

# THE FLOOD OF 1880.

BY J. R. MATTHEWS.

"Come all that dwell within the land,  
And humbly fall beneath the hand  
Of an offended God.

Ye youths that's furl'd in the bud,  
And aged with your hoary head;  
Fall prostrate to His nod.

Know ye that liv'd in days of yore,  
Tell us had creatures ever bore  
Disasters worse than this?  
When hundreds like the lamp of day,  
In three short hours were called away  
To meet their final doom!

The good are into glory gone,  
Celestial legions guard them on,  
Conduct them to the throne.  
Seraphic notes they now can sound,  
And glory dazzles all around,  
In upper climes they dwell.

The wicked too have met their fate,  
Caught within confusion's bait,  
To blackest midnight hurl'd.  
Where dark combustions ever roll,  
Which ever burn and know the soul,  
But never can devour."

THE FLOOD of Monday January the 12th, 1880 is a phenomenon which none can accurately describe. The oldest man in the island may remember having seen a succession of rainy days, and the overflow of 'Boyd's' Fountain and 'Olivees' rivers in his day, but further than that he cannot go; for unparalleled in the history of the West Indies is the gigantic Flood which an Allwise Creator has been pleased to visit us with. The great Fire of 1867, and the ravages of the Hurricane of 1871 dwindle into comparative insignificance when compared with the devastation and destruction entailed upon the land by this terrible calamity. The loss of human lives and property is without a parallel in the island's history. In the case of the former, whole families were swept away. Husbands and wives who were up to that moment "lovely and pleasant in their lives," alas! in "their death was not divided." The ruthless and unsparing Flood tore from

the mother's arms the helpless infant. The brother who dared to snatch from the angry and infuriated waters the beloved sister was himself engulfed by the torrent and became food for fishes. On this terrific night the friend saw with despair his friend vainly trying to stem the torrent of this relentless Flood, but could not afford the least assistance; his own life stood in jeopardy every minute. The cries of dying men and women were awful; the shrieks of the helpless infants were pitiful in the extreme. Alas! what a night! It appeared as if the Destroying Angel were commissioned to lay waste the town of Basseterre: and but for the effectual and fervent prayer of the righteous man it seemed as if the fate of our town were decreed. Like sweet incense these prayers and supplications ascended to Heaven, and the Disposer of the destinies of the human race bade the Angel to "stay his hand."

"Relentless flood! thy name shall be  
Handed to posterity;

For ages yet to come,

If ask'd of thy ability,

The answer is—dexterity,

A devastation—fierce!"

Sunday the 11th of January will be a day never to be forgotten in the annals of St. Kitts. With the exception of a few showers of rain which fell at intervals during the day it was in every sense of the word fine. Towards sunset an unusual warmth was felt compared with a few evenings preceding. This change of weather was noticed to continue up to 9 o'clock p.m., when an intense cold set in, then a light shower of rain fell, and ceased. Two hours after the rain began again, and it poured until 3 o'clock the following morning. It was during this space of time that the work of destruction began and ended. This part of the night was intensely dark. The hitherto gradual flow of water in the streets was now augmented by the overflowing of Boyd's Fountain and Olivees rivers, the former passing through Monkey Hill, actually inundated a portion of College Estate, the property of S. A. Wade, Esquire; whilst the latter running thro' Shadwell's Estate, the property of the Hon'ble T. Berkeley, being assisted by a small tributary running from Milliken and Mardenbro, overwhelmed and literally destroyed its crops. It has been suggested that

a water-spout was the prime cause of this devastating Flood; and it would seem so when looking at the hills adjacent to the town. If such truly was the case, then this destructive phenomenon was of a giant magnitude, for looking at the furrows and rents it made on Monkey Hill and Olivees mountain it is easy to conjecture that it was more than a mile in extent. The writer of this pamphlet is one of the many that have endorsed the theory of the water-spout as being the prime cause of this overwhelming calamity.

Passing from College Estate we enter Basseterre on the North side. Here at College Street we behold a general sweep. The observer is bewildered as he gazes on the surrounding scene. Protective walls and guardian breakwaters, which had hitherto effected the intention for which they were built for generations past, have now given way to this impetuous and angry torrent which seemed to have been bent on carrying everything before it. The premises of Dr. A. Boon, and those above and below them, are now actually a Sahara, and desert of sand. Here at College Street apparently is the greatest amount of destruction. It was here that that truly christian man, David Taylor, his wife, mother-in-law, and nine children perished! Of them it can truly be said "they were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in death they were not divided." Collecting his family around him, this pious man offered up a prayer to God, in the act of doing which the upper storey of his house was washed away, and himself and family were deluged by the angry waters which inundated the walls beneath. Poor man! Frank Burgundy, too, another devoted and pious Christian, with his wife and seven children were washed away by this unparalleled Flood. Mrs. Walters and children, and a long list of other names, all, all were engulfed at this portion of the town, and gone to their last account: and with the palm of Sainthood, having finished their "Pilgrims Progress" here, we trust have reached the portals of the city that has foundation: whose builder and maker is God.

