



## OPEN LETTERS

### The Terrible Upheaval in the Straits of Sunda.

WHILE glancing over the series of questions in the prize competition relating to The Century Dictionary, I noticed the query as to which was the more destructive, the volcanic outbreak in the Straits of Sunda, in 1883, or that at Pompeii, in the year 79.

As I passed through the Straits of Sunda a few days after that terrible catastrophe, I was a witness of some of the after-effects of that gigantic upheaval.

It was early in August, 1883. The good ship *Santa Clara* of New York city, after a three months' stay in the Bay of Manila, weighed anchor, and filled away for "home," laden with sugar and hemp. She had sailed from New York eight months previous, with a cargo of oil for Yokohama. She had been chartered to run down from Yokohama to Manila in ballast, and load sugar for New York. The period of what, in nautical parlance, is called "lay days" ran out, and our sugar cargo was not complete. According to the terms of the charter, this subjected the shippers to a heavy demurrage. But our "hustling" Yankee captain compromised with the shippers by filling out with hemp at a very high rate.

So here we were at last, "homeward bound," our captain ambitious to make the round voyage inside of a year, the rest of us eager to get back and enjoy the fruits of our labor, sailor fashion, which would probably be getting rid, in three days, of the money it had taken us twelve hard months to earn. My back aches now, and my hands get sore, when I think of the weary "boxhauling," anchoring at night, and heaving up anchor at the first glint of dawn; the setting of every rag that would draw in the light winds prevailing, when we could get a favorable "slant" down through some narrow strait; the constant drudgery necessary in navigating through the Philippine Islands, the Celebes Sea, Macassar Strait, and the Java Sea.

Twenty-eight days out from Manila we were off Batavia, when a German man-of-war spoke us, notifying the captain that a few days before there had been a volcanic eruption on the island of Krakatoa ("old Thwart-the-way," the sailors called it), in the Straits of Sunda, between Java and Sumatra, accompanied by an earthquake and a tidal wave that sent up a wall of water ninety feet high, wiping the town of Anjer completely off the map, breaking the island of Krakatoa into two parts, and causing a loss of life then estimated at about ninety thousand; but later estimates, I believe, placed the loss between thirty and forty thousand. The captain further said there had been no time to survey the Straits of Sunda, and he advised great caution in working through them, as there was no knowing what new reefs might have been thrown up. Thanking the German captain, we dipped our colors and squared away. The next forenoon we reached the entrance to the straits.

We had a light working breeze, and the wind was fair. Captain Rivers ordered sail shortened until we could just about carry steerageway. Off Anjer Point we hope to. What a change in that place since I had last seen it! Then the ship had been surrounded by the natives in boats loaded with fruits, sweet potatoes, yams, monkeys, parrots, Javanese ornaments, tobacco, and everything that would appeal to "poor Jack's" fancy; and now there was—one solitary boatman with sweet potatoes and yams; where the town had been not a house was to be seen; not another thing to indicate human life!

On questioning the native boatman, we learned that his life had been saved by the accident of his having gone into the interior on some errand. The poor fellow's family had perished with the rest. The captain bought the boat-load of vegetables, and after it was aboard we felt our way cautiously along, keeping a sharp lookout for broken water.

When off Java Head the captain concluded that we were out of danger, and ordered all sail made. With the water perfectly smooth, and a strong, fair wind, we were soon bowling along at the rate of twelve good knots an hour.

We had been working all hands; but now, with the long stretch across the Indian Ocean to the Cape of Good Hope before us, we started the regular "watch and watch."

At four bells in the middle watch (2 A. M.) I was roused by the cry of "All hands on deck!" to shorten sail. I tumbled on deck, rubbing the sleep out of my eyes. The next order was, "Keep the men standing by." Sailor-like, we all growled, and wondered what the "old man" meant by rousing us out when we had a fair wind, a smooth sea, and everything, as we supposed, to his liking. Then a turn across the deck to the weather side brought my heart into my mouth; for there on our weather bow ahead (as I could see under the foot of the foresail), and to leeward, as far as the eye could reach, were apparently "breakers." Still we stood on, the long lines of foam coming nearer and nearer with frightful rapidity. Murmurs of fear were heard from some, but most of us braced ourselves for the shock, and were momentarily expecting to feel the keel grinding on the rocks, and see the spars come tumbling down about us. A moment more, and we were in the white water; but we felt no shock, and did not hear the grinding noise we dreaded. Our way was slowly checked, but not entirely stopped. A little shower of spray, and some of the white water, breaking over the weather-rail by the forebraces, soon explained the mystery. The white water was pumice-stone, and the sea was covered with it for miles and miles. When we ran into these dead ashes of the volcano the ship was going at least eleven knots an hour. For the rest of the night we did not make over four, and the wind had not diminished in any



degree. It was a bright moonlight night, and the scene was indescribably beautiful. We seemed to be sailing through glistening white snow, the intense phosphorescence in these waters giving the same diamond rays from the particles of pumice-stone, as they turned and rolled in our wake, as are thrown from clear snow on a still, cold, frosty night.

