

S.S. 336



Himalayas and Buchenwald

SIR, — Why had Major Bahuguna to die? Murray Sayle told us ("Herald," May 3) that Bahuguna lost one glove. His hand froze quickly, and he was unable to grip the rope traverse, or right himself.

The same fate befell the French Himalayan expedition leader Herzog some years ago. He lost both mittens and his hands had to be amputated.

I was faced with the horrifying aspect of thousands of men (including myself) losing their hands in the blizzard winter of 1938/1939 in the concentration camp of Buchenwald. We worked for 12 hours in ice and snow. No winter clothing was issued, but some SS officers made money by bringing warm underwear into the camp for sale to those who got money from home. But some of these men lost their mittens—stolen the moment they put them down and turned away. Thou-

sands had no money to buy mittens at all. The injuries and amputations were dreadful.

I had 240 men under my care. Somehow I talked the SS men into giving me warm underwear "on credit" for all my men. Then I forced the "rich" prisoners to pay for 2 or 3 sweaters, mittens, etc., the 2nd and 3rd pair to be given to the poor prisoners. But there was still the spectre of losing them by theft. I then issued short lengths of rope and all had to sew their mittens on to their sleeves. None of my men lost a mitten or a hand.

Where did I get this idea? My good and poor mother sewed the mittens of all her four children to their sleeves. Since then, whenever I see Everest climbers with mittens about to get lost, I think of my good mother, and now I think of poor Bahuguna who had to die because nobody had the good idea of mama Bliss.

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