

A Letter from White Island.

From one who lived there during an Eruption.

By VICTOR ZEAL.



ACCORDING to my promise I at last write you a short account of my life on this little volcano.

So far I have lived here for two years, and wildly exciting have been some of my experiences.

White Island, as you know, is marked on all maps as a volcano, and is full of hot springs and steam holes, also great quantities of sulphur, and is, perhaps, one of the finest sights in the world. It is about nine miles in circumference, and at one side rises abruptly out of the ocean to a height of 1200 feet. It is always canopied by a snowy cloud of steam.

The cliffs, which rise to the full height of the mountain, are of the most dazzling colours. Red hematite, black obsidian, and yellow ochre blending with the brown and white rocks, whilst green and golden sulphur crystals glint everywhere.

In the centre of the island is a lake of about twenty-five acres area. It is highly charged with hydrochloric acid, and is of a pea-green colour.

It is a magnificent sight to stand on the far side of this lake on a sunny morning, and to look seaward.

On either hand are the towering cliffs, in the foreground the bright green lake, overhead, like a bridal veil, floats the snowy cloud of steam, while stretching away to the horizon lies the sapphire sea, all tipped with dancing, white-crested waves.

But sometimes the east wind springs from sleep, and then how different is the scene. The gale rushes upon us with all its fury, and the gigantic swell of the Pacific Ocean sweeps upon the little island as if no power on earth could stop its course. Up the high cliffs it mounts, a hundred feet or more, looking like a solid green mountain. Then with a report like thunder it bursts into a mass of snowy foam, and in seemingly baffled rage tosses about great boulders, tons in weight, as if they were so many marbles, and the roar and the rattle of its anger can be heard many miles away.

But most strange and wonderful of all was my experience of an eruption on the island, and one from which there was no getting away. I had three of my brothers and two sisters staying with me for their holidays. All the men but two had gone to the mainland with the last shipload of sulphur, and would not be back until the steamer called again, which was never any stated time. The two men and I were laying down a steel tram-line from the sulphur platform to the landing place.

The children had been with us about three weeks, and were having a fine time on the island, when, one morning as we were working away, we heard the noise of a great explosion. We dropped our tools and ran as fast as we could to where we could get a sight of the crater. The first glance showed us that a