

# Onslaught of Fire and Poisonous Gas Overwhelmed Martinique

Louis H. Ayme, United States consul at Guadeloupe, sends the following cable to the Chicago Tribune from Fort de France, Island of Martinique.

I have just returned from St. Pierre. The desolation of the ruins of the city blasted by the fire and sulphurous fumes from the angry crater of Mont Pelee can only be inadequately pictured. Not a half of the horrors to be seen there have been told.

I left the Island of Guadeloupe in a chartered steamer Saturday night. We approached the site of the once fair tropical city soon after 6 o'clock in the morning.

The island with its lofty hills was hidden behind a leaden colored haze. Enormous quantities of the wreckage of large and small ships and houses strewn the surface of the sea. Huge trees and, too often, bodies with flocks of sea gulls soaring above and hideous sharks fighting about them, were floating here and there. From behind the

could scarcely distinguish the sites of the large buildings that had been destroyed under the rain of fire, lava, mud and ashes.

The still smoking volcano towered above the ash-covered hills. The ruins were burning in many places and frightful odors of burned flesh filled the air.

With great difficulty a landing was effected. Not one house was left intact. Viscid heaps of mud, of brighter ashes, or piles of volcanic stones were seen on every side. Here and there amid the ruins were heaps of corpses, almost all the faces were downward, as if the unhappy victims had rushed into the streets when the first shock of the catastrophe aroused them, only to meet a sudden and awful death that smote them to the earth as they ran.

So many piles of corpses were to be seen that it is difficult to describe any in particular detail. In one corner twenty-two bodies of men, women and

that the disaster came suddenly.

On the morning of the disaster the inhabitants of the city awoke to find heavy clouds shrouding the Mont Pelee crater. All the previous day loud detonations from the volcano had been heard, so loud that the reverberations echoed from St. Thomas on the north to Barbadoes on the south. The fearful crashing sound ceased and there began a shower of fine ashes, which fell like rain over the city. The inhabitants became alarmed, but Gov. Mountet, who arrived at St. Pierre the evening before, did everything possible to allay the panic. They partly succeeded, but scarcely had the fears of the people been allayed when there came the explosion, and in an instant St. Pierre, its people, its houses, had been blotted out of existence.

After a search of three hours in the ruins I found no trace of the American consulate. Consul Thomas T. Prentiss, his wife and two daughters, are undoubtedly dead. That quarter of the city is still a vast mass of blazing ruins. Nor has any trace of James Japp, the British consul, been found. Mr. Japp had a large family at St. Pierre.

From everything I saw I feel confident that 30,000 is not too great an estimate of the loss of life. Every one in the city perished, and suburban towns added thousands to the number of victims.

Plantations and small villages have been devastated by the ceaseless rain of ashes and fire which has poured from Mont Pelee.

These survivors have taken refuge in the hills, away from the danger of the lava flow in the valleys, but still menaced by the showers of fire. They must be relieved, taken to places of safety, fed and clothed. The work must be done quickly. Hundreds and even thousands of them must perish as it is before help can reach them.

The work of exploring the ruins of St. Pierre, of bringing away the refugees in the hills in the northern part of the island and of burning the bodies of the victims is progressing as rapidly as circumstances will permit.

Fort de France is crowded with refugees and food is already so scarce that alarm is felt that it will be exhausted before supplies can reach here.

As a result of the relief work the people who had fled to the hills behind the village of Le Precheur, nearly 4,000 in number, have been brought here.

They are in a most pitiable condition. Hundreds of them are frightfully burned and in most urgent need of medical care. All the doctors and nurses in Fort de France are working night and day among the injured and they are assisted by scores of volunteer nurses, many women of the wealthiest families of Fort de France giving their services.

A number of steamers, including the government vessel Rubis, started from here for St. Pierre. They carried government delegates, a number of gendarmes, a detachment of regular infantry and several priests.

The vessels also carried a quantity of fire wood, petroleum and quicklime, for use in the cremation of the bodies of the victims of the terrible volcanic outbreak. Large quantities of disinfectants and stocks of clothing for the refugees were also shipped to St. Pierre.

The refugees had, as a rule, assembled at Le Carbet and Case Pitote, not far from St. Pierre, and, it is reported, over a thousand of them have died since the fearful stream of lava poured down Mont Pelee.

The sea for miles round was covered with the wreckage of the vessels sunk off St. Pierre at the time of the disaster, and ashore only a few trees, all bent seaward by the force of the volcanic shower, were left standing.

