

The Ginza Alps

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Here and there among my murky childhood memories are preserved several isolated flashes like fragments from a film: though strikingly vivid in themselves, they have lost all context. I find it surprisingly difficult to identify the child appearing in those dreamlike sequences directly with my actual self. He and I seem the same, yet not the same. There is certainly an inseparable link between him and my present self, but the connection is completely shrouded in obscurity. Attempting blindly to trace such tenuous, almost broken connections makes us realize the unreliability of the reasoning faculties on which we normally depend. Human consciousness truly comes to seem like a dream or an illusion. Did those fragmentary memories actually happen, or are they recollections of images dreamt of a night years later and projected back into the past? The more you think about it, the less sure you become. Once you begin having such doubts, you completely lose confidence in the veracity of all memories of the past, not only those of childhood.

One fragment of my dreamlike childhood memories shows a corner of the Ginza district of Tokyo on a snowy night, circa 1885.

In this filmic fragment I am eight years old and being taken by my parents to see a play at the Shintomi Theatre¹. That must have been the first time I had seen a play in Tokyo, though my mother had, it seems, taken me to the theatre several times in our provincial hometown. I have almost no memory of what the performance was like, but one image remains sharply etched in my mind: the grimly beautiful figure of the ghost of Tomomori as he enters in *Benkei Aboard Ship*² and whirls round and round with his glinting halberd, now advancing, now retreating. He was played, if I am not mistaken, by the late Sadanji³. Any recollection of his opposite Benkei, presumably the actor Danjuro⁴, has, strangely enough, vanished completely. The ghost of the vanquished Tomomori evidently aroused some intense, indefinable emotion akin to sympathy in my boyish mind, which sentiment still remains with me today.

I also vaguely recall the sight of the theatre teahouse⁵. When I reflect on that, I fancy that I have caught a glimpse of Tokugawa times.

After the performance ended, it seems we took a stroll together to Ginza. We

dropped into a shop, Tamaya, where my father looked idly at timepieces or the like. I can still conjure up at will a vivid image of the shop as it was on that night.

It was late, and the street outside was almost deserted. A blustery wind was blowing. My fifty-year-old father was seated on the smooth-worn timber ledge just inside the doorway, wearing I think a cape with a collar of sea-otter fur. Above his head pulsed the fishtail flame of a gaslight. One of the unctuous, aging shopmen spread out imported toys, in those days a rare sight, in front of the lad who was obviously the apple of the eye of his customer the old soldier. One was a stuffed elephant, only six or seven inches tall, made of dark grey velvet; when wound up with the winding key on its flank, it would bolt forward with a whirr of meshing cogs, deftly flexing its long trunk up and down as it darted smartly ahead. Another was a shaggy bear sitting with its hind legs thrust forward, which swayed its head and front paws in a comic dance as a pretty music-box tune emerged from its belly.

I hoped my father might buy me one, but such upper-class toys were far too fancy to pester him for, so I held my peace; and in the end, sure enough, he bought me nothing. We then took a late-night rickshaw ride through Hibiya Gate and past the moat abutting the dark, forlorn, frigid parade ground⁶ to our home in Nakarokuban-cho. I seem to recall lofty arc lamps flickering luridly purple here and there in the darkness of Marunouchi on the way. Whether such lights in fact already existed at the time I do not know, but such is the scene in the cinema of my memory.

The recollection of that winter's night in Ginza, deeply imbued with sentiment, has lingered with me for life. For that there must be some profound reason, but try as I may I can discover no clue as to what it is anywhere in the realm of my consciousness. There must have been a light on that day so intense as to sear its events in my mind with particular vividness. The light itself has long vanished, leaving only a single photographic print in perpetuity. There is a story about how the words written on a scrap of paper that happened to be on the desk at the moment of a murder were indelibly imprinted on the murderer's brain; similar occurrences may be much more common than one would imagine. Most of our fragmentary memories of childhood are, it would seem, formed in some such light, which disappears from memory because it fails to register at the time.

