

Earthquakes and Volcanoes.

There is no foundation for the view generally held that great earthquakes are caused by volcanic eruptions, says Prof. R. A. Gregory, writing in the London Sunday at Home.

It is true that rumblings are heard and shocks felt before a volcano bursts into activity and during the subsequent eruption, owing to the subterranean explosions of the imprisoned water vapor and various gases, but though every active volcano gives spasmodic shocks, these movements are rarely felt over more than a limited area.

On the other hand, the greatest earthquakes—those that shake the whole earth about fifty times every year, have their origin in regions where there are no volcanoes.

A volcano is a pin-prick in the earth's surface, and it serves to relieve the local pressure by permitting the escape of steam and molten rock; but an earthquake is produced in most cases by a sudden fracture of the solid substructure of a large region, and as the great mass of material slips into a new position, the shock causes the crust of the earth to shiver from pole to pole.

These dislocations are naturally most frequent in regions where mountain ranges are apparently still being squeezed up—where rocky folds are still being bent into shape, as in the Himalayas, and off the west coasts of North and South America, and the north of Japan.

Regions of greatest stability of the earth's crust are, in fact, found chiefly along the margins of continents or tablelands which rise suddenly to considerable heights above oceanic or other plains.

Great fractures of the earth's structure seem, however, in some cases to be followed by increased volcanic activity, though little is yet known of the nature of this relationship. Professor John Milne has found that all known volcanic eruptions which have occurred in the Antilles, from the first which took place in 1692, have been heralded or closely accompanied by large earthquakes in that region, but more frequently by similar disturbances in neighboring rock-folds, particularly that of the Cordilleras of Central America.

In April, 1902, a severe earthquake occurred in Guatemala, and a week later volcanoes in Martinique and St. Vincent showed signs of the activity which culminated in the devastation of large parts of these islands.

Another instance occurred at the end of January last year, when a great earthquake which originated off the mouth of the Esmeralda river in Colombia was followed a few days later by the eruption of the Mont Pelee and La Soufriere volcanoes. A convulsion in Central America may, therefore, be taken as a warning of eruptions or shocks in the West Indian islands; but though volcanic activity may follow an earthquake of unusual severity, it must be regarded as an effect of the disturbance rather than the cause.

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The Shape of the Earth. Professor Love at the Leicester meeting of the British Scientific association attacked in the mathematical section the problem of the present shape of the earth and the reason for the distribution of continents and oceans.

Certain characteristics of this distribution stood out in a marked way, when examined on a map of the world—the tapering shapes of Africa and of South America, for example, or the great bulk of the Pacific ocean. Why was there this one-sided sort of distribution of land and water?

Professor Love suggested that it was due to the fact that the center of the earth was not its center of gravity, and that for many ages there had been an endeavor on the part of the earth to adjust its mass and its weight. Stripped of its oceans, which cling to it as a drop of water clings to a greasy spot, the original sphere of the earth would be found deformed into a sort of irregular, pear-shaped surface. The stalk of the pear was in the southern part of Australia, and contained Australasia and the Antarctic continent. This was surrounded on all sides but one (toward South America) by a zone of depression—the waist of the pear. This, again, was

surrounded on all sides save one (toward Japan) by a zone of elevation, the protuberant part of the pear. And finally we found the nose of the pear in the central Atlantic between the Madras and the Bermudas. The earth was no longer gravitationally unstable; it had settled down; and the oceans had settled into the hollows best afforded them by the earth's shape. But earthquakes still occurred and would occur, and might be considered as of the nature of a relief of the strain induced by the earth's long-sustained efforts to settle its mass.

There was also to be considered the effect of the slowly diminishing speed of the earth's rotation. This had had a double effect. It had helped to diminish the tendency of the earth's oceans to draw toward the equatorial regions, while, on the other hand, it had produced an actual reduction of the equatorial protuberance of the earth's figure. Thus also had been produced seismic activity in the earth's efforts to adjust itself to changing conditions, together with alternations of an advance of the oceans a little nearer the poles and back again.

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