"They are gone to that bright city,  
Where the towers of crystal shine;  
And the walls are all of jasper,  
Built by workmanship divine."

From College Street we will retrace our steps and

visit King's Ground. Here we find enough to arouse our pity and commiseration. The water coming by the way of Springfield, and joining with the stream from Olivees river, crossed through the premises of Mr. C. Evelyn carrying destruction and death with it in this locality. The misery and wretchedness entailed by the Flood on King's Ground will hardly be retrieved. In a word the desolation here is rampant. Once the hot bed of vice, King's Ground is now the scene of the greatest confusion and woe. With tremendous velocity the waters ran towards the sea, bearing on its bosom huge trees, massive rocks, large houses, and small huts. By the impetuosity of the furious torrent; the west wall of the Market was thrown down, and the Slaughter house and another building (all new) were partially dismantled. The houses of Lazarus Tittley and Samuel R. Carey became next the objects of assault. The former house was carried from its foundation a considerable distance down the stream, whilst the latter cannot discover the smallest fragment of his. Mrs. Carey and her daughter-in-law were carried away as the husband and father was preparing to seek shelter with them among the neighbours. When the danger of this night became but too evident, Carey desired his wife and daughter to dress; that being done they were just on the eve of leaving the house when it fell and separated the husband from the wife and child for life. This poor man heard the piteous moans of his daughter as she floated down the stream, but could not afford the least help. It was the Providence of Almighty God which saved him from the same fate.

" Swift came the mighty torrent down,  
 No barrier could impede  
 Its progress towards our little Town,  
 Such was its fearful speed !

The streets and lanes were soon engulf'd  
 By a broad water-sheet;  
 Surrounding Nature was convuls'd,  
 At Jove's Majestic feet."

The house of Mrs. Ramsay at the foot of King's Ground was washed away, and she found a watery grave. John Thomas Croke, Betsey Beard, Judith Thomas, and daughter, are numbered among the dead of King's Ground. Croke had just succeeded in res-

ening a friend from the fury of the water, when he missed his footing and was borne away by the angry Flood. On the other side of the Gut Market the scene was appalling. The house of Mrs. Elizabeth Somersall, which had previously defied the waters of former days, gave way, and her loss could be estimated at hundreds of pounds. Herself and sons had a very narrow escape. Mrs. Joseph Parris, over the other side of the Gut, lost considerably.

We will now traverse the town eastward to meet the Temple, a densely populated locality. In our way the eye is arrested every step by the magnitude of the catastrophe. The stores of W. A. Cook, Esqr., were partially destroyed. The water entered his warehouse cellar and damaged his goods to an enormous extent. M. Lagois suffered materially in this calamity. The premises of Mr. Mondesire were literally flooded. So also are those of Messrs. Wade & Abbott. And now we arrive at the Temple. It would appear that the waters from College Street forced its way from Dr. A. Boon to the Wesleyan Mission House, and crossing over the Victoria Road began its work of destruction to the north of Mr. MacNish, whose premises were nearly embedded in the sand. The water in his cellars was more than six feet deep. His loss is immense. Here Ralph Sheppard and family, Mrs. Phillip and three children lost their lives in their endeavours to escape the fury of the element. The scene in this locality is heart-rending in the extreme. Pursuing our way eastward, and turning to the right we gain Pall Mall Square. What is left of this delightful spot is now indescribable. A desert of sand tells the story for itself; and from the number of dead bodies found there, one will conjecture that many of the unfortunates were making for the Court House for refuge, but were overpowered by the velocity of the water and perished. Glancing round-about we see the Business premises of G. W. Bennett & Co., almost covered with sand. The loss of this Establishment is estimated at £2,000. In going further southward we reach the Bay. Here the *debris* of the Flood were littered in reckless profusion. Huddled together in the mud we observed hogsheads of coals, boxes, puncheons, barrels, and other articles of merchandize. The Treasury buildings, the two wharves, the premises of Mr.

