ST. PIERRE'S DAY OF DOOM.

To the Last, the Light-Hearted Population Refused to Believe There Was Danger, Though the Warning Was Ample.

The special correspondent of the New York Herald, writing from St. Pierre, Martinique, says:

It is not so very long ago that I visited this poor St. Pierre—this now city of the dead. It had, I am told, undergone but few changes until the coming of that frightful day which changed it so utterly.

Where all is now aching desolation a chaos of ruined walls, blackened stumps of trees and sickening stench, there basked in summer sunshine a little city splashed through with vivid color—red tiled roofs cutting sharp lines on walls of creamy white, yellow and orange and bird's-eye blue, mingled with the green of tropic verdure. Built on a long undulation, which sloped to the sea, where it clustered in a riot of color near the shore, its suburban spots could be picked out here and there along the flanking spurs and foothills which roll from Pelee's base, that great volcanic bulk whose crest is ever shrouded in a veil of clouds.

Over the doomed city the morning of May 1 broke in miracle splendor, skies bright and blue, and foliage washed to a fresher green by a hard rain which had swept over the island the preceding night. But it was the last fair day that St. Pierre was to know.

The market place, the first section of the city to show life when a West Indian town awakes, was filling with venders and purchasers, when the first murmur of Pelee, the sleeping giant, was heard—a deep-toned, jarred growl, which instantly blanched the faces of all who heard, for those bred in the shadow of the volcano had long since learned to dread its wrath, and, growing up, these in turn had taught other generations of the malevolence that giant bulk. Startled eyes were turned to the gloomy mountain, and were reassured to see it still quiet so far as vision went, for its top was hidden in a white mist, and there was no sign of boiling lava and no fall of hurtling rocks.

Those who by chance were in the city that morning, and who by far luckier hazard were out of it before its fall, tell of how short-lived the fright was and how quickly the mercurial population regained its buoyant spirits. Some there were who looked grave when ashes, white and fine as powdered magnesia, began to sift from the great cloud which hung over Pelee's crest, but it seems that none thought to connect these myriads of floating particles with the deep, muffled rumble which had just been heard; none to trace the one to the other—the effect to the cause. Their minds were not grooved to such analysis; they were too simple, too West Indian for that. Sufficient that the rumble had gone.

St. Pierre was gay that night of May 1. The municipal band played music in the plaza, as was its wont Thursday evening. This band night was the one when youths and maidens might mingle in public, and the young gallants and mademoiselles, promenading around the square under the watchful eyes of fathers and mothers and duennas, talked lightly of Pelee and that whitening fall.

Up near Morne Rouge, abode of St. Pierre's well-to-do, there was a lawn party that evening, which carried its gayety far into the night—zitzas tinkling in the tropic air, and mantilla-draped girls dancing in the moonlight to the click of castanets.

Friday, day of the evil omen, dawned over St. Pierre. It was made sombre by a thunderstorm, which brooded over the mountains and from whose dark clouds came intermittent flashes of lightning. The nervous started at every thunderclap and anxiously asked one another if that was not Mont Pelee, while others sought to trace the blinding flashes to their source, to see if they were really the mere play of lightning or volcanic blazes from the time-worn crater, which many believed, and all hoped, was long ago extinct. Then a heavy mist settled over the city and its surroundings, and under its depressing influence the day wore itself to a close.

Saturday, May 3! Just five days to the obliteration, to death, utterly, wholesale, sudden and tragic! And yet St. Pierre went forth that day to carnival doings, local celebration in honor of something or somebody.

Facts are meager as to that one day and those following, for it must be remembered that nobody survived the horror that was so soon to come. But there were some who had spent days in the city just previous to the tragedy—some who had left it only a scant half-hour before the holocaust. Grieving for their own lost dead and with nerves unstrung by the narrowness of their own escape, it may be that their overwrought minds are coining visions now, but these tell earnestly of a column of smoke which arose, black as a pall, from Pelee's white shroud to rear its billows of crape into the form of a great upended coffin. However that may be, there is evidence that all festival gayety went when showers of pebbles began to rattle over the city, with now and then a shower of sand, of grains hot to the touch, despite their long flight through the air.

