Fuji-no-Yama

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by Lafcadio Hearn

in Exotics and Retrospectives

Kité miréba,
Sahodo madé nashi,
Fuji no Yama!

Seen on close approach, the mountain of Fuji
does not come up to expectation.

–JAPANESE PROVERBIAL PHILOSOPHY

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL SIGHT IN JAPAN, and certainly one of the most beautiful in the world, is the distant apparition of Fuji on cloudless days–more especially days of spring and autumn, when the greater part of the peak is covered with late or with early snows. You can seldom distinguish the snowless base, which remains the same color as the sky: you perceive only the white cone seeming to hang in heaven; and the Japanese comparison of its shape to an inverted half-open fan is made wonderfully exact by the fine streaks that spread downward from the notched top, like shadows of fan-ribs. Even lighter than a fan the vision appears–rather the ghost or dream of a fan;–yet the material reality a hundred miles away is grandiose among the mountains of the globe. Rising to a height of nearly 12,500 feet, Fuji is visible from thirteen provinces of the Empire. Nevertheless it is one of the easiest of lofty mountains to climb; and for a thousand years it has been scaled every summer by multitudes of pilgrims. For it is not only a sacred mountain, but the most sacred mountain of Japan–the holiest eminence of the land that is called Divine–the Supreme Altar of the Sun;–and to ascend it at least once in a lifetime is the duty of all who reverence the ancient gods. So from every district of the Empire pilgrims annually wend their way to Fuji; and in nearly all the provinces there are pilgrim-societies–Fuji-Ko–organized for the purpose of aiding those desiring to visit the sacred peak. If this act of faith cannot be performed by everybody in person, it can at least be performed by proxy. Any hamlet, however remote, can occasionally send one representative to pray before the shrine of the divinity of Fuji, and to salute the rising sun from that sublime eminence. Thus a single company of Fuji-pilgrims may be composed of men from a hundred different settlements.

By both of the national religions Fuji is held in reverence. The Shinto deity of Fuji is the beautiful goddess Ko-no-hana-saku-ya-himé–she who brought forth her children in fire without pain, and whose name signifies "Radiant-blooming-as-the-flowers-of-the-trees," or, according to some commentators, "Causing-the-flowers-to-blossom-brightly." On the summit is her temple; and in ancient books it is recorded that mortal eyes have beheld her hovering, like a luminous cloud, above the verge of the crater. Her viewless servants watch and wait by the precipices to hurl down whosoever presumes to approach her shrine with unpurified heart. . . . Buddhism loves the grand peak because its form is like the white bud of the Sacred Flower–and because the eight cusps of its top, like the eight petals of the Lotus, symbolize the Eight Intelligences of Perception, Purpose, Speech, Conduct, Living, Effort, Mindfulness, and Contemplation.

But the legends and traditions about Fuji, the stories of its rising out of the earth in a single night–of the shower of pierced jewels once flung down from it–of the first temple built upon its summit eleven hundred years ago–of the Luminous Maiden that lured to the crater an Emperor who was never seen afterward, but is still worshiped at a little shrine erected on the place of his vanishing–of the sand that daily rolled down by pilgrim feet nightly reascends to its former position–have not all these things been written in books? There is really very little left for me to tell about Fuji except my own experience of climbing it.

I made the ascent by way of Gotemba–the least picturesque, but perhaps also the least difficult of the six or seven routes open to choice. Gotemba is a little village chiefly consisting of pilgrim-inns. You reach it from Tokyo in about three hours by the Tokaido railway,

