

THE EPICS OF EVEREST

The main setting of this story is centered on and about the world's highest peak, twenty nine thousand and two feet, Mount Everest, towering above the world's highest range of mountains, the Himalayas. The lonely peak is called the **Choma Lungma**, (the goddess Mother of the World). The Himalayas are located between Tibet, a country of Central Asia located next to India, and Nepal, a country bordering on India. In the center of these is the highest peak in the world, Mt. Everest. Around it are huge glaciers and cliffs of ice, precipices that plunge thousands of feet, and chasms and treacherous slopes of snow which, though they seem firm, may avalanche at any time. These are the visible defenses of Everest. The invisible ones are more treacherous; winds of over one hundred miles per-hour, air so thin men lose their senses, and light so fierce that eyes and skin have to be protected from it. It was unknown that this was the highest mountain until 1849, when Sir George Everest, Surveyor General of India made the discovery. It was after him that the mountain was named. Men disguised as Tibetians were smuggled into the country of Tibet because Tibet was then known as the "Forbidden Land". Mount Everest was surveyed in this manner, which took a great deal of time. For comparison, Mount Everest is about twenty times as high as the Empire State Building.

In 1913, Captain Noel tried to conquer Mount Everest disguised as a Mohammedan from India, but met with much difficulty. The first mobilized force was formed in 1913 and met in Darjelling. The object was to seek a route for climbing East Rangbuk Glacier, North Col North East Shoulder, to the foot of Everest. Mallory on his return to London said that the chances of reaching the summit were fifty-to-one. The first attempt to climb Mount Everest in March, 1922 had failed on account of weather. The next attempt, which was also postponed, was made with oxygen. They started on June 7, 1922. Mallory who was on many of the expeditions, contributed the most towards the conquest of Mount Everest. On this attempt eight men had died, seven porters and Dr. Kellas. On June 6, 1924 Mallory and Irvine had gone higher than ever before but they never came back. Their ice axe was found on a later expedition. By this time "The Goddess Mother of the World" had killed twelve of the men who had pitted themselves against her. Nine years had passed while the British tried to get permission from the Dalai Lama. At last in August, 1932 they

were given permission to try again. This attempt was called off on account of the heavy snowfall and the danger of avalanches.

In the mid-thirties Everest was exerting a world wide fascination. Letters flooded London on how Everest should be climbed. One man had a theory of his own and determined that he would put it to the test. He was Maurice Wilson, thirty-seven years old. He believed that by abstaining from food and living a vigorous life, the human intelligence could be increased. He decided to climb Mount Everest by crash-landing a plane near the summit of the mountain, climbing to the top and then coming down. The authorities heard of this and took away his plane. He decided to do it alone, but died in the attempt, on May 31, 1931. This is when the last entry was made in his diary.

The 1936 expedition to climb the mountain was called off. It was beaten before it started by the weather. Despite all the rebuffs, there was no thought of giving up the efforts to reach the summit of Everest. If anything, determination hardened, and each expedition which returned unsuccessful represented a challenge to send another and yet another. Another attempt was made in 1938, but this too was defeated by Everest's weather.

Then the world was thrown into World War II and plans to conquer the mountain were put aside, though not forgotten for twelve troubled years. The end of World War II brought, as one of its indirect results, the closing of the Tibetan gateway to Mount Everest. Chinese Communists had taken over Tibet. Yet just as one door to Everest closed, another opened. The government of Nepal in previous years had been unwilling to allow mountaineers from other nations into its territory. But starting in 1947, the Nepalese authorities changed their attitude. A route was found to the summit from the south. The route was over on up the Khumbhee Glacier and through the ice fall into the western Cwon, then to Lhotse, and across the Geneva Spur to the peak of Everest. But let's not run too far ahead. There is a lot to be accomplished before this.

The expedition had learned quite a bit. First, the slopes of the South Peak had been seen from a distance and provided a not too difficult route by which to reach the top of the South Col. Second, the ice fall could be climbed and would probably be better in pre-monsoon weather than later. With this knowledge the expedition returned to England, eager to have one more try at climbing "The Goddess Mother of the World", this time from the Southern side.

Back in England an unexpected and somewhat delicate hitch occurred. It was found that the Swiss had applied to the Nepalese government for permission to try to climb Everest and this had been granted. The British figured it would be useless to apply for permission and have a challenge to the conquering of Everest. The Swiss made a few good attempts but when the best Sherpos and four or five others were injured, this held them up a bit. Then the cold set in and the attempts to climb Mount Everest were called off. Everest remained unconquered after ten efforts to reach her summit, and fourteen lives had been lost. But man, though many times driven back, had not surrendered. The following year the British would try again (1953).