According to what my mother often told me years later, I was inordinately fond of

travelling on the horse tram and would sometimes get one of our student boarders or regular visitors to take me on it just for the ride. I can still recall the pair of skinny, wretched-looking nags kicking up the thick, oozing mud between the rails as they pulled the painted rectangular carriage on a rainy day, and how they sometimes explosively discharged dung. Because of the shoddy tracks, or perhaps the unstable undercarriage, the tram would pitch back and forth in its progress as if bowing politely. I think the conductor sounded a horn like a tofu vendor's, though here my memory may have confused the horse tram with a type of rickety horse-drawn omnibus. In fact it may have been a bell he had. I cannot help feeling, however, that it must have been a horn because my memory of the horse tram is strangely and inextricably associated with another: that of a sturdy tin container of expensive imported biscuits equipped with a lock, a gift from someone or other around that time. This was decorated on the top and four sides with the most exquisite paintings, one of which portrayed a mail coach full of passengers travelling through the English countryside. Within this beautifully colourful picture, only five or six inches square, lived and breathed that magical world one imagines the Occident to have been around the middle of the last century. How lovely and fairy-tale-like seemed the extraordinary realms of which that small biscuit-tin lid offered a glimpse! When I actually visited the West many years later, however, the Occident of my fantasies was nowhere to be seen. That biscuit-tin lid was the "green door"⁷ of my childhood. Be that as it may, one of the riders of the London-Reading⁸ mail coach in the picture was wearing a silk hat — and blowing a horn. In my dreamlike memories that mail coach and the Ginza horse tram have completely merged into one, inseparably linked by association.

In 1886 we left Tokyo and moved to the distant Nankai region, our ancestral home. A decade later, in the summer of 1895, I returned alone to Tokyo and stayed for a month on the second floor of the home of the I. family next to Chikuyo⁹ in Owari-cho, Ginza. My father had at the time been called up from the reserves for the Sino-Japanese War; he was billeted at the M. Inn in the Hirakawa-cho district of Kojimachi Ward, Tokyo, while serving with the K. depot division.

On the second floor of the I. home or in the toilet on the first, the sight and sound and aroma of the eel being fanned as it was grilled in the kitchen of Chikuyo, just across the three-foot-wide alley, would reach you through the window. On festival days like that in

honour of Bishamon,¹⁰ night stalls lined the street in front of the lattice sliding doors of the I. family store. I would join the manager and shop assistants, and the family's son, S., in the store's office area to play games and talk. The younger shop clerks, who were passionate about literature, would critically discuss the pieces appearing in *Bunko*, then virtually the only literary magazine for youth. The oldest member of staff, Mr. Y., your typical Tokyo cockney, sometimes broached blatantly sexual topics, whereupon the young belletrists indignantly shooed him away. The flow of people outside, sooty smoke billowing from their portable oil lamps, did not cease even at three in the morning. Towards dawn a post-office carriage occasionally trotted by in the vicinity of Mihara Bridge loudly clanging its bell. In the inner quarters Mr. I. and his wife seemed to live in a world not so different from that of Tokugawa times. Mrs. I., born in Edo before it became Tokyo, knew almost nothing of the new city; virtually the only time she went out was for an annual visit to the Buddhist temple with her relatives in the Otowa neighbourhood. She doted on me almost as if I had been her own son, but to my discomfiture I never had any idea what she was talking about. She was difficult to follow because she spoke on the assumption that you were intimately familiar with her world.

The couple's son, S., would take me to see the public entertainments at a theatre in the east alley near Kyobashi. During matinees on a hot afternoon there might be only four or five people in the audience. As the shaven-headed Momokawa Joen¹¹ told a heroic tale of sixteenth-century warlords punctuated with raps of his fan, some idler, dressed perhaps in a loose, coarsely woven cotton kimono tied at the waist with a short sash, would be sprawled on the tatami with his head cradled in his hand and pick pieces of sushi out of a small round container. We also went to another variety theatre somewhere around the west alley. There a practitioner of the new style of storytelling, who despite his youth sported a jet-black beard — I think it must have been Ito Chiyu¹² — was telling a true tale of the Meiji Restoration years when a character with the same surname as mine happened to come up in the course of his narrative. S. burst out laughing, and the storyteller apparently noticed, for he broke into a grin and kept his eyes fixed on me as he continued.