which rises for miles as it approaches the neighborhood of the mighty volcano. Gotemba is considerably more than two thousand feet above the sea, and therefore comparatively cool in the hottest season. The open country about it slopes to Fuji; but the slope is so gradual that the table-land seems almost level to the eye. From Gotemba in perfectly clear weather the mountain looks uncomfortably near–formidable by proximity though actually miles away. During the rainy season it may appear and disappear alternately many times in one day–like an enormous spectre. But on the gray August morning when I entered Gotemba as a pilgrim, the landscape was muffled in vapors; and Fuji was totally invisible. I arrived too late to attempt the ascent on the same day; but I made my preparations at once for the day following, and engaged a couple of *goriki* (strong-pull men), or experienced guides. I felt quite secure in seeing their broad honest faces and sturdy bearing. They supplied me with a pilgrim-staff, heavy blue *tabi* (that is to say, cleft-stockings, to used with sandals), a straw hat shaped like Fuji, and the rest of a pilgrim's outfit;–telling me to be ready to start with them at four o'clock in the morning.

What is hereafter set down consists of notes taken on the journey, but afterwards amended and expanded–for notes made while climbing are necessarily hurried and imperfect.

I

August 24th, 1897

FROM STRINGS stretched above the balcony upon which my inn-room opens, hundreds of towels are hung like flags–blue towels and white, having printed upon them in Chinese characters the names of pilgrim-companies and of the divinity of Fuji. These are gifts to the house, and serve as advertisements. . . . Raining from a uniformly gray sky. Fuji always invisible.

August 25th

3.3O A.M.–No sleep;–tumult all night of parties returning late from the mountain, or arriving for the pilgrimage;–constant clapping of hands to summon servants;–banqueting and singing in the adjoining chambers, with alarming bursts of laughter every few minutes. . . Breakfast of soup, fish, and rice. Goriki arrive in professional costume, and find me ready. Nevertheless they insist that I shall undress again and put on heavy underclothing;–warning me that even when it is Doyo (the period of greatest summer heat) at the foot of the mountain, it is Daikan (the period of greatest winter cold) at the top. Then they start in advance, carrying provisions and bundles of heavy clothing. . . . A kuruma waits for me, with three runners–two to pull, and one to push, as the work will be hard uphill. By kuruma I can go to the height of five thousand feet.

Morning black and slightly chill, with fine rain; but I shall soon be above the rain-clouds. . . . The lights of the town vanish behind us;–the kuruma is rolling along a country-road. Outside of the swinging penumbra made by the paper-lantern of the foremost runner, nothing is clearly visible; but I can vaguely distinguish silhouettes of trees and, from time to time, of houses-peasants' houses with steep roofs.

Gray wan light slowly suffuses the moist air;–day is dawning through drizzle. . . . Gradually the landscape defines with its colors. The way lies through thin woods. Occasionally we pass houses with high thatched roofs that look like farmhouses; but cultivated land is nowhere visible. . . .

Open country with scattered clumps of trees-larch and pine. Nothing in the horizon but scraggy tree-tops above what seems to be the rim of a vast down. No sign whatever of Fuji. . . . For the first time I notice that the road is black–black sand and cinders apparently, volcanic cinders: the wheels of the kuruma and the feet of the runners sink into it with a crunching sound.

The rain has stopped, and the sky becomes a clearer gray. . . . trees decrease in size and number as we advance.

What I have been taking for the horizon, in front of us, suddenly breaks open, and begins to roll smokily away to left and right. In the great rift part of a dark-blue mass appears–a portion of Fuji. Almost at the same moment the sun pierces the clouds behind us; but the road now enters a copse covering the base of a low ridge, and the view is cut off. . . . Halt at a little house among the trees–a pilgrims' resting-place–and there find the goriki, who have advanced much more rapidly than my runners, waiting for us. Buy eggs, which a goriki rolls up in a narrow strip of straw matting;–tying the matting tightly with straw cord between the eggs–so that the string of eggs has somewhat the appearance of a string of sausages. . . . Hire a horse.

