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Types of Japanese Scenery: Nikko and Asama.

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THERE is one beauty of the sun, said Solomon, and another of the moon. So it is with the types of scenic beauty. There is that which enthralls by its simple grace, and there is that before whose awe-inspiring force the spectator feels that the beautiful is lost in the sublime. There is a loveliness of tree-clad mountains and torrents hurrying by moss-grown banks; of cascades shimmering out of depths

AVENUE OF CRYPTOMERIAS.

of foliage, and heaven-reflecting lakes. Such is the loveliness of Nikko, and it is easily understood. But what are the charms of Asama? Wherein lies

the attractiveness of grassy moorlands culminating in the "grisly top" of a mighty cinder heap? It is the magnetic force of weird sublimity, brooding over a land of volcanic remains. Here are hills, but they are hills of ashes. Here is air, but it has the reek of sulphur. And torrents there are:—

> "Torrents, methinks, that heard a mighty voice
> And stopped at once, amid their maddest plunge."

Over the romantic water-riven district of Nikko, hedged in by mountains, 8,000 feet high, there hangs the pall of solemnity—that indescribable air of the past. The most renowned of its protecting peaks, the graceful Nantaisan—second only to Fuji itself among the sacred mountains of Japan—looks down through shifting mists upon the solemn groves where the buried Shoguns lie. From first to last rises the roar of the Daiyagawa—from its rocky cradle on bare Shiranesan to its debouching on the plain, intermingled with the noise of many waterfalls. Ere this fine mountain stream foams past the buttresses of the Sacred Bridge, it receives the outflow of two considerable lakes and, issuing from the second of these, flings itself 250 feet into an almost circular abyss, forming the Kegon waterfall, the largest in Japan.

ONE OF NIKKO'S TORRENTS, THE MARIGAWA.

In short, the Daiyagawa, and the course it has made for itself amid the stately mountains on its path, is the source and nucleus of Nikko's beauty. In its thirty-mile long valley, by gorge and glen and lake and chasm, there is found that combination of the sombre and the picturesque, of vivid verdure and rocky majesty, which entitles it to rank among the most charming in the world.

The Japanese people, with their keen sense of the æsthetic, give due praise to the glories of Nikko. "Call nothing magnificent," runs the proverb, "till you have seen Nikko." Yet, strange to say, Nikko is not one of the *Sankei*, or three beautiful places of Japan. That is possibly because the

scenery is not so typically Japanese as, for example, that of Amanohashidate, on the Western Sea. True, if one exclude the shrines, the occasional temple embowered in trees, and the tea-house perched on some point of vantage, the scenery of the Nikko group much resembles in its general features that of any mountainous, profusely watered district, where the erosive agencies of nature have full play, and the soil lends itself readily to their action. The region, moreover, is of volcanic origin. Basaltic rocks flank the gorge which leads to Chuzenji, hot springs are found at Yumoto, while Shiranesan, the loftiest summit of the group, was active as recently as 1889. But Nature and her grand ally Time have laid their softening hands on this once troubled land and veiled the desolation of earth's fires. Luxuriance has everywhere usurped sterility, and the great group, toned and tree-clad, now forms one of the vertebræ of the backbone of Japan.

THE KIRIFURI "MIST-FALLING" CASCADE.

The approach to Nikko is sufficiently impressive. Two avenues lined with mammoth cryptomerias lead to the equally impressive groves which hold the famous shrines. The more direct of these leads from Utsonomiya—the

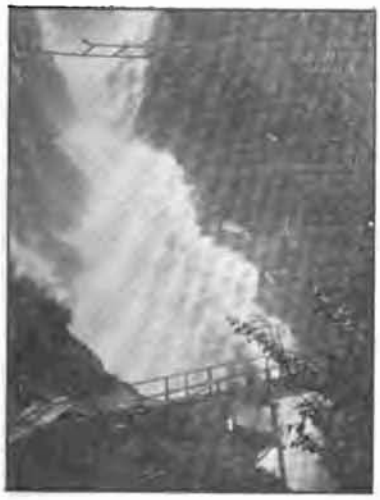
route now followed by the railway—and is some twenty miles in length. The other, known as the Reiheishikaido, from its being used by the Mikado's envoy in journeying to the tombs, follows a more southerly and circuitous course, but is not in so perfect condition. According to tradition, the trees of this avenue were planted by a man too poor to buy a lantern to place on the altar before the Shogun's grave. It was a magnificent offering. The majority of trees are from seventy to one hundred feet in height and from fifteen to twenty feet in circumference at the base, while the only breaks in their continuity are at the villages and the crossing of the streams. The two avenues meet at Imaichi, four miles from Nikko, and crossing the Daiyagawa by the Sacred Bridge, pass up the long flights of steps to the mausolea, under the shadow of cryptomerias. The bridge, a structure of red lacquer, eighty-four feet long by eighteen wide, which spanned the stream between two projecting masses of rock, was swept away by floods in the typhoon of September, 1902. It is now in process of reconstruction after the original design. Ordinary mortals cross by a less elegant structure a little lower down the river.

