FUJIYAMA IN MAY.

By the Rev. W. WESTON.

We left Miyanoshita at about 11 A.M. on Wednesday, May 18, and walked over the Otome-toge (*Anglicè* 'Jungfrau-joch') to Gotemba, arriving there at about 4 P.M. It was the fourth time I had crossed the pass, but only on this occasion have I had any view whatever of the 'matchless mountain,' which is tantalising, for, as a phrase in 'Chamberlain's Japanese Grammar' puts it, 'The Otome-toge is *the* place to see Fuji from.' On arriving at the inn near Gotemba station our first proceeding was to get coolies to carry our baggage to the hut in the forest, at which we intended to pass the night.

A noisy crowd soon gathered round, for the idea of climbing Fuji whilst still her shoulders were robed in snow was in their ideas such an insane, as well as impossible, proceeding that the opportunity of seeing the Englishmen mad enough to attempt it was too good to be lost.

Still, a number of coolies were willing to a certain extent to help us to fail, and the difficulty was to reduce their numbers and their exorbitant demands to reasonable figures. This was at length done, and at 5.30 we started, trying to save an hour by taking jinrikishas along the road which passes from Gotemba to the lower slopes of the forest, and then turns off to Suyama and Subasniri. As a matter of fact, we didn't gain much time, and we soon left the jinrikishas and pushed on steadily through the forest on foot. The sun had now set behind Fuji, but the distant summits of the Hakone hills were gilded with its last rays, and as we looked across the great plain the view was extremely pretty.

For some hours we plodded on through the forest over a very rough narrow track in the soft black soil, and my back got a good many jolts from stepping unawares into holes which it was not easy to see or avoid. At length, about 10 P.M., we reached our hut called Tarōbō, from a goblin supposed to haunt the neighbourhood. We had expected to find it unoccupied, and hoped to have it all to ourselves, but upon arriving we discovered a party of coolies who had come to erect a better one in the place of that now existing. It reminded me of an occasion some years ago, when I went to sleep in the lower hut on the Matterhorn before climbing it from the Zermatt side. I had then, too, believed I should have a quiet time, but night was made hideous by the constant chatter and almost ceaseless smoking of a party of Italian guides, who had returned from an unsuccessful attempt to hang a rope ladder near the summit on the Breil side of the peak. But no one can touch the Japanese for chatter—one can't call it conversation—and on this occasion it was long before rest came. However, we cooked some food, and lay down on the rough-boarded floor of the hut and did our best to get some sleep before getting up and making an early start the next day. A dull sky greeted us as we moved off from the hut at 4.30 on the following morning, and we were not very sanguine as to

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the weather prospects, though, as a matter of fact, it soon cleared, and we had a brilliant day, the distant views, however, being a little hazy.

In a short time we had cleared the upper edges of the forest in which our hut stands, and found ourselves at the foot of the cone of Fuji, some 5,000 ft. above sea-level, then beginning a tiresome grind through the soft yielding ashes which gave way at every step, reminding one of the Irishman's difficulties on a slippery road, since for every yard he stepped forward he slipped two yards back.

There was no semblance of a path anywhere between the edge of the forest and the summit of the mountain, though I believe there is an attempt made to mark out one for the pilgrims in the summer time. The nature of the walk was such as to demand frequent admiration of the view, tying of boot-laces, &c. The prospect over towards the Hakone hills was very fine, and as we mounted higher and higher the view became more and more extensive, the sea now occupying an increasing part of the landscape. I think it is the *variety* of the view, as well as its extent, which makes an expedition on Fuji so unusually interesting, and in some respects more impressive than those from Alpine summits in Switzerland. Of course, there one can look upon Swiss or Italian lakes, as the case may be; but here the noble expanse of the blue waters of the Pacific Ocean strikes one in quite a different way.

Our route lay just on the east slope below the huge mound called 'Hōyeisan,' so called after the period when the last eruption of Fuji (in 1707) took place, the great hollow between Hōyeisan and the summit of the mountain being formed at the same time.

For about five hours we plodded steadily along, until at 10.30 we found ourselves at the edge of the great slopes of snow which descend on all sides to within about 9,000 ft. above sea-level.

Here one of the three coolies gave in. It was too risky, he said, and he was not going any further. Having no time to waste, we left him behind, he finding shelter in a small hut which still stood out white and bleached against the dark ashes of the volcanic cone. The other two men we persuaded to come on with us yet further, for there was still another little cabin perched upon a platform of blocks of lava some 500 ft. higher up. But it was hard work to get them on. Their straw *waraji* wouldn't hold the snow, so I went on in front and cut some steps by way of facilitating matters. I happened to have brought with me a pair of *kanakanjiki*, the Japanese *crampons*, and these we gave to the coolies to use. They consist of a cross of wrought iron with each end of the cross bent down, and sharpened into a point of about an inch long, and one cross is fastened to each foot by a piece of cord. As I had only one pair, however, each coolie could use only one *kanjiki*, the style of progression thus necessitated being very much of the 'dot and carry one' nature. Still by dint of perseverance and zig-zagging across the face of the slope, aided here and there by a thin seam of lava rock cropping out above the snow, our men succeeded at last in reaching the hut of which I spoke.