Wattley, and Brass Castle, paid dearly for the resistance they offered to the mighty water! The very sea receded; and in the place where large schooners considered themselves secure from a "South-wester," sand, stones, large trees &c., brought from the mountains, are now securely stranded, and the heterogeneous accumulation of property are all embedded here, as well, it is believed, as the bodies of most of those whose names are among the missing. Here they are for the present. Here they will remain

"Till the storm shall unchain them  
From out their dark cave,  
And break the repose of  
The soul and the wave."

The Religion inculcated by us in our youthful days teaches us to believe that "God in the midst of wrath remembers mercy." The truth of this realized itself in the case of poor Margaret Vanderpool. This woman with her son, a boy of 13 years, lived on the Bay, at the foot of King's Ground. Amid the fury of the Flood her house, with herself and this little urchin, was washed away. The little boy, who had been taught to swim by his little comrades in Irish Town, secured a door which was passing by and brought it to his Mother, and keeping pace with her both were drifted past Old Road, when the Mother upon making a signal as she was passing, was rescued by James Bristol, and others at a distance of four or five miles from land. Being rescued she told them the story of her poor son George who was so instrumental in saving her.

"The sad affecting tale she told,  
A tear from many drew,  
And its simplicity was such,  
That all believed it true."

Bristol again impelled by philanthropic motives, sallied forth to the rescue of this little boy from the jaws of the angry waves. Onward he pulled his little boat until at length he espied him. He was almost dead; poor fellow! On being taken into the boat his first inquiry was for his Mamma. Bristol did not know who his Mamma was until he described her as a black woman who was *enciante*. There was no doubt now as to Margaret Vanderpool being the mother. Old Road was reached and amid sobs and cries the

beholders witnessed the re-union of mother and son. Two days after the mother gave birth to a child (girl) and both are up to the present doing well. Such was the wonder-working Providence of Him

“ Who plants his footsteps in the sea,  
And rides upon the storm.”

Many other cases of Providential deliverances could be cited, but our space forbids. On the two succeeding days 17 dead bodies were found in the island of St. Eustatius, which were ordered to receive Christian burial by the Governor of that place.

“ We weep not that a foreign shore,  
Received their mortal frame ;  
The Christians home is every where ;  
Their God is still the same.”

We have within a limited compass given our readers an idea of the magnitude of this dire calamity so we must now hasten to a close: in doing which we will not fail to express our heartfelt gratitude in praise of Mr. F. S. Wigley, Police Magistrate of Basseterre, Inspector Thom, Mr. Stevens, of the Treasury Department, Archdeacon Gibbs, Dr. Branch, and Mr. Kortright, S.P.W., for the indefatigable zeal and untiring energy they displayed in searching out and burying the dead. Regardless of self, these patriots were foremost, whilst in many cases relations shrunk from the decaying corpses of kindred and friends. Emmanuel Smith, Abraham Daniel, Elisha Thomas, and George Forbes, they too deserve the thanks of the entire community for the labour they performed in handling the decomposed corpses of those who were found later on. These men together with the gentlemen above-named were here, there, and everywhere, rendering help, and we are sure that the community will accord to them the tribute due to their exertions.

Such, dear reader, is a feeble description of the Flood of January, 1880. Language fails to depict in glowing terms the stupendous magnitude and vast extent of this dire calamity. The wretchedness and misery it has left behind will be felt by generations yet unborn. Our fathers have told us, and we ourselves have seen some of the mighty workings of “ Him who fills immensity and dwells in space unapproachable ;” but alas ! what they and we have seen sinks into

insignificance when compared to the ravages of this destructive column of water. This surely is one of the signs of the times. This certainly is one of the fulfillments of the prophetic Scriptures relative to the latter day. Do we not hear of wars and rumours of wars in Continental Europe now a days? Is not Great Britain, Russia, Austria, and Germany preparing themselves for a coming strife? Was not a famine in India a few months ago? Do not the Scriptures say plainly that these things "must be" the forerunners of the last judgment?

"Hark! what wakens up the nations,  
Gog and Magog to the fray,  
Hark! what soundeth—'tis Creation;  
Groaning for its latter day!"

We will conclude these pages by reminding our readers that notwithstanding in almost every era of man's history "the wrath of God" in some degree or other has been poured out on nations and individuals; yet we are told by the Baptist, that there is "a wrath to come," of which he warned the Jewish nation in his day. Sooner or later that wrath may overtake us. Let us therefore whilst there is time and opportunity "put off the works of darkness and put on the whole armour of light," for "Our God is a consuming fire."

---

Printed at the "Advertiser" Office, Fort Street, Basseterre,  
St. Kitts, by RICHARD CABLE.

1880.