it has been added a wider study of the theory of mountaineering, especially the theory of belaying, with which the names of Wexler and Leonard are especially associated. The skill of American mountaineers in belaying technique was brilliantly demonstrated on K2 in 1953; when one man held seven. The study of safety measures generally has attracted great attention in recent years under the leadership of the Safety Committee of the American Alpine Club with its annual reports.

American mountaineers are fortunate in having in their own continent a great deal of mountain country little exploited until recently. The many possibilities of new routes and virgin peaks near home perhaps explain why American expeditions to the Himalayas have been relatively few. Since 1939 the standard of rock-climbing has risen to a spectacular degree. The use of artificial aids, not only pitons but expansion bolts, has made possible feats like the ascent of the Lost Arrow in the Sierras. Meanwhile, sometimes linked with scientific observation, there has been intensive exploration of the remote regions of the North-West, in Alaska, the Yukon and the Canadian Coast Range. The use of aircraft to drop supplies, first practised by the Army, has brought within reach the further parts of these vast areas of snow and ice. New climbing areas have been opened, like the Northern



Photo, R. R. E. Chorley]

I. G. McNaught-Davis leading on the Ryan-Lochmatter route of the Aiguille du Plan.

Selkirks and the Lloyd George range. Most of the peaks which were still virgin in 1939 have been climbed, and the era of alternative routes has begun, notably on Mount McKinley, where several new routes, and the traverse, have been done.

In climbing the mountains of North America American and Canadian climbers have taken the lead. In South America most of the important ascents have fallen to parties from outside or to foreign climbers temporarily living in South America. Interest in their own mountains has, however, grown among local climbers in recent years. There are now many local clubs. In Argentina President Peron cultivated nationalist and military aspects of mountaineering, and it is established as a national sport. The Argentine Army has taken special interest in Aconcagua, and the normal route has been equipped with permanent huts. The Argentines have also been active in Patagonia and in the Bariloche district. The Bariloche national park has with government support become the national playground for ski-ing and mountaineering, and a corps of professional guides has been established. There is some parallel in Chile, but there the emphasis has, until quite recently, been more on ski-ing.

In Patagonia Agostini's party climbed San Lorenzo in 1943 and an Argentine party San Valentin, which had resisted several previous attempts, in 1952. But the most brilliant feat was the ascent of Fitz-Roy by the French in 1952. With its long passages both of sustained pitonning and of severe free climbing, this must be one of the most technically difficult expeditions ever accomplished ; it was an exploit of the first magnitude on the part of Terray and Magnone. Another notable ascent, also by a French party, was that of the South face of Aconcagua in 1954, unhappily at the cost of severe injuries through frost-bite. British activity has not been reported from this area until Tilman's party crossed the Patagonian ice-cap in 1956.

In other parts of South America the important ascents have fallen to climbers from a variety of nations. In Colombia and Ecuador, the names of Kraus and Grière have been prominent. In Peru, a Swiss A.A.C.Z. party in 1948 climbed a number of fine peaks. Yerupaja fell to the Harvard-Stanford party of 1950. In 1951 a Franco-Belgian expedition made the first ascent of Nevado Alpamayo. In 1952 the Dutch geologists Egeler and de Booy, with Lionel Terray, climbed Huantsan and other peaks, and an Italian party Caullaraju. In the same year, the summit plateau of Salcantay was reached by two Swiss living in Cusco, and the highest point by an American–French expedition ; it is disputed which should have the honour of the first ascent. In the Vilcanota group Ghiglione has made several expeditions, and a German party had a number of successes in 1953. British climbers have been conspicuously absent from the Andes until very recently, but

the ascent of Huagaruncho in 1956 was an important contribution. 1956 also saw the ascent by a mainly French party, led by the redoubtable Terray, of Chacraraju and Taulliraju, two peaks of formidable difficulty which had been rumoured to be impossible.

