

# CLIMBING FUJIYAMA IN WINTER<sup>1</sup>

BY J. SPENCER KENNARD, JR.

NEARLY every winter one or more attempts are made to climb Mount Fuji, or at least to go part of the way up its snow-covered sides. Comparatively few succeed in reaching the summit, due to bad weather, lack of proper equipment, lack of experience in mountain-climbing, or other circumstances. The writer was fortunate in reaching the ninth hut just below the actual summit, which is the highest point that has been reached this season.

Contrary to a prevailing opinion, the climbing of Mount Fuji in winter is entirely feasible, and, what is more, it is the rarest of sports. It presents hardships in unpleasant moments. But to any lover of outdoor exercise, of real thrills without undue risk, of the joy of achievement, of the glorious air of the mountains in winter, and of beautiful scenery, the trip is well worth while.

There is much misunderstanding about the climbing of the mountain at such a time of year. Because the official season is limited to two months in summer many assume that the police authorities forbid it. Others, familiar with the terrific windstorms that sweep the mountain and the thick mantle of snow which seems to cover it for so much of the year, imagine that the cold is beyond human endurance and the slopes almost impossible to climb. Others, less familiar with mountain-climbing, and especially with snow

ascents, can see only the risks, not knowing the many precautions with which, as experience has shown, it is possible to eliminate nearly all of such dangers.

The decision seriously to investigate the feasibility of such a climb — but with little hope of getting very far — was made only a couple of days previous to the attempt, when on a trip around the mountain with a friend. Therefore the ascent had to be undertaken without those extra preparations which would have added much to the comfort of the venture. But on arriving at Subashiri on the afternoon of January 3 and telling the proprietor of the Okomeya hotel of our desire to try the ascent, we found him quite equal to the occasion. He, and especially his wife, did all in their power to make the climb a success. They were able to provide extra wrappings with which to resist the cold, iron crampons for affixing to the shoes to prevent slipping, and a good Swiss ice-axe which had seen service in an ascent by a Japanese professor in the month of May a few years ago. They also obtained a guide on short notice who had the special advantage of having been over part of the same road on the previous day.

After completing our preparations, we retired about eight o'clock with the assurance that we should be awakened at one o'clock in the morning to dress and have a good breakfast before starting on the climb.

The time for departure was set at 2 A. M., which, from experience gained

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in climbing mountains in Switzerland, seemed not unreasonably early for beginning a good steady climb, and an hour at which the snow would afford the easiest walking. But, as it worked out, everyone overslept, and it was three o'clock before we got away — with the result that there was not time to explore around the actual summit of the mountain, as would have been very easy but for this late start.

Passing up through the avenue of cryptomerias before the shrine that marks the starting-point of the Subashiri ascent, we entered the rough frozen road, which after an hour's walk brought us to the first rest-place. We did not stop here, but kept on to the Umagaeshi hut, which we reached at 4.45 and where we paused for five or ten minutes. Up to this point the snow had been scarce, but from here it began to impede progress, and soon we were sinking some four or five inches at every step. That we were not more impeded was due to the scarcity of the recent snowfalls, and another time one would probably find the snow considerably deeper. Another hour brought us to hut number one, where again we rested a few minutes and then proceeded.

During the first part of this walk the ascent had been quite gradual over a wide road, but on the last part the road had become much steeper and narrower, and was no longer straight as before. Also the woods had become much denser, and, set off by the white snow, were beautiful. Indeed, we scarcely appreciated the beauty of the landscape till, at one moment, our lantern going out, our eyes, no longer dazzled by its light, could take in the scenery about us. The white snow, the tall motionless trees, and the absolute silence, gave one a very vivid sense of his Maker. It is in just such spots that men in all ages have found God most real.

At ten minutes of seven we reached the second hut, and stayed here just one hour. Another time, however, this place should be left at the latest by seven o'clock, and if possible by half-past six. A good rest is needed at this point, nevertheless, for it is here that one leaves the shelter of the forest and begins the real ascent.