St. Pierre, it is now said, was in a more sober humor that evening than it has been within the memory of those who tell disjointedly the tale of the days that ushered in its doom. And when on the next morning—Sunday, that was—another growling note was heard from Pelee and a small river of hot, black mud, touched here and there with red, was seen to come snaking down out of the mists screening Pelee's summit, to cascade over a hundred-foot precipice and then to follow the line of least resistance until it swirled about the Guerin factory, setting that building ablaze and destroying many lives, then apprehension grew into fear and soon might have lapsed into a panic, which doubtless would have saved through flight the lives of the thousands that were soon to be sacrificed.

It was at this crisis that the hand of the government appeared. To Fort de France, the seat of local authority, had come reports of the uneasy feeling of those dwelling in St. Pierre, Martinique's commercial theater. It is thought that Gov. Mouttet honestly believed there was no cause for alarm and that a panic in St. Pierre would work disaster in many ways, interrupting commerce and injuring the whole island as well as the threatened city. He, if none other, realized that an exodus from the place would be a tacit acknowledgment of the danger that lurked in the volcano, which all in Martinique would have the world believe was long ago extinct and never to be restored to the list of still active nor yet classed with those that are dormant.

So it came about that the governor saw fit to exercise moral restraint, it not being within his province or within that of any other man to use physical force in a matter of this kind.

In St. Pierre there were some government employes, among these graybeards who had spent years in volcanic regions, and who knew something of the preliminary warnings which come from these excitable hills. When the lava streams came pouring down from Pelee these at once made hurried applications for leaves of absence. The government sought to make an example of the youngest, and in a communication to him denied the application for furlough, and said moreover that if the applicant quitted his post at the time his position would be taken from him. This man—unfortunately, names are hard to obtain now from Martinique's hysterical population—promptly decided that his life was worth more than his place and, packing up his belongings, went with his family to some point inland, just where no one seems to know.

It seems that the others were not so hardy, or were more so, according to one's way of looking at it. At all events, when the government's dictum was known all the government employes decided to remain, and as fear loves company no less than misery does, these affected to make light of the danger so as to better induce the others to remain.

Monday, May 5—Less than eighty hours, and the 30,000 lives of St. Pierre are to be blotted out as quickly as one snuffs a candle. Fear is rife among the populace the morning of this day and an unwonted silence pervades the city—the hush that precedes a great tragedy. Macaws and parrots squawk discordantly from cages, fountains tinkle merrily, seas and skies are blue, but pervading all is an air of expectancy—of dread.

Few have yet left the city, but it would now take little to turn every street into a struggling stream of humanity fleeing panic-stricken from the vicinity of that awful volcano. From tales I have heard one can easily conceive of what a trampling rush might have followed some tocsin alarm—such a mad rush for safety as theater crowds are wont to make when the cry of "fire" is heard.

But there was none in Martinique to give needed warning—not even Pelee. All that day and the next and the next the volcano smoked, and at intervals emitted clouds of ashes, finely pulverized pumice the chemists say the ashes are composed of, but the wind sent the smoke and ashes away from the city, and while the rolling clouds were seen from far-off points and while the ashes fell on the ships half a hundred miles away none in St. Pierre seems to have known that the mountain was even then pouring forth smoke and ashes.

What the residents did know was that a commission of geologists had been appointed by the government to survey Pelee and report upon it—to say whether there was danger there or not. Then, too, the governor was coming, and, moreover, his family was coming with him. Could there possibly be any danger where so eminent and so important personages as these were? Also a company of soldiers from Fort de France were coming, and while the St. Pierrans were talking of their arrival the company appeared.

