

Killed in Niagara's Weird "Cave of the Winds"

The Unique Question Now Before the Courts as to Whether the Appalling Death of a Father and Mother Crushed by Rocks Between the Cliffs and the Colossal Curtain of the Falls Was Man's

Negligence or "An Act of God"

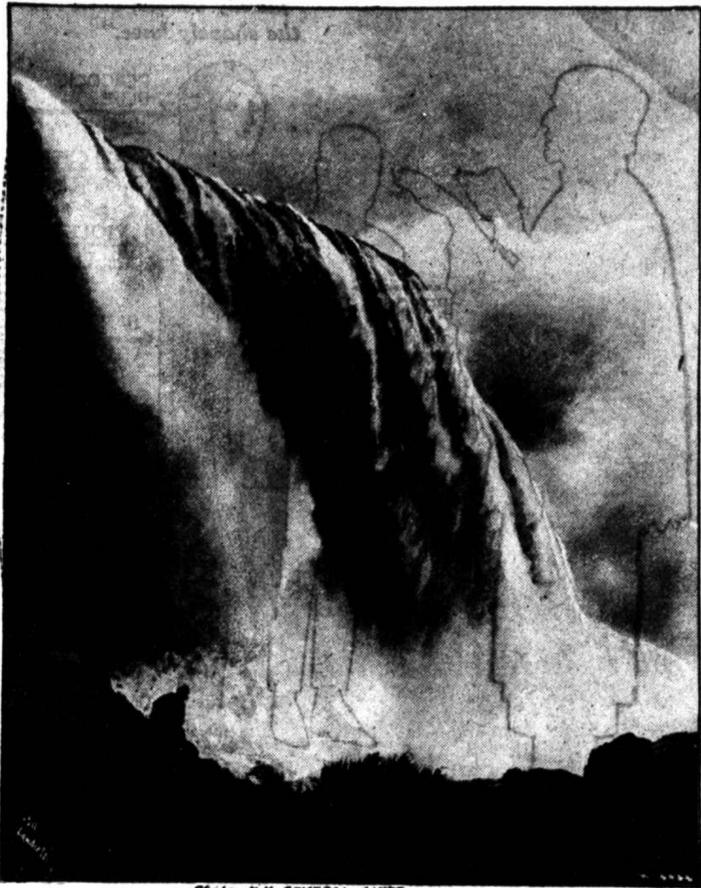


Photo N.Y. CENTRAL LINES.

The Mighty Breast of Niagara Falls, Behind Which is the "Cave of the Winds."

HIDDEN in a mass of legal verbiage in the papers filed by Joseph C. Hartman in his suit against the management of the Cave of the Winds at Niagara Falls is the story of one of the most peculiar and terrifying accidents in years. Just about a year ago Hartman's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Hartman, of Brooklyn, were buried under an avalanche of rock in the famous cave, and died a death as fearful as the mind of man can conceive. Joseph Hartman, as administrator, has filed two actions in the Brooklyn Supreme Court, asking \$50,000 for the death of his father and \$25,000 for the death of his mother.

Harold O. Wright, the concessionaire who operates the Cave of the Winds, is defendant in the suit. His defense, thus far, is that he is not the responsible party to any accident of this nature in the Cave—that he merely rents dressing rooms and waterproof clothing and provides the guides for the trip. Anyone, according to his defense, may enter the Cave without paying him a fee.

But, as in many "negligence" cases, the question will undoubtedly arise during the trial as to whether this accident was or was not "an act of God."

"An act of God," in legal phraseology, means simply that something happened which no human agency could have foretold or prevented or guarded against.

Could Wright, or any other person, have foretold the rock slide; if so, could he have prevented it? Could he have known so definitely that a slide was impending that he should have closed the Cave to tourists? These are some of the questions that a jury in the Hartman suit will have to consider.

The setting of the tragedy, which took the lives of three persons and injured two others, is one of the most awe-inspiring in the world.

For the cave, so called, is in reality nothing but a narrow ledge of slippery rock along the face of the cliff under the Falls.

Under the Falls! A sheet of water twenty feet thick arching overhead to fall with a force that crumbles granite hundreds of feet below. A slimy wall of rock on one side, the living curtain of water on the other; a narrow, tortuous footing and frail bridges over pointing fingers of rock below. A thunderous roar, reverberating so loudly that shouts are muffled to whispers. A sombre gloom, in which swirl clouds of mist, writhing like the serpents of Niflheim.

