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before the storm," I wanted to say, but being the lame duck of the party, had no one to say it to.

* * *

THE steepness eased off, and I could hear a sound like locomotives blowing off steam. The others were over the crest of the glacier and about a hundred yards from the vents when she went up. There was a roaring explosion and a brown column of dirt grew up and filled the sky. The thing seemed too big to be worth running away from. It would be like a very small Mickey Mouse running away from a very large giant. But as the roaring turmoil grew larger and larger, the experts in front, guide and geologists, began to run across the glacier, so I began to run too.

Boulders about three feet across, trailing small stuff behind them, came out of the side of the thing in neat parabolic curves. There was a clatter of falling stones in the crater, and a continuous crackling of lightning in the swirling clouds of dirt which filled the sky. The thing was almost overhead now, but nothing more seemed to be dropping out of it. By the time we had all run 50 yards and gathered together, the highest ash must have been 4,000 or 5,000 feet above our heads, and still rising like an unballasted balloon. In the place where the forward members of the party had been when they started to run, we later found many holes in the ice where hot boulders had melted their way down. One of them was big enough for three men to get right in while I took a picture, and another hole, which fortunately no one jumped into, went right through into a crevasse.

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WE took some pictures and began to freeze in a bitter wind. Food was suggested, and we ate bitterly frozen sandwiches. Then in company with members of the Ruapehu Ski Club and others, our party went up the part of the crater ridge called Paretaitonga, on to the second highest peak of Ruapehu. Here we were upwind of the volcanic activity and the place was free of boulder craters, which at least meant that it had not been hit recently.

From Paretaitonga we looked down on the circular hole which had once held



Looking down from Paretaitonga at the vents in the crater

the crater-lake. Now it held a level disc of solidified lava, in which a number of immense smoke-candles seemed to be set. A few gushed white smoke, presumed to be pure steam, and steam rose near the face of the glacier. Near the centre of the circle there was a powerful gusher of pink smoke, while vents in the far half of the area sent up a dense background of brown. A very busy vent near the base of the ridge sent up a greyish outpouring, and in among the voluminous brown background black explosions went up every few minutes, sending out stones in silhouette against the snow, while above the stones lightning-riddled tumultuous clouds periodically obscured a daytime moon. By analogy with the bagpipes one came to think of the continuous vents, responsible for the steady streaming of ash over the lip of the crater as the drones, and of the explosive vent which sent up "cauliflowers" as the chanter.

From the top of the mountain the world looked very large, and the activity in the crater, immense as it was, did not look quite immense enough to be a manifestation of the earth's fiery centre. In any case, modern theory rejects the fiery centre and accounts for volcanoes by

saying that certain deep rocks are forced up from below by great pressure even though solid, passing through faults in the surface rock. Near the surface the release of pressure allows certain dissolved gases to escape and combine with the oxygen of weathered surface rocks. This burning of gases from the rocks to form steam and other products maintains the heat of the "volcanic furnace," and so keeps the top of the rising rock, the lava, in a plastic condition. This allows more gases to be released, and so the volcano maintains itself rather in the way in which the heat of a candle-flame melts more wax. With a volcano, though, there is no snuffing the wick if the wax begins to run over as a lava flow.

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ERUPTIONS, like diseases, are neatly classified according to their symptoms. When one watches Ruapehu's present activity, it is seen to correspond very closely to the definition of Vulcanian Activity as defined by Wellington's Professor C. A. Cotton: "The lava is very viscous, and does not long remain liquid in contact with the atmosphere, but consolidates in the crater. The phenomena of eruption are explosive. Much fine ash is emitted, and ash-laden gases ascend so as to form voluminous 'cauliflower' clouds; the ash is distributed widely by winds. 'Bread-crust' bombs and angular blocks, both derived from new lava in the crater, are thrown out, together with fragments of the old lavas and the debris of pre-volcanic rocks."

Whatever the theory, the view from Paretaitonga was the greatest show on earth. We must have watched it for about two hours without feeling the cold before being warned we would have to hurry to be back at the truck before darkness. When we did get down and relieved the anxiety of the two geophysicists, the light had gone. They had noticed with alarm that the big one had gone up at just the time we were due at the crater.

Carefully we stowed ice-axes, cameras and skis in the valuable truck, and rumbled down the rocky road towards unfrozen food, hot baths, and the evening mail from home.



On Paretaitonga. Below is the glacier and the Pinnacles. In the distance the ash-soiled cone of Ngauruhoe

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