We would go to bathe at the bathhouse in Ginza's west alley, roughly across from where the German bakery is now. I am uncertain whether it is the same as the one there

today. It was frequently patronized by geisha, a strange sight for a lad from the provinces: necks painted lily-white, faces above the jawline made up in a shade between yellow and pink, the hair on both sides of the nape curled upward into a bun. Also an extraordinary rarity for me in those days, as well as a delicious treat, was the ice cream served at the fruit shop on the east side of the Gochome neighbourhood. The ineffable flavour of vanilla ice cream aroused in me a longing to visit exotic lands unseen and unheard of at the ends of the earth. A round scoop served in a small glass vessel about the size of a liqueur glass was too expensive for a middle-school student to indulge in too often. And around what is now Futabaya¹³ there was a small place by the name of Hatsune specializing in sweet adzuki soup with rice cake, whose soup with strained adzuki I personally found tastier than that of Junikagetsu¹⁴. Eating was, alongside the desire for knowledge, then the most important thing in my life.

I first tried Western food when my father took me to a Western-style restaurant roughly across from where Tenkin¹⁵ is now located. I felt quite nauseated when I was told, upon consuming an odd-shaped, strange-tasting chunk of meat, “That was beef tongue.” All I found palatable on that occasion were the dessert and coffee at the end. It was also around that time, I think, that my father took me to Matsuda for lunch. For some reason I recall how there was a pinch of ground ginger attached to the inside of the lid of the red lacquered bowl in which the egg custard was served. That led my father to give me a kind of disquisition on the differences between provincial and Tokyo cuisine.

I recollect seeing Iwaya “the Goblin” Matsuhei¹⁶ clad in red driving by in his carriage: it was the golden age of his Tengu or “Goblin” Cigarettes. The goblin mask on the russet wall of his store, its diabolical scarlet nose jutting out into the street, was certainly enough to overpower this timid young bookworm. Matsuhei was a capitalist and an exploiter, yet with his pugnacity and predilection for red he had much in common with those involved in today’s proletarian movement. He also had a fascist streak, however, in his championing of domestic cigarettes in a bid to drive Pin Head and Sunrise¹⁷ out of the market. He was in truth the harbinger of a new era.

I remember too S.’s highly amused account of how, when he went to the Western-goods store of Kishida Ginko,¹⁸ that cosmopolite of a bygone era, to buy Elephant Brand toothpowder, the shop boy, having evidently misheard him, grinningly

brought him a strange rubber sac. S. had a habit of stammering abashedly when he spoke. The infant Kishida Ryusei¹⁹, I suspect, might already have been toddling about the shop at the time.

The bazaar²⁰ at the foot of Shimbashi Bridge apparently already existed in those days. A bazaar was an emporium with a cellular organization, as it were. It anticipated in embryonic form the later department store, though it must have been spared the problems with independent retailers that plague department stores today, for it was itself essentially a collective — a beehive or coral reef — of independent retailers. At any rate, it was the most convenient place for a visiting provincial to search for presents for those back home. In that regard it is little wonder that today, when Tokyo's entire population consists of provincials, department stores do such a thriving business. Genuine Edoites, now reduced to a small rump, merely take empty pride in their insistence on purchasing dyed fabrics at Chikusen²¹ and footwear at Iseyoshi²² — though it is true that few articles of department-store merchandise have any real character.

I returned to Tokyo exactly four years later, in the summer of 1899, when I graduated from high school and entered university. Again the I. family in Owari-cho put me up for several days until I found lodgings at a Buddhist temple in Yanaka. After moving to Yanaka, I went to stay in Ginza almost every Saturday night. Although the horse tram of old had by then, if I recall correctly, been supplanted by the train, the character of that neighbourhood of brick had changed little in the intervening four years; only now I wore a mortarboard instead of attending middle school, while S. had grown from a boy to a young man and learnt to drink. I had become a devotee of haiku poetry since being initiated into that art by Soseki²³ in Kumamoto, and after arriving in Tokyo I sometimes visited Shiki's²⁴ retreat in Negishi; hence I may have unintentionally aroused a passion for composing new-style haiku among the employees of the I. family store. The youngest of them at the time, a lad by the name of K., later went on to become quite an accomplished haiku poet, and has actually opened a rather unusual haiku-themed *oden*-stew restaurant on the Ginza canalside.

There was already in those days a café on the second floor of Fugetsudo²⁵ in Nabecho, with an antiquated, beat-up piano in the corner. S. once took me there promising to treat me to a “bun with a milk filling”, which turned out to be a *chou à la crème* or cream puff. I was teaching myself French at the time, and S. enlightened me

that *chou* was French for “cabbage”.