It seems singular that the presence of this small band of soldiery should have inspired a misplaced confidence, but it was so, though none seems to have asked what good the soldiers could have done, or even the mightiest army have effected against volcanic Pelee.

The governor came, and with him his family arrived from Fort de France on the little steamboat Topaz. With the governor came the geologists, the wise men who were to sit in judgment and to so fatuously misjudge.

They pondered long, and then gave fatal assurance that all was well. The people read the assurances which the papers printed, drew a long breath of relief and then turned their attention to other things, to affairs of business and pleasure and all that goes to make up the indolent, happy life of the pleasure loving natives of this isle. And that night—the night of May 7—the wise men hastened back to Fort de France.

The governor and his family were to have followed the next day, the French cruiser Suchet having been directed to leave her anchorage at Fort de France at 7 o'clock for the purpose of bringing home the governor and his party.

That plan, if carried out, would have brought the cruiser to her doom, and her crew will never cease to thank their saints and bless the blundering mechanic who broke something in the engine-room as the vessel was about getting under way, which accident delayed her departure and probably saved the lives of all on board.

Wednesday night—eve of horror!

There are none left alive to tell what the city was like that night, but just around a little promontory at its southern edge nestles the little village of Carbet, a pretty town of some six or seven hundred people. And not one of them was hurt, the town having been screened by the high ridge which lay between it and St. Pierre and runs sheer to the sea.

Its northern wall was precipitous and built close up to it was the southern section of St. Pierre, a thickly populated district whose houses left barely enough room for streets, the buildings huddling close to the steep and wooded acclivity, as if seeking to escape on the other side of the ridge. The intervening distance was short. By the broad, finely graded, bridged and tunneled highway which connected city with village, one would judge that a five minutes' brisk walk would be amply sufficient to reach the one from the other.

But none sought safety by that road—at least none escaped by it. The heart-breaking pity of it all is that safety was so near—at the end of one's fingers almost. For just over the ridge the grass and palms are everywhere as green as any in the tropics to-day, while up to the very crest of its northern slope are the ineffaceable marks of ruin and disaster, as if some sea of flame had brimmed to the very crest of the ridge, to suck back again before overflowing on the other side.

So it is the the village folks of Carbet that one must turn for the last act in this horrible tragedy.

Night fell, the villagers say, with an unnatural, unearthly quiet. Not a breath of air to stir the palms fringing on the shores; not a ripple to break the mirror-like clearness of still waters. It was as if the hush of death lay everywhere. True earthquake weather, more than one of the villagers observed as they noted the oppressive stillness of the air and the strange quiet of the racked earth.

Thomas T. Prentiss, United States consul at St. Pierre, was sitting on the veranda at his home in the early hours of the following morning. A friend came driving by in a buggy.

"You had better get out of this," he called to the consul. "I am getting out, and getting out as fast as I can."

"Oh, you are just merely a little scared," Mr. Prentiss replied. "There is no need of anyone going away."

"It is better to be safe than sorry," retorted the citizen as he whipped up his team and hastened on.

It is from this man, who witnessed the disaster a short time later from a neighboring elevation, with a few who survived the wreckage in the offing, and the few who looked on the cataclysm from distant points, that the only eye-witness versions can be had.

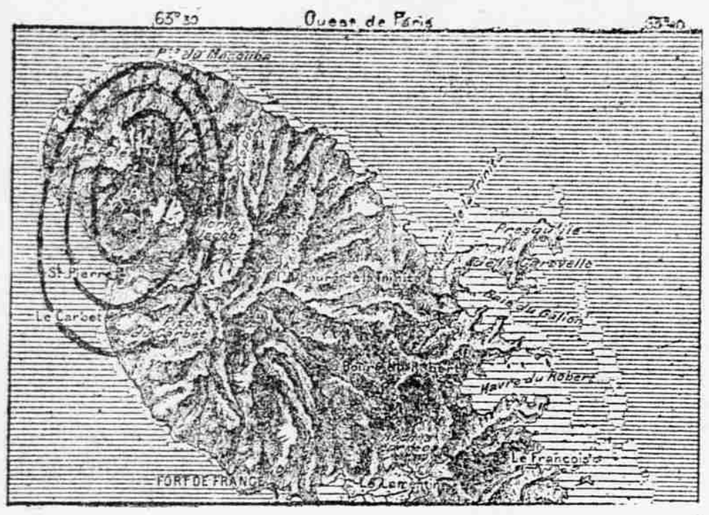
The hour of the disaster is placed at about 8 o'clock. A clerk in Fort de France called up another in St. Pierre and was talking with him at 7:55 by Fort de France time, when he heard a sudden, awful shriek, and then could hear no more.