Pioneering in the Andes is still in the primary stage, with the objective the ascent of new peaks by the easiest route, though on many of the peaks the easiest is far from easy. Few of the main peaks have yet been climbed more than once or twice or by alternative routes. The era of repetitions and new routes is not yet, although after the spate of first ascents in the last few years, it must now be not far off. In Peru, perhaps the best area, some three-quarters of the peaks have now been climbed, but several fine ones are still virgin. To European climbers the Andes are proving increasingly attractive, and one of the most important developments in the general history of mountaineering in recent years has been the realisation of their potentialities. Their previous neglect was no doubt partly due to the overriding lure of the Himalayas for the few parties then able to contemplate distant expeditions. Perhaps, too, the dullness of Whymper's book put people off the Andes. Before the development of air travel they were difficult of access, and not until the three expeditions led by Schneider in the 'thirties, and the books recording them, did the attractions of the Cordillera Blanca of Peru become widely known. It is now realised that to those impatient with the increasingly multitudinous sophistication of the Alps the Andes offer expeditionary mountaineering and pioneer ascents with certain advantages over the Himalayas. The problems of altitude are less serious, the logistics less complicated, the approaches easier and shorter : less time is spent getting to the mountains and more can be given to climbing them. Latter day mountaineers have been grateful to their predecessors for leaving in the Andes these exciting possibilities in mountains not quite like any others in scenery and type of climbing, and with their deliciously tongue-twisting nomenclature.

Finally, before we come to the Himalayas, something must be said of mountaineering in the U.S.S.R.

In all the areas we have surveyed so far mountaineering traditions and techniques derive from a common original in the Alps. Moreover, mountaineers frequently climb in ranges outside their own country and exchange information through books and journals. All this makes the mountaineering world essentially one. But mountaineering in Russia stands apart, different in tradition, little known in execution. The iron curtain has been as firm in mountaineering matters as in others. Sir John Hunt's visit to Moscow to lecture on Everest did something to pierce it, and it was again lifted a little by the visit to London of representative Soviet mountaineers in 1956. The lecture then delivered

to the Alpine Club [4] indicated an approach to mountaineering unlike our own. ' In the Soviet Union mountaineering is part of the general system of physical education aimed at meeting the requirements of the harmonious physical development of all the citizens of the U.S.S.R.' It is organised by the state, with official badges and titles for proficiency. ' Our experience shows that the state control has told favourably on the development of mountaineering especially in the outlying districts of our country.'

But the same two trends are apparent in Soviet mountaineering as elsewhere. Formidable statistics were quoted to show the move to popularisation, facilitated by the establishment of organised camps and training centres. It was not possible, from the information given, to judge the prevailing technical standard, but the achievements most proudly spoken of were long face climbs and marathon circuits involving many bivouacs and complicated logistics. In Russia, too, there has been increased activity in distant ranges. In the Pamirs special achievements have been the exploration of new routes on Stalin peak and the ascent in 1953 of Korzhenevskaya peak, the fourth highest in the Soviet Union. The Russian visitors were well enough informed about western climbing to make interesting comparisons between their practice and ours, for example their preference for comparatively large parties. But they have not yet climbed outside their own country ; they denied rumours of Russian attempts on Everest from the north.

IV

We must now turn to the Himalayas.

Himalayan history since 1939 falls into two parts. In the period up to 1950 there is little of significance to record. The war years were a blank ; those immediately following saw only a few expeditions whose objectives and achievements were, by later standards, modest. The climbing of Satopanth and Kedarnath by the Swiss party of 1947 was a foretaste, but it is not until 1950 that the great period really begins. Then, Annapurna 1950 ; Everest and Nanga Parbat, 1953 ; K2 and Cho Oyu, 1954 ; Kangchenjunga and Makalu, 1955 ; Everest again, Lhotse, Manaslu, Gasherbrum II 1956—it is a tremendous list. Everest, K2, Makalu, Lhotse, Cho Oyu, Manaslu, all repelled earlier assaults within our period ; and on Dhaulagiri failure is not yet (1956) redeemed. But the general pattern is of success ; and by the end of the period success seems to come by a larger margin : not one but two parties reach the tops of Kangchenjunga and (in 1956) Everest, and the whole expedition the top of Makalu. What lies behind this series of triumphant achievements ?

