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MOUNT ETNA FLAMING.

ONE OF THE WORST VOLCANOES IN THE WORLD.

Molten Lava Pouring Down the Mountain Sides and Threatening Inhabitants at Its Base.

Catania, July 11.—The terror of the people living in the vicinity of Mount Etna is increasing in consequence of renewed violence of the eruptions from the different craters of the volcano and the prolonged subterranean rumblings more and frequent. The poorer inhabitants of Nicolosi, who have been driven from their customary field work by the advance of the lava, are being supplied with free bread and soup. The houses of the town were severely shaken last night, many windows being shattered.

The accounts telegraphed from Italy, meagre as they are, show that the people dwelling around about the volcano of Mount Etna are in the face of a calamity like that which befell the entire district in the year in which the "chained giant" imprisoned in the famous volcano last attempted to find release and, in his anger, poured out floods of fire over the vineyards and olive groves, burying the homes of some thousands of people. Fortunately the calamity of 1886 was not so great as with previous eruptions, especially that of 1869, when if we are to believe in the accuracy of the curious fresco in the Cathedral of Catania, which represents blood red streamers of lava descending from Monte Rossi, the city of Catania was overwhelmed.

A population of 300,000 persons dwell on the mountain slopes around about Etna. There are two cities, Catania and Aci Reale, and sixty three towns or villages. The whole district is more thickly populated than any other part of Sicily or Italy, for, while the population of Italy per square kilometer is 90, and of Sicily 88, that of the habitable zone around Etna is 550. The fertility of the soil, caused by the decomposed lava, attracts this excess of population. The vine flourishes and the soil gives abundance of corn, olives, pistachio nuts, mulberries, oranges, lemons, figs and other fruit trees. This cultivated zone may be described as the outer one around the base of the mountains.

An inner zone is the wooded belt, which extends to a height of some 6000 feet, the height of the crater cone itself being over 10,000. There are fourteen separate forests in the Etna region, some abounding with oak, beech, pine and poplar, and others with chestnut, ilex and cork trees. The celebrated chestnut—Castagno di Cento Cavalli—one of the largest and oldest trees in the world, is in the forest of Carpinetto, five miles above Giarre, on the east side of the mountain. The region beyond is a

complete desert of black sand, scoriae, ashes and masses of ejected lava, and extends for about a mile and a half around the central crater. In autumn, summer and spring this portion is covered with snow, some of which in the deep ravines, is eternal.

THE MINOR CRATERS

A remarkable feature of Etna is the large number of minor cones scattered over its sides, some of them being of very large dimensions. The great crater of Etna itself is a vast abyss of nearly 1000 feet in depth, shut in by precipitous walls. It varies in width, but is between two and three miles in circumference. Sometimes it is nearly full of lava, sometimes it appears bottomless. There is a general similarity in all of Etna's eruptions. Earthquakes precede the outburst, loud explosion are heard, rifts open in the side of the mountain, smoke, sand, ashes and scoriae are discharged, cinders are thrown out and accumulate around the crater in a conical form, ultimately lava rises through the new zone, frequently breaking down one side of it where there is least resistance, and flowing over the surrounding country just as is the case to-day.

THE CALAMITY OF 1886.

In May, 1886, Etna had one of its worst periods of eruptions. They had been preceded by earthquakes and the formation of new craters. Every year after 1883, new openings had been made, which disgorged molten streams of lava that spread down over the plain with unrelenting sureness, overwhelming fields and vineyards, gardens and peasant farms and leaving once flourishing villages in ruins. In July, 1885, the crater on the summit sent forth from time to time vast volumes of dense smoke and ashes and violent earthquakes were felt on September 25 and 26 especially in and near the town of Nicolosi.

Then the volcano took a rest until May, farana and Catania. These earth tremblings began at 11 o'clock in the morning, lasted all day, and during the night flames and streams of lava broke forth and earthquakes of great violence sent terror to the hearts of the people, especially those dwelling on the southern side of the mountain.

About 2 o'clock on the morning May 19 an eruption of molten lava broke forth from the central crater, and simultaneously a stream poured from a new crater on Monte Grosso, close by the Monte Principe di Napoli, which had been formed by the eruption of 1883. This was about five and a half miles northward from Nicolosi. The lava stream which emerged from the crater with vast development of steam and accompaniment of subterranean rumbling noises and earthquakes, moved down the mountain side in two arms separated 160 feet from each other with a speed of sixty-four feet and in the direction of Nicolosi and Bel-

passo, threatening especially the first named place, so that the inhabitants loaded their worldly possessions on hand cars and on the backs of mules and sought refuge in flight. Troops were sent from Catania to render assistance to the people, and the archbishop and the burgomaster of Catania also hastened to the scene of threatened danger to comfort and aid the affrighted people as much as lay in their power.

MANY NEW CRATERS.

On May 20 it was learned that altogether eleven new craters had been formed, three of which, in the valley between Mont Grosso and Monte Negro, vomited forth great quantities of lava and ashes. The streams of glowing lava were in some places 200 meters broad and descended with relentless force. In places the stream would divide into several smaller streams and would take an altogether unexpected direction. Then these would come together again and by sheer weight of lava take on increased speed. On May 20 the little village of Guardiola was overwhelmed by a lava stream within the space of a few hours.

The City of Nicolosi, which was most threatened at the time, is a pleasant place of 27,000 inhabitants and known to all travelers in Sicily as the headquarters for the Etna journey. It has been destroyed three times by the eruption of Mount Etna—namely, in the year 1537, 1633 and 1669. The lava streams of 1669 are still to be seen spread over immense space southward of Nicolosi, marking the graves of many thousands of people who were overwhelmed at the time. But it needed only a few years before the people returned to the valleys, where flourishing gardens of tropical fruitfulness soon rose up again on the old lava beds.

NICOLOSI THREATENED.

On the evening of May 20, 1886, the lava stream was only three miles distant from Nicolosi and five and a half from Belpasso. On the following morning the molten stream had devoured a portion of the vineyards and olive groves. On the 21st the river of fire had approached still nearer to the apparently doomed towns, when a new molten stream broke forth from the southern declivity of Etna, and pressed down toward the two places. On May 24 the crater again assigned greater activity, and the main body of the lava stream grew more rapid in its advance.

Day and night, weeping, wailing and praying the people of Nicolosi wandered in procession with their sacred pictures, hoping thereby to ward off the final calamity. Images of the Virgin were affixed to the doors of the houses and churches, and when the anguish of the poor people had become extreme the veil of St. Agatha, which was supposed to have saved the people of Catania in the year 1669, was, at the request of the archbishop, sent from that city to Nicolosi, where it was welcomed with great enthusiasm by the people and solemnly exhibited in the church.

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