While this hut would make a very unpleasant refuge in a blizzard, with the wind howling through the wide apertures between the boards, still the fact that it is kept open and so well stocked with firewood does not a little to remove danger from the climb. Furthermore, if one did have to seek refuge here in a storm, it would be very easy to cut off the greater part of the room with its gaping cracks by a snow partition and a little banking of snow on the inside against the other walls. There is also a supply of straw mats which could be put into similar service or used for added covering.

If one were planning to spend the night anywhere on the mountain, this on the whole would be the best hut in which to spend it, both because of the inexhaustible supply of firewood and the fact that it is still in the shelter of the woods which connect it up to some extent with the outside world.

If we are informed correctly, there is but one other hut on the entire mountain left open and furnished with a stock of firewood to last through a storm, and that is the fifth one on this same ascent. The fifth, while limited in its supply of firewood and exposed, has the advantage of being the better-built hut and a full two hours nearer the summit.

On leaving this hut we soon passed out of the forest and into the open. The snow became at once both harder and thinner, so that walking was easy. The path was very distinct. Indeed it continued to be so all the way up the

mountain, very little of the marginal rows of black stones being buried under drifts. These drifts, however, began to be quite numerous, compensating for the thinness in other places. While once in a while one sank into them, usually by careful walking it was possible to go along on the top of the crust.

The whole scenery about here was exceedingly beautiful, the many bushes that reach up a considerable distance above the forest line being covered with a curtain of lacework of tiny icicles and particles of snow driven by the wind. Also once in a while one got a glimpse through a rift in the clouds of the great peak, dazzling in its white mantle, towering aloft above us against the blue sky. A moment later the veil of mist would be drawn again across the scene and we would continue plodding onward.

Just an hour of such climbing brought us to the third hut. The whole exterior of this has been built of the gray volcanic rock, and all the usual apertures sealed up with the same stone, except the very lower part of a side door, which allows just enough space to squirm through in case one had to seek refuge in an emergency. This hut is typical of the great majority, though only in this case and in that of Station Five did we observe any means of access to the interior.

It was at about this point that we began to experience the violence of the wind. We had hardly left the shelter of the forest before we began to feel it, but did not mind it much till we got up higher. While it slowed up progress, and often chilled us, it was not serious at first. The noise of the wind overhead, however, was often deafening. It is impossible to describe the roar as currents of air clashed with one another as if in deadly combat, each striving for the mastery. It sounded at times like

the peal of giant bells, the booming diapason of the organ of a great cathedral, and the thunder of artillery, all combining into majestic chords both awful and beautiful. We heard this fighting of the winds above us only a few times: usually we were in the midst of it where we could not appreciate it. But it was worth the whole trip just to have heard it.

It was while plodding on between the third and fifth huts that our guide slipped and slid some forty feet, striking against some bushes. He seemed little the worse for it save for a painful bruise. For a couple of hours or so, however, he felt a bit lame, and eventually we had to shoulder his pack. If I remember rightly, he was not as yet wearing his crampons, which would have made such a slip practically impossible. Given proper equipment, there is no excuse for slipping in mountain-climbing on the frozen snow, for not only do the sharp points of the crampons dig into the ice, making one's steps even more sure than when a person is walking on an ordinary city pavement, but there is also the sharp ice-axe to rely on.

We learned a good lesson, incidentally, regarding the ice-axe — of how useless is any equipment unless one knows how to use it. No real Alpine climber would ever let his ice-axe out of his grasp. To take no chances, a strong thong or braided chord binds it to his wrist, so that even if he lets go of it it will still be with him so that he can arrest a fall. He also carries it with point away from him — lest he fall on it, and that it may the more easily be instantly driven into the ice. However, in all such matters of Alpine technique we found this guide like every other alleged guide we have met in Japan — absolutely ignorant. Two years ago last summer when on an approach to Yarigataki, and again the next season

when climbing Tsurugi, the same thing was experienced with regard to the use of the rope, the ignorance of the guide in the latter case coming very near proving fatal to one of the party. These experiences have taught us that in Japan one will do well to entrust the guide merely with indicating the way and carrying the bulk of the load, and beyond that to rely absolutely on one's own judgment.