The goddess of Fortune decreed that I should reside in Tokyo from then until today, more than three decades later. In my mind the period since 1899, despite a hiatus during my travels in the West between 1909 and 1911, forms a single unbroken continuum. My memories of Tokyo and Ginza accordingly fall into three sections thus:

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How much further the last and longest line will extend is unclear. The two shorter lines, separated by about a decade, are quite distinct. The second short line and the third, longer line are only four years apart, so that events towards the beginning of the latter period may have become mixed up with those of the former. The third line is about thirty years long, and things that happened three decades ago may seem like yesterday, whereas others that happened last year may seem like a decade ago. What might be termed “mnemonic convection” appears to take place in the waters of the Serpentine²⁶ formed by the stream of memory.

The third line is fairly broad, for it encompasses my entire life since I ventured forth into the world. It is made up of a set of extremely fine filaments forming what might be termed my personal “Ginza line”²⁷, which is linked in turn with my visions of Ginza from the distant past represented by the two shorter lines. Ginza occupied a significant place in my impressions of those two spells, and that has certainly had a lingering effect on my perceptions of Ginza in later years, during the period represented by the longer line.

The brickwork once characteristic of Ginza almost completely disappeared after the earthquake²⁸. The I. family, one of my second homes, went their separate ways years ago, but the house itself, at least, remained largely unchanged until the earthquake; now, however, it is gone without a trace. And what happened, I wonder, to the vendor of clogs across the street, which in the old days you could observe from the wooden railing around the office area of the shop? I do not know whether it is the same as the one now immediately next to the Mitsukoshi department store. Junikagetsu, the sweet adzuki soup restaurant, apparently decamped to a back alley somewhere, but I have no idea of its subsequent fate. I feel as if I wander around Owari-cho on a vaguely nostalgic quest for the places in my visions of the past, though the very ground beneath my feet is buried under paving of terrazzo and asphalt.

My lodgings at the temple in Yanaka were gloomy and depressing in the extreme. Whenever I went to stay in Owari-cho on a Saturday, the place was so bright and warm and bustling that it strained my nerves; but when I got back to Yanaka, it would be dark and cold, and sometimes, late on a rainy winter's night, there might be a lonely funeral at the temple for a baby laid to rest in what looked like a wooden crate. To one emerging from six days of austerity and asceticism in that tomblike world, the nighttime lights of Owari-cho could not fail to look sublimely beautiful. People who go to Ginza for a stroll today doubtless have sundry motives, but many of them must experience similar emotions to those I did thirty years ago. They sense some indefinable void in their hearts. They head for Ginza with the notion that if only they walk its pavements, that void will be filled. And after a bit of shopping or a hot cup of coffee they feel as if it has been, if only for a moment. But because the void is not so easily filled, they barely get home before they begin missing the lights of the city. Generally speaking, the lonely and melancholy yearn for human company even as they fear it, like an insect attracted to the very light it dreads. Even in my own circle there are quite a few scholars who are considered reclusive yet, surprisingly, enjoy an idle saunter around Ginza — which on reflection actually makes sense. For anyone exhausted by constant dealings with others, it is a natural desire when at leisure to want to escape human society even for an instant and traverse the ridges of the Alps or savour a moment's tranquillity soaking in a mountain hot spring. For those who are joyous and fulfilled in their hearts, nothing could be so ridiculously unpleasant as walking through the cramped, cluttered, stuffy streets of Ginza; they would of course rather breathe deep lungfuls of fresh air and stretch their limbs unencumbered amid majestic natural scenery. The waiter at the F. coffee shop, a young lover of literature by the name of M., often remarked that he had no idea why anyone would promenade around Ginza. He had an excellent point when you think about it.

Speaking of Alps, Ginza now has its own. The ascent up the stairs of one of its department stores to the summit is quite a trek. And if you go out onto the rooftop on a hot summer's day, you are a hundred feet above ground and the temperature is a degree or two cooler. Above you is blue sky or white cloud; occasionally a plane flies over. On some days you can see Mount Fuji in Suruga and the mountains of the Boso Peninsula. It might be a good idea while they are at it to erect a steel tower rising a further three or

four hundred feet above the roof and build an observation deck atop it. Advertising could be displayed on the sides: that would be more effective than using advertising balloons and soon pay off the construction costs with the fees levied. It is an instinctive human desire to want to climb upward, one that already manifests itself in infancy. One notable scene among my faint memories from when I was in Nagoya at age four is of my struggling and struggling to clamber up onto a boarded veranda high above me at the rear door of some home. Most people must have similar memories. Nurture that instinct enough, and you could end up becoming an alpinist willing to sacrifice your very life in an assault on the summit of Everest. It may be, then, that department stores are popular for more reasons than mere utility and convenience alone — in which case independent retailers should take account of this consideration in their strategic planning.

