

ASCENDING TO THE GODS.

BY H. L. LATHAM.

MT. FUJI once seen will never leave you. Whether you are a native, a Japanized American, a globe-trotter from nowhere, it is just the same. Our first sight of Fuji San was from the sea, *en route* from Yokohama to Kobe. Only its peak was in view, but we were thereafter to be counted among its worshipers.



MOUNT FUJI.

(From a Japanese art print.)

Later our train sped by its outskirts and we saw its eternal base and new ardor was enkindled within. Our cottage at Ninooka lay hard by a range of hills in the Hakone district; from these we have repeatedly viewed the "mountain of immortality." From this viewpoint we discovered that the higher we ascend to gaze upon Mount

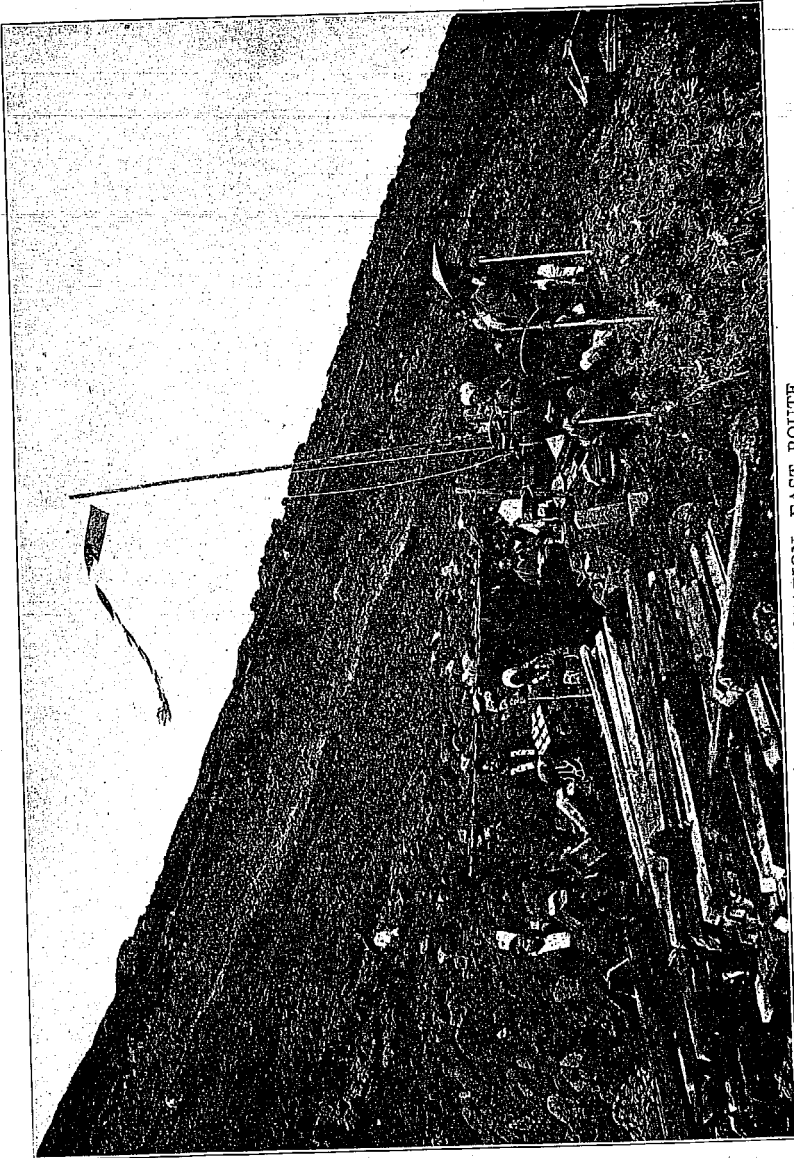
Fuji the higher and grander does the mountain appear. As we look upon the long uninterrupted slope for its full extent the more appreciable is it according as the line of vision approaches perpen-



MOUNT FUJI.

dicularity to the line of the slope. This possibly was the grandest truth this great wonder taught us—a lofty ascent is necessary for the adequate appreciation of the great, grand or noble.

