



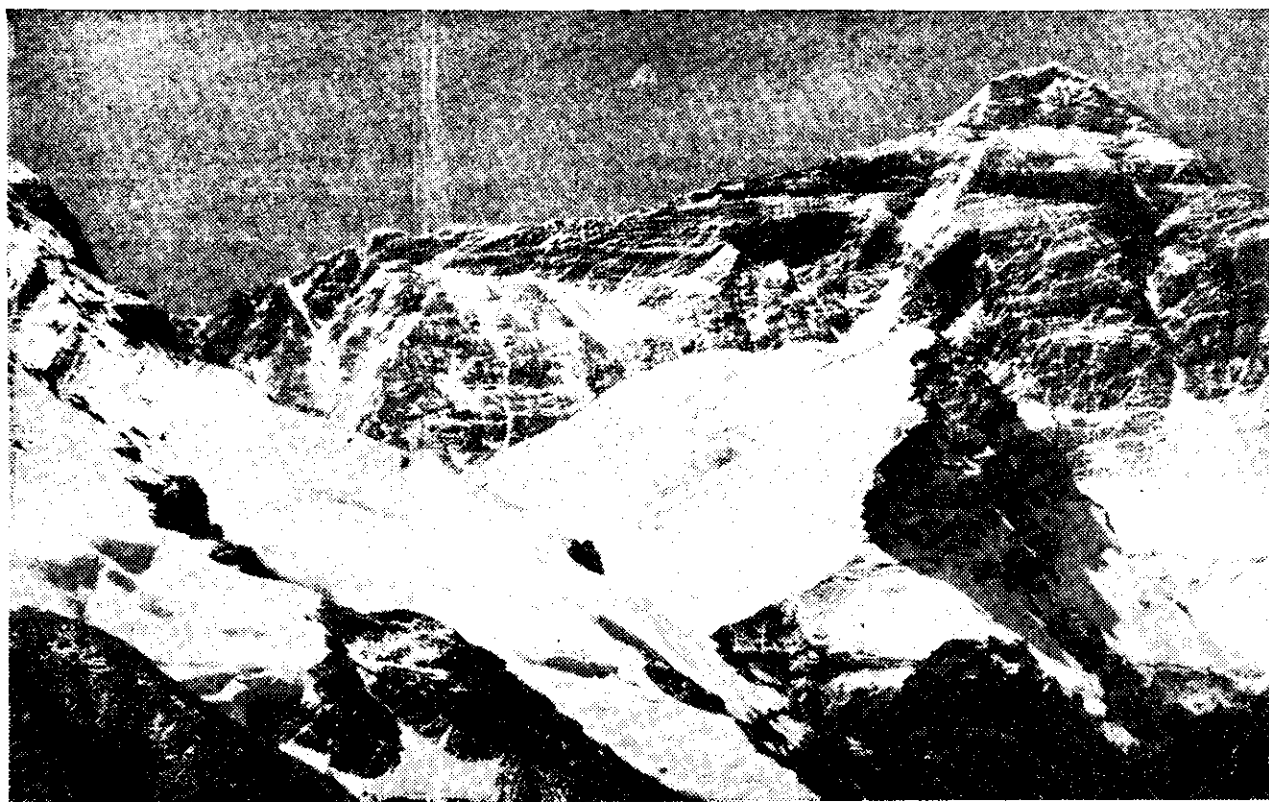
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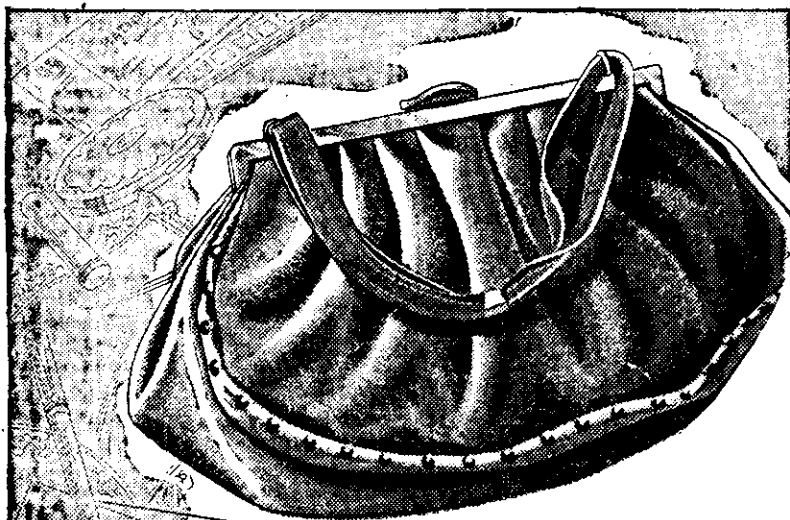
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BOOKS

Everest is Still a Challenge

MOUNT EVEREST, 1938. By H. W. Tilman.
Cambridge University Press.

(Reviewed by John Pascoe)

NO mountain holds the imagination more than Everest. Its height makes the mountain supreme in the Himalaya and in the world. Its great mass has a dignity at which photographs can only hint. Its name is linked with the greatest of British mountaineers and of Himalayan porters. It is the ambition, if a secret one, of most men who have climbed in the last 27 years. Till 1921, 90 miles was the closest that any European had been to the mountain. Since then there have been seven expeditions to visit Mount Everest, of which five have made serious attempts. So far there has not been certain success. There have been adventure, hardship, advances, retreats, tragedies, and interplay between man and mountain that constitutes a story as brave as that of Polar exploration. Some nonsense has been written, but never by the protagonists themselves. The mountain has not only drawn the best climbers, but it has drawn the best from the climbers.

Before assessing and describing Mr. Tilman's contribution to a worthy tradition, it may be expedient to glance backwards. In 1921 Mallory and Bullock reconnoitred Mount Everest and proved that one route was feasible. In the following year a determined assault was made by this route, whose key was the North Col above the Rongbuk glacier. Finch and Bruce reached 27,230 feet, with help from oxygen. Mallory and Norton also made a determined attempt. An avalanche below the North Col killed some porters and brought the expedition

of 1922 to a tragic close. Mallory's feeling for the mountain was such that he wrote ". . . how can I help rejoicing in the yet undimmed splendour, the undiminished glory, the unconquered supremacy of Mount Everest?"

In 1924 Mallory and Irvine never returned from what may have been the highest ascent. Their progress was seen by Odell, till cloud curtailed them. Nine years later an ice-axe was found below the ridge, and though this must have belonged to Mallory or Irvine the final height they reached is still a secret.

In 1933 Wyn Harris and Wager pushed their attack to the point reached in 1924, and Smythe and Shipton also went very high. In 1935 Shipton led an expedition during the monsoon, in which 26 peaks of over 20,000 feet were climbed. This party included the New Zealander L. V. (Dan) Bryant, whose achievements were in keeping with his unequalled record in the Southern Alps. In 1936 another expedition tried, but, as in the previous year, the North Col was the highest point reached.

This summary has not space to detail the difficulties of acclimatisation to great altitudes, nor the continuous struggle against bad conditions that is the theme of all the expeditions. One striking characteristic of most of the Everest expeditions was that they were blessed with the weight, authority, and resources of the Alpine Club and the Royal Geographical Society. Another was that their finance was in part dependent on worldwide publicity and newspaper rights. Many of the climbers felt that the expeditions were unwieldy and over-organised. The thesis presented by Mr. Tilman is that a smaller expedition, such as the one led by Shipton in 1936 and by him in 1938, can achieve the same measure of success and with only one-fifth of the gear carried and one-fifth of