Sky clears as we proceed;–white sunlight floods everything. Road ascends; and we emerge again on the moorland. And, right in front, Fuji appears–naked to the summit–stupendous–startling as if newly risen from the earth. Nothing could be more beautiful. A vast blue cone–warm-blue, almost violet through the vapors not yet lifted by the sun–with two white streaklets near the top which are great gullies full of snow, though they look from here scarcely an inch long. But the charm of the apparition is much less the charm of color than of symmetry–a symmetry of beautiful bending lines with a curve like the curve of a cable stretched over a space too wide to allow of pulling taut. (This comparison did not at once suggest itself: the first impression given me by the grace of those lines was an impression of femininity;–I found myself thinking of some exquisite sloping of shoulders toward the neck.) I can imagine nothing more difficult to draw at sight. But the Japanese artist, through his marvelous skill with the writing-brush–the skill inherited from generations of calligraphists–easily faces the riddle: he outlines the silhouette with two flowing strokes made in the fraction of a second, and manages to hit the exact truth of the curves–much as a professional archer might hit a mark, without consciously taking aim, through long exact habit of hand and eye.

II

I SEE the goriki hurrying forward far away–one of them carrying eggs round his neck! . . . Now there are no more trees worthy of the name–only scattered stunted growths resembling shrubs. The black road curves across a vast grassy down; and here and there I see large black patches in the green surface–bare spaces of ashes and scori&qaelig;; showing that this thin green skin covers some enormous volcanic deposit of recent date. . . . As a matter of history, all this district was buried yards deep in 1707 by an eruption from the side of Fuji. Even in the far-off Tokyo the rain of ashes covered roofs to a depth of sixteen centimetres. There are no farms in this region, because there is little true soil; and there is no water. But volcanic destruction is not eternal destruction; eruptions at last prove fertilizing; and the divine "Princess-who-causes-the-flowers-to-blossom-brightly" will make this waste to smile again in future hundreds of years.

. . . .The black openings in the green surface become more numerous and larger. A few dwarf-shrubs still mingle with the coarse grass. . . The vapors are lifting; and Fuji is changing color. It is no longer a glowing blue, but a dead sombre blue. Irregularities previously hidden by rising ground appear in the lower part of the grand curves. One of these to the left–shaped like a camel's hump–represents the focus of the last great eruption.

The land is not now green with black patches, but black with green patches; and the green patches dwindle visibly in the direction of the peak. The shrubby growths have disappeared. The wheels of the kuruma, and the feet of the runners sink deeper into the volcanic sand. . . . The horse is now attached to the kuruma with ropes, and I am able to advance more rapidly. Still the mountain seems far away; but we are really running up its flank at a height of more than five thousand feet.

Fuji has ceased to be blue of any shade. It is black–charcoal-black–a frightful extinct heap of visible ashes and cinders and slaggy lava. . . . Most of the green has disappeared. Likewise all of the illusion. The tremendous naked black reality–always becoming more sharply, more grimly, more atrociously defined–is a stupefaction, a nightmare. . . . Above–miles above–the snow patches glare and gleam against that blackness–hideously. I think of a gleam of white teeth I once saw in a skull–a woman's skull–otherwise burnt to a sooty crisp.

So one of the fairest, if not the fairest of earthly visions, resolves itself lnto a spectacle of horror and death. . . . But have not all human ideals of beauty, like the beauty of Fuji seen from afar, been created by forces of death and pain?–are not all, in their kind, but composites of death, beheld in retrospective through the magical haze of inherited memory?

III

THE GREEN has utterly vanished;–all is black. there is no road– only the broad waste of black sand sloping and narrowing up to those dazzling, grinning patches of snow. But there is a track–a yellowish track made by thousands and thousands of cast-off sandals of straw (*waraji*), flung aside by pilgrims. Straw sandals quickly wear out upon this black grit; and every pilgrim carries several pairs for the journey. Had I to make the ascent alone, I could find the path by following that wake of broken sandals–a yellow streak zigzagging up out of sight across the blackness.

6.40 A.M.–We reach Tarobo, first of the ten stations on the ascent: height, six thousand feet. The station is a large wooden house, of which two rooms have been fitted up as a shop for the sale of staves, hats, raincoats, sandals–everything pilgrims need. I find there a peripatetic photographer offering for sale photographs of the mountain which are really very good as well as very cheap. . . . Here the goriki take their first meal; and I rest. The kuruma can go no farther; and I dismiss my three runners, but keep the horse–a docile and surefooted creature; for I can venture to ride him up to Ni-go-goséki, or Station No. 2 1/2.