When nearing St. Pierre the Rubis met a number of tugs towing lighters filled with refugees.

The heat from the smoking, lava-covered ruins at St. Pierre was suffocating and the stench from the corpse-strewn streets was awful. Only a few walls were standing. The report that the hospital clock was found intact with its hands stopped at 7:30 was confirmed, as was the statement that the offices of the cable company had entirely disappeared.

On all sides were found portions of corpses, which were gathered up by the soldiers and gendarmes and burned on one of the public squares.

Not a drop of water was procurable ashore. The darkness caused by the clouds of volcanic dust shrouded the town, and continuous subterranean rumbling added to the horror of the scene.

The fort and central quarter of the town were razed to the ground and were replaced by beds of hot cinders. The iron grill work gate of the government offices alone was standing. There was no trace of the streets. Huge heaps of smoking ashes were to be seen on all sides.

At the landing place some burned and ruined walls indicated the spot where the custom house had formerly stood, and traces of the larger shops could be seen. In that neighborhood hundreds of corpses were found lying in all kinds of attitudes, showing that the victims met their death as if by a lightning stroke. Every vestige of clothing was burned away from the charred bodies, and in many cases the abdomens had been burst open by the

intense heat. Curiously enough, the features of the dead were generally calm and reposeful, although in some cases terrible fright and agony were depicted. Grim piles of bodies were stacked everywhere, showing that death had stricken them while the crowds were vainly seeking escape from the fiery deluge. On one spot a group of nine children were found locked in each others' arms.

The vaults of the Bank of Martinique, at the head of what had been the Rue de l'Hospital, were found intact. They contained 2,000,000 francs (\$400,000) in specie and other securities, which were sent here for safe-keeping.

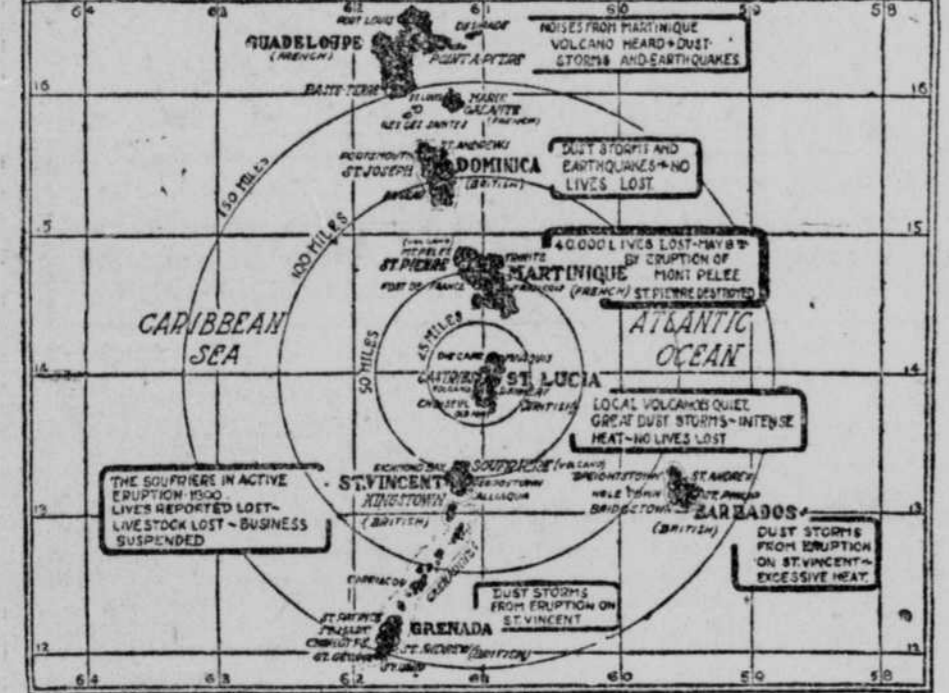
The vaults of the government treasury are now being searched in the hope that a large amount of money and other valuables deposited by the principal merchants of the city may be saved.

talked with Captain Muggah, Mr. Scott, the first officer, and others. They had been on the bridge.

"The captain was horribly burned. He had inhaled flames and wanted to jump into the sea. I tried to make him take a life preserver. The captain, who was undressed, jumped overboard and hung on to a line for a while. Then he disappeared."

"Gus" Linder, the quartermaster of the steamer, who is horribly burned and can scarcely talk, confirmed this.