ON THE ROAD TO CHUZENGI. A WAYSIDE FALL.

A good general view of Nikko and its surroundings may be obtained from the Daikoku Hill, behind the Kanaya Hotel, or, at the cost of a little more exertion, from Toyama, the bold, wooded eminence which rises beyond the Inarigawa, the torrential affluent which the Daiyagawa receives from the north. Immediately below is the foam-marked course of the Daiyagawa, with the temples occupying the slopes on its left bank. Above, and filling in the western sky, rises the huge bulk of the Nikko range proper—Nyohozan, Omango, and Nantaisan itself—in a magnificently outlined ridge.

The depression to the left of the last is occupied by Lake Chuzenji, while the white road winding up the valley, with its interminable stream of big-hatted pilgrims, leads to the same goal.

Nikko, we know, is a land of waterfalls. Two hundred, says Mrs. Bishop; twenty-five, says Murray. It is no doubt a question of terms, and of what amount of water falling produces a waterfall. But of those that call for notice the latter figure is probably nearer the mark. And of these, again, certainly the Kirifuri (mist-falling) Cascade merits honourable mention. A pleasant walk of three miles over undulating country to the north-east brings the traveller to a tea-house on the brink of a deep gorge from whence a *coup d'œil* of the fall is obtained. But the cascade, pretty enough as this distant view appears, improves on a nearer acquaintance. By a steep zigzag path it is possible to descend to the foot of the fall. A considerable volume of water shoots over the topmost ledge, 150 feet above, and in three leaps falls, past a wealth of foliage, into the rocky glen below. In the last descent it spreads itself over a huge sloping slab in three well-defined streams, which give to the fall its characteristic appearance. Another notable cascade is the Uraminotaki (Back-view Fall). Here the cliff over which the stream rushes overhangs to such an extent that the traveller can pass along a narrow ledge behind the fall. Neither in height, however, nor in volume does this fall approach the Kirifuri. But it is time now to make the steep ascent to Chuzenji. Let us not regret the arduous climb, for it takes us past the finest waterfall in Japan. We have seen that the waters of Lake Chuzenji descend over 2,000 feet ere they reach the Sacred Bridge—a distance of seven miles. By far the greater part of this fall occurs immediately on leaving the lake. This is the climb we have to negotiate, and it is here that the Daiyagawa takes its greatest leap.



CATARACT ON THE KEGON GORGE.

A practically level road, beset with the tramlines from the Ashio copper mines, leads the traveller to the *Umagaeshi* teahouse, beyond which horses are not expected to go. A little further, the valley narrows and the road ascends. A mile more, and the slope is sufficiently steep to require a zigzag path and sufficiently long for an hour's plodding thereon. At rare intervals one emerges from the all-pervading forest, to be rewarded with exquisite

views of other densely-wooded slopes streaked with cascades and leading up now to some mist-encircled mountain, now to some clearly outlined peak. At last the traveller sets foot on a soft and turfy stretch of land, as gorgeously timbered as before, but level—and resembling nothing so much as a bit of the New Forest set down in Japan. Already there falls on his ear the roar of many waters; he is on the Chuzenji Plateau and before him is the Kegon Fall.

Two things impress the spectator on his first view of the fall—its height and the remarkable character of the chasm which receives its waters. The former alone is sufficient to command respect, for from the sheer lip of the precipice to the unfathomed caldron below is a clear drop of 250 feet; but it is the latter which gives to this cataract its grandeur and its individuality. Apparently an ancient crater, its eastern wall broken away, the sides of the great rift are of reddish scarred basalt and sink into a rocky basin from which the spray continually rises and out of which a foaming torrent shoots to make, amidst the boulders that impede its steep descent, a hundred minor falls.

SCENE ON LAKE CHUZENJI.

A narrow and precipitous path, down which "old persons and young persons and persons who have had too much *saké*," are forbidden by notice to descend, leads to the foot of the fall, passing on the way another awesome cataract, which is bridged by an airy and somewhat nerve-trying structure. The Kegon Fall has of late years acquired a sinister reputation for suicides—some thirty persons, mainly students from Tokyo universities, having thus betaken themselves to "that undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns."

