Review: The Pelée Catastrophe

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THE PELÉE CATASTROPHE.

'The Eruption of Pelée.' By Angelo Heilprin. Published for the Geographical Society of Philadelphia by J. B. Lippincott Company. 1908.

This beautiful volume contains the last words of the celebrated American geographer and lecturer on the volcanic eruptions in Martinique, in which he, perhaps more than any other writer, had stimulated popular interest for several years. It is illustrated by a large number of photographic plates, most of which have appeared already in the author's books on Montagne Pelée, but some of them are new. The accompanying text gives a *résumé* of the observations he had made during repeated visits to Martinique, and an outline of the results of his last expedition in 1906, when he found the crater in a comparatively quiescent state, and was able to examine closely the ruins of the great obelisk which once had occupied it.

Prof. Heilprin's name is associated with his daring expedition to Martinique in May, 1902, immediately after the great catastrophe in which St. Pierre and its thirty thousand inhabitants were destroyed in a few minutes. He was the first to climb the volcano and obtain a glimpse of the interior of the crater, and later in the same year he had a very narrow escape from death on August 30, when nearly two thousand inhabitants of the eastern slopes of the mountain were suddenly killed in the night by the descent of a burning cloud from the crater.

The book bears the stamp of the author's mind in every paragraph: his great erudition and the enthusiasm with which he collected information from all sources regarding volcanic eruptions and those of Pelée in particular are very impressive. Still more, perhaps, are we conscious of the fascination which everything that was picturesque, horrible, and unexpected in the volcanic phenomena of these remarkable eruptions exerted over his imagination. We get a series of brilliant word-pictures linked with speculations of the most daring kind. Compared with Prof. Lacroix's classic monograph on Pelée, the result of many months of patient research, this book appears a mere sketch, though a very graphic one. The author seizes on those details which will arrest attention and stimulate wonder. The magnetic and tidal disturbances, atmospheric phenomena, and sound effects of the eruptions are gone into at considerable length. One of Prof. Heilprin's most original suggestions was that the great rock pillar which rose from the crater of Pelée, and at one time towered 1000 feet above the lowest portion of the crater's rim, was an old volcanic plug or "neck" which had been dislodged from its base and borne upwards by the ascending magma of the recent eruptions. Though remarkably ingenious, this hypothesis has found little favour, and what we know of the petrography of the column and of its recent history (it has now crumbled down to a mere ruin) has not served to render it more probable. We lay down the book with a sense of regret that a writer so stimulating and attractive, so cultured a type of the strenuous American, should have been lost to science at the early age of fifty-five years.

J. S. F.

MATHEMATICAL AND PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY.

THE PROTECTION OF NATURE.

'The Care of Natural Monuments, with special reference to Great Britain and Germany.' By H. Conwentz. Pp. x. + 185. Cambridge: University Press. 1909. *Price* 2s 6d. *net*.

A lecture delivered before the British Association in Leicester in 1907 forms the substance of this small volume, in which the author, who is Prussian State Commissioner for the Care of Natural Monuments, makes an appeal for the registration