The little that actually happened then can be briefly, very briefly told. It is known that at one minute there lay a city smiling in the summer morning; that in another it was a mass of swirling flames, with every soul of its 30,000 writhing in the throes of death. One moment and church bells were ringing joyous chimes in the ears of St. Pierre's 30,000—the next the flame-clogged bells were sobbing a requiem for 30,000 dead. One waft of morning breeze flowed over cathedral spires and domes, over facades and arches and roofs and angles of a populous and light-hearted city—the next swept a lone mass of white-hot ruins. The sun glistened one moment on sparkling fountains, green parks and fronded ponds—its next ray shone on fusing metal, blistered, flame-wrecked squares and charred stumps of trees. One day and the city was all light and color, all gayety and grace—the next its ruins looked as though they had been crusted over with twenty centuries of solitude and silence.

Prof. Robert T. Hill, United States government geologist and head of the expedition sent out by the National Geographical society, has just come in from a daring and prolonged investigation of the volcanic activity in Martinique.

Prof. Hill chartered a steamer and carefully examined the coast as far north as Port de Macouba, at the extreme edge of the island, making frequent landings. After landing at Le Precheur, five miles north of St. Pierre, he walked through an area of active volcanism to the latter place and made a minute examination of the various phenomena disclosed.

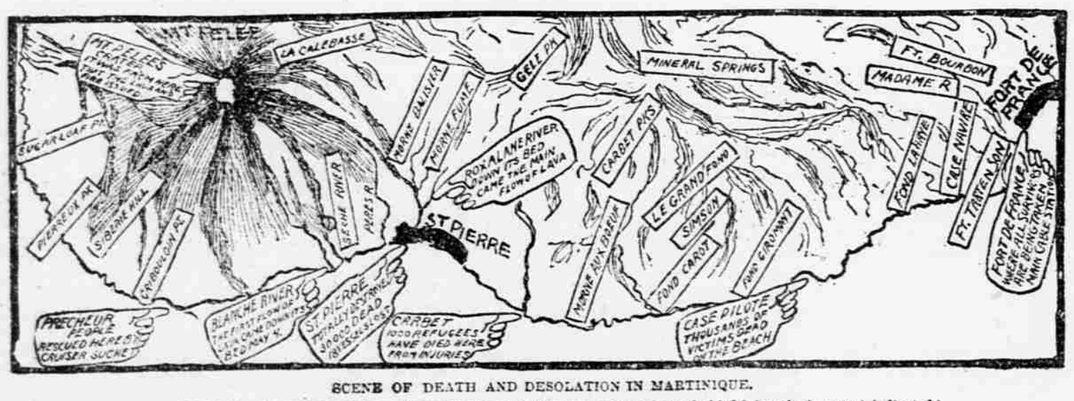
ZONES OF DESTRUCTIVENESS AT ST. PIERRE AS REPORTED BY UNITED STATES GEOLOGIST.



Professor Robert T. Hill.
(First Man to Penetrate to the Crater of Mont Pelee and Report on the Eruption.)

Governor Mouttet.
(Martinique Official Whom Scientists Hold Was Responsible for the Great Loss of Life from the Eruption of Mont Pelee.)