Lake Chuzenji, whose peaceful shores now burst upon the eye, is the third in size, and the deepest, of the lakes of Japan. Not exceeding Windermere in area, it has twice the depth of the English lake, while it is both double the size and double the depth of its rival of Hakone further south. Despite the altitude of the lake, 4,200 feet, the foliage which surrounds it is of striking wealth and variety. The graceful pyramid of

Nantaisan rises in quiet beauty from the hither shore; beyond, the bolder outlines of Shirane, with their ever-present suggestion of volcanic force. The Daiyagawa breaks in on the northern bank fresh from its hurried course over the Dragon's Head Fall. Away across a level moor lies the still more elevated basin of Lake Yumoto (5,000 feet above sea level). Here, pines alone clothe the encircling sides of loftier hills, and the mists roll from the shoulders of wilder mountains than those of Chuzenji. Sulphur wells down from the bowels of Shirane into the western waters of the lake, constituting the famous hot springs. Yumoto's is a concentrated loveliness, distinctly Alpine in character. Like its greater sister, it leaves its elevated cradle with impetuous haste—by a waterslide over smooth rocks inclined at an angle of 60° and 220 feet in perpendicular height. Yumoto and, indeed, Japanese lakes in general, are lacking in one particular. Neither at the Nikko lakes, nor at those of the Hakone district, are to be found any of those islet-masses of foliage which, mirrored in the placid waters, form so charming a feature of English and Scottish lake scenery.

THE FIRST GLIMPSE OF YUMOTO LAKE.

Two days by road and rail—over a rough and lofty pass and down a pretty river valley—bring the traveller to a totally different type of scenery—the playground of volcanic force, where smoke and fire fiercely riot. Here Asama roars ceaselessly, and sends at intervals into a torrid sky "the pillar of cloud by day, of fire by night."

The volcano of Asama-yama lies fairly in the line of volcanic activity which runs through central Japan, in a direction generally north and south. From Shiranesan to the Seven Isles of Izu, past the neighbourhood of Fuji, this fiery trail can be distinctly traced. Here it simmers, there it boils, in Asama it day by day explodes.

True this is but part, and a very small part, of the great line of volcanic activity which fringes the Pacific from the Aleutian Islands to the Sunda Straits, but it is a very active part. Asama is its central vent, its glory. In the ever fuming Mihara, the lighthouse of Yedo Bay, it flashes forth once more, and betwixt the two rises the silent cone of Fuji, "their great original."

YUMOTO LAKE AND SHIRANESAN.

No great eruption of Asama has taken place in recent years. In 1894 and 1900 stones as well as ashes were ejected from the crater in considerable quantities. Not a day, however, passes without the frequent emission of smoke and sulphurous vapour, in varying force and volume. The last great outbreak took place in 1783—when a mighty flood of lava welled over the north-eastern lip of the crater, cut its fiery way through a dense forest and wiped out of existence a dozen villages. Now pleasure-seekers picnic on the slaggy surface of the now silent cataract.

The ascent of Asama is usually made from Karuizawa, six hours by rail from Tokyo. After passing Takasaki the line, ascending rapidly, becomes little more than a series of tunnels, of which there are twenty-six within a few miles. Karuizawa, the head of the plateau, at an elevation of 2,500 feet, nestles at the foot of grassy but treeless hills, from whence the smoking cone is in full view. "The place," says Professor Chamberlain, "possesses no attractions in itself." Wooden summer houses –some mere boxes, others more pretentious, are dotted about the plain and on the hillsides. Though not devoid of ordinary visitors, Karuizawa was made by missionaries for missionaries, and is a standing monument to the text "the labourer is worthy of his hire." Within ten miles, and six thousand feet above the surrounding country, rises the huge bulk of the largest active volcano in Japan.

Asama is generally approached by night. Fire and darkness are ever well allied, and in this instance the latter forms a powerful stimulus to the imagination, as well as aiding the eye. Horses may be taken as far as Ko-Asama, the parasitical cone on the east side. Starting, therefore, at ten p.m., this first stage of the journey, over a soil of ashes and lapilli, for the most part thinly veiled, can be accomplished by one a.m. Here the horses are left and the *bettoes* sleep; vegetation ceases and the climb begins.

Asama is a deceptive mountain to negotiate. Viewed from a distance, the ascent appears a simple matter. The angle of rest, except on the cone itself, does not exceed 30°. Nevertheless the climb is sufficiently fatiguing, and more than once the stranger is apt to flatter himself that he is on the "last lap," till yet another long slope reveals itself before him. Moreover, a soil of cinders, large and small, ashes and angular stones, does not constitute the best of surfaces for human feet.

