

REVIEWS

Annapurna. Maurice Hertzog. (Translated from the French by Nea Morin and Janet Adam Smith.) Jonathan Cape. 15/-.

The ascent of Annapurna by French mountaineers in 1950 was a startling development in Himalayan climbing. Not only is this the highest mountain yet climbed to the summit, but the circumstances attending its conquest were unprecedented. Apart from an expedition to the Karakoram in 1937 the French had no previous experience of this sort of enterprise. Only one of Hertzog's party, Ichac, had been to the Himalaya before; the others were alpinists, three of them Chamonix guides. The expedition set out to reconnoitre and if possible climb Dhaulagiri. It was only when this project had been shown to be impracticable by the approaches to which the party was committed that the attack was directed towards Annapurna. Despite further loss of time due to faults in existing maps, this mountain was reconnoitred and climbed to the summit, thus falsifying Smythe's prophecy that no Himalayan giant would be conquered at the first attempt.

The book falls inevitably into two parts. Up to the third of June it is a gripping tale of mountain adventure at its best, a great peak attained by the exceptional vigour, skill and courage of the team and above all of the leader. After the third of June things went badly wrong. Was it bad mountaineering or simply bad luck? The writer tells the plain facts without making excuses, without blaming himself or others, even without complaint against outrageous fortune. The agonising business of getting blind and badly frostbitten men off the mountain had to be described. Whether the horrors of the subsequent injections and amputations need have been given in detail may be disputed.

The remarkable spell which this book puts on the reader seems to result from its being more than the account of a climb. "In this narrative we do more than record our adventures, we bear witness." In fact, it records the spiritual pilgrimage of a man who achieves a lifelong ambition only to be plunged almost at once into a hell from which death would at times have been welcome deliverance. He comes through, physically maimed but spiritually made whole. He records his experience with simplicity and sincerity, without false modesty and with no more than a proper pride in what has been accomplished. His attempt to "bring out the human aspect, and convey the extraordinary psychological atmosphere in which everything took place" has succeeded sufficiently to be disturbing in places. This psychological atmosphere is, of course, basically a French one. The "un-English" episodes are the more in evidence because translated into English words. The presence of professional guides perhaps taints the atmosphere once or twice, but not much. Although Hertzog has striven throughout to do full justice to the parts played by his colleagues, it is his own leadership and personality which dominate the story. The team was splendid in attack and in retreat; its members lacked nothing in skill, strength and courage. One nevertheless feels that none of the others possessed that dynamic quality by which their leader organised the attack and seized the victory. And one does not suspect the writer of wishing to give this impression. Perhaps a great mountain will only bow its head when there is this element of greatness amongst its assailants.

D.J.M.

FOOTNOTE—

Since going to press the news of the British triumph on Everest has altered this position.

The Cuillin of Skye. B. H. Humble. Robert Hale. 30/-.

Although not written as a climbers' guide, "The Cuillin of Skye" makes a valuable addition to our libraries on that enchanting island. The photographs are excellent and those who know these mountains will find this book full of interest, whilst for those who have already passed their zenith Mr. Humble brings back vivid memories, creating a link with the early pioneers. His chronological story of exploration in the Cuillin is well conceived, and whether we have become armchair climbers or still retain our wind and muscle we read with sympathy how those early adventurers fought their way across the high bealachs, and of the formidable distances covered in the days when accommodation was so limited. A vivid picture is drawn of Glen Brittle and shows how much is owed to its natives for their generous hospitality in the early days.

Then came the era when explorers set up their own "prefabs." on the shores of Loch Coruisk whence, though life was strenuous, they developed opportunities for further conquest of virgin peaks.

Climbing parties reach the Cuillin by devious routes, but what more original than by chartering a steamer? Hints might well be made to our Hon. Organiser for something in this line, say from Glasgow or Liverpool.

We read with interest how each record of completing the Great Traverse of the Peaks within 24 hours is only made to be broken shortly after. Elaborate plans were sometimes made for laying caches of food, including "Mummy's Blood," at strategic points along the route, though we are told of one young lady who trotted round in hiking shorts. There are still records waiting to be broken, but the enthusiast of today will probably have to include the Cuillin of Rhum to make a job of it.—R.H.

British Crags and Climbers. Edited by E. C. Pyatt and W. Noyce. 21/-.

This is an anthology of British climbing literature chosen from various climbing journals and devoted to climbing in our own land. As such it is excellent, including such classic accounts as those of the first ascents of the Devil's Kitchen and the Ben Nuis Chimney. Moreover, we are pleased to see reproduced Ray Colledge's "Slings and Arrows" from the *M.A.M. Journal*.

It is, to me, satisfying to see so many different types of mountain activity dealt with: Mountain Howffs, Malvern Beacon, Cornish Cliffs, Night Climbing at Cambridge, Bridge Climbing, all are included. But one feels that something is missing, that a vital link in climbing development is not represented. This missing link is—Gritstone. With so many climbing clubs—about 50—actively associated with Gritstone Climbing, a type of rock work which has produced so many of our finest climbers, it may be regretted that the joint editors have made no reference to it. There is, indeed, an illustration of an abseil from a gritstone crag; but that is all.

Apart from this notable omission, the book has everything the reader desires, and the editors have chosen well indeed. This is certainly a book for the climber's leisure hours, a book to re-read and therefore to possess
E.B.

Journal of the Mountain Club of South Africa. 1951.

This really magnificent production makes one think that costs of producing journals must be a great deal lower in Cape Town than in this country. For five shillings the M.C.S.A. members and others can buy 160

pages, 21 beautifully reproduced photos, one colour plate, and many line drawings. One compares it with the Himalayan Journal (Oxford) selling at 21/-. The matter is all interesting. Snow on Ben Macdhuì (9,846 feet in its African setting) and lots of rock-climbing. The Injasuti Triplets look like the best kind of Dolomite spires. Climbs are graded from A to G in these parts. It is interesting—and may surprise some of us—to note that this Club was formed in 1891.—S.S.

Cambridge Mountaineering. 1952.

Another five-shillings-worth, and though smaller and less lavishly illustrated than the foregoing almost as good value for money. Odell heads the list of contributors, among whom we note R. R. E. Chorley (who with McNaught made the first British guideless ascent of the Fou by the S.W. Ridge); P. C. Parks, reporting on George Sutton's Lyngen 1951 party, and M. H. P. Bott writing of the Joint Oxford and Cambridge expedition to Ny Friesland, Spitzbergen, in 1951. This, and the fact that only three of the seventeen articles deal with British climbing, gives an idea of the range of Cambridge activities in the mountain world. The photos are excellent—but I could have wished for some of the Hoggar, those Central Saharan peaks so colourfully described by Bernard Pierre.—S.S.

Pyrenaica. Vasco-Navarro Regional Bulletin. (Fedaracion Espanola de Montanismo), No. 1, Year 2.

This Bulletin is in Spanish and I am no bueno at the language; but it is plain from the photographs—not very well reproduced, but then this is only a regional bulletin—that the Spaniard takes his climbing seriously. Spectacular pinnacles and free abseils evidently have their place in Spain as in the High Alps. Grotto exploration, expedition to Aconcagua, and an article on how to use rock-holds and climb chimneys, point to a wide-angle view of "montanismo."—S.S.

Journal of the Irish Mountaineering Club. Vol. 3, No. 1. 1952.

This is a roneo'd magazine of 30 pages and bears the signs of a keen and growing organisation. The membership of the I.M.C. is now 200, and judging by the number of new climbs (most of them short and many somewhat artificial) the 200 are pretty active. Though published in Dublin, the Journal is all in English.—S.S.