At the top of each flight of stairs in the department stores of the Ginza Alps is a flowery meadow of beautiful objects and people. You cannot pick them and take them with you, but the very sight is a feast for the eyes. For twenty pennies²⁹ you can buy a blind-stitched belt with one eye on a resplendent kimono that costs a thousand yen, and thus wondrously delude yourself into believing that you have bought an expensive sash matching the latter. It is easy to make yourself feel wealthy by pretending that all the merchandise on display is yours and you are merely storing it here free of charge because you do not have room for it all at home. You can retrieve it whenever you need it upon presenting the receipt. The only problem is that at the critical moment the receipt is gone.

Fires can strike department stores just as forest fires occur in the Alps. Forest fires spread upward from the valley to the mountaintop, but they also spread downward. Department-store fires, on the other hand, move only upward, never downward, so as long as you have an escape route, all you need to do is make your way toward the ground. If you fail to get out that way, head for the rocky summit where there is nothing to burn, and you will be safe there. During the fire at Shirokiya department store some arrant twaddler stirred up panic by claiming that the roof might collapse in the flames, but a reinforced-concrete mountain will not disintegrate in a fire. It is such a poor conductor of heat, moreover, that on the roof there is no fear of burning the soles of your shod feet even if the blaze has been raging for half a day below. If the smoke rising

from the windows comes billowing over you, you should be all right as long as you keep your face down on the floor. It would not do, however, if several thousand individuals ended up on top of one other like that, and were a fire suddenly to break out in a teeming department store, the stairs could become completely blocked with sardined people. That has actually often happened during cinema fires. The most important thing at such a time is the proper training of those stranded, which is however also the most difficult thing to ensure.

A fire is the combustion of matter; it is thus a physiochemical phenomenon. This phenomenon is particularly common in Japan. It is curious, then, that few Japanese scientists study it. That may be because no university in the West yet offers lectures on the subject of “pyrology”. Be that as it may, department stores are liable to become devilishly ingenious mass killing machines unless full precautions are taken. Besides being chock-full of fuel, they are designed such that, once a fire begins, the exits become clogged with people, which living stoppers are then incinerated. A forest fire typically exacts a tremendous toll, but only in money because few people are in the vicinity.

The skyline of the Ginza area as viewed from the Alpine summit of a department store is strikingly uneven, like that of Manhattan as seen from a plane, with this difference: the tallest residences here are only as high as the lowest residences there. That jagged unevenness possesses a modern feel without the sleepy monotony of the avenues of Paris. You might poke yourself in the eye if you are not careful. The view also puts you in mind of a neglected garden bristling with weeds, with ant-like people and insect-like automobiles scurrying about their business.

When tall new structures appear, they do so in an instant. By the magical power of Aladdin’s lamp, or the marvellous hammer of Japanese folklore that brings forth anything you desire, massive buildings suddenly materialize in the most unexpected places; for though in fact constructed at a snail’s pace over a prolonged period, they are one day suddenly freed of their filthy, shabby veil — like a person who, having spent years in obscurity assiduously working to cultivate his abilities, one fateful dawn suddenly reveals himself to the world.

Neon signs too are proliferating everywhere, but unlike buildings they can be installed virtually overnight for next to nothing. By the same token, a violent hailstorm

would smash half of them to pieces in minutes. It would seem, then, that there has not been a single major hailstorm since neon lights came into vogue; but if in the coming April or May a thunderstorm front should bring a brief volley of hailstones the size of pigeon eggs, the area around Ginza would be left fairly dark for a spell. If it could be accurately forecast when that would happen, somebody might try to corner the market for neon gas. But even without a hailstorm, the outcome would be the same if the signs were struck by loose objects blown off the street by raging winds. Those who wished to take precautions against such an eventuality could easily do so by encasing their signs in wire netting, but taking precautions for tomorrow is evidently not the modern way.