All these visions aroused a passion to surrender ourselves more fully to Fuji. A little company of foreign residents from Ninooka,



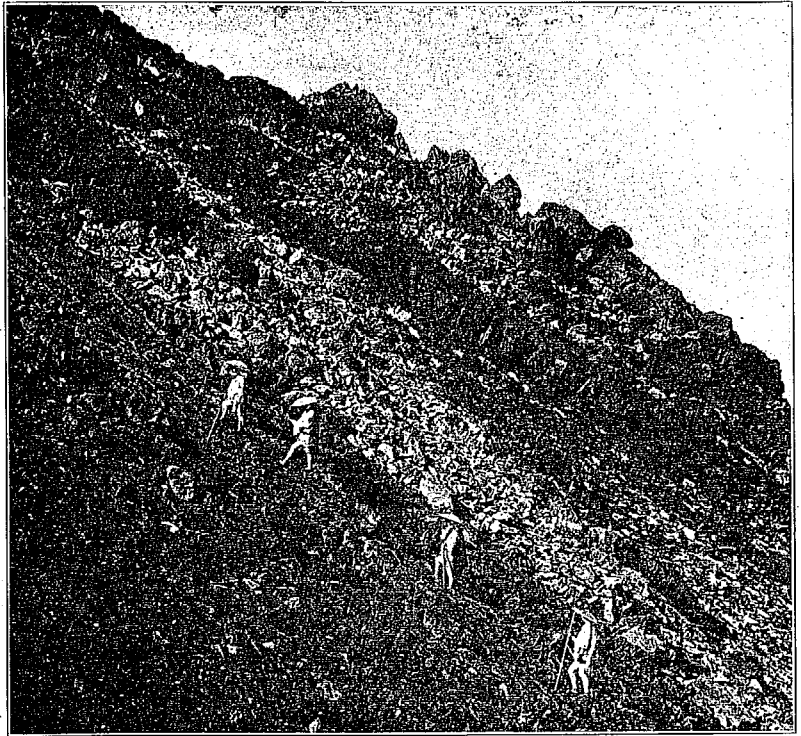
THE SIXTH STATION, EAST ROUTE.

some two miles distant from Gotemba, started at noon-tide for the ascent. All but one were afoot, though the walk to the first station at the base of the mountain consumed five hours. Our pathway

from far out in the valley nearly up to the steepest ascent lay over "cinders" of the volcano, rendering the footing exceedingly yielding to the tread.

At the first station, Ichigome, we halt for a rest and lunch. The party is equipped with straw sandals, the mountain-stock—*kongo-zue*, some further additions to our commissary, and we are ready to set out on the actual ascent of the mountain.