On the way we noted that there is no fourth station. At one point below the third hut we saw a place where apparently a hut had once stood, in which case what must have been the fourth hut was renamed as the third. This caused surprise at first till we recalled the Japanese superstition which avoids as far as possible the number *shi*. Nowhere so much as in mountain-climbing could a weary traveler seeking rest so little afford to take it at a place which might bring about his death. So the *shi go*, the 'hut of death,' has wisely been eliminated.

In a little less than an hour — at twenty minutes to ten — we reached the fifth station. This was quite similar to the third, except more exposed. Crawling in through the little hole left on the more sheltered side, we found the place quite inviting. The whole of the inside was lined with boards, and there was no place, apparently, where the wind could get through except at the back, where there was a section with no stone facing and the boards had wide cracks between them which admitted snow and wind. However, it looked as though it would be possible to close that up with very few minutes of snow-banking. Tucked away in the rafters were bundles of firewood, sufficient at least to last through any ordinary storm that persons taking refuge here might have to face, and for use of those passing by as we were.

Indeed this is the point in the ascent to which, apparently, guides have no objection to taking people, but beyond which they are very loath to proceed. It required strong inducing to prevent the wasting of a valuable hour and to get once more on the way.

The wind became very severe as we were leaving here, and we had not gone far when the sudden gusts beat down upon us with fury. By relieving the guide of his pack, however, as he was still feeling pain from his fall, and just keeping plodding along, the two of us reached the sixth hut a little after eleven o'clock.

We found this hut walled up solidly and the drifts of snow burying it in most places to the roof. We would have given much just to have been able to get inside, to be out of the wind and to light a fire for a few moments, but found it impossible.

We paused in the shelter of one of the buildings to eat a bite of lunch. This was a mistake, for it took a long time to get rid of the chill we caught crouching there. Indeed our fingers seemed as though frozen, until the excruciating pain of resumed circulation assured us that all was well. Another time we shall know enough not to pause, but to eat while moving.

Leaving the pack here, we resumed the plodding upward. With the wind and the high altitude, the speed was now very slow. Many were the suggestions that we give it up and turn back. Finally our guide, calling attention to the fact that a slip might well prove fatal because of the precipice below, indicated that he was very loath to go farther. As a matter of fact it was dangerous, for we had no rope with which, if one slipped, the other could hold him back, and we had only one ice-axe between us, and the man holding that did not know how to use it. So we returned to the sixth hut.

At this point we parted company, the guide going back to the fifth station with the pack, a time limit being unfortunately fixed when we were to meet there to return to the village. Taking the ice-axe, we resumed the climb from here alone. It was now just five minutes of twelve, and the time remaining for climbing safely very short. A full half-hour was consumed in getting back to the highest point we had reached together.

Progress over this stretch was very slow. It seemed necessary to pause at almost every pace and gasp for breath. One was reminded a little of the experience of the Mount Everest climbers, who at the highest altitudes had to pause for six breaths after every pace. We found that ten paces, then a pause for as many breaths, was one good way of keeping up a steady progress. Otherwise one would pause too long and get chilled. The wind was sometimes terrific. We wore heavy fur gloves, but they were utterly inadequate in this cold, and it was necessary now and again to swing one's arms vigorously to keep up the circulation.

No special notice was paid to the seventh hut, except that it resembled pretty much the third and fourth: a hut of black stones, but much larger, as we remember, than the others. Our real objective, the highest point we hoped to reach in the time within which it seemed safe to keep pushing forward, was the eighth hut. This was reached about half-past one. It looked like a regular hotel, with one of the buildings made of corrugated iron with glass windows. We examined it carefully to see if it could be used as a refuge in emergency, but found everything apparently securely closed up. There was a large padlock on the main door, but we judged that if necessary the staples to which it was fastened

could be pried off with the point of an ice-axe.

