

THE PAST MONTH.

By S. E. GREVILLE-SMITH.

DICKENS somewhere tells of two octogenarian grave-diggers, who referred to those younger than themselves as children almost, and believed with more sincerity than feigning that their own "time" was somewhere in the dim distant future. We all know old people of that kind; people who refer to the death of a contemporary as "untimely," and who profess to believe that a man dying at seventy is cut off in his prime; people who refuse to consider their "latter end," as a contingency too remote. Yet if the slightest cough assail them they are ready to lie down and give up the ghost at once.

A curious, nay, a comical parallel to the state of mind here noted is to be found in the mental attitude of Aucklanders in respect of volcanic action. It happens now and then that some globe-trotter, whose appetite for knowledge has been relieved chiefly by the reading of guide books and the tales of antecedent travellers, and who is driven by the pseudo-scientist's passion for making deductions, expresses the belief that Auckland will some day be hoist by its own petard, as one might say. He has learned that Rangitoto, Mounts Eden, Hobson, Albert, Wellington, Smart, and a

dozen other cones, are volcanic and once upon a time vomited fire, and, cheerful pessimist that he is, sees no reason why they shouldn't "go it again."

But he does not alarm the Aucklanders, for the simple reason that no Aucklander believes it possible for Rangitoto or Mount Eden, or any of the other craters, to misbehave themselves after so long a persistence in decency and order. "Qui a bu, boira," say the French, but this tendency to "break out" does not apply rigidly to volcanoes, and to Auckland volcanoes not at all. Most likely the Aucklanders are right; at any rate, we all hope they are.

Nevertheless, it is a remarkable circumstance that, the other morning, when some person or persons unknown dynamited a tool-shed at Mount Eden, with a bang that was heard for miles around by people whom business or pleasure or a bad conscience kept awake, half the population reading the scare heading in the morning paper at once jumped to the conclusion that a volcano had broken loose somewhere. Directly the mystery had been cleared up they were just as firmly convinced as before that wherever else the alleged "internal fires" may seek an outlet they won't come this way.