Start for No. 2 1/2 up the slant of black sand, keeping the horse at a walk. No. 2 1/2 is shut up for the season. . . . Slope now becomes steep as a stairway, and further riding would be dangerous. Alight and make ready for the climb. Cold wind blowing so strongly that I have to tie on my hat tightly. One of the goriki unwinds from about his waist a long stout cotton girdle, and giving me one end to hold, passes the other over his shoulder for the pull. Then he proceeds over the sand at an angle, with a steady short step, and I follow; the other guide keeping closely behind me to provide against any slip.

There is nothing very difficult about this climbing, except the weariness of walking through sand and cinders: it is like walking over dunes. . . . We mount by zigzags. The sand moves with the wind; and I have a slightly nervous sense–the feeling only, not the perception; for I keep my eyes on the sand–of height growing above depth. . . . Have to watch my steps carefully, and to use my staff constantly, as the slant is now very steep. . . . We are in a white fog–passing through clouds! Even if I wished to look back, I could see nothing through this vapor; but I have not the least wish to look back. The wind has suddenly ceased–cut off, perhaps, by a ridge; and there is a silence that I remember from West Indian days: the Peace of High Places. It is broken only by the crunching of the ashes beneath our feet. I can distinctly hear my heart beat. . . . The guide tells me that I stoop too much–orders me to walk upright, and always in stepping to put down the heel first. I do this, and find it relieving. But climbing through this tiresome mixture of ashes and sand begins to be trying. I am perspiring and panting. The guide bids me keep my honorable mouth closed, and breathe only through my honorable nose.

We are out of the fog again. . . . All at once I perceive above us, at a little distance, something like a square hole in the face of the mountain–a door! It is the door of the third station–a wooden hut half-buried in black drift. . . . How delightful to squat again–even in a blue cloud of wood-smoke and under smoke-blackened rafters! Time, 8.30 A.M. Height, 7085 feet.

In spite of the wood-smoke the station is comfortable enough inside; there are clean mattings and even kneeling-cushions. No windows, of course, nor any other opening than the door; for the building is half-buried in the flank of the mountain. We lunch. . . . The station-keeper tells us that recently a student walked from Gotemba to the top of the mountain and back again–in *geta!* Geta are heavy wooden sandals, or clogs, held to the foot Only by a thong passing between the great and the second toe. The feet of that student must have been made of steel!

Having rested, I go out to look around. Far below white clouds are rolling over the landscape in huge fluffy wreaths. Above the hut, and actually trickling down over it, the stable cone soars to the sky. But the amazing sight is the line of the monstrous slope to the left–a line that now shows no curve whatever, but shoots down below the clouds, and up to the gods only know where (for I cannot see the end of it), straight as a tightened bowstring. The right flank is rocky and broken. But as for the left–I never dreamed it possible that a line so absolutely straight and smooth, and extending for so enormous a distance at such an amazing angle, could exist even in a volcano. That stupendous pitch gives me a sense of dizziness, and a totally unfamiliar feeling of wonder. Such regularity appears unnatural, frightful; seems even artificial–but artificial upon a superhuman and demoniac scale. I imagine that to fall thence from above would be to fall for leagues. Absolutely nothing to take hold of. But the goriki assure me that there is no danger on that slope: it is all soft sand.