We must first pay tribute to the courage, determination, physical

[4] *A.J.* 61. 310.

Photo, I. G. McNaught-Davis]

J. BROWN AT 23,400 FT. ON THE MUZTAGH TOWER.

[*To face p.* 108.

toughness and mountaineering skill of the men concerned. Herzog, Lachenal, Shipton, Lambert, Tenzing, greatest of the great company of Sherpas, Hunt, Hillary, Evans, Bourdillon, Hermann Buhl—it is invidious to continue the list. They and their companions—for these triumphs are not won by one or two men, but by a team—have won a lasting place in the history of mountaineering and indeed of human endeavour. But there is more to it than the personal qualities of the men, great though these have been. Earlier Himalayan expeditions also included fine and determined climbers. Why should this great sequence of successes come suddenly, within a few years, after half a century of striving ?

Politics have had an influence. Though Tibet and the northern route to Everest have been closed to western climbers, the opening of Nepal has given access to many mountains previously out of reach and to untried flanks of others. The increased number of climbers and higher average level of achievement in mountains nearer home have provided more people willing and competent to join expeditions ; and the public interest in mountaineering, extending far beyond those minded to mountaineer themselves, has provided funds.

These things have played a part ; but the main factors have been three. First, there is improved equipment. The most important development has been in oxygen apparatus, both for climbing and for sleeping ; but down clothing, nylon ropes, better boots, tents, sleeping bags and food have all contributed. To climbers near their physiological limits even small improvements in clothing or equipment make a material difference.

The second factor is better knowledge. The legacy of experience bequeathed by the pre-war expeditions was the foundation, to which has been added all the current experience accumulating year by year. Every expedition, successful or unsuccessful, contributes to this. Returning expeditions commonly avow their debt to their predecessors, for example the 1953 Everest party to the Swiss expedition of 1952, and they in turn to the 1951 British reconnaissance and the pre-war expeditions. Especially important has been the better understanding of physiological aspects of high altitude climbing, such as the problem of dehydration, to give but one example. More debatable has been the freer use of drugs by some parties to stimulate performance at critical moments.

The third factor, perhaps the crucial one, is the breaking of psychological barriers. We have seen in mountaineering the same phenomenon as in other pursuits, in athletics, for example, in regard to the four-minute mile : a feat is essayed for many years in vain ; someone achieves it, and then suddenly other people become able to achieve it also. The explanation is mysterious, but it develops out of better

knowledge, is, indeed, the consequence of one special piece of knowledge, knowledge *that it has been done*. Psychological familiarity, and competition, are other, but not perhaps the only, contributory factors.

The period has been dominated by the attack on the major peaks by fairly large, nationally sponsored expeditions. Cho Oyu is the exception, an 8,000-m. peak climbed by a small private party. The merits of large or small expeditions are debated, but in any event we are probably coming to the end of the period of grand expeditions. Though there are still some 8,000-m. peaks unclimbed, the greatest prizes, which were thought to justify the cost and could command the funds, have been won. In the future we may expect a larger number of smaller and less lavish parties.

There is already a great multiplication of small parties visiting the Himalayas. Besides the assault on the biggest peaks, this is the great feature of our period, and the pointer to the future. Distance, time and cost must always set limits, but a Himalayan expedition is no longer the rare prize of the expert few. Already to audiences at mountaineering lectures the streets of Katmandu are as familiar as Piccadilly.

