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were compensations. For one thing, the picture was still there, still lighting up our drawing-room with its vista of garden walls, flame-coloured blossom, and remote blue hills beyond the Seine valley. For another, the search for its begetter had in the end uncovered a rich vein of human interest, a Gauguin story in reverse—the life story of a man who got at least a foothold on the lower slopes of Parnassus, then, out of a deep artistic humility, gave the whole thing up and went back to the normal everyday life of the world from which he came. Maybe he is happy in that world—maybe it is the right ending to the story—a nice flat Simenon ending, with all realities

faced, all the psychological factors neatly totted up, and an emphatic, if invisible Q.E.D. at the bottom of the last page. But the heart of another being a dark forest, it is not for me to guess. All I know is that sometimes, when I look at that blaze of red blossom in the foreground of his picture, and the mastery with which he suggested the green valley of the Seine beyond, I find myself wondering if his life might not have been at any rate a trifle more *en rose* if he had gone on struggling. *Ars longa, vita brevis*, but it would have been at least something to have given those glossy gentlemen at the art dealers' the fright of their lives with the prospect of a second Cézanne!

SANTORIN, ISLES OF GRIEF

BY J. B. RIGG

SIX thousand million years ago, when our Solar System was scarcely born, the infant Earth changed from the gaseous to the liquid state. Or so we may conjecture, for there was no one there to see it. More strictly speaking, there were several liquids of different densities. These arranged themselves in order of density, with the heaviest in the centre, the lightest on the surface of the sphere. The Earth then had no seas as we understand them, for there was as yet no water. Yet, in as much as she was all liquid, she was all ocean. Moreover, the molten sphere, whirling through space, was subject as always to the laws of the Universe, which directed those tractive forces to form tidal waves on a surface that was too flexible to offer much resistance. And the tiny tides that form in the oceans of today are as nothing to the mighty swellings on the face of the primeval Earth.

At length by a process known to physicists as resonance, the amplitude of these tides increased until the bulge trembled on the brink of independent existence. Then the cord snapped which bound it to Mother Earth, and part of the outer layer—the very scum of the Earth—flew off into space, steadied and

began a quasi-eternal circuit as our first satellite, the Moon.

That part of the scum which remained has seen many changes since that monstrous birthday. At first it formed one huge continent, floating on the denser layers beneath. 'Pangæa'—all the Earth—the scientists have called it. Then, owing perhaps to changes in the Earth's centre of gravity, there followed stress, strain and fracture. Cracks appeared, and in them might have been seen the embryos of the continents of today. At length, some hundreds of millions of years ago, the fragments drifted apart. More recently, in many places, they have drifted together again. At least, that is one theory: there are others.

Traces of these convulsions are written large on the map of the world. The skeletal arcs of the East and West Indies and of the Aleutian Islands, the Himalayan wall, the great mountain systems on the western edges of the Americas all testify to the drift of continents. Yet nowhere is the picture painted more vividly than in the seas, islands and mainland of Asia Minor and Greece.

Here the clutching fingers of Morea and Chalcidice and the penin-

sulas of ancient Ionia point seawards to groups of islands that are but the shattered fragments of sediments folded when one continent over-rode another and then, as though exhausted, sank backwards and downwards till ocean rolled in to cover all but the highest mountain tops. In many places, the fractures extended down to the molten rocks beneath the crustal layers. These forced their way upwards to reach the surface as volcanoes. Such was the origin of the Aegean Sea, in whose centre lies the volcanic group of Santorin.

Since the days of Darwin it has become fashionable to give rational explanations for the miraculous events of the Bible. We feel our intellects superior to those who insisted, a hundred years ago, that the Earth was created at 9 A.M. (zone time not stated) on the 23rd of October, 4004 B.C. Was the Flood, after all, no more than the result of a burst natural dam and a drained lake in the mountains of Anatolia? Must we imagine Noah and his crew pulling hard against the stream till they reached Ararat? The recession of the Gulf of Suez and the subsequent overwhelming of the Pharaonic host are easily accounted for in terms of a seismic surge such as those which, even in our own time, have brought death and destruction to Southern Chile and the Pacific Islands. The Plagues of Egypt are no exceptions. The Nile, we are told, did not run with blood but with the debris of the red igneous

