

The mountain world

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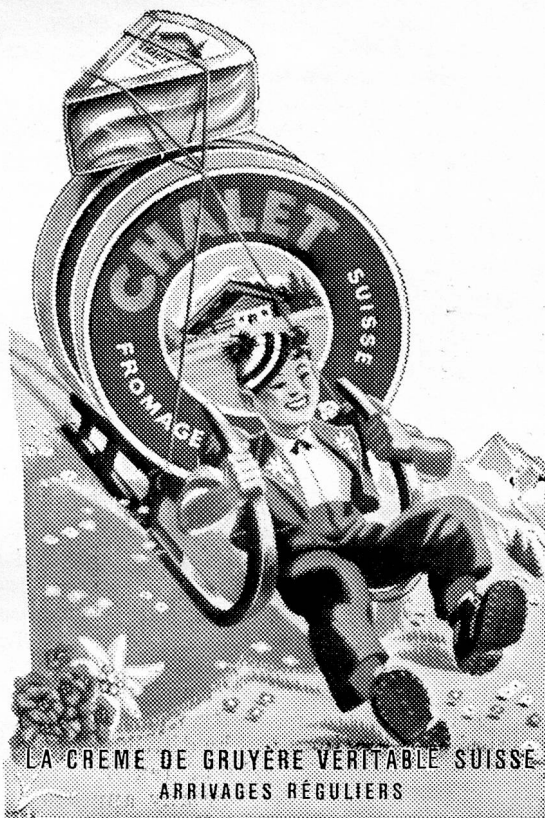


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In conclusion, we wish to convey to Mr. Landauer the great pleasure we, his compatriots, feel in knowing that he is one of our kith and kin, and we are proud of his achievements which are equal to the best traditions of our homeland; by his efforts, energy and integrity he has added to the good name which our country enjoys everywhere. He has proved, beyond doubt, to our younger generation, that by hard work and initiative one can get "to the top".

ST.

THE MOUNTAIN WORLD.

Throughout the ages man has striven to overcome natural obstacles. He has never ceased to pit his intelligence against the elements, he has explored unknown lands, the vastness of the oceans, the high altitudes and, of late, the mysterious outer space. To-day there exists a number of enthusiastic and dedicated men who have made it their business to study and conquer the great heights. The more forbidding and inaccessible these appear, the keener becomes the mountaineer's determination to find a way to the summit. As a result there are few, if any, great mountains in the world that have not been climbed.

The Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research, under whose auspices many expeditions have been organised, is responsible for the compiling of a kind of year-book in which outstanding feats of mountain exploration throughout the world are recorded. The latest volume of "The Mountain World", published in an English text by George Allen & Unwin Ltd., price 25s. net, is now available. It is a finely-produced book of 208 pages of which 68 represent maps and photographs. Regrettably there is no index.

The sixteen contributions of which the work is composed come from the pen of experienced mountaineers of world-wide repute. The story they tell will appeal to all lovers of mountains whether active climbers or armchair admirers. The ascents described cover every part of the globe. They include the Mexican volcanoes, the Rockies and Mount Rainier in North America, several peaks in the Himalayas and many mountains in the Peruvian highlands and the Andes. Two of the papers deal with the tragedies of the Mont Blanc and the Eiger. All of it makes fascinating and interesting reading.

It is a remarkable fact that the many daring and dangerous ascents in the remote regions were accomplished with but one fatal accident whereas the more familiar heights in the Alps claimed a heavy — and

unnecessary — loss of life. When in June 1957 an Austrian expedition climbed the Chogolisa, a 23,459-foot peak in the Himalayan range, a cornice over which the party, unroped, were moving, broke away and Hermann Buhl fell to his death. His body was never found. Karl Diemberger, who narrowly escaped his companion's fate, gives a graphic and moving account of the disaster.

The more immediate, because nearer in distance, incidents of the Mont Blanc and the Eiger tragedies are the subject of two arresting and thoughtful articles by René Dittert and Othmar Gurtner. Two young Frenchmen, in the winter of 1956/7, had succeeded in reaching the summit of Mont Blanc when they got into difficulties and had to be rescued. Attempts were made to reach the men, first by roped parties and later by means of a helicopter. They were duly located but the machine crashed on landing and became useless. Meantime the two young men, probably injured, had found some sort of protection in the fuselage of the damaged plane. They were seen by the pilot of another helicopter who failed however to make contact with them and had to return to base. At this stage orders were given to halt all rescue operations and the two unfortunate men were abandoned to their fate. Their bodies were recovered three months later.

It is difficult to understand, writes the author, why the operations were suspended at a moment when the weather had cleared and it would have taken only a few hours to reach the fuselage and the helpless men. The fatal decision was certainly contrary to every Alpine tradition. It caused much uneasiness and led to considerable polemic and criticism. The author's conclusion is "Rescue operations in the mountains are to-day held back by the idea that modern mechanical means — airplanes and helicopters — make rescue columns henceforth unnecessary. This would explain the lack of enthusiasm and the delays. The two men have paid with their lives for technical developments."

The terrible holocaust on the Eiger in the thirties is a different story. Not until 1931 had the challenge of the forbidding and dangerous North-face been overcome. Many years of careful observation and repeated trial climbs finally enabled Dr. Lauper to solve the problem and to lead an all-Swiss party to the summit by a comparatively safe route. His success aroused the ambitions of a large number of young Germans who during the years 1934 to 1938 vied with each other to gain the laurels of this difficult ascent. They did so with a complete disregard of the warnings by older and more experienced mountaineers. Their purpose, it would seem, was not so much the straightforward



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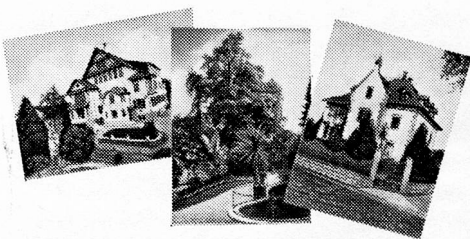
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