The objective is still usually the ascent of new peaks or the exploration of new country. But the beginnings are discernible of a new trend towards fine peaks though they are neither the highest nor the easiest, and to objectives chosen by the same kind of criteria as we follow in the Alps ; the challenge of technical difficulty is being taken up. Proleptic of this secondary stage of development was the 1951 Lyons expedition to Nanda Devi, which ended in tragedy. Their project, the traverse of the two peaks, was an Alpine conception ahead of its time in the Himalayas. But the time for such traverses will come. More immediately significant were the ascent of Baruntse by the New Zealand expedition of 1954, and the two ascents of the Muztagh Tower by British and French parties in 1956. On these climbs a high degree of technical difficulty was surmounted ; and the Muztagh Tower was climbed by two parties by different routes. In this instance the second party did not know until a late stage that they would be preceded, but we may expect more re-ascents, by design, especially by alternative routes ; and technical difficulty is becoming a lure instead of a deterrent. The special difficulty of extreme height will always keep the biggest peaks in a class apart, but 1956 saw the second and third ascents of Everest. The obvious challenge of the old North ridge, and perhaps a traverse, is unhappily impeded by the political closure of Tibet.

It is not only that climbers are becoming more sophisticated in their approach to the Himalayas. The conditions under which they go there are becoming more sophisticated also. Nepal is reported to have introduced formal regulations to control the many expeditions. Porters

are becoming more experienced, and more organised, and in consequence of the demand for their services expect higher rates of pay. The élite, the Sherpas, are advancing rapidly from load-carriers to expert guides ; the leadership and prestige of Tenzing, and the mountaineering school established under his direction, may further hasten this progress. In some parts of the chain Asians are beginning to climb in their own mountains on their own initiative.

Conditions are changing rapidly in the Himalayas. The first glory of the Golden Age is perhaps already over. But the history of Himalayan mountaineering is still young, and full of promise.

V

In this survey of the major ranges we have seen how the two general themes, of exploration in distant ranges and of popularisation, are evident in varying degrees in each area. Both may be expected to continue.

Exploration has always been an important element in mountaineering, and it becomes more and more difficult to find anything new in nearer ranges. The public interest in mountaineering has in several countries enabled funds to be built up to finance distant expeditions. In Britain the proceeds of the 1953 Everest expedition inaugurated the Everest Foundation. Moreover, increased activity in distant ranges is but one aspect of increased activity everywhere.

Many factors continue to promote popularisation. Underlying is perhaps a growing reaction from the factory and the office, from the urban life of our age. More practically, there are higher wages and longer holidays. But most of all there is fashion : people, especially young people, take to climbing because their friends do ; the fashion is now well established and the effect cumulative. To it is added the influence of many books, for the public appetite for mountaineering books has provoked a copious supply. The development of training schools and organised courses for beginners is more a symptom than a cause of popularity, but it also contributes by making easier for the timid the first approach which must have daunted many in the past. Belief has grown in the virtues of mountaineering as a medium of education, physical and moral, and in many countries it is now being deliberately fostered among young people by organisations both private and official. France, for example, has its *écoles d'alpinisme*, Britain the Outward Bound Schools, and the centres established by the Central Council of Physical Recreation and other bodies.

Popularisation means changes. It means more organisation. The multiplicity of clubs has already been referred to. Mountaineers have always enjoyed forming clubs, and then quarrelling about them ; in the present generation both traditions are preserved. But the need has

been recognised for co-ordinating bodies to promote common interests. The British Mountaineering Council was formed in 1944, under the aegis of Geoffrey Winthrop Young. In France there is the Fédération Française de la Montagne. For many years national organisations and the equivalent have been loosely associated in the Union Internationale des Associations d'Alpinisme.

It means also, less happily, more commercialism, and it means some changes in the nature of the sport itself. When mountains are climbed so often, there must be some loss of mystery and romance. A climb becomes less a venture into the unknown than the performance of a more or less difficult prescribed exercise; this is becoming true not only of the more frequented ranges, but even in the field of exploration. This is one reason why modern climbing writers tend to concentrate on technical matters.

But novelty is not everything. As the pleasures of pioneering become rarer, the pleasures of history and association are multiplied; and to the newcomer all mountains are new. Mountaineering is an evolving sport, and each generation of climbers has its own approach. In the first century of the Alpine Club mountaineering has given much to many people. There is every prospect that it will give just as much during the second, but to more people, and in changing ways.