But we pause to scan the groups of pilgrims just emerging from

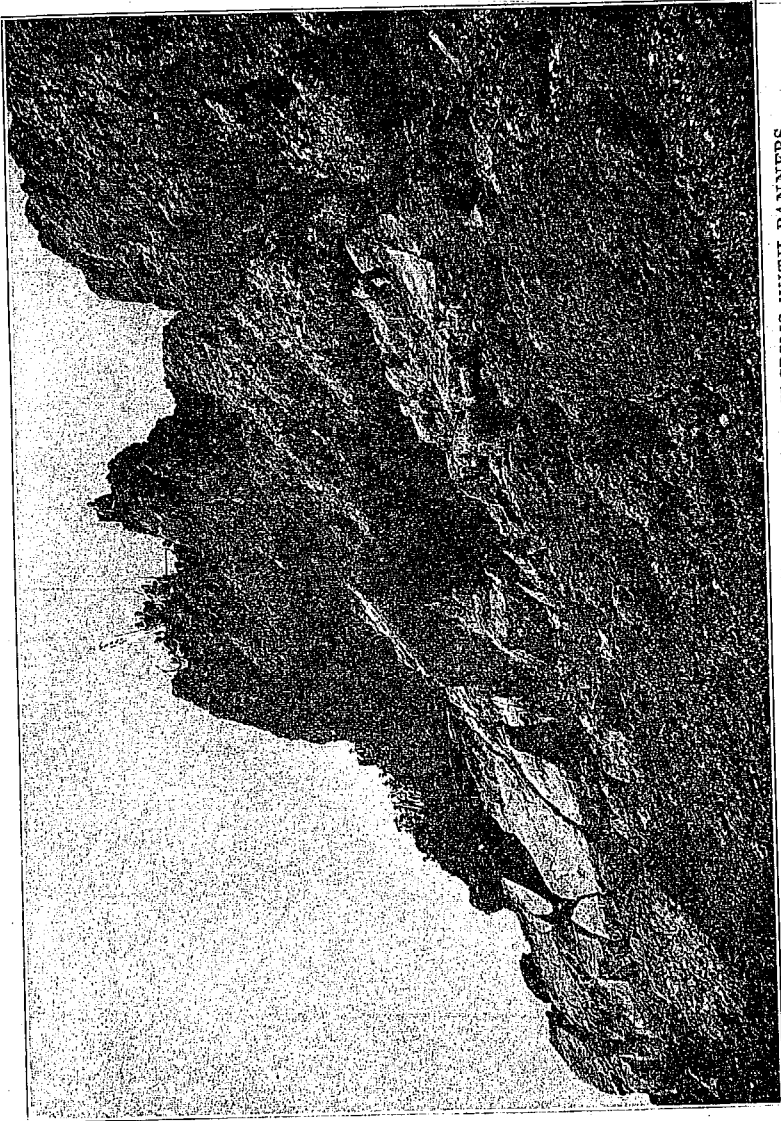


MUNATSUKI—BREAST-PUSH, THE STEEPEST ASCENT.

the pathway exit beneath the roof of the hotel. They are clad in the traditional habiliments of the pilgrim in some cases; others less influenced, doubtless, by religious motives have made no change in the ordinary pedestrian's garb. Many pause to purchase trinkets or mementoes from the stalls spread with luxuriant display of dainty, decorative and useful articles, for this is the last stop in the sacred environs of the Pride of the Empire.

There is no unbearable sense of divine presence evident upon the

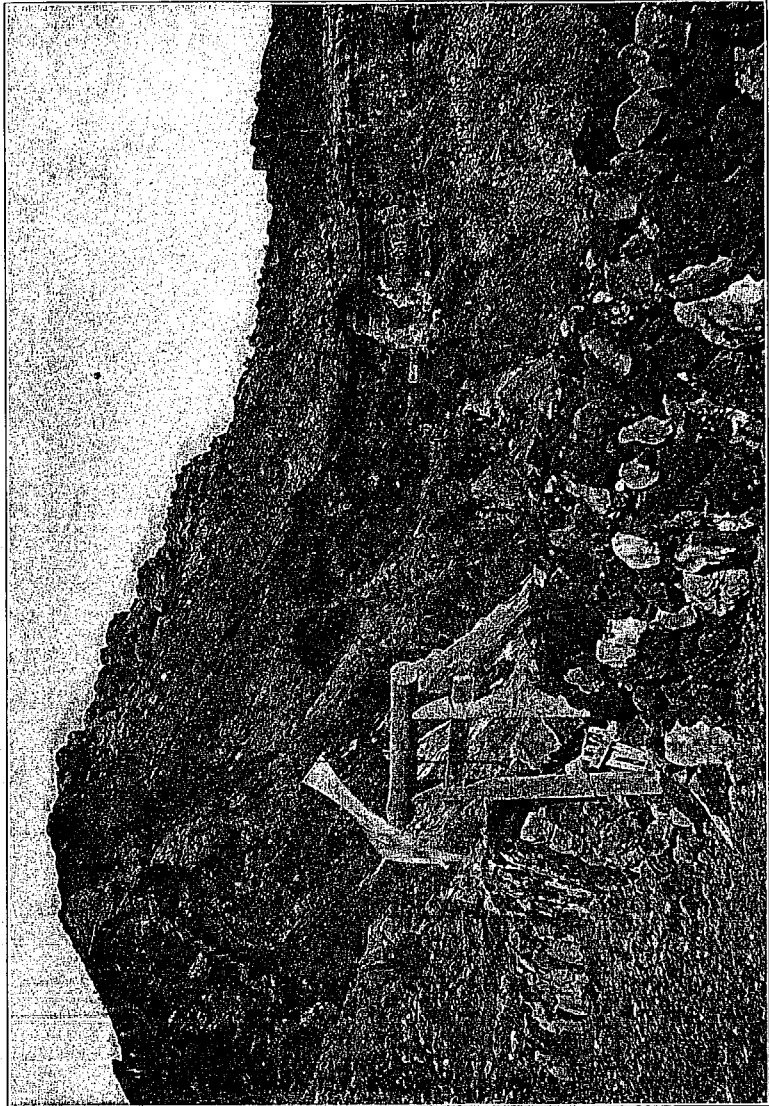
countenances of these pilgrims. The same hilarity and placidity of inner repose are here commingled as elsewhere throughout the journeying Japanese public.



A RUGGED SPOT FROM A DISTANCE. A BAND OF PILGRIMS WITH BANNERS.

