

The Martinique Disaster.

How in the early morning of Ascension Day, May 8 (writes a correspondent of the *San Francisco Monitor*), out of the cavernous jaws of Pelee death descended with a sword of flame and reaped the richest harvest in all history, is a story which the whole world knows almost by heart already.

The furious mountain sent devastation with such awful swiftness that it is probable that this absolute annihilation was accomplished in probably less than a minute.

Of those who were in the city at the time of the catastrophe none is left alive; of those few in the ships in the harbor who escaped with their lives every one sufficiently recovered from fearful burns has told a pitifully short and disconnected story, taken up principally with personal suffering, and long since caught broadcast over the world.

Some of these injured ones are still at Fort de France. I talked with them. What they say is a repetition of an old story of a fight for life in the harbor. I will not repeat it here.

There are yet a few who viewed the awful holocaust from distant hills. The story of one of these will tell probably all that will ever be told of how a city with all its inhabitants was reduced to ashes almost within the twinkling of an eye.

Such a witness is Father Jean Alcege Roche, pastor of the church on Morne Vert, a village some five kilometres above and southeast of St. Pierre, and about ten from the crater. Morne Vert is much nearer the crater than was St. Pierre, but it was a little more out of the wind from the mountain, and was protected from its fiery output by several peaks and profound valleys.

Father Roche watched the mountain almost constantly from April 25, when its activity was first observed, to the second great eruption on May 20. He told not only of the world-startling explosion of May 8, but also of the earlier and lesser one of May 5. This is his story, all too briefly told:

Ample Warnings.

'There were rumblings and smoke every day, and dust and ashes fell on Morne Vert. Looking towards Pelee, we could see whitish clouds rise to great heights above the crater, and streams seemed to pouring down the western slopes toward Precheur and St. Philomen, villages considerably north of St. Pierre, that are now covered with mud.

'On May 5 the violence of the daily eruptions increased. That was the day when Precheur on the Riviere Blanche and the Guerin sugar factory were destroyed. On that day we saw great volumes of water, steaming hot, go tumbling down the mountain side. It leaped over all obstructions. The water courses could not confine it. It fell hissing into the sea.

'More terrifying was an avalanche of hot mud which followed the water. It, too, bounded over hills and precipices and fell over the cliffs into the sea with a great roar. It was this flood of mud that buried the sugar factory and Precheur in which 4500 persons had lived. The people, I believe, had left their houses before that had occurred.

'The night before the supreme eruption the mountain was less agitated than it had been at any time since it began troubling and rumbling. This reassured many of the residents of St. Pierre, and hundreds who had come out of the city returned.

On the Fatal Day.

A few minutes before eight o'clock in the morning, after we had finished early Mass, there was a disturbance on Mont Pelee which compelled attention. A dense column of smoke and steam shot into the air to a great height. Up, up it went for three or four miles. Then it spread out like the crown of a gigantic palm tree. Around this great blackish column crept spiral columns of white, while through the pitchy awning above lightning played incessantly.

Below the crater hundreds of jets of smoke and steam started upward until the whole mountain appeared to be a smoking, burning mass. Before the column broke there was a blinding flash of light followed by a terrific report. Then came another flash of flame and thunder and then a third; and between the second and third sheets of flame great stones shot up into the cloud of smoke, and then while the lightning played I saw a great cloud break from the mountain and roll toward us. Then I started to run for protection toward a shrine cut in the solid rock.

'We had barely turned our backs to the mountain when we felt the intense heat, and before we had gone 200 yards all were thrown to the ground. The whole world looked black. Big pieces of stone were falling all about us, and it seemed for a moment as if we all would soon be asphyxiated. We were fast losing consciousness when a breeze sprang up from the south and saved our lives. It saved Morne Vert.

'When I regained my feet I looked towards St. Pierre which, you know, lay in a hollow place at the foot of the mountain. As I looked there was a blinding flash of fire and in a moment the whole beautiful city was in flames. The flame seemed to travel like lightning over the city from north to south. But it was not lightning. It looked as if the black cloud from the mountain had been ignited as soon as it reached the city.

Saw Cathedral Burning.

'Every building in the city seemed to be on fire at once. I saw flames leaping from the cathedral. Walls were toppling and falling. As I looked upon the destruction I stood fascinated and dazed. The human mind could not grasp the full import of the impressions being received through the eyes. Stones of great size continued to fall around us for a few minutes, and finally only ashes and sand and dust.

'All this lasted but a few moments. It could not have been more than twelve or fifteen, if that long. In that time the entire

forest cloak of the mountain had been withered to dust and the sky was lurid with the glare of the burning city. Otherwise midnight darkness would have prevailed, so dense were the vapors and dust in the sky.'