Ginza looks enough of a mess after a gale, but on New Year's Day it presents an appallingly filthy spectacle. I passed through Ginza at exactly noon on New Year's Day 1931, on my way from relatives in Azabu to relatives in Asakusa, and it was desolate, grim, dismal, *trostlos*³⁰ — not all the adjectives in the dictionary suffice to describe the scene. The fronts of the smaller shops, normally beautifully decked out, were shuttered behind rickety sliding doors dating back to the Meiji period. Rusty, peeling shutters or soiled blinds were down on the show windows of the bigger stores. The New Year's Eve stalls had been frantically cleared from the streets, and in their wake scraps of paper and bits of straw and every other form of rubbish imaginable were randomly scattered everywhere; they were whipped up into dusty swirls by the arid winter wind blowing at the time, and then accumulated in sheltered corners here and there, twitching convulsively. The place looked as it were like an utterly repulsive old lady exposed to the harsh light of day, her white face powder peeling off and hairpiece missing.

Few sights are as beautiful, by contrast, as the lights of Ginza during an evening snowfall. Electrical lamps of every type work at maximum efficiency when the streets are blanketed in snow. Neon signs, too, look their most attractive on a snowy night. On such nights Ginza sheds the gritty everyday reality of ordinary human existence and is enveloped in a magical atmosphere almost reminiscent of a fairytale. The very noises of the city sound completely different from normal. The merchandise in the shop windows sparkles with unbelievable colours. At such times dropping by a spotlessly bright coffee shop, seating oneself at a marble table beside a warm heater, and sipping a hot cup of coffee is the perfect way to lose oneself in daydreams.

A large Christmas tree rises up out of the mysteriously sparkling mist as in the vision

of the Little Match Girl in the *National Reader*³¹ we were taught at middle school. The many-coloured decorations suspended from its fir branches shimmer with every longing for the past and hope for the future. The temple bells ring out, the firecrackers explode, and sky and earth erupt into cries of “Prosit! Prosit Neujahr!”³² The slay bells jingle, and Gretchen³³ leans out of her second-floor window to listen to the village band’s serenade. As my eyes pursue these insubstantial figments, they light upon a package of chocolate on a glass shelf, and there is the mail coach on the biscuit tin from my dreams of the past. The faces of my parents flash before me as they looked fifty years ago, and Sadanji, hair dishevelled, is dancing on stage in the role of Tomomori. It is at such moments that coffee tastes best.

Neither meteorologists nor physiologists can explain why coffee tastes especially good on a snowy or cold rainy day. It may be because, with the air being moist, you do not actually feel thirsty, which liberates the taste buds to be that much more sensitive.

Ginza has countless places that serve coffee, each with its own flavour. But there are precious few places that serve what I would consider a truly delicious cup of coffee. I sometimes find that Ginza, right in the middle of Tokyo, Japan, can be surprisingly unobliging. The best coffee I have ever had in Japan was the one that the painter F.³⁴ brewed me many years ago at the sink in the corner of his filthy studio, boiling the water himself.

As with coffee, so with department-store merchandise: it often frustrates me how, of all that plethora of goods, so few are to my liking. I sometimes go to pick up a replacement for a broken coffee cup or ashtray, but most items these days have completely superfluous embellishments that I absolutely cannot abide, and I just cannot bring myself to buy them. When my necktie is worn out and I decide to treat myself to a new one, rarely in all that embarrassment of riches can I find anything that strikes me as just the thing. That may be a trivial matter of no significance except insofar as it proves that my tastes are behind the times, but for all its triviality it does get me thinking. If at such times we were to buy the thing in the latest style that we detested most and just put up with it, we might actually end up liking it. A concrete warehouse that at first looked bleak might, when you got used to the sight, come to seem as poetic or haiku-esque in its own way as the rude hut of a pauper. A coffee cup bearing a contemporary pattern might, with familiarity, start looking decidedly interesting. That I am too impatient to

wait for it to do so and constantly grumble about young people these days may essentially testify that I am not long for this world. If I were resolved to live to a hundred, I would grit my teeth and make an effort to accustom myself to the wares I dislike. Scaling the Alps of time is naturally an arduous task. Not to be outdone by the young, I too, perhaps, should clamber up the valleys of the Ginza Alps, prepared at least for a ripe old age. And if I reach seventy, I shall seek out Elysian spring in the rarefied halls of a merry club or salon in some remote alpine Shangri-La, and there drink of the fountain of youth.

