

Adventure Completed

THE ASCENT OF EVEREST, by John Hunt; Hodder and Stoughton, English price 25/-.

(Reviewed by John Pascoe)

THE omission of "Conquest" from the title of this book is significant of Sir John Hunt's humility. He gives a detailed account of the famous expedition and full credit to previous explorers, British, Sherpa and Swiss. As a leader he was painstaking, unselfish and conscientious to the point of overwork. To these qualities he added the experience of a soldier who planned a campaign, fought and won by attention to every problem of supply, communication and morale, helped by a perfectly trained and lavishly equipped force.

The leader's abilities are reflected in his work as writer. His appreciations of the problems, his factual accounts of his preparations, approach march, build-up of supplies, ascent to the South Col and the stages of the final assaults are precise and logical. The moving and modest description by Hillary of his magnificent climb with Tenzing on May 29 is substantially the one that he wrote earlier



SIR JOHN HUNT
"Controlled under-statement"

for *The Times*, London. There are good appendices by specialists on important aspects of expedition work such as equipment, oxygen, diet and physiology.

Inevitably the reader will look for some narrative of great power about key incidents of the adventure, but he

must realise that in writing a book in a month, Hunt has compressed his story into controlled under-statement. His flashes of humour and imagination are welcome. Where Hertzog of Annapurna fame evokes exhaustion with emotionally charged overtones, Hunt is content to write: "We were now sitting down every ten paces or so, although the difficulties were over and the angle no longer steep. We recognised Tenzing and Hillary approaching us over the icy surface. My knees gave way and I collapsed, a ridiculous figure, as they came up."

Other members of the expedition may in future years publish letters or diaries that will give a complete and vivid personal reality to those exacting days high on the world's greatest mountain. In the meantime the official account stirs our full admiration for a daring plan bravely and safely executed.

There are many sidelights of great interest. A wireless call from Hillary to Hunt captures the grim tenacity of route finding:

Hullo, John—this is Ed at Camp III—Mike and I had a pretty tough day casting round for an alternative approach to Camp III, and also for another way into the Cwm—Line of cliffs to right towards Nuptse quite hopeless and much more dangerous than direct route—We'll have to stick to this one—Mike and I have done quite a lot of work on the Nutcracker—bloody dangerous place—fixed pitons for handline on the lower wall—Also put rope ladder down the cliff for the boys to bring loads up here avoiding the ice crack—Looking forward to seeing you, John—Whack-o-Over.

Hunt's inspiration to team-work was vital. In assessing the reasons for success he lists the achievements of previous parties, sound planning, excellent equipment, including oxygen apparatus, good food, fair weather, and the co-operation of Sherpas. "Above all else," he writes, "I should like to stress our unity as a party. This was undoubtedly the biggest single factor in the final result." The concluding paragraph in this book ends: "There is no height, no depth, that the spirit of man, guided by a higher Spirit, cannot attain." Hunt shares the mysticism and deeply religious sense that has been vital to many other great Himalayan mountaineers.

The book's production has the solid dignity and good taste worthy of its importance. Delightful sketches by Charles Evans compare well with the many exciting photographs. Close-up portraits of expedition members and Sherpas are especially valuable as a record. Eight colour plates complete a fine set of illustrations.

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