IV

THOUGH DRENCHED with perspiration by the exertion of the first climb, I am already dry, and cold. . . . Up again. . . . The ascent is at first through ashes and sand as before; but presently large stones begin to mingle with the sand; and the way is always growing steeper. . .. I constantly slip. There is nothing firm, nothing resisting to stand upon: loose stones and cinders roll down at every step. . . . If a big lava-block were to detach itself from above! . . . In spite of my helpers and of the staff, I continually slip, and am all in perspiration again. Almost every stone that I tread upon turns under me. How is it that no stone ever turns under the feet of the goriki? They never slip–never make a false step–never seem less at ease than they would be in walking over a matted floor. Their small brown broad feet always poise upon the shingle at exactly the right angle. They are heavier men than I; but they move lightly as birds. . . . Now I have to stop for rest every half-a-dozen steps. . . . The line of broken straw sandals follows the zigzags we take. . . . At last–at last another door in the face of the mountain. Enter the fourth station, and fling myself down upon the mats. Time, 10.30 A.M. Height, only 7937 feet;–yet it seemed such a distance!

Off again. . . . Way worse and worse. . . . Feel a new distress due to the rarefaction of the air. Heart beating as in a high fever. . . . Slope has become very rough. It is no longer soft ashes and sand mixed with stones, but stones only–fragments of lava, lumps of pumice, scoriæ of every sort, all angled as if freshly broken with a hammer. All would likewise seem to have been expressly shaped so as to turn upside-down when trodden upon. Yet I must confess that they never turn under the feet of the goriki. . . . The cast-off sandals strew the slope in ever-increasing numbers. . . . But for the goriki I should have had ever so many bad tumbles: they cannot prevent me from slipping; but they never allow me to fall. Evidently I am not fitted to climb mountains. . . . Height, 8659 feet–but the fifth station is shut up! Must keep zig-zagging on to the next. Wonder how I shall ever be able to reach it! . . And there are people still alive who have climbed Fuji three and four times, *for pleasure!* . . . Dare not look back. See nothing but the black stone always turning under me, and the bronzed feet of those marvelous goriki who never slip, never pant, and never perspire. . . . Staff begins to hurt my hand. . . . Goriki push and pull: it is shameful of me, I know, to give them so much trouble. . . . Ah! sixth station!–may all the myriads of the gods bless my goriki! Time, 2.07 P.M. Height, 9317 feet.

Resting, I gaze through the doorway at the abyss below. The land is now dimly visible only through rents in a prodigious wilderness of white clouds; and within these rents everything looks almost black. . . . The horizon has risen frightfully–has expanded monstrously. . . . My goriki warn me that the summit is still miles away. I have been too slow. We must hasten upward.

Certainly the zigzag is steeper than before. . . . With the stones now mingle angular rocks; and we sometimes have to flank queer black bulks that look like basalt. . . . On the right rises, out of sight, a jagged black hideous ridge–an ancient lava-stream. The line of the left slope still shoots up, straight as a bow-string. . . . Wonder if the way will become any steeper; doubt whether it can possibly become any rougher. Rocks dislodged by my feet roll down soundlessly;–I am afraid to look after them. Their noiseless vanishing gives me a sensation like the sensation of falling in dreams. . . .

There is a white gleam overhead–the lowermost verge of an immense stretch of snow. . . . Now we are skirting a snow-filled gully–the lower-most of those white patches which, at first sight of the summit this morning, seemed scarcely an inch long. It will take an hour to pass it. . . . A guide runs forward, while I rest upon my staff, and returns with a large ball of snow. What curious snow! Not flaky, soft, white snow, but a mass of transparent globules–exactly like glass beads. I eat some, and find it deliciously refreshing. . . . The seventh station is closed. How shall I get to the eighth? . . . Happily, breathing has become less difficult. . . . The wind is upon us again, and black dust with it. The goriki keep close to me, and advance with caution. . . . I have to stop for rest at every turn on the path;–cannot talk for weariness. . . . I do not feel;–I am much too tired to feel.. . . How I managed it, I do not know;–but I have actually got to the eighth station! Not for a thousand millions of dollars will I go one step farther to-day. Time, 4.40 P.M. Height, 10,693 feet.

