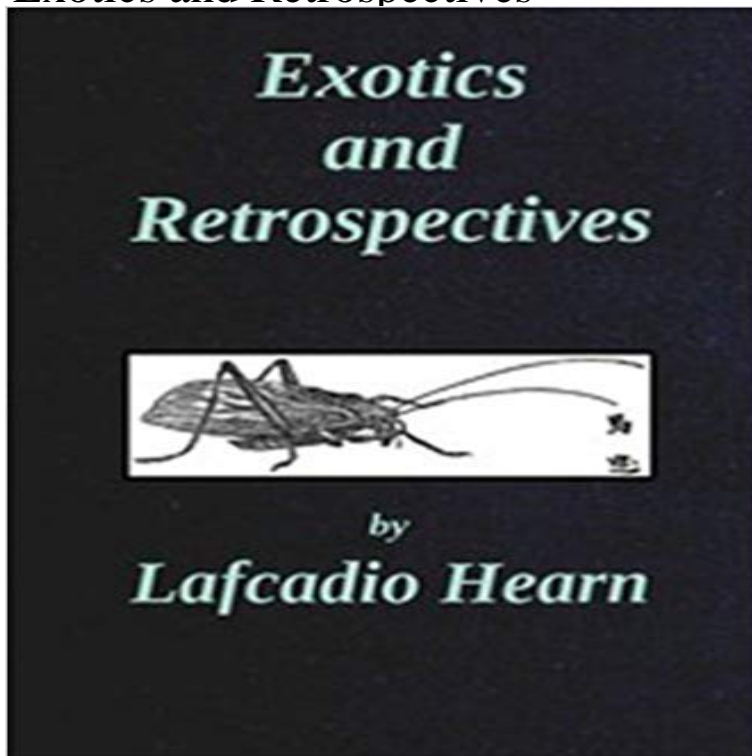


Exotics and Retrospectives



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[4] 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 life-time 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-[5]pilgrims may be composed of men from a hundred different settlements.

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