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Issue July, 1953

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From the journal:

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Abstract

The first page of this article is displayed as the abstract.

EDITORIAL

MASTER HUMPHRY'S BOOKCASE

Hearing of one of those jack-in-the-box volcanic islands that recently disappeared without trace in the Pacific, we were reminded that the Institute has a bookcase. As the story that produced this response is not widely known, we crave the reader's indulgence for some words of explanation.

In 1831 British ships controlled the Mediterranean with the squadron at Valetta under Vice-Admiral Sir Henry Hotham. On 11 July that year, peasants near the Sicilian coast saw jets of white vapour rising above the horizon out to sea. Two days later the master of a merchant vessel on the way to Malta noticed columns of smoke and steam issuing from the water and making a great noise. By 19 July a crater had become visible, as yet only a few feet above the water. The sea flowed into it through a breach in one side and was continually being thrown out again. Every few minutes steam and ashes gushed forth.

On 30 July, Captain Senhouse, the flag captain of Admiral Hotham's ship H.M.S. *St. Vincent*, made a landing. By then the crater was in the centre of a huge ash-heap with almost vertical sides rising steeply out of the sea. After going round it in a boat he decided that he could only land a party at one point. They found it compact enough to walk on and climbed to the summit, where the British flag was planted. They named it Graham island, apparently after Sir James Graham, who was then First Lord of the Admiralty.

The volcano was extremely active and grew in size every day from then until about 16 August. The eruptions were at their fiercest on 7 August when Captain Irton, of the 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade, visited it and made a series of interesting sketches and drawings. It was still violent when, five days later, Admiral Hotham's squadron arrived from Valetta. Officers of the various Malta regiments joined the expedition and were present at the last violent eruption on the night of 15 August. During the next two days it quietened down and, as no further activity had been seen by 20 August, a survey party went ashore led by the Master of the brig *Ganges*. He was helped by three mates, the ship's surgeon, a group of sounding officers and a number of officers of the 7th, 73rd and 85th Regiments. The squadron left on 22 August, having detailed the *Ferret* to stay on for a further two weeks in case the volcano should come to life again.

John Davy (brother of the more famous scientist Sir Humphry Davy), an Inspector of Army Hospitals then stationed at Malta, had already visited Graham Island with Captain Wodehouse of the *Ferret* on 5 August, when the eruptions were becoming most intense. From the sea, Davy said, they sounded like the magnified rumblings of heavy carriages on a cobbled pavement, but no shocks were felt. Lightning darted about over the cone and the thunder added greatly to the tumult.

For a time the volcano was quiet and it was then that Davy decided to draw in close to the island on its leeward side. Coming to within a boat's length of the cliffs, the sailors paid out their line and found as

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