rocks of the Ethiopian Plateau. Only a modicum of biological imagination is required to explain away boils, blains, frogs and locusts. But what of the ninth plague—that of darkness? An eclipse could scarcely have lasted three days. Nor to the best of our knowledge, could a single night. But here Professor Hans Petterssen in his 'Cruise of the Albatross' comes to our rescue. He suggests that the Plague of Darkness may have been due to the smoke and cinders of Santorin which, blown before the prevalent northerly summer winds, reached Egypt at the time of the terrific eruption which shattered the island in the middle of the second millennium B.C.

Whether or not there is any connection between Santorin and the wanderings of the Israelites, the islands have a past that is steeped in legend. Appolonius of Rhodes declared that the group appeared above the sea at the time of the return of the Argonauts. Much more recently (1962) Professors Otchakovsky and Galanopoulos (as reported in 'The Times') have suggested that Atlantis lies beneath the Aegean and that its inundation followed the eruption of Santorin, which was the metropolis of the vanished kingdom. Certainly prehistoric buildings have been found beneath thick layers of volcanic ash. Nor does there seem to be any reason to doubt the statement of many other authorities, besides those quoted here, that a much larger island was destroyed about 1500 B.C.

and reduced to those fragments which remain today.

The shape of the largest island of the group, Thira (or Thera) is that of a west-facing crescent moon. Westward across a narrow strait there lies the smaller island of Thirasia, part of the cone, and separated from Thira in the great eruption of 237 B.C. In A.D. 197 there appeared the first of a group of smaller islands in the middle of the lagoon. 'Between Thira and Thirasia,' wrote Strabo, 'flames arose out of the waves for four days, so that the whole sea boiled and blazed, and they gradually threw up an island, just as if it were raised by mechanical means, composed of liquid masses.' This was Palæa Kaimeni, which, together with Aspro Nisi, Nea-Kaimeni, and Mikra - Kaimeni, remains today. These are the very cores of the volcano, each of the Kaimenis well-named 'the burned.'

Since classical times the group has lain in restless sleep, from which Hephaistus, as the volcano is often called, has leapt from time to time to spread destruction on those who live about the crater's rim.

Major eruptions took place in A.D. 726 and 1457. In 1650, about three and a half miles off the north-east coast of Thira, a small island appeared to the accompaniment of such shock waves that a Venetian squadron that was passing at the time barely escaped shipwreck, while galleys in the Cretan harbour of Canea dragged their anchors. A few days later a country vessel from

Amorgo ran upon a bank of material thrown up by the volcano. 'The whole crew,' so the Jesuit missionary, Père Richard, reported, 'perished from suffocation. Moreover, a boat with nine men in it was thrown on the coast of Nio; the crew were all dead and much inflated; eyes inflamed and all in an attitude which indicated the actions of each at the time of dissolution.' Cinders were carried by the wind to Anatolia and to Platea in Central Greece. However, the isle produced by this eruption has since submerged. Now it is called Columbus Bank.

In 1707 a new island, Nea-Kaimeni, appeared in the middle of the lagoon and 'rose from the size of a molehill . . . to a height of seventy or eighty metres, and attained a mile in circuit.' (Here I quote Lieutenant Leycester, who, in turn, quotes Père Richard. The cautious reader will, however, note that the metre as a measure of length had not been invented in 1707—in any case the mixture of units is confusing.) 'On the following year . . . a party was made up, of which the Latin bishop was one, to endeavour to effect a landing: but without success. It appears that they tried at all points and the nearer they approached, the more boiling was the water; and it is confidently stated that pitch ran out of the seams of the boat.'

"*C'est une île fantasque*," said a lady in Alexandria when she heard that H.M.S. *Mohawk* (in which I was serving) was to visit Santorin.

We sailed from Alexandria at midnight on 1st July 1939, slipping out in the darkness past the breakwater where a destroyer had been on guard since that day, some months before, when the Italians had made a futile attempt to block the Great Pass with a sunken liner, in the hope of bottling up a large part of the British Fleet.

