

NANGA PARBAT from the Fairy Meadow—a photograph taken on the ill-fated 1934 expedition

BOOKS

Success at a Cost

NANGA PARBAT, by Dr. Karl M. Herrligkoffer; Elek Books, N.Z. price 21/-

(Reviewed by John Pascoe)

NEAR the Northern border of Kashmir, Nanga Parbat rises to 26,620 feet, as one of the nine highest summits in the world. Its great and tragic history as a mountain was written by eight expeditions in which 14 European climbers and 17 porters lost their lives.

In 1895 the British climber A. F. Mummery made his attempt on Nanga Parbat, and with two Ghurkas was never heard of again. It is likely that an avalanche Nanga Parbat's most deadly weapon, claimed a kill. The German-American expedition of 1932, and the German expeditions of 1932, 1934, 1937 and 1938 all contained brilliant mountaineers; and the leading names, such as Welzenbach, Merkl and Aschenbrenner were written into Himalayan history. Unfortunately the standard of team work varied, and at times there was little spirit of goodwill between porters and sahibs. The assault of 1934 developed into a shambles in which the Germans adopted the motto of every man for himself, and most of the porters fought their way back to base camp unaided, while Merkl and Welzenbach died slowly of hunger, exhaustion and exposure. In 1937 a giant avalanche obliterated nine Sherpas and seven Germans at Camp IV. Paul Bauer, of Kangchenjunga fame, was flown out to take charge of the search. He led another expedition in 1938, but the porters failed; and who could be surprised?

In 1939 the Germans reconnoitred a new route on the West face near the one explored by Mummery. Stonefall made the attempt a hazardous one, and the venture petered out at 21,000 feet. One of the climbers was Heinrich Harrer, who was interned in India, escaped to Tibet across the mountains, and wrote a travel book that is one of the best of its decade. In 1950 two

young Englishmen died in a winter attempt on the mountain.

These matters are stated fairly in the first nine chapters of the book, and a close study of this section is essential to an understanding of the 1953 expedition. As step-brother of Merkl, Dr. Herrligkoffer was determined to attempt the mountain. As a leader he does not seem to have been able to weld his team into a well-disciplined body, and as writer he can only be judged by the work of his translators, who explain their difficulties in a special introduction.

The 1953 expedition of ten was ill-assorted and quarrels were frequent. Aschenbrenner and Ertl were veterans; the rest younger. The route followed the traditional approach from the Rakhiot Glacier. Storms and avalanche-threat delayed the assault till a sudden intrusion of good weather made an attempt possible. Hermann Buhl left his companion asleep, made a solo dash, climbed the peak, suffered a benightment, and, not supported adequately by his partner, was lucky to return alive. Back in Germany the author recorded that "of the nine members of the team, six have remained my friends."

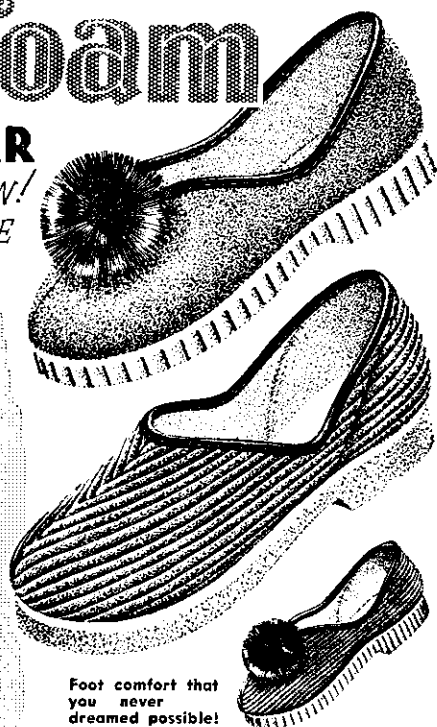
Such disunity is indeed a high price to pay for success, and if the whole of an expedition cannot be carried out with consistent comradeship, one is left to doubt whether the enterprise is worth it. Buhl made history, but it carries

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