



La Catastrophe: The Eruption of Mount Pelee, the Worst Volcanic Disaster of the 20th Century

Alwyn Scarth

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On May 8, 1902, on the Caribbean island of Martinique, the volcano Mount Pelée loosed the most terrifying and lethal eruption of the twentieth century. In minutes, it killed 27,000 people and leveled the city of Saint-Pierre. In *La Catastrophe*, Alwyn Scarth provides a gripping day-by-day and hour-by-hour account of this devastating eruption, based primarily on chilling eyewitness accounts.

Scarth recounts how, for many days before the great eruption, a series of smaller eruptions spewed dust and ash. Then came the eruption. A blinding flash lit up the sky. A tremendous cannonade roared out that was heard in Venezuela. Then a scorching blast of superheated gas and ash shot straight down towards Saint-Pierre, racing down at hundreds of miles an hour. This infernal avalanche of dark, billowing, reddish-violet fumes, flashing lightning, ash and rocks, crashed and rolled headlong, destroying everything in its path--public buildings, private homes, the town hall, the Grand Hotel. Temperatures inside the cloud reached 450 degrees Celsius. Virtually everyone in Saint-Pierre died within minutes. Scarth tells of many lucky escapes--the ship *Topaze* left just hours before the eruption, a prisoner escaped death in solitary confinement. But these were the fortunate few. An official delegation sent later that day by the mayor of Fort-de-France reported total devastation--no quays, no trees, only shattered facades. Saint-Pierre was a smoldering ruin. In the tradition of *A Perfect Storm* and *Isaac's Storm*, but on a much larger scale, *La Catastrophe* takes readers inside the greatest volcanic eruption of the century and one of the most tragic natural disasters of all time.

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