Here they flatly refused to move another step, so we decided to leave them beind also. On entering the little hut, we found it, like the one lower down, partly filled with frozen snow, but we managed to get a

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little fire made, and after a meal on sardines, cocoa, &c., Fordham and I sallied forth alone, taking with us my rucksack, which contained some warm wraps, food, &c.

It was now 11.30 A.M., and we were at an altitude of 9,500 ft. The wind was fairly strong and keen, but the sun was warm.

The coolies bade us a sarcastic farewell, with every assurance of the impossibility of our reaching the top; and then, as we left them, they sat down in a sheltered spot to enjoy their everlasting *ippuku* (one whiff) and the spectacle of our discomfiture.

We gradually worked our way across the south face of the mountain, a view of which is well seen from near Miyanoshita, until in about three hours we found ourselves on the lava rocks of the south-west arête, these proving an acceptable change after the soft snow, which had made the 'going' somewhat hard.

On reaching the arête we went nearly straight up it to the top, arriving at the highest part of the south side of the crater lip at 3.30 P.M. Here an icy wind met us, and great care was needed, when approaching the inner edge of the 'lip,' to avoid a slip over the cliffs, which on nearly all sides fall sheer into the crater hollow. The 'O-ana' 'great hole,' as the Japanese sometimes call it, presented a wonderful sight. Excepting where the sides of the inner walls are too steep to allow it to lodge, snow or ice covers the entire top of the mountain. Here and there enormous icicles hang blue against the dark red of the rocks, and a solemn stillness, broken only by the occasional roar of gusts of wind, which drive the snow in small pellets into our faces, reigns over all. One couldn't help recalling, as one gazed on this wonderful scene, until now unvisited by man, some of the illustrations in Mr. Whymper's magnificent engravings in his recent work on the 'Andes,' descriptive of his first ascent of the mighty Chimborazo, though our peak here is on a so much smaller scale and more regular in form.

The highest point of Fuji is about 12,400 ft. above sea-level, but the mountain has no companion within 2,000 ft. of that height, the next loftiest summits being those on the borders of Hida and the Shirane San of Kōshin. These, however, are some distance away, and there is nothing with which to institute a comparison. Fuji is so immense relatively to its surroundings, and so isolated, that all else is dwarfed, and the view is simply one great relief map with varying colours and shades on lake and forest, and sea and plain. To turn away from the deathly whiteness of the snow at our feet, and look out far and wide over the vast expanse of country, all full of fresh spring life, to the restless sea beyond, was a wonderful experience. The novelty will never come again; the recollection of this scene viewed from the summit of the fairest mountain of one of the fairest lands in God's creation will live in my memory as one of its best treasures.

Our time was all too short, however, and the lateness of the hour and the keenness of the wind warned us not to linger. Two of my fingers were already slightly frost-bitten, and Fordham's eyes were beginning to suffer from the glare of the sun reflected from the snow, he having *blue* spectacles instead of smoked ones. I, on the other

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hand, whose eyes are by no means strong, felt not the least inconvenience, my dark smoke-coloured glasses proving a far better protection.

We left the top about 4 P.M. and raced down the snow slopes as hard as we could go, arriving in about an hour and a half—including a halt to search for Fordham's hat which got blown off and was not recovered—at the hut where our two gallant coolies had deserted us. Here we found them waiting—again enjoying an *ippuku*, but much astonished to find their prophecies had not come true.

They said they had been able to trace our progress most of the way, and had seen us near the top. Some time was now spent in making a small fire for a brew of cocoa, and nearly an hour had slipped by before we were again on the move. However, there was still nearly an hour of daylight before us, and the work of the day was practically done. By this time the sun was well on the opposite of the mountain, and as we descended a magnificent effect was produced by the shadow of the peak thrown dark across the plains between it and the Hakone hills. The cloud effects, too, were very remarkable, one great mass, gilded with the rays of the setting sun, exactly resembling some great cathedral dome with its attendant spires.

By half-past seven we were at the Tarōbō hut, finding there our friends of the previous night, who gave us a warm welcome and some hot Japanese tea, a very refreshing drink, by the way, on an expedition of this kind, though in my own belief cold coffee is *the* one to recommend. Having sent on a coolie in advance, with orders to get some horses or jinrikishas, if possible, at Gotemba, we followed at leisure, and after another two and a half hours' walk arrived at the cottage at which we had left our Kurumas the previous evening. Here we found a couple of the 'man-power carriages,' or 'pullman cars,' as a facetious American dubbed them, awaiting us, and in these we proceeded to Gotemba, arriving at midnight at the inn which we had quitted the afternoon before at 5.30 P.M. So ended our expedition, in which no real difficulties were met with, and which can thoroughly be recommended to any mountaineer who is in Japan at this season.

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