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The Destruction of St. Pierre.

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When we landed at Fort de France, just two weeks after the terrible catastrophe which in one blow laid low the most prosperous city, not only of Martinique, but in all the Lesser Antilles, it was difficult to realize that only sixteen miles away lay the world's greatest picture of ruin and death. Here, at Carbet's base, lay nestling the picturesque little town so dear to the heart of Josephine, Napoleon's loved but abandoned wife. And yet all was changed. The shops, filled with their gaily colored cloth, white-brimmed Panama hats and delicious fruits, were closed and locked. On the streets there was the same scene of inactivity. Here and there groups of men, both black and white, stood and in hushed whispers spoke of the fury of the volcano; grief-stricken women, dressed in the deepest mourning, silently hurried along on their way to the church, where continual services were being held for the souls of the dead and for the preservation of the living—and even the children by their frightened faces showed that they, too, were impressed and terrified by the hissing volcano to the northward. There was hardly a person in the town who did not suspect that sooner or later Fort de France would receive from Pelee's crater death and desolation; and yet there were few, comparatively, who were leaving for other islands. In Martinique lay their hopes and aspirations, and in Martinique, if need must, they would die.

Between Fort de France and the spot where once was St. Pierre the land comes down to the sea in alternating scallops and tiny valleys. Hiding from the people of Fort de France the monster head of Mt. Pelee, the two-headed Carbet rears its giant form over three thousand feet above the level of the ocean. In some ages of the past the mud flowing down Carbet's peaks formed the scallops which now end abruptly with the ocean. Dotted here and there between these monster mud banks covered with delightful verdure are, red-tiled houses surrounded by waving fields of sugar-cane. On the topmost point of each ridge there now stands a huge cross as a guard from the fury of Mt. Pelee. But even so, none but a few of the most hardy have remained in their homes outside of Fort de France since the day of the destructive eruption of Pelee—that mountain which was once the pride of the citizens of Martinique.

Two little towns are situated on the shore between Fort de France and the line of death which marks the termination southward of the zone of influence of Mt. Pelee. First is Case Navire, and then, a little further up, is Case Pilote. The latter is about seven miles from the former site of St. Pierre, but yet there are no evidences of the volcano, except that the green trees and glistening fields of sugar have now taken a grayish appearance, and instead of the customary and quaintly beautiful red roofs of the houses there is again the somber gray. Over all the land, too, in this vicinity there hangs a misty veil, and high above the hills to the southward is now seen what appears to be a monster umbrella-shaped cloud of white.

The once prosperous suburban town of Carbet marks the beginning of the scene of desolation. The change is sudden and appalling. From a land of beauty we are suddenly brought face to face with death and destruction in its most complete form. The houses and churches of Carbet are not destroyed, but are covered with many inches of ashes and volcanic dust; the palm trees and other tropical foliage bend under their weight of dust, and many of them have broken in twain; the once richly colored and sweet scented flower gardens are buried completely out of sight, and not one human soul now dares to live in Carbet. Few of its inhabitants, however, were killed, for the little town was saved from complete annihilation by its position close behind a scallop which separates it from the resting place of St. Pierre.

Only a little further along the coast and St. Pierre is before us. Now the mountain in all its terrifying glory is clearly visible, only a short distance ahead.

For over four thousand feet it rises from the sea and throws forth for many thousand feet higher massive clouds of now white and now black smoke and vapor. It seems as if some giant hand, controlled by a supernatural power, has, with one scoop, dug out near the mountain's base an immense hole with an opening only toward the sea and Mt. Pelee. In this hole there once thrived one of the most prosperous cities in all the West Indies—it was the site of St. Pierre. Now it is hard, from the distance of a mile, for one to discern that there remains anything there which bears resemblance to the works of man. A little nearer in, the land simply seemed roughened, and it was not until we had come very near to the shore that it was possible to distinguish between the place where the city had once been and the works of nature in the rear toward the mountain.

Gray was here, there and everywhere. Dust and dirt and ashes and mud, with here and there a jagged remnant of what had once been a beautiful house, a large church, or a city hall, was all that remained of St. Pierre. Not one human soul anywhere. And in the rear Mt. Pelee was lost in the clouds and smoke above. This beautiful and quaint little town was only so short a time ago all color and freshness; then the mountain was covered with giant palms interlaced so closely with green vines that it had presented to the eye one hugely beautiful mass of green. There, on that hillside just back of this joyous city, was one of the most beautiful gardens the world has ever known. Fountains were scattered here and there in the squares, throwing showers of glistening spray into the air, and moving about were gayly dressed people chattering one to the other in their *patois* French. Now there is a desolate stretch of gray merely accentuated by the jagged and grawsome ruins.

But let us enter the town. It hardly seems possible to tell in which direction and where the streets had formerly run. Houses have toppled in and scattered themselves to such an extent that it appeared as if the same giant hand which had once formed the site for St. Pierre had now swept itself over the entire city, knocking down buildings with the ease that ten pins fall when struck by the rolling ball. There must have been a wind with the fury of a terrible cyclone, for iron bars as large as a man's wrist were bent and twisted and huge trees have literally been torn from the earth and cast in every direction. Where there were no ruins to be seen it was due to the fact that they had been buried far below the rivers of mud, which had flowed down Pelee's side through this natural gateway into the city. But most surprising of all there was no lava.