V

IT IS MUCH TOO COLD here for rest without winter clothing; and now I learn the worth of the heavy robes provided by the guides. The robes are blue, with big white Chinese characters on the back, and are padded thickly as bed-quilts; but they feel light; for the air is really like the frosty breath of February. . . . A meal is preparing;–I notice that charcoal at this elevation acts in a refractory manner, and that a fire can be maintained Only by constant attention. . . . Cold and fatigue sharpen appetite: we consume a surprising quantity of Zo-sui–rice boiled with eggs and a little meat. By reason of my fatigue and of the hour, it has been decided to remain here for the night.

Tired as I am, I cannot but limp to the doorway to contemplate the amazing prospect. From within a few feet of the threshold, the ghastly slope of rocks and cinders drops down into a prodigious disk of clouds miles beneath us–clouds of countless forms, but mostly wreathings and fluffy pilings;–and the whole huddling mass, reaching almost to the horizon, is blinding white under the sun. (By the Japanese, this tremendous cloud-expanse is well named Wata-no-Umi, “the Sea of Cotton.”) The horizon itself–enormously risen, phantasmally expanded–seems halfway up above the world: a wide luminous belt ringing the hollow vision. Hollow, I call it, because

extreme distances below the skyline are sky-colored and vague–so that the impression you receive is not of being on a point under a vault, but of being upon a point rising into a stupendous blue sphere, of which this huge horizon would represent the equatorial zone. To turn away from such a spectacle is not possible. I watch and watch until the dropping sun changes the colors–turning the Sea of Cotton into a Fleece of Gold. Half-round the horizon a yellow glory grows and burns. Here and there beneath it, through cloud-rifts, colored vaguenesses define: I now see golden water, with long purple headlands reaching into it, with ranges of violet peaks thronging behind it;–these glimpses curiously resembling portions of a tinted topographical map. Yet most of the landscape is pure delusion. Even my guides, with their long experience and their eagle-sight, can scarcely distinguish the real from the unreal;–for the blue and purple and violet clouds moving under the Golden Fleece, exactly mock the outlines and the tones of distant peaks and capes: you can detect what is vapor only by its Slowly shifting shape. . . . Brighter and brighter glows the gold. Shadows come from the west–shadows flung by cloud-pile over cloud-pile; and these, like evening shadows upon snow, are violaceous blue. . . . Then orange-tones appear in the horizon; then smouldering crimson. And now the greater part of the Fleece of Gold has changed to cotton again–white cotton mixed with pink. . . . Stars thrill out. The cloud-waste uniformly whitens;–thickening and packing to the horizon. The west glooms. Night rises; and all things darken except that wondrous unbroken world-round of white–the Sea of Cotton.

The station-keeper lights his lamps, kindles a fire of twigs, prepares our beds. Outside it is bitterly cold, and, with the fall of night, becoming colder. Still I cannot turn away from that astounding vision. . . . Countless stars now flicker and shiver in the blue-black sky. Nothing whatever of the material world remains visible, except the black slope of the peak before my feet. The enormous cloud-disk below continues white; but to all appearance it has become a liquidly level white, without forms–a white flood. It is no longer the Sea of Cotton. It is a Sea of Milk, the Cosmic Sea of ancient Indian legend–and always self-luminous, as with ghostly quickenings.

VI

SQUATTING BY THE WOOD FIRE, I listen to the goriki and the station-keeper telling of strange happenings on the mountain. One incident discussed I remember reading something about in a Tokyo paper: I now hear it retold by the lips of a man who figured in it as a hero.

A Japanese meteorologist named Nonaka attempted last year the rash undertaking of passing the winter on the summit of Fuji for purposes of scientific study. It might not be difficult to winter upon the peak in a solid observatory furnished with a good stove, and all necessary comforts; but Nonaka could afford only a small wooden hut, in which he would be obliged to spend the cold season without fire! His young wife insisted on sharing his labors and dangers. The couple began their sojourn on the summit toward the close of September. In mid-winter news was brought to Gotemba that both were dying.