But we must hasten on. Our feet carry us well up to the third station—a crude cabin built of lumber and stone like all upon the mountain. Here the equestrian must dismount, discharge his horse

and attendant and share the lot of the common pilgrim. We partake of supper and make our final effort for the night.



LOOKING INTO THE CRATER.

We are told there is yet time to reach the fifth station where we may find our lodgings. Darkness comes on but our guide knows the path well and at 9 P. M. we are at the door.

"Go men!" is answered by the expected "*O hairi nasai*" and we accept this brief but cordial invitation to enter.

Our weary limbs will scarcely let us sleep. No one can willingly trust himself to lie down until our host gives every assurance that well before the break of day he will arouse us and set us out upon our further journey.

So we occupy a few remaining spaces upon the floor along with the worthy Nipponese who have returned thus far upon their descent. Our guide and porter spreads our quilts and we are soon meditating



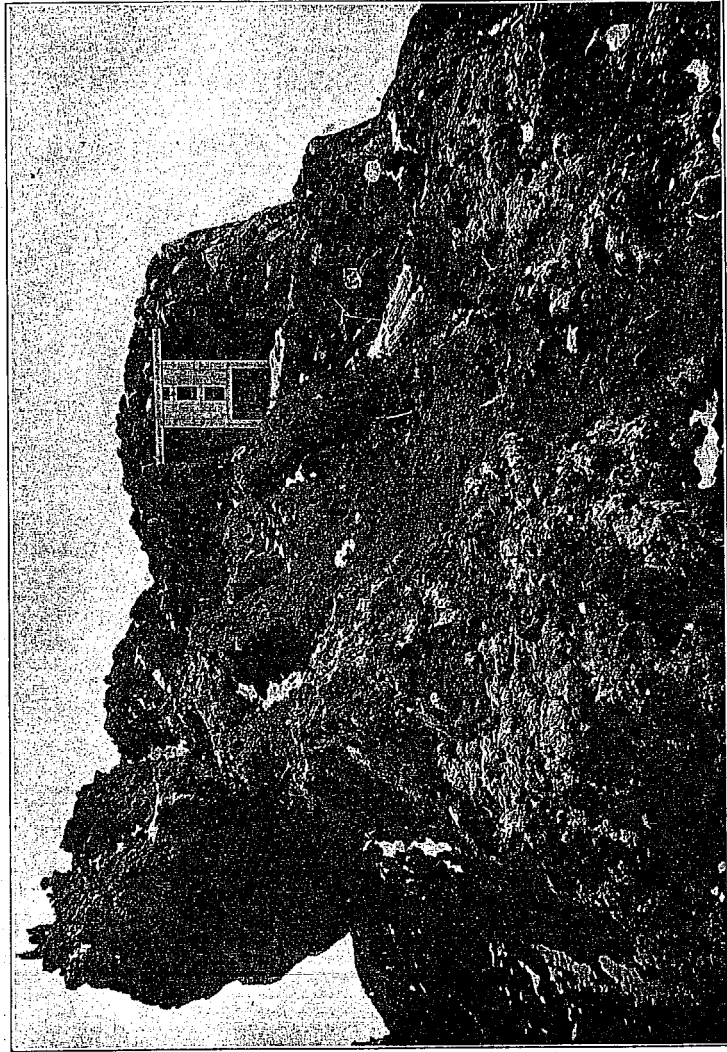
SHRINE DEDICATED TO THE HONORABLE INTERIOR.
Note the snow banks.

on the possible outcome of the battle with the featherless contestants for our life's blood.

At four o'clock we are out at the door of the cabin. God's charge to Abraham comes to mind. The stars seem fairly reaching out to us to bless us on our journey. All is ready and we set out for a few hours' walk before reaching the most difficult part of the ascent.

Repeatedly we turn to catch the first sign of the dawning day.

Presently we note a brightening in the east and the slow growth of pencils of light into beams emanating from a common center toward south, north, the zenith and toward several points between these.