This is the story of the cataclysm by an eye-witness. It agrees with the theories advanced by scientists as to the character of the phenomena. Pelee is not yet in a condition to allow of man, however learned, to penetrate the mysteries of her bosom.

According to the eminent experts with whom I have talked, however, the dominant fact that stands out in the whole story of destruction is that St. Pierre was built on a site that invited ruin. The city was built on a ledge of ground extending for a distance, north and south, of about two miles, between the sea on one side and a bluff that rose almost straight up on the other.

At the northern end of the city the houses scattered on to a plain at Pelee's base; it ran then south of it between the bluff and sea to the precipitous sides of the great hill called Morne d'Orange on the south. There were singularly few streets running longitudinally.

This city, therefore, presented a veritable gully, and when at last Pelee's breath was blown, it found 30,000 penned in a *cul de sac* from which escape was impossible. The condition of the debris, the falling of the walls in one direction, the burning of the trees more on one side than on the other, led to the conclusion, according to Professor Jagger, with whom I explored the ruins, that the havoc was wrought by an explosive volcanic tornado.

The Philippines.

THE Rome correspondents of certain English secular papers have been busy of late in reporting the result, or what they probably imagined was the result, of the American mission to the Vatican regarding affairs in the Philippines. It is very necessary to take the cable news concerning the Holy Father with the proverbial grain of salt. In view of the prominence which has been given to the Philippine question during the past week, the following extract from the *Ace Maria* will be of interest at the present time:—

When Judge Taft went as Chief Commissioner to the Philippines, one of the few restrictions placed upon him was the injunction to secularise the schools and bring them, so far as possible, into conformity with our public schools. The Philippine bishops, and even some of the first-rating 'liberal' laymen, assured Judge Taft that secularised schools would not suit the people; the invariable answer of the Commission was that the American Constitution—which follows the flag only so far as the politicians approve—frowns on a religious school system even when all the taxpayers demand it. The Mohammedans of the Jolo islands may retain their slaves and concubines, and the Koran may be taught in their schools, but the religion of Christ must be banished from the classes attended by the Catholic Filipinos. There are some excellent reflections on this subject in an article in the *Congregationalist* by Mr Emerson Christie, who, as will be seen, writes with first-hand knowledge:

'The second great difficulty we are meeting here is, fortunately, capable of being more easily remedied. I refer to the insistence of a whole Christianised population of Mindanao that their own native teachers, whom they pay out of their own pockets, shall teach their children religion in the public schools. The Filipino people in the South are a unit on this point; and since the natives pay the *maestros* or *maestras* out of their own municipal treasuries, it is an act of justice to let them have their wish. I voice the judgment of my colleagues of the teaching force in the southern islands when I say that the Civil Commission went somewhat too fast when it passed the school law forbidding, under pain of removal, any teacher in the public schools from teaching any religious practice whatever.

'We Americans have arrived at the secular school idea after hundreds of years of experience under circumstances—such as that of religious disunity—which do not exist among the Filipinos proper, who pride themselves on their Catholic unity. The bulk of the Christianised Filipinos of Mindanao, unless compelled to do so, simply will not send their children to a school where they can not learn the catechism. The state of the public schools in and around Zamboanga to-day, after an attempt to apply the secularising law has been made, fully bears out the accuracy of this statement. The eight American teachers in and around Zamboanga, the metropolis of Mindanao, have an average of only about 13 pupils apiece in actual attendance, to whom they teach only English. Under the leadership of the Spanish Jesuit priests, the natives have united to found parochial schools, where the children can obtain the religious knowledge the parents consider essential to salvation. Thus a splendid opportunity for bringing permanent peace to this distracted country, by instilling loyalty and respect for America into the children's minds, is thrown away for the sake of carrying out a doctrinaire policy for which the islands are utterly unprepared.'

Japanese Streets.

IN Japan houses are not numbered according to their sequence, but according to the order of the erection. That is to say, No. 73 may adjoin No. 1, with No. 102 on the opposite side. No. 2 is probably a mile down the street. The city of Tokio is made up of 1,330 streets, in which are 318,320 houses. These houses are divided up into 15 wards. If a street passes through more than one ward the houses are numbered according to the wards in which they are; that is, a street passing through six wards will possess six number ones. It would be like hunting for a needle in a haystack for a stranger to try to find a number in Tokio, but a jinriksha driver knows the position and number of almost every one of the houses in Tokio. He is able to do this by having made his business the one study of his life.