Nobody knows how much longer the phantasmagoric film of Ginza that started when I was eight will continue. People age, but nature rejuvenates herself. The willows of Ginza, having once disappeared, returned last summer to grace the streets again with their drooping foliage. In place of the horse tram from my dreamlike past, a new subway will open this year as Ginza steadily expands in three dimensions. It may not be long before a landing place for airplanes appears atop the Ginza Alps; no need, perhaps, to live to a hundred to see it. If natural history repeats itself, however, another great earthquake will strike the Kanto region by the end of the twentieth century or the beginning of the twenty-first. What will be Ginza's fate then? We must start taking precautions now or it will be too late. But here's the rub: by that time Tokyoites will have clean forgotten about the previous great earthquake, and the damage done by the next one will be exacerbated by decades' worth of hazardous facilities of every description. It should be one of the primary duties of Japan's rulers to prepare for emergencies by exercising proper oversight in that regard, since the country is so prone to earthquakes. Yet no one in government these days, it seems, treats the issue of earthquakes as a matter of vital national concern. So unless ordinary citizens start displaying sufficient resolve now, the Ginza Alps could, after all the toil that went into raising them, again be reduced to a desert of ashes and twisted steel one day. Instead of trying to ward off that calamity by offering human sacrifice, one idea might be to set up two stone slabs, at the foot of Shimbashi and of Kyobashi bridges respectively, and on the face of each embed a copper plate engraved with words to the effect, "Wait! Are you ready for the Big One?" But that will serve no purpose whatsoever if everyone rides by in a taxicab. It would perhaps be more effective to display such an inscription as conspicuously as possible on each of the peaks of the Ginza Alps range. All that

distinguishes man from beast is his ability to plan for tomorrow. It is, I believe, incumbent on citizens today who experienced the earthquake and conflagration of 1923 to take it upon themselves to act.

This essay first appeared in the February 1933 issue of the magazine Chuo Koron. It was reprinted in the fourth volume of Terada Torahiko Zuihitsu-shu (The collected essays of Terada Torahiko) published in the Iwanami Bunko series.

Notes:

This set of notes is mainly a translation of the annotations accompanying the Japanese text in the Iwanami Bunko edition, supplemented with extra information to aid the English reader.

1 The Shintomi Theatre gave rise to the last golden age of kabuki, the so-called Shintomi era from 1878 until around 1884. Under the direction of impresario Morita Kanya XII, it brought together some of the best-known kabuki actors of the day, most notably Ichikawa Danjuro IX, Onoe Kikugoro V, and Ichikawa Sadanji I, and employed the great dramatist Kawatake Mokuami as its in-house playwright. It was the successor of one of the most prominent kabuki theatres of the Tokugawa period, the Morita Theatre, which moved to Shintomi-cho (in present-day Chuo Ward, Tokyo) in 1872 and, after modernizing its organization and audience policy, was officially renamed the Shintomi Theatre in 1875. The theatre burned down in the great earthquake of 1923.

2 *Funa-Benkei*, a dance drama written by Kawatake Mokuami. It portrays the young general Yoshitsune, conqueror of the Taira clan but now a fugitive from his brother the future shogun, fleeing across the sea accompanied by a handful of retainers, including the warrior-monk Benkei. During the voyage the ghost of the drowned Tomomori, a scion of the vanquished clan, rises from the waves to exact vengeance by taking Yoshitsune down into the ocean depths, but is thwarted by Benkei's prayers.

3 Ichikawa Sadanji I (1843-1904), one of the leading kabuki actors of the Meiji period (1868-1912) alongside Ichikawa Danjuro and Onoe Kikugoro. The adopted son of Ichikawa Kodanji IV, he became a protégé of Kawatake Mokuami and pioneered new theatrical directions in original works by him like *Benkei Aboard Ship*.

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4 Ichikawa Danjuro IX (1838-1903), the greatest star of the Meiji stage. With his imposing bearing, melodious voice, and skilled delivery, he was equally adept at playing heroes, villains, and female roles, and equally at home in historical dramas and pieces about contemporary life.

5 *Shibai-jaya*, a teahouse attached to a kabuki theatre that besides serving refreshments to theatregoers also arranged seats and provided many other services. Originating in the Tokugawa period (1600-1868), theatre teahouses declined in the late nineteenth century and disappeared after the 1923 Tokyo earthquake.