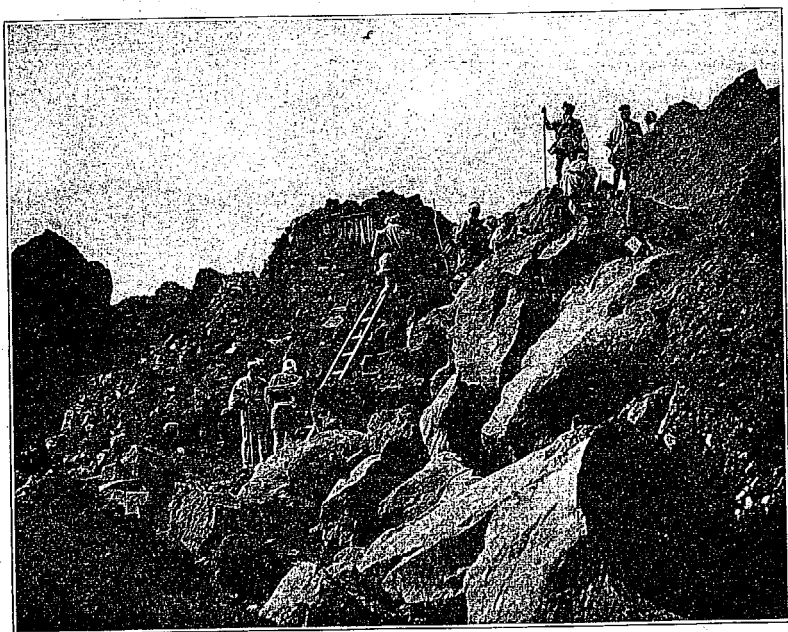
SHRINE DEDICATED TO NONAKA ITARU,
The first scientific observer of winter phenomena on Mt Fuji. (The highest point in Japan proper.)

Beneath us is a sea of clouds, white as snow, hiding every vestige of the earth from view even far up the mountain side. In a few moments more a golden, billowy sea lies at our feet as the disk of the sun rises. Ten thousand tongues would not suffice to describe

such a sight. The whole toil of the journey would have been amply repaid by this twenty minutes' view of the sunrise.

The sixth station is reached. The scoria is now displaced by the massive volcanic rock piled about in grand confusion. We can now see the steepest of the ascent up which advance seems utterly impossible, for there is no pathway in view whereby we may scale its almost perpendicular wall.

Just past the eighth *gome* our equo-pedestrian is struck with mountain sickness; at the actual entrance upon the steepest ascent he is unable to accompany the party. By taking a dozen steps and



THE ASCENT OF A DIFFICULT CRAG.

resting a little progress is made, but only when the guide and a companion return from the top and almost carry him is the journey finally completed.

We are now upon the *chojo* of Mount Fuji, 12,490 feet nearer heaven than when first we saw the Peerless Mount. We look below; the clouds have largely vanished. Men are invisible, villages are dots. The beautiful lake Hakone lies off to the right guarded by her mountain consorts. We share the spirit of the mountain as we note our commanding position whence even the ocean far out lies easily under our gaze.

The spirit of the mountain is symbolized for us in the tiny shrine at which the worshiper may bow facing the interior of the crater. The sanctity of the mountain is due to Sengen Sama whose shrines may be found indeed at numerous spots upon the mountain. Associated with this cult another member of the primitive mythologic ancestral pantheon is established as an august resident upon the mountain. Her name is Konohanasakuya-hime-no-mikato.

What brings the pilgrim hither? you ask. Just this: all Japan is sacred ground; there are gods everywhere, but he who would ensure prosperity must once in his life visit the imperial shrines at Yamada and if possible ascend Mount Fuji. The gods are quick to respond either to deeds of reverence or to slights. Therefore he who would bind to himself the powerful divinities of Fuji must exhibit his profound reverence by undertaking this pilgrimage.

It is to be noted that art or natural beauty are associated with all these sacred places. Religious impulses alone are not sufficient to command all these toilsome journeys, some may say. Whatever the truth may be, the pilgrim never suffers too much by being sent to desert wastes or dangerous heights—his own gain is equal to that of the gods.

There are six routes of ascent to Fuji and each brings its quota of visitors; the more pious encircle the rim of the crater as a part of the journey. This requires some two or three hours' walk. Others descend into the crater and view more closely its solid walls and banks of snow. The temperature for the six weeks of the open season is in the main most delightful; but no vegetation is found above the eighth station. Snow we saw as far down as the foot of the Munatsuki.

Our invalid rested, our lunch eaten, our tea-money deposited, we are ready to descend. The native mind, filled with sacred traditions from childhood, would seem more likely to descend from this marvel of nature with highly wrought enthusiasm. But we too feel that we have been near to God. By evening we are again in our mountain cottage attempting to share our experience with less privileged companions.