Francisco Angelo, who speaks poor English, vividly described the onrush of the fire. He says the captain was a brave man, too brave to be burned to death. Angelo further asserted that the storm of fire lasted not more than five minutes. Joseph Beckles, a seaman, who is fifty years of age and is so frightfully burned that he cannot



(From the New York Herald.)

volcanic well came blasts of hot wind mingled with others ice cold.

At Le Precheur, five miles north of St. Pierre, men and women frantic to get away begged for a passage on the little steamer. We had room for none, but managed to pick up twenty-eight half dead men, women and children, who were so badly burned that they had to be lifted over the steamer's side. Of the twenty-eight, sixteen died on the boat before we reached Fort de France. Only three or four of the others are likely to live.

The condition of these unfortunates is no worse than thousands of refugees in the hills about Le Precheur. Hundreds of them will die before relief can reach them. Thousands need medical care, food, clothing, and above all, water.

children were mingled in one awful mass, arms and legs protruding as the hapless beings fell in the last struggles of death. From under one large stone the arm of a white woman protruded. Most notable was the utter silence and the awful, overpowering stench from the thousands of dead.

The fiery stream which so completely destroyed St. Pierre must have been composed of poisonous gases, which instantly suffocated every one who inhaled them, and of other gases burning furiously, for nearly all the victims had their hands covering their mouths or were in some other attitude showing that they had sought relief from suffocation. All the bodies were carbonized or roasted.

Through the middle of the old Place Berlin ran a tiny stream, the remains

## MONT GAROU, ST. VINCENT'S DEATH-DEALER.



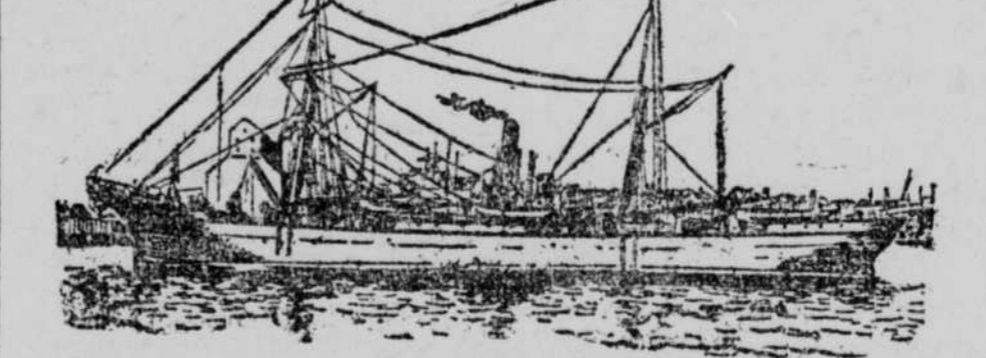
The eruption of the volcano on St. Vincent's, which already has covered a portion of the island with molten lava and killed hundreds, continues, and the inhabitants, unable to escape, are panic-stricken.

As the steamer felt its way down the west coast of the island we could see that the whole north end of the island was covered with a silver gray coating of ashes resembling snow. Furious blasts of fire, ashes and mud swept over the steamer, but finally St. Pierre was reached, or rather the spot where St. Pierre stood before that awful three minutes.

For two miles along the water front and for a half a mile back from shore to the foothills at the base of the volcano stretched the heaps of smoking ruins. Streets there were none. One

of the River Gayave. Great trees, with roots upward and scorched by fire, were strewn in every direction. Huge blocks and still hot stones were scattered about.

The completeness of the catastrophe is evident when it is stated that, so far as known at the present time, no one save a handful of survivors picked up from the wrecked vessels in the harbor by the French cruiser Suchet, escaped. Even they are unable to tell what actually happened, so crazed are they from the experiences they passed through. It is certain, however,



THE CABLE STEAMER "POUYER QUARTIER," OF HAVRE, WHICH BROUGHT 450 SURVIVORS TO PORTE-DE-FRANCE.

Nearly 4,000 of the refugees from the vicinity of the village of Le Precheur, a suburban village, were rescued by the French cruiser Suchet and the cable repair ship Pouyer-Quartier and were brought here.

As a result of his inspection, the commander of the Suchet reports that crevices and valleys are constantly forming in the northern portion of the island, where the land is in a state of perpetual change. Fortunately, that part of the country was evacuated in good time by the inhabitants, who fled to Fort de France.

Lava continues to stream down the mountain side, accompanied by terrific thunder and lightning.

The stories of the survivors added to the awful details of the particularly harrowing account of the loss of the British steamer Roraima.