Looking to the North, to the East and to the South there was one continued stretch of desolate ruin. At no place in the city was there to be seen a house with a roof, and, indeed, there was not one house with walls higher than what had been its first story. Dust and ashes were piled high against the side of these flattened walls, and huge rocks—some from the volcano and some which had formed parts of buildings—had been thrown here, there and everywhere. And in and among this monotonous wreck and ruin were the decomposing bodies of the former people of St. Pierre.

How did this city meet its doom? How was it possible that in less than five minutes St. Pierre was changed from a place of life, joy and happiness to this desolation? From an eye-witness—a priest—who lived about five kilometers inland from St. Pierre and partly around the mountain just outside of the blast of Pelee's breath, we obtained what is probably the best description of the destruction of the city that has yet been given.

At about half past seven in the morning of May 8th a dense black mass of smoke rising rapidly, rolling, twirling and twisting upward to a prodigious height, was seen coming from Pelee's crater. Suddenly the upper portion dilated like a huge sunflower on its stalk and the lower part became wrapped in a snow-white wreath of vapor, which encircled the column and then intermingled with it and appeared as black cloud and silvery masses. Through the pitchy awning above lightning played incessantly and below on the side of the mountain monster jets started upward until the whole mountain appeared to be a submerged, smoking, burn-

ing mass. There was a blinding flash, and it appeared as if some keen-edged knife had cut the stalk of the flower, and with a loud report, like the guns of the navies of the world simultaneously exploding, the black cloud swept down the mountain upon the little city. Lightning flashed and crackled, and surrounding world became as dark as the darkest night. As the cloud reached the city there was another blinding flash and a loud report, and from north to south St. Pierre burst into flames. The only fire from the volcano was that of lightning. Flames do not come from the crater.

Only a short distance from where the quays of St. Pierre were formerly situated stands the ruins of the beautiful cathedral. Only a small section of the front and rear walls are now standing, and between them are huge stones—the wreckage of the towers, the immense bell and the broken and desolated altar. The flow of mud has buried nearly everything. Here, in this wreckage, were found many bodies, and it is very probable that at the time of the eruption the church was filled with people praying to the Almighty for deliverance from the volcano. These people be it known, had been given not less than twelve days' warning of the subsequent catastrophe. The first eruption, on May 8th, left standing a large part of the cathedral, but the second eruption, on May 20th, utterly demolished it. Formerly, standing upon the apex of the roof between the towers of the cathedral, there was a large metal figure of the Christ. When the hot blast burned itself across the city the Christ fell, and is now buried many feet below the *debris*.

The principal street of St. Pierre was called Rue Victor Hugo. It is now very difficult to determine just where this street ran. What had once been shops, banks and an opera house and a city hall was now but a gray waste, on which dust and ashes had drifted in large piles covering heaps of stones that had formerly been reared in magnificent edifices. The ruins of the Hotel de Ville, the City Hall of St. Pierre, are shown in the photograph. This building stood in a great square, where once had also been fountains, gardens and statues.

In what was known as the central section of the city there is perhaps slightly less devastation than anywhere else. But even there it is next to impossible to distinguish one from another. In one of the ruins, however, I found a little crevice filled with clay pipes, not one of which had been broken in all of this ruin. Walls had tumbled and toppled around them, and the blasts of superheated gases had killed and destroyed all life for miles around, and yet these little fragile pipes had remained intact. In another place we found a nest of china-ware, with only a very few pieces cracked by the intense heat. Here also, immense rocks had fallen, but in such a way as to protect the ware.

In the southern end of the city—a suburb called Anse—there lived many of the most wealthy citizens of St. Pierre. Altho' farthest from Pelee Anse had not escaped the violence of the mountain. The wealthy and the poor suffered the like fate. Southern St. Pierre was just as desolate as northern and central. Now no one can distinguish between what was the wealthy resident section and the places where stood the hovels of the poor.

Walking over and along where once was the Rue Victor Hugo down into Anse one is most forcibly reminded of Lord Lytton's last days of Pompeii. There, where those smoldering ruins are now seen once stood the palatial residence of Diomed. A little beyond had lived Clodius and down this street had fled Glaucus, bearing in his arms the beautiful form of his beloved Ione. But from St. Pierre no human soul escaped, and the novelist of the future, who attempts to narrate and describe the horrors which befell St. Pierre on that fateful morning of May 8th, must, if he be truthful, bring a far different ending to his book than Lord Lytton gives to his famous work. The silent evidences given by the dead bodies scattered throughout the ruined city show conclusively that some of the people, at least, saw the whirlwind of black cloud, flashing lightning, burning gases and boiling mud coming toward St. Pierre from the burning hole on the summit of Pelee, but not one escaped.—The Independent.