"Keep a good look-out for unlighted dhows, sub.," said the Captain to the officer of the watch as he went down to his sea-cabin. None was sighted, and dawn was already pale in the east before the end of the middle watch. Next day the sea, though heaving gently like the chest of a sleeping giant, was mirror smooth. The ship was stopped, a boat lowered and hands piped to bathe. In a moment, as though the order had been given to abandon ship, all but those on watch were leaping into the water, where they splashed about for twenty minutes with the sea-bottom between one and two miles below them.

We sailed on past the gaunt hills of Crete, and next day, a little before sunrise, Santorin lay ahead, rough purple cliffs between pink sky and amethystine sea. Thus must countless sailors have seen the lovely isles of Greece since first man ventured upon the waters. What thoughtful person, surveying such a scene, would look further for the stimulus that roused the imaginations of the ancient Greeks, and brought them to triumphs of original thought which, for all the wonders of the

modern world, have never been surpassed?

The sun had risen and the light was flooding over the hills of Thira as the anchor plunged. The mystique of early morning had gone and in its place had come a brassy Mediterranean day. The cliffs of the crater rim, red, black and white, dropped sheer into the lagoon, save where in one place a white-walled track zigzagged up the slope. At points along the cliff edge hung white, walled towns, like snow on a mountain range. To the southeast rose Mount Elias, eighteen hundred feet high, limestone and marble, sole remnant of that other island—Atlantis?—that existed before the great eruption three thousand five hundred years before.

Although several writers state that, because of the depth of water, ships visiting Santorin must remain under way, there were several vessels at anchor when the *Mohawk* arrived. One was a British yacht, and there was a French destroyer, *Fantasque*, if I remember rightly. The *Mohawk* anchored too, though it was not easy to find good holding ground in a place where the depth of water changes so constantly that no reliance can be placed upon the chart. However, the anchor was eventually let go in 25 fathoms—a precarious spot; for a cast of the lead showed 137 fathoms (over 800 feet) under the stern.

Courtesy visits were exchanged without delay. An officer was sent to the British yacht. The French-

men called on the *Mohawk*. As the French captain stepped on to the quarterdeck to the shrill of pipes, hopes that the guard, in presenting arms, would puncture the awning with their bayonets, were frustrated by the judicious drill of the gunner's mate. Then our Captain and later other officers visited the *Fantasque*. Little thought any of us then of the tragedy that lay scarce twelve months ahead.

There was another visit to be made. A British subject, who lived in Thira, had sent a message saying that he had something to communicate. Thira is nine hundred feet above the surface of the lagoon, and is reached by a cobbled path that zigzags at an easy gradient up the cliff face. Was I supposed to climb the path wearing my white No. 10 uniform? Clearly no mechanical transport would be available. But the use of a donkey was obtained for twenty-five drachmae. This useful though irritating animal wound its way slowly upwards, veering from side to side in an attempt to rub its back against the wall and heedless of the white-clad limbs that bestrode it.

As we climbed I could see the whole Santorin group spread out below me: the isle of Thirasia with its town on top of its cliffs, and in the middle of the lagoon the black masses of the Kaiments. Beyond Thirasia lay the blue shield of the Mediterranean with other islands of the Cyclades dimly visible on the horizon. In Thira it was cool, for

the architecture is wholly adapted to the climate. The white-washed houses throw back the heat; cool breezes breathe in streets that are so narrow as to be constantly in shade. Here the arch and the cupola are everywhere seen, for no other style of building is so capable of offering resistance to earthquakes. 'These,' wrote Leycester, 'I have seen to rock to and fro like ships in a gale and at times to resume their perpendicular.'

The British subject was an elderly man with a drooping white moustache and kind eyes; he gloried in his nationality. He spoke in halting French, for that is the lingua franca of the Greek archipelago, saying that the Italians were building air-fields on Stampalia, one of the Dodecanese Islands, a blur in the heat haze to the east. We talked in a high room through whose unglazed windows would be seen the fields of Thira dipping gently to the sea: an arid landscape, yet there was something reminiscent of Ireland in the whitewashed cottages and churches and stone walls. The countryside was clad with vines, for most of the population live by viticulture, which flourish on the rich volcanic soil.

