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<i>The Mexican Volcano Parícutin:</i> DR. PARKER D. TRASK .....	501
<i>Presentation of the Sedgwick Memorial Medal</i> .....	505
<i>Obituary:</i>	
<i>Elmer Darwin Ball:</i> DR. CHAS. T. VORHIES.	
<i>Deaths and Memorials</i> .....	506
<i>Scientific Events:</i>	
<i>The Proposed Development of Wayne University; Rare Chemicals; The Sugar Research Foundation; The Alabama Academy of Science; Awards of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers</i> .....	508
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i> .....	511
<i>Discussion:</i>	
<i>Tryptophan and Phytohormone Precursors:</i> PROFESSOR GEORGE S. AVERY, JR. and DR. JULIUS BERGER. <i>The Roots of Spinal Nerves:</i> DR. DONALD DUNCAN. <i>Taxonomy and Genonomy:</i> PROFESSOR CARL EPLING. <i>Isolation of Influenza A by Intrallantoic Inoculation of Untreated Throat Washings:</i> MINNIE THIGPEN and JAMES CROWLEY .....	513
<i>Scientific Books:</i>	
<i>Naturalist at Large:</i> PROFESSOR T. D. A. COCKRELL. <i>Developments in Science:</i> DR. S. A. KORFF .....	516
<i>Special Articles:</i>	
<i>Retardation of Rancidity by Sulfhydryl Compounds:</i> DR. PAUL GYÖRGY, DR. ERIC T. STILLER and DR. MARTIN B. WILLIAMSON. <i>Vitamin B<sub>6</sub> Deficiency Anemia in the Dog:</i> SUSAN GOWER SMITH, ROBERT CURRY and HAROLD HAWFIELD .....	518
<i>Scientific Apparatus and Laboratory Methods:</i>	
<i>Technique for Stroboscopic Studies of Insect Flight:</i> DR. CARROLL M. WILLIAMS and DR. LEIGH E. CHADWICK. <i>The Coagulum-Contact Technic in Traumatic Rupture of the Liver in Dog and Man:</i> DR. MACHTELD E. SANO and DR. CLARENCE A. HOLLAND .....	522
<i>Science News</i> .....	8

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## THE MEXICAN VOLCANO PARÍCUTIN<sup>1</sup>

By Dr. PARKER D. TRASK

U. S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

THE new volcano in Mexico, El Parícutin (pronounced Pah-ree-koo-teen) is a unique geological phenomenon; for, before our very eyes, it has sprung into existence and has grown to a very respectable height of 1,500 feet, all within a period of 8 months. It lies within a region in which no previous volcanic activity has been known within the memory of man, though in 1759 the volcano El Jorullo, some 50 miles to the southeast, likewise suddenly was born, grew to a height of more than 1,000 feet within 5 months, and then quieted down, never more to erupt violently. Will Parícutin do likewise? That remains to be seen, for at present it is still going strong.

For the first time in their lives geologists have been able to observe in a single volcano all stages of its history. Parícutin exhibits many of the features of

<sup>1</sup> Address presented before the Geologic Section of the New York Academy of Sciences in New York, October 4, 1943. Published by permission of The Director, Geological Survey, U. S. Department of the Interior.

other volcanoes; but other volcanoes have been encountered by geologists after they have been in existence for some time, and their early history is unknown. The early history of Parícutin therefore fills important gaps in our understanding of volcanism.

To me the most outstanding aspect of this volcano is the incredible rapidity with which it grew. Within one week it was 550 feet high and within 10 weeks it was 1,100 feet in altitude. Up to this time, all the material in its cone had come from fragments that had been blown into the air from the volcano. No lava came from the cone until nearly four months after the eruption started; and then, contrary to some popular reports, it did not flow over the lip of the crater. Instead, it broke through the sides of the cone, undermining the overlying fragmental material. Lava appeared within two days of the first explosion, but it issued quietly from a fissure about 1,000 feet north of the explosive vent.

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