Relatives and friends tried to organize a rescue-party. But the weather was frightful; the peak was covered with snow and ice; the chances of death were innumerable; and the goriki would not risk their lives. Hundreds of dollars could not tempt them. At last a desperate appeal was made to them as representatives of Japanese courage and hardihood: they were assured that to suffer a man of science to perish, without making even one plucky effort to save him, would disgrace the country;–they were told that the national honor was in their hands. This appeal brought forward two volunteers. One was a man of great strength and daring, nicknamed by his fellow-guides *Oni-guma,* "the Demon-Bear," the other was the elder of my goriki. Both believed that they were going to certain destruction. They took leave of their friends and kindred, and drank with their families the farewell cup of water–*midzu-no-sakazuki*–in which those about to be separated by death pledge each other. Then, after having thickly wrapped themselves in cotton-wool, and made all possible preparation for ice-climbing, they started–taking with them a brave army-surgeon who had offered his services, without fee, for the rescue. After surmounting extraordinary difficulties, the party reached the hut; but the inmates refused to open! Nonaka protested that he would rather die than face the shame of failure in his undertaking; and his wife said that she had resolved to die with her husband.

Partly by forcible, and partly by gentle means, the pair were restored to a better state of mind. The surgeon administered medicines and cordials; the patients, carefully wrapped up, were strapped to the backs of the guides; and the descent was begun. My goriki, who carried the lady, believes that the gods helped him on the ice-slopes. More than once, all thought themselves lost; but they reached the foot of the mountain without one serious mishap. After weeks of careful nursing, the rash young couple were pronounced out of danger. The wife suffered less, and recovered more quickly, than the husband.

The goriki have cautioned me not to venture outside during the night without calling them. They will not tell me why; and their warning is peculiarly uncanny. From previous experiences during Japanese travel, I surmise that the danger implied is supernatural; but I feel that it would be useless to ask questions.

The door is closed and barred. I lie down between the guides, who are asleep in a moment, as I can tell by their heavy breathing. I cannot sleep immediately;–perhaps the fatigues and the surprises of the day have made me somewhat nervous. I look up at the rafters of the black roof–at packages of sandals, bundles of wood, bundles of many indistinguishable kinds there stowed away or suspended, and making queer shadows in the lamplight. . . . It is terribly cold, even under my three quilts; and the sound of the wind outside is wonderfully like the sound of great surf–a constant succession of bursting roars, each followed by a prolonged hiss. The hut, half buried under tons of rock and drift, does not move; but the sand does, and trickles down between the rafters; and small stones also move after each fierce gust, with a rattling just like the clatter of shingle in the pull of a retreating wave.

4 A.M.–GO out alone, despite last evening's warning, but keep close to the door. There is a great and icy blowing. The Sea of Milk is unchanged: it lies far below this wind. Over it the moon is dying. . . . The guides, perceiving my absence, spring up and join me. I am reproved for not having awakened them. They will not let me stay outside alone: so I turn in with them.

Dawn: a zone of pearl grows round the world. The stars vanish; the sky brightens. A wild sky, with dark wrack drifting at an enormous height. The Sea of Milk has turned again into Cotton–and there are wide rents in it. The desolation of the black slope–all the ugliness of slaggy rock and angled stone–again defines. . . . Now the cotton becomes disturbed;–it is breaking up. A yellow glow runs along the east like the glare of a wind-blown fire. . . . Alas! I shall not be among the fortunate mortals able to boast of viewing from Fuji the first lifting of the sun! Heavy clouds have drifted across the horizon at the point where he should rise. . . . Now I know that he has risen; because the upper edges of those purple rags of cloud are burning like charcoal. But I have been so disappointed!

