Polar Explorer #8

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NOBU SHIRASE’S FIVE RULES—1911

1. Never drink alcohol
   "A crew of gorillas," “Beasts of the forest.” The locals came to gawk at our camp in New Zealand, ground for our huts begged from a wealthy man. This after barely scraping funds to leave Japan? After our small send-off of only a few bored students? After the ice itself pushed us out of its bays? Drink might have been permissible.

2. Never drink tea
   That is to say, don’t be held hostage to ceremony. It was one of Mawson’s men who came to our aid. Vouched for us, told us what he’d seen of the white land. Scientist to scientist. I gave him what had been given me before I left the temple’s shore. Made three hundred years ago by Mutso no Kamikanoyasu, its maker’s name, carved in the blade, can only be read in reflection. What need did I, a scientist, have of a sword?
3. *Never drink hot water*

My father a monk, as a boy
all of Konoura knew I was too...
well, they called me naughty.
At the school for priests, they said
Buddhists could not make expeditions.
Too much striving.

4. *Do not smoke*

We planted our flag on Yamato Yukihara
having marched eight days, unable
to go farther. Two weeks before,
Amundsen stood on the pole. A week
before, Scott and his men found flags
at the spot they sought. These goals are smoke.
Our flag stood on ice unanchored, no land
beneath it to be claimed. Fifty-six years
would pass before another followed
from Japan. My presence by then
only spirit, the evidence sunk. Perhaps bits
of it rising by then as fog.

5. *Never warm your body*

Home, debts were larger than the dream
through which they had accrued. I lived
to see the great cloud above two cities,
fire that never should have been made.
A year and a month later, above the fish shop
in Koromo, a blocked intestine killed me.
My farewell poem the only thing left
to show those who found me that once
I'd lived a strange, cold dream.