DIAGRAM OF VOLCANOES IN THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE.



SCENE OF DEATH AND DESOLATION IN MARTINIQUE.
(Official French government map of northwestern Martinique, with points of chief interest at present indicated.)

TERMS OF PEACE,

BRITISH EXPECT SOON TO ANNOUNCE SETTLEMENT.

NO DOUBT OF ITS CONCLUSION

Despite Balfour's Pretended Uncertainty Parliament is Sure of Plan—Cabinet Puts Fininshing Touches on the Agreement.

LONDON, May 31.—The government leader, A. J. Balfour, announced in the house of commons that he hoped to be able on Monday next to announce the result of the peace negotiations in South Africa.

Mr. Balfour added: "I cannot, however, be absolutely certain of being in a position to do so, and until the statement can be made I do not think it expedient to take up the budget."

The government leader also said: "A recent phrase, 'hung in the balance,' has been absurdly misinterpreted as referring to divisions in the cabinet on the subject of the budget. That is not a fact ,and the question is whether the house can properly be asked to discuss the budget until they know precisely where they stand in regard to the negotiations."

In spite of Mr. Balfour's pretended uncertainty there is no doubt whatever in the house of commons, or elsewhere, that a full peace settlement will be announced Monday next.

The capture of Commandant Halan, announced from Middelburg, Cape Colony, renews attention to the rebellion in Cape Colony. Commandant Malan took the Commandant Scheeper's command when the latter was captured by the British and became chief Boer commandant in Cape Colony after Commandant Kritzinger's capture. Malan, who was mortally wounded when captured by Major Colett's mounted troops, was among the irreconcilables who refused to send delegates to the peace conference at Vreeniging, Transvaal.

According to the latest uncensored correspondence from Capetown the Boers are still in constant occupation of at least twenty-two different localities in Cape Colony, having more than a score of bands of raiders, mounted and armed, and of sufficient mobility to defy successful pursuit, although the British have often swept and "cleared" every mile of the colony's territory. A correspondent reports that the "invasion is more actively aggressive than ever and rebellion is more rampant."

"The campaign against the roving Boer commandoes in Cape Colony, which has been in active progress for sixteen months, has achieved nothing beyond keeping them moving. "Any occasional success," the correspondent adds, "obtained by the seventeen British columns operating in Cape Colony is more the result of luck than of their tactics, and these unpalatable facts will continue as long as so few columns co-operate in the hustling. The inadequacy of the supply of the troops is at the root of the unsatisfactory operations."

The British cabinet was specially summoned last night and sat for a little over an hour. It is generally accepted, this morning, that the session, though brief, sufficed to put the final touches on the agreement which will terminate the war.

Spanish Are Still Sore.

PARIS, May 31.—It is announced in a dispatch to the Patrie from Madrid that Senor Sabino Arana, leader of the Biscayan nationalist party, sent a long cable message to President Roosevelt, congratulating him on the establishment of the republican government in Cuba, and that the Spanish censor suppressed the message.

Connelly Must Serve Two Years.

COLUMBUS, Neb., May 31.—A motion for a new trial in the case against Vincent Connelly of Lindsay, convicted of assault with intent to kill in the district court last week, was overruled and Judge Jamison sentenced Connelly to two years in the penitentiary.

Death for Train Robbery.

WASHINGTON, May 31.—Senator Platt of New York has introduced a bill making train robbery a felony and providing the death penalty for the offense.

Passes Silver Coinage Bill.

WASHINGTON, May 31.—The house passed the bill to increase the subsidiary silver coinage.

Herbert Gets the Appointment.

LONDON, May 31.—Hon. Michael Henry Herbert, who is nominally secretary to the British embassy at Paris, probably will be the next British ambassador to the United States, in succession to the late Lord Pauncefote. Mr. Herbert's appointment probably will not be announced until the remains of Lord Pauncefote arrive in England. The only question as to Mr. Herbert's selection is the approval of King Edward.