More and more luminous the hollow world. League-wide heapings of cottony cloud roll apart. Fearfully far away there is a light of gold upon water: the sun here remains viewless, but the ocean sees him. It is not a flicker, but a burnished glow;–at such a distance ripplings are invisible. . . . Farther and farther scattering, the clouds unveil a vast gray and blue landscape;–hundreds and hundreds of miles throng into vision at once. On the right I distinguish Tokyo Bay, and Kamakura, and the holy island of Enoshima (no bigger than the dot over this letter "i");–on the left the wilder Suruga coast, and the blue-toothed promontory of Idzu, and the place of the fishing-village where I have been summering–the merest pin-point in that tinted dream of hill and shore. Rivers appear but as sun-gleams on spider-threads;–fishing-sails are white dust clinging to the gray-blue glass of the sea. And the picture alternately appears and vanishes while the clouds drift and shift across it, and shape themselves into spectral islands and mountains and valleys of all Elysian colors. . . .

VII

6.40 A.M.–START FOR THE TOP. . . . hardest and roughest stage of the journey, through a wilderness of lava-blocks. The path zigzags between ugly masses that project from the slope like black teeth. The trail of castaway sandals is wider than ever. . . . Have to rest every few minutes. . . . Reach another long patch of the snow that looks like glass-beads, and eat some. The next station–a half-station–is closed; and the ninth has ceased to exist. . . . A sudden fear comes to me, not of the ascent, but of the prospective descent by a route which is too steep even to permit of comfortably sitting down. But the guides assure me that there will be no difficulty, and that most of the return journey will be by another way–over the interminable level which I wondered at yesterday–nearly all soft sand, with very few stones. It is called the *hashiri* (glissade) and we are to descend at a run!

All at once a family of field-mice scatter out from under my feet in panic; and the goriki behind me catches one, and gives it to me. I hold the tiny shivering life for a moment to examine it, and set it free again. These little creatures have very long pale noses. How do they live in this waterless desolation–and at such an altitude–especially in the season of snow? For we are now at a height of more than eleven thousand feet! The goriki say that the mice find roots growing under the stones. . . .

Wilder and steeper;–for me, at least, the climbing is sometimes on all fours. There are barriers which we surmount with the help of ladders. There are fearful places with Buddhist names, such as the Sai-no-Kawara, or Dry Bed of the River of Souls–a black waste strewn with heaps of rock, like those stone-piles which, in Buddhist pictures of the under-world, the ghosts of children build. . . .

Twelve thousand feet, and something–the top! Time, 8.20 A.M. . . . Stone huts! Shinto shrine with torii; icy well, called the Spring of Gold; stone tablet bearing a Chinese poem and the design of a tiger; rough walls of lava-blocks round these things–possibly for protection against the wind. Then the huge dead crater–probably between a quarter of a mile and half-a-mile wide, but shallowed up to within three or four hundred feet of the verge by volcanic detritus–a cavity horrible even in the tones of its yellow crumbling walls, streaked and stained with every hue of scorching. I perceive that the trail of straw sandals ends in the crater. Some hideous overhanging cusps of black lava–like the broken edges of monstrous cicatrix–project on two sides several hundred feet above the opening; but I certainly shall not take the trouble to climb them. Yet these–seen through the haze of a hundred miles–through the soft illusion of blue spring weather-appear as the opening snowy petals of the bud of the Sacred Lotus! . . . No spot in this world can be more horrible, more atrociously dismal, than the cindered tip of the Lotus as you stand upon it.

But the view–the view for a hundred leagues–and the light of the far faint dreamy world–and the fairy vapors of morning–and the marvelous wreathings of cloud: all this, and only this, consoles me for the labor and the pain. . . . Other pilgrims, earlier climbers–poised upon the highest crag, with faces turned to the tremendous East–are clapping their hands in Shinto prayer, saluting the mighty Day. . . . The immense poetry of the moment enters into me with a thrill. I know that the colossal vision before me has already become a memory ineffaceable–a memory of which no luminous detail can fade till the hour when thought itself must fade, and the dust of these eyes be mingled with the dust of the myriad million eyes that also have looked in ages forgotten before my birth, from the summit supreme of Fuji to the Rising of the Sun.

On right, part of an illustration by Zanna Aristarhova,

based on a photograph of a Shinto Monk at the Kiyomizu Temple in Kyoto, Japan, taken by Larry Hightower