6 Now Hibiya Park, one of Tokyo's major parks. In the Tokugawa period this area was the location of the residences of several daimyo (feudal lords who ruled their own domains elsewhere in the country), including that of the powerful Nabeshima clan of Saga. Those residences were demolished after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 to make way for a parade ground, which was converted to a park in 1903.

7 The reference is unknown. Perhaps a coinage of the author, "green" being used in its (English) sense of "young" or "naive".

8 The town of Reading is about fifty kilometres west of London.

9 A restaurant known for its broiled eel.

10 One of the Seven Gods of Good Fortune, whose festival days were the fifth, fifteenth, and twenty-fifth of each month.

11 Momokawa Joen (1832-1898), stage name of Sugiura Yosuke, a leading practitioner of the traditional art of narrating historical tales. The first of several storytellers to use that name, he was born in Edo (now Tokyo) and apprenticed under Ito Enshin. A heavily built man with a shaven head, he reputedly never took the stage sober. He was nicknamed "Joen the Cat" because of his skill at narrating one of the standards of the storytelling repertoire, "Tale of a Hundred Cats".

12 Ito Chiyu (1867-1938), another traditional storyteller as well as a politician. After serving as a member of several municipal and regional assemblies in Tokyo, he joined the Seiyukai, one of the leading political parties of prewar Japan, and was twice elected to the lower house of the Imperial Diet as a representative for Tokyo's third district. He also authored biographies of such notable figures in Japan's recent history as Saigo

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Takamori and Inoue Kaoru, along with a popular account of the early Meiji years. Towards the end of his life he published his own eponymous magazine.

13 A luxury-goods store in Ginza.

14 A restaurant specializing in shiruko (sweet adzuki soup with rice cake) located in the Yonchome neighborhood of Ginza.

15 A well-known tempura restaurant in Ginza.

16 Iwaya Matsuhei (1850-1920), cigarette manufacturer in the years before the establishment of the government tobacco monopoly in 1904. His company made a dozen or more varieties of cigarettes all named for the tengu or long-nosed goblin of Japanese folklore — Red Tengu, White Tengu, Golden Tengu, etc.; hence they were known as Tengu Cigarettes. He was also an innovator in the public-relations field: he wore a red frock coat, drove around in a red carriage, and lived in a red-brick house.

17 Cigarettes marketed by the Kyoto-based Murai Bros. & Co. before the establishment of the government tobacco monopoly in 1904.

18 Journalist Kishida Ginko (1833-1905), a native of Okayama. He studied with the American missionary James Hepburn, whom he assisted in compiling the first modern Japanese and English dictionary. After establishing his own newspaper, he joined the editorial staff of the one of the most prominent papers of the day, *Tokyo nichinichi shimbun*. He also took part in the founding of two organizations devoted to promoting good relations with China.

19 Kishida Ginko's son, the painter Kishida Ryusei (1891–1929).

20 *Kankoba*, a kind of shopping centre that was the forerunner of the department store in Japan.

21 A shop dealing in dyed fabrics since the early Meiji period, then located in Asakusa Kotobuki-cho in Tokyo. It moved to nearby Umayabashi after the Pacific War.

22 A dealer in footwear once located in Tokyo's Nihonbashi district. It no longer exists.

23 Natsume Soseki (1867-1916), the author's English master at high school in Kumamoto (on the island of Kyushu) and one of Japan's greatest modern novelist.

24 Masaoka Shiki (1867-1902), poet and critic who established a new style of haiku.

(Notes)

25 A well-known confectioner's shop.

26 A reference to the recreational lake of that name in Hyde Park, London.

27 An allusion to the "world line" of relativity theory, a line in space-time representing the successive points occupied by an entity throughout its existence.

28 The Great Kanto earthquake of 1923.

29 Literally "twenty *sen*". A *sen* is one hundredth of a yen.

30 German for "disconsolate", "wretched".

31 The *National Reader* was an English textbook extensively used in the Meiji period. "The Little Match Girl", of course, is the fairytale by Hans Christian Andersen.

32 "Happy New Year" in German.

33 A typical German female name, appearing for example in the works of Goethe.

34 Apparently Fujishima Takeji (1867-1943), a painter in the Western style.