In October, 1952, while the Swiss expedition was making its second try for the summit of Everest, the Royal Geographical Society in London announced that the British would make their attempt in the Spring of 1953. This expedition was perhaps the best equipped and trained of any sent against Everest. Oxygen would be used, both closed and open types of apparatus being used. The ice fall was in an even more dangerous and forbidding state than it had been either during the reconnaissance expedition of 1951, or during the Swiss attempts of 1952. It was planned then the climb would be made up the ice face of Lhoste into the South Col, and from there up the Southern ridge to the South Summit of Everest, and then on to the true summit, two hundred and twenty feet above. The first attempts would be made directly from the South Col by two climbers, Bourdillon and Evans with the closed type oxygen apparatus. If they could get to the South Summit and bring back information they would have done splendidly. If they got to the true summit they would be heroes. Should they fail, however, to reach the top of Everest, another attempt would be made by Hillary and Tensing Bhutia. They would have porters and stay the night alone on the South Summit and proceed the next day to the top. But before any assault could be made, the enormous task of erecting a series of camps up the face of the Lhotse and the South Col had to be completed. It was a gruelling job, hard on climbers and Shepas alike. Bedding, fuel, food, tents, oxygen all had to be brought up a trail laboriously stamped up the glassy side of Lhotse. At last, on May 24, all was ready. Camp Seven had been established on the South Col. Bourdillon and Evans, in good physical condition, spent the night there. On the following morning they would make their dash for the summit. This attempt was delayed for twenty-four hours on account of trouble with the oxygen appa-

tus. The next day they left and reached the top of the South Summit of Everest, a height of 28,700 feet and 580 feet higher than any man had climbed before. They had to turn back on account of the delay they had earlier in the morning, but they had learned that the route was very dangerous from there on.

Hillary and Tensing were delayed for a day on account of weather and continued the next day. Then Lowe, Gregory, and Axgnuma set off ahead of them for camp eight. The weather was excellent for climbing. They all reached the place where Colonel Hunt and Da Namgyal had dumped their load for Camp eight—two days previously. It was decided that this spot was too low, and the camp would have to be established higher up if there was to be any hope of Hillary and Tensing reaching the summit. They erected their tent at twenty-seven thousand nine hundred feet and the rest of the party wished them luck and departed for the South Col. The following morning, after a cheerless night, they prepared a breakfast of sardines and crackers, drank large quantities of lemon juice and sugar, and after checking their breathing equipment, set off at 6:30 A.M. for the summit. They were now four hundred feet from the South Summit. Here they changed their oxygen bottles which lightened the load of each man to nineteen pounds. But they were on their last bottle, apart from the one-half empty one as which Bourdillon and Evans had left for them. They would have to move fast and use as little oxygen as possible. Before them now lay the final ridge to the summit. With the oxygen running short they had no time for speculation. Hillary led the attack on the ridge. Each man took his turn at cutting steps in the hard snow. At one point, Tensing's breathing was not good and when Hillary examined it, there was a block of ice about two inches in diameter in the exhaust tube of his breathing apparatus. This meant he was getting hardly any oxygen at all.

After one hour of climbing, they came to a rock forty feet high, blocking the route to the summit. They finally went around it in a very dangerous manner in which they both risked their lives. They set out again after pausing for a sigh of relief. Once more they faced the danger of a series of cornices. The ridge curve daround to the right. One of them surely would be the summit. They were moving slowly and the oxygen was running low. Then Hillary realized with a jolt of excitement that the ridge ahead, instead of rising above them, sloped downward. Below lay the East Rangbuk Glacier. Trembling with excitement he straight-

ened up and looked around. This was the peak of Everest, twenty-nine thousand and two feet in the air. The time was eleven-thirty. Hillary took his oxygen set off after the handshaking and patting on the back had stopped, and photographed Tensing slanting on the peak of "The Goddess of the World" holding on his ice handle the flags of Britain, Nepal (where Tensing was born), India where he lived, and the United Nations. The two remained about fifteen minutes on the summit. They searched for signs of Mallory and Irvine, but found nothing. Then they turned to come down. They found it very difficult, but after a great effort they finally reached the South Summit where they were they were helped the rest of the way by Noyce and Lowe, who brought them hot soup and emergency oxygen. This revived them sufficiently to get to the South Col camp. And there, over a meal of omelet and mugs of hot lemonade, the two told the story of their great triumph.

The news that the peak had been reached was flashed around the world within a few hours of Tensing's and Hillary's returning from the summit. It reached Queen Elizabeth II on the eve of her glittering coronation, a tribute as it were to the Queen whom many Britons hope will follow in the footsteps of her predecessor, Queen Elizabeth I.

She has conferred knighthood on both Colonel Hunt, leader of the expedition, and upon Hillary. To Tensing went the award of the George Medal, Britain's highest award for a civilian. The two returned from the mountain to be greeted by demonstrations such as have rarely been afforded any men in modern times. They were met by ceremonial dancers and by members of the British Embassy in Nepal. They were smothered with flowers and covered with kum-kum, a red powder of rejoicing given by the Nepalese to their greatest heroes. The stage coach of King Trebhuvan, ruler of Nepal, carried them through the streets of Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, for an audience with the King himself. From all corners of the globe messages of congratulations showered upon them.

The conquering of the mountain as you have gathered in this report was all done by team work and not by any few individuals. All who ventured against Mount Everest are sharers in the glory of its winning, from the early determined explorers, to the men who lost their lives in the attempt of seeking information for others to use. It is not that man has achieved the highest mountain in the world, but that man would not give up his efforts to do so, even in the face of death, until he was victorious.

— D. SOPER.