C. C. Evans of Montreal and John G. Morris of New York, who are now at the military hospital of Fort de France, say the vessel arrived at 6. As eight bells was struck a frightful explosion was heard up the mountain. A cloud of fire, toppling and roaring, swept with lightning speed down the mountain side and over the town and bay. The Roraima was nearly sunk and caught fire at once. The steamer Roraima had reached St. Pierre that day with ten passengers, among whom were Mrs. Stokes and her three children, and Mrs. H. J. Ince. They say they were watching the rain of ashes, when, with a frightful roar and ter-

live, having inhaled flame, said in weak tones that he was the last man to see the captain. The captain was then trying to reach a floating mattress.

From the Italian ship Teresa Lovico several men were saved, but they are in a frightful state, except Jean Louis Prudent of St. Pierre. Although on deck and unprotected, he was little burned.

Prudent says there was first an awful noise of explosion, and then right away a cyclone of smoke and fire, but such was the poisonous, choking nature of the smoke that it burned worse than the fire. The cyclone of gas tore the masts out of ships, blew others up, and sunk some of them. Soon afterwards came a wave of fire bigger than the smoke cloud.

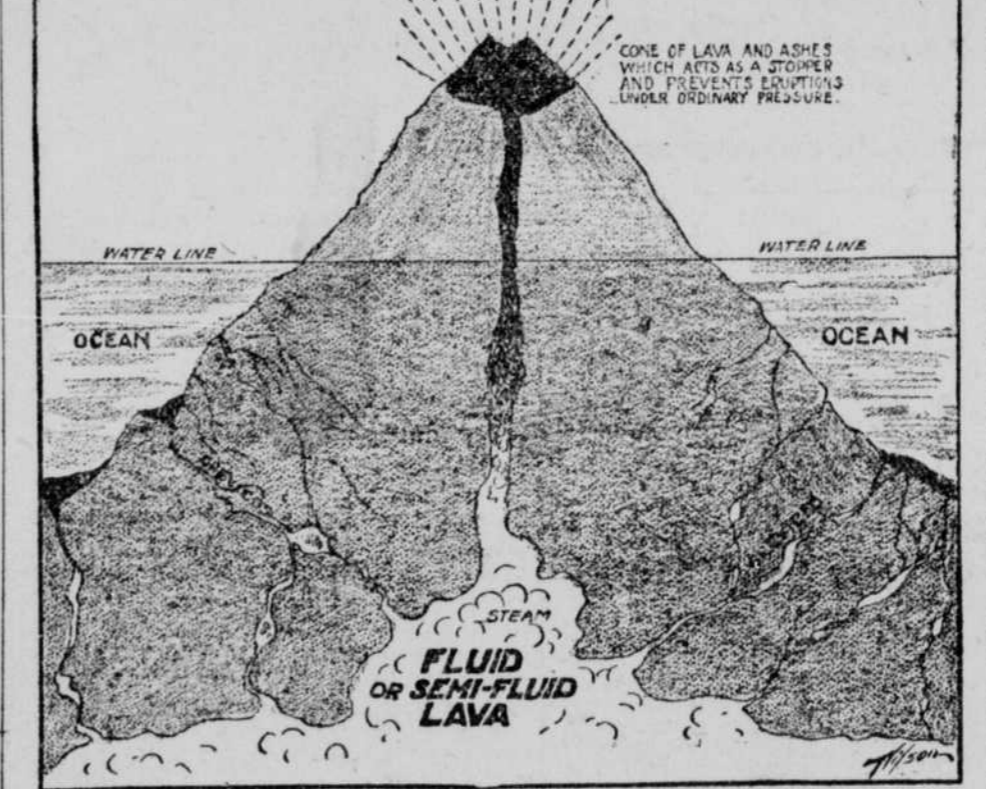
"That cloud," continued Prudent, "was bigger, it seemed, than the mountain."

"The fire burned the city everywhere at once. Near me I saw only dead men, but on shore I saw men and women rushing back and forth for an hour. They would not run long. Then came that choking smoke, and they would drop like dead flies."

"The explosion, smoke and fire all came and went in three minutes, but the city burned for three hours. Then every house was finished and nothing alive was left."

"Some men from the sinking ships got to the shore, but they were burned up there."

## HOW A VOLCANIC EXPLOSION IS CAUSED



A study of the above picture will show how a molten mass in the mountain's interior met the water and how the steam generated thereby, following the line of least resistance, blew off the top of the volcano.

ric electrical discharge, a cyclone of fire, mud and steam swept down from the crater over the town and bay, sweeping all before it and destroying the fleet of vessels at anchor off the shore. There the accounts of the catastrophe so far obtainable cease.