The daylight brought unpleasant sights. Here and there a dead body would be seen floating along, with trunks of trees, pieces of boats, and other reminders of the awful calamity. We ran out of this pumice-stone sea that day, but from there down to the cape we would see occasional patches of it. Our thrifty captain took advantage of the circumstance to lay in enough pumice-stone to smooth paint and scrub bright-work for the next ten years. Eleven months and twenty days from the time we passed Sandy Hook, bound out, we were again anchored in New York Bay.

*E. J. Henry.*

#### Should Higher Education be Provided for the Negro?

THE most ardent advocates of the interests of our colored Americans are puzzled as to what is the best practical education for this particular people. The question used to be a local one, growing out of Southern opinion and prejudice. Happily, the question has become national. Philanthropists at the North, who have been generous in gifts for the educational advancement of the colored people, have become skeptical when the subject of higher education for this people is suggested. It is an open secret that those who magnify industrial training for the colored people receive the most munificent gifts to foster their work, both North and South. That the North has experienced a change of heart respecting this problem of educating the colored people goes without saying. No one can be censured for this, for the scare of the times is, for all people, "over-education." The cause of apprehension on the subject mentioned may be in what a writer stated in an open letter in THE CENTURY some time ago: "If the negroes are made scientists rather than classical scholars, it may avoid to some extent the prejudice against whatever tends to put a colored man on a level with whites. They might come to look upon a scientific negro as they would upon an improved cotton-gin—that is, a promising addition to the resources of the country." From such reasoning one readily sees that it is not the highest good sought from a practicable standpoint, but the best policy in view of "existing conditions." Whenever the education of a people is based upon policy at the expense of the perfect development of the race, that system of education is a failure. It is far from our thought, however, to advocate a classical education for the masses of the colored people—or of any people, for that matter. We do claim stoutly, however, that for specialists, as "teachers," "model pastors," and "leaders," to use another's terms, a thorough education is as essential for colored people as for white people. It is an exceed-

ingly novel idea of education which abridges its breadth and scope to local environment. No man is properly educated unless his capacities are ranged in the fullest line of the service for which he is fitted.

The colored man is too shrewd not to believe that what is good enough for a white man's son is just good enough for his own son. The example of Talladega College, in Alabama, and other institutions in the South, is commended by some for "dispensing entirely with Greek and altogether with Hebrew. Students, instead, are given a thorough acquaintance with the English Bible, with an abridged but very exacting drill in church history, systematic theology, etc." Such a curriculum is a maker of "the model pastor," "the negro's greatest need." We would add that "model pastors" are somewhat scarce in the churches, and our white churches should profit by the curriculum mentioned.

The only manly and practical way to face this question is to settle the point whether thoroughness in biblical study is as essential to the leadership of colored clergymen as it is to white clergymen. Is a knowledge of Greek and Hebrew necessary for the average biblical student? There is a good deal of blind reasoning in the trite phrase, "thorough acquaintance with the English Bible," with no discriminate knowledge of what really constitutes the English Bible. We admit in all candor that "knowledge puffeth up," model pastors and leaders not excepted; and we are forced to the conclusion that one seldom finds a colored man with a classical training who does not betray in some way a consciousness of his high attainments; and there are preachers who read the Bible in the original tongues who instinctively feel that they are caught up to a high state above their fellows. But this lofty-mindedness proves nothing in respect to race; for consciousness of superior attainments is not always absent from white preachers, though it may not be so frankly shown as by the colored students.

If the institutions which educate the colored people *en masse* even modify their curriculums on the theory that the colored race should have a special education, their usefulness will be virtually at an end.

We doubt seriously whether a scientifically educated negro will satisfy the country in contradistinction to her classically educated whites. The "improved cotton-gin" would certainly put a high premium upon itself; and in the South especially the racial status of wealth would doubtless be reversed. The country is no more willing to receive the "scientific negro" than it is willing to acknowledge the social status of the negro. Classified education will not settle the race problem as such, but an all-round practical training will; and those institutions educating the colored people as *people*, and not as a *race*, in lines developing their special and varied gifts and callings, are giving birth to a new race and hastening the dawn of a new civilization in America.

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