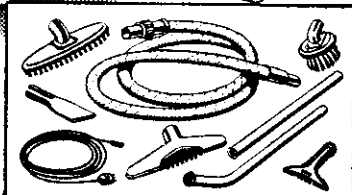
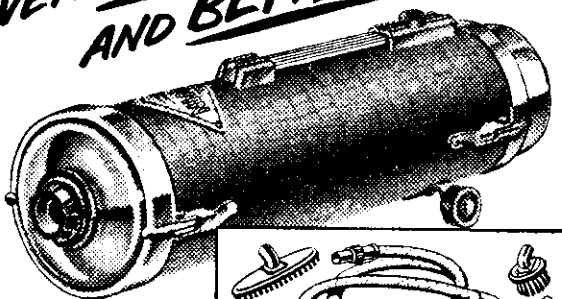


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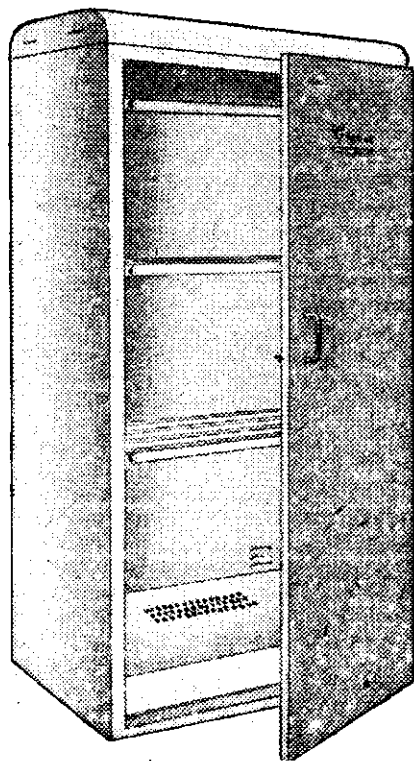
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The Stain on the Snow

THERE are signs that the Everest controversy, which once or twice threatened to become troublesome, is now like one of the local depressions that are so frequently said to be moving eastwards. Some parts of it were probably exaggerated; but when allowance was made for the acute news sense or extreme sensitivity of one or two newspaper correspondents—who sent reports of snubs that may not have been much noticed by members of the Hunt expedition—the argument that remained was sufficiently disturbing. Two gallant men, a New Zealander and a Sherpa, were roped together for the final climb. They reached the summit, where Sir Edmund Hillary photographed Tensing Norkay with a string of flags. Most of us had a special satisfaction in knowing that the peak had been climbed by men of different races, symbolising in their shared achievement the true unity of mankind. There was grace and wisdom in the decision to take up the flags of Nepal, India and United Nations as well as the Union Jack. Nothing could have shown more plainly that the spirit of the expedition was not tied to a narrow nationalism.

The question of precedence, if it could exist on the upper slopes of Everest, would be treated as an alpine matter. Sir Edmund Hillary was in the lead; but he was roped to Tensing, and they reached the summit as a team. They could scarcely have succeeded if supporting climbers had failed to set up Camp VIII at 27,800 feet, an altitude higher than that of all previous camps. And Everest was conquered because the entire operation was planned and carried out with skill, courage and tenacity. It was not until the expedition returned to lower levels, where men are commonly believed to be more rational than at points higher than 20,000 feet, that the trouble started. Factions arose, not only to

acclaim Tensing as the true conqueror of Everest, but also to dispute his nationality. There were even reports that he was "being got at" by Communists. By then we were all back in the workaday world, among the old familiar things; and the mountain mood was over. When the arguments are ended, however, the achievement will remain, to be set down in books which will keep the story undimmed. And perhaps the controversy would have been less troubling if it had not brought such a contrast between the higher and lower levels of experience.

Nothing great is done in this world without some noise of distraction. It seems sometimes as if there must be a descent into littleness after every new gain has been made for human dignity. Not only on the upper slopes of Everest is it difficult to breathe: there are also altitudes of thought and feeling from which men come down with alacrity. Greatness is acclaimed, if it can be seen unmistakably; but the first admiration is followed by an intense critical activity. There is no resemblance to the criticism by which new ideas are tested. The intention is not to discover what is true or useful, but merely to turn glory into advantage. Yet even this may be indirectly a tribute to skill and fortitude. The uproar was an unseemly sequel, but it showed that men could see the value of what had been done. There was no argument about the usefulness of the climb, no complaint because it was without economic results. One allegation of "escapism" came from a Chicago newspaper, but the source of comment was too well known to be taken seriously. People who lived within sight of Everest had no false notions about the magnitude of the feat. They could see the glory, and could not be blamed too much for wanting it for themselves. And if for a time a shadow came across it, like a stain on the snow, the peak itself was untouched.

N.Z. LISTENER, JULY 10, 1953.