Next day three Lazarist priests, two of them Greek and the third a rather odorous Frenchman, visited the ship for the purpose of taking a party of officers to see the volcano. We stood around awkwardly in the Captain's cabin. How did one converse with Lazarists? Was it

the thing to inquire about the state of salvation in Santorin? Had they read any good breviaries lately? The captain took the initiative by offering the cigarette-box to the head priest.

"I would much rather have a cigar," the latter replied.

Then the captain's steward, Johnny, brought in the drinks and everyone was happy.

The ship's motor-boat was inshore waiting for the messman, so it was decided to make the short trip to Kaimeni in the whaler under sail. There was a brisk breeze from west of north, so Kaimeni lay almost dead to windward. One of the Greeks, who spoke no English, pointed impatiently at the island as the whaler tacked towards it.

"Tell him," said the Captain at length, "that, although this is one of the finest sailing-boats in the world, she just won't sail straight into the wind."

The sea around Kaimeni is warm and sulphurous. Greeks bring their ships here, for the waters clean a copper bottom more effectively and more cheaply than a squad of dock-yard workers. But, if the water is warm, how much more so is the dry land! We jumped ashore and started off along a hot and dusty path. Great masses of lava, like boulders from a glacier, were strewn about. Indeed the whole island was black lava, streaked here and there with the yellow of sulphur. The chief priest plodded on at a great pace, as though he feared that the

island might at any moment blow up under his feet, as indeed it might have done. Occasionally he halted to explain that here was the crater of such and such a year. Sometimes he thrust little bits of newspaper into crevices in the hope that they would catch fire. They never did, though the ground in many places was too hot to touch. In one spot there gaped a cavern, aptly called by the Frenchman '*les portes d'Enfer*,' for the temperature within was said to be four hundred degrees Centigrade. Here and there in the cooler spots grass tried feebly to grow, but there was no sign of the fig-trees which Lieutenant Leycester saw in 1848. It was pleasant to turn one's back on such desolation and to see Thira resting on its hilltop, the blue waters of the lagoon, and our own ship peacefully at anchor.

After a stay of about five days the *Mohawk* sailed on another mission.

A few weeks later part of Kaimeni sank into the sea. Then came the war. On 5th May 1941, Santorin was occupied by the Italian Army, which remained on the island until October 1943. After the capitulation of Italy the island passed to the Germans under the command of Rudolph Esse, a second lieutenant of the German Navy, with a mixed force of Germans and die-hard Italian Fascists.

The harbour of Thira was bombed several times by the Allied Forces, since it offered safe shelter to small ships engaged in supplying the Ger-

man forces in Crete. On 23rd April 1944, a party of British and Greek commandos led by Captain Stevenson and by a Greek resident in Egypt, Stephanos Kajoulis, landed in Thira from a submarine. They had already been in contact with Doctor George Covaïos and other Greek patriots on the island with a view to attacking German installations. The Allies destroyed the radio-station and captured its garrison of ten men. Later they attacked the barracks and killed ten Germans, twenty Italians and the second-in-command, Fritz Hanson. Of the commandos, Kajoulis and a British sergeant, Kingstone, were killed. Next day, about ten Greeks were killed by a time-bomb which had been placed in the radio station.

However, the remaining Germans on Santorin, reinforced by others from Crete, later captured all those

Greeks who had assisted the Allies. Six men were shot and I have often wondered whether the gentle Englishman was among them.

On 18th October 1944 the German garrison surrendered to a British party landed on Santorin from H.M.S. *Ajax*.

In 1957 another eruption occurred. Much of the town of Thira was destroyed in the accompanying earthquake. The events are recorded in a pathetic little book: '*Christo des Cyclades*,' by Jacques Heyst:

'Les ruelles ne sont plus, ni les coupoles, terrasses. La falaise, qu'est elle devenue? Tout à l'heure, le soleil va dessiner des lignes ignorées sur le ciel, le profil des campements, les secours, les tombeaux, les prières, le feu. . . . Le soleil se lève sur les cendres, les désarrois, la solitude du sel. . . .'