ON THE SUMMIT—ONE OF THE UNFATHOMABLE RIFTS.

After some two hours' plodding by the dim light of a lantern, the first of the three concentric craters is reached. Ere this, subterranean rumblings are heard and felt, while against the further darkness and the sky above can be seen the red glow of the crater's fire. It is wise now to ascertain the precise direction of the breeze, so as to approach the summit of the cone on the windward side. For to be caught in one of the suffocating sulphurous clouds which the volcano belches forth at intervals would involve unpleasant if not fatal consequences. For similar reasons an absolutely calm day would not be a suitable time to approach the brink of the crater or to examine its depths.

If no other indication was forthcoming that the traveller was approaching one of Nature's grand phenomena, there falls upon his ear the roar of the volcano, like the noise of the sea upon a wild night. The awe-inspiring sound quickens his step and the pulses of his heart. Up the steep desolate slope, over the yielding dust and ashes, he hastens near the fiery goal. To his right, maybe, through the rocky lips of the gigantic safety-valve, rises a column of steam and sulphurous smoke, crimson on its under side. Another moment, and he stands on the treacherous verge of Asama's hollow breast.

THE BRINK OF THE ABYSS.

The sun has not yet risen and it is dark. Let the traveller approach, if he dare, and prostrate himself on yon projecting shelf of rock—safer, despite its prominence, than the shelving bank of slippery soil which ends in the rotten yet abrupt edges of the fearful precipice. Here let him lie prone and gaze into the hell below.

Six hundred feet beneath him, and a quarter of a mile in width, lies the present floor—if floor it can be called, on which no mortal foot has trod. For who shall test the stability of that burning crust? or what unmeasured depths of molten rock it hides from view? And who shall state the nature of those mysterious pools which lie at random over its glowing surface, boiling furiously? Now the fiery bosom which bears them heaves and rocks; now it angrily subsides. From a hundred crevices in the dark, sheer sides there shoot out jets of steam and sulphurous vapour, illumined by the fierce light below. Livid, seared and restless—so looks Asama's burning heart by night.

Let the spectator now retire to the outer slope of the cone, until daylight enables him to look down into the abyss under altered conditions. The sun shows redly over the dark line of the eastern hills and the level rays come clear across the mist-covered moor, to glint on the crest of Asama. To the

south they fall upon the majestic cone of Fuji, forty miles away; to the north they light up the heights of Nikko; to the west they glisten upon the jagged summits of the wild Hida-Etcha range and upon Yarigatake, the most jagged of them all. Then, when daylight floods the hills, let him return to his point of vantage and make a fresh inspection of the weird display.

VIEW ACROSS THE CRATER.

Just as a live coal, when exposed to the light of the sun, looks dead and grey, so with the fervid bottom of the vent. The heat is none the less, steam issues and the volcano roars; but the floor of the crater looks grey and normal—like any other boulder and gravel-strewn expanse, save for the boiling pools which lie about its surface. The mighty cliffs which encircle the floor of the crater are of a pale, ashen hue, streaked here and there with suggestive red.

THE LAVA STREAM OF 1783.

While the writer was thus scanning the bed of the abyss, one of the periodical eruptions took place. From a round hole, apparently a yard in diameter,

on the further side of the crater floor, a torrent of black smoke suddenly burst forth in rapid puffs, as if expelled by a series of explosions. This was accompanied by a whirring noise as of a swiftly revolving electric fan. As the smoke rose, it expanded and filled the crater, forming a great column of billowy vapour which drove away before the wind. This lasted some twenty minutes, during which, and for some little time afterwards, a slight deposit of moisture was noticeable, and a rain of fine dust.

THE LAVA STREAM—A NEARER VIEW.

On the sides of the cone are several rents and fissures —"unfathomable rifts" of which it is well to beware in making the descent. By keeping to the north of the usual path the lava stream of 1783 may be reached. This terrible evidence of subterranean force—this sample of the sublime—extends for several miles beyond the foot of the mountain, being in places from two to three miles wide, and is fringed by a dense forest, through which it has torn its way. Some of the individual blocks are from twenty to thirty feet in height. But no adequate idea of this weird yet magnificent spectacle could be conveyed by words. To stand upon its slaggy, steam-rent surface, and gaze up at the burning mountain from which it came; to hear in one's ears the roar of the volcano, and to have before the mind's eye the awful glow of the hidden fires in its breast, is to realize the magnitude of the forces of Nature, to feel instinctively the feebleness of man, and forget the beautiful in the sublime.