As evidence that this point had been reached we scratched our names and the date on the wooden wall of a small outhouse. Although the wood did not appear to be very old, all the softer parts of the surface had been eaten away by the terrific gales.

The ninth hut seemed only a short distance above this, but it took nearly three quarters of an hour to reach it. While we were on the way the sun disappeared behind the mountain, and a moment later the wind suddenly ceased and all around the noise of the wind was succeeded by an intense calm. Almost immediately the temperature seemed to rise many degrees. From feeling so cold that it was difficult to keep one's grip on the ice-axe, one suddenly felt quite warm, if not overheated. If one were assured of such an absence of wind as this, the climbing of the mountain would prove comparatively easy.

Although, in good weather, the ninth hut is only twenty minutes from the very top, and in the delightful calm that succeeded the storm it would have been very easy to make it, the agreement with the guide to meet him at a fixed time made it necessary to turn back from here.

It was very pleasant going down. The solemn stillness coupled with the grandeur of the mountain was most impressive. We doubt if there is anything more wonderful in this world in its majestic beauty than the snow-covered sides of a great mountain. If anything exceeds it, it is to be up on the top of that same mountain looking down on a vast panorama many thousands of feet below. We have enjoyed this many times climbing in Switzerland, and little expected to be privileged with the same experience on Japan's great mountain. To be up alone or

with a few friends in such surroundings is like suddenly stepping into another world. There is nothing so exhilarating and so purifying to one's own soul. Expressed in song — and one finds it hard to refrain from song in such surroundings — the grandest music of the hymn books seems inadequate.

Thus we found our way downward

till we met the guide a little above the fifth hut, and from here pushed on back to the village.

The return was uneventful and took a little under three and a half hours. It was too late to catch the last motor-car, which leaves at 4.55, and so we had to spend the night there.

## THE CHINESE SOUL SELF-INTERPRETED<sup>1</sup>

BY KU HUNG-MING

[KU HUNG-MING probably comes as near to being an encyclopædic scholar of the eighteenth-century type as any living philosopher. He is the principal defender of Confucianism in China, and is the master of several European languages, and has published books in two or three of them.]

PEOPLE often speak of the Chinese character. They generalize about it. That is a mistake, for the character of a North Chinaman is as different from the character of a South Chinaman as is that of a German from that of an Italian. But if there is no such thing as a distinct Chinese character, there is a distinct Chinese mentality still to be found among all the old-style Chinamen, but rapidly disappearing among their 'progressive and modern' descendants of the present generation.

Let us see what this old-style Chinese mentality is. If you observe a man from the lowest ranks of the people, you will find that he is not so rude and

coarse as a European of the same class. The old Chinaman — the true Chinaman, to speak exactly — is a gentleman. I mean by that a person who is not rough, rude, or violent, and who avoids being disagreeable. This quality expresses itself in the passive features of the true Chinaman, which ordinarily have the repose and reserve of a face struck on a coin.

In other words, the physical and moral defects of your true Chinaman, though not eliminated, to be sure, are mitigated by inbred gentility. He may be coarse and he may be ugly, but his coarseness and his ugliness are not accentuated. They do not run to extremes. He may be vulgar, but his vulgarity is not aggressive or obstreperous; he may be stupid, but his stupidity does not descend to absurdity. If he is tricky, his trickery lacks malice. In a word, the real Chinaman may have physical and moral defects, but he does not obtrude them offensively.

One often hears it said that a foreigner who resides a long time in China learns to like the Chinese, but that one who lives a long time in Japan learns to

<sup>1</sup> From the *Journal des Débats*, (Paris Conservative daily), August 18, 21, September 1, 2, 4, 11