"I never can forget the horrid, fiery, choking whirlwind which enveloped me," said Mr. Evans. "Mr. Morris and I rushed below. We are not badly burned—not so badly as most of them. When the fire came we were going to out posts (we are engineers) to weigh anchor and get out. When we came up we found the ship afloat and fought it forward until 3 o'clock, when the Suchet came to our rescue. We were then building a raft."

"Ben" Benson, the carpenter of the Roraima, said: "I was on deck amidships, when I heard an explosion. The captain ordered me to up anchor. I got the windlass, but when the fire came I went into the forecabin and got my 'duds.' When I came out I

## LOCAL OPTION LAND LEASING

What Land Agent Says Stockmen of Western Nebraska Want.

OMAHA, Neb., May 19.—"The all-absorbing topic of discussion among thousands of stockmen in Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming and Idaho now is the question of leasing the public lands," said C. E. Wantland, who is the general agent of the Union Pacific Land company at Denver, and who came to Omaha Thursday. "The change of sentiment on this subject has been something marvelous in its extent and suddenness. Stockmen, and hundreds of them, who only yesterday were fighting bitterly every proposition faintly contemplating the leasing of these lands, are now actually advocating such a movement most enthusiastically."

"Just now the problem is how to let those stockmen who are now favorable to the leasing scheme do so, while the ones who still hold out may not be affected. For instance, in western Nebraska the stockmen are all won over and are demanding this method of handling the ranges. There are about 10,000,000 acres of public lands out there, and the stockmen wish to lease them. About half of this territory can be irrigated. Now if the western Nebraska people, whose conditions are different from the conditions in other states, can agree upon a fair plan for range control in their state, to protect their interests from destruction, why not allow them to have it?"

We think we have this plan now in the local option scheme. When I proposed this two years ago it met with a storm of protest. Now the stockmen are asking for its establishment in many places. It is a county local option land leasing plan, which is to be applied to any county whenever the secretary of the interior is satisfied that a majority of the stockmen in that county wish it to go into effect."

**THREE PERISH IN FLAMES.**

Father, Mother and Child Lost in a Conflagration.

LAUREL, Neb., May 19.—Fire broke out in the agricultural implement house of John Jacobson at about 3 o'clock in the morning and consumed the house and bowling alley belonging to Mr. Carlquist. Three persons perished in the fire and two were injured. The dead are: John Jacobson, owner of the implement house; Mrs. John Jacobson and a child of the Jacobsons.

Injured: Thomas Snyder, burned about face and hands; child of the Jacobsons, burned about face and hands.

Mr. Jacobson occupied the rooms on the second floor of his building as a dwelling, his family consisting of himself, wife and two children. Mr. Jacobson had in his employ a man named Will Snyder, who made his home with Mr. Jacobson.

Mr. Snyder escaped from the burning building with Jacobson's older child. Each was badly burned. Mr. Jacobson, wife and youngest child were apparently suffocated and lost their lives in the burning building.

**Fear of Grasshoppers.**

HARRISBURG, Neb., May 19.—Banner county has been thoroughly soaked during the past week, rains having fallen in portions of the county every day. The farmers and ranchmen are jubilant over the abundance of grass, which has never been better at this time of the year, and over the prospects for an abundant crop. Much concern is felt that the grasshoppers are going to do damage this year.

**Sack of Counterfeit Money.**

GRAND ISLAND, Neb., May 19.—While a coal car was being switched to the sugar factory, a workman found a stock in the car, which apparently had some contents. Upon opening it the man found twenty-five counterfeit dollars, of poor metal but of excellent stamp. The car is being traced with the end to secure, if possible, a clue as to the origin of the money.

**Arrest Preacher for Shooting.**

BEATRICE, Neb., May 19.—Rev. S. P. Benbrook, pastor of the Christian church at Wymore, was arrested at that place on a charge of shooting at Dr. Johnson of Wymore with intent to kill.

**Rural Delivery at Benedict.**

BENEDICT, Neb., May 19.—Postmaster Lett received official notice from the postoffice department that free rural delivery would begin at Benedict July 1.

**Difficult to Invest Funds.**

LINCOLN, Neb., May 19.—Treasurer Stuefer says he still finds it difficult to obtain bonds for the permanent educational funds of the state, even when taken on a 3 per cent basis. Notwithstanding the decline in interest rates, he declares, the demand for securities seems to keep on increasing. Mr. Stuefer, acting under authority given by the board of educational lands and funds, purchased \$50,000 of Hall county court house bonds.