It was here that death overtook the Hartmans. In the very noontime of life, with everything to live for, just at the beginning of a hard-earned leisure, they were crushed to death.

For it was on their long-deferred honeymoon that the blow fell. They had worked hard, had seen their sons grow to manhood, had saved to buy their home in Brooklyn, and then, at the earnest entreaties of the sons, had consented to take a vacation. All their married life they had talked of this outing; when they were married it was customary that honeymoon tours include Niagara Falls. They had always wanted to follow the fashion of their youth.

One of their first trips at Niagara had been that to the "Cave of the Winds." They were members of a party of one hundred, led by a guide. Through the roaring mist they went, shrouded in oilskins, for the atmosphere of the cave is that of a cloud. The Hartmans were well toward the van of the little procession as they filed into the mouth of the cave and disappeared in the gloom. Robinson, the guide, was leading, followed by Frank R. Haehling, of Detroit, and his wife; T. W. Lee, of Pittsburgh, and his fiancée, Miss Clara M. Faust. Then came the Hartmans and after them the rest of the party.

Robinson had just crossed the fourth bridge leading to what is known as the middle stairway when an overhanging mass of shale rock gave way. The noise of the Falls smothered that of the rock, and Robinson had no intimation of danger until he heard Lee cry out. He turned to see Miss Faust torn from Lee's grasp and hurled to the rocks below. Mr. and Mrs. Hartman, in the middle of the bridge, fell with it and were buried under the rock. Lee and Haehling, severely injured, escaped death by a miracle.

The mass of rock, of course, was loosened by the action of the Falls, which is slowly—very slowly—wearing away the ledges and is imperceptibly receding.

It had taken thousands of years for the Falls to wear away that mass of rock. But those thousands of years came to an end at the very instant when the Hartmans were on the fatal spot. Thousands of years, a certain number of days, a few minutes and fractions of seconds.

What are a few seconds to thousands of years? Yet a few seconds sooner or later and three lives would not have been lost. The site of the bridge was cut off. The bodies were recovered by members of the crew of the Maid of the Mist, who rowed under the Falls and delved in the shattered rock.

And so death came to them—not on a mountain peak, nor in the clean sea, nor even in a city street. They died trapped in a cave, as did their ancestors when the world was young.

It is precisely this fear, inherited through the ages, that makes death underground so terrifying. It is the subconscious mem-



Diagram Showing How the Hartmans and Their Unfortunate Fellow Tourists Were Dashed to Death by a Fall of Rocks from the Back of the Cave.

ory of days when a rock-slide blocked up the mouth of a cave home, like the fear of falling off a tree, that haunts our dreams. Dreams of smothering, dreams of falling—glimpses both in the life of cave-dwellers and tree-men.

The lure of terror—call it adventure—the day dream of the perils that our ancestors endured, is what brings people to places like the Cave of the Winds; makes others climb difficult mountains and cling, fly-like, to the walls of the Grand Canyon and descend the craters of volcanoes. The lure of terror—the daring that makes children climb fences and slide down cellar doors and leads college presidents to death in the Canadian Rockies.

Foolish? But what would the world be without it? The allure of the Cave of the Winds may be called standardized. Thousands have passed through it unharmed. Thousands more will brave it unscathed.

Yet all the elements of danger and the thrilling phenomena of fear are there. There are other spots in the world where the elements are different and, superficially, perhaps more dangerous.

The Grand Canyon, for instance, with its Bright Angel trail, along which the sure-footed mules wend their way, carrying tourists who would gasp if they had the breath. This is the thrill of great height of precipitous cliffs, their brink only a foot away.

So with mountain peaks—the arduous climb over slippery rocks, through eternal snow, over deep precipices floored with jagged rock. It is not the few moments at the very pinnacle that reward the mountaineer, nor, though he may think it, the knowledge that he, of all mankind, is the first to reach the summit. It is the subconscious realization that he has defied Nature, defeated her or cheated her, has eluded fate. It is the thrill of victory.

But there would be no thrill if there were no danger!

On occasion the lake of fire in the volcano, Kilauea, in the Hawaiian Islands, can be one of the most terrifying places in the world. Many tourists make the pilgrimage over the barren, treeless, wind-swept slopes of Mauna Loa, through the lava, fog and rain, to the Volcano House, only to find that the crater has been inactive for months and gives no signs of a return to life.

Yet the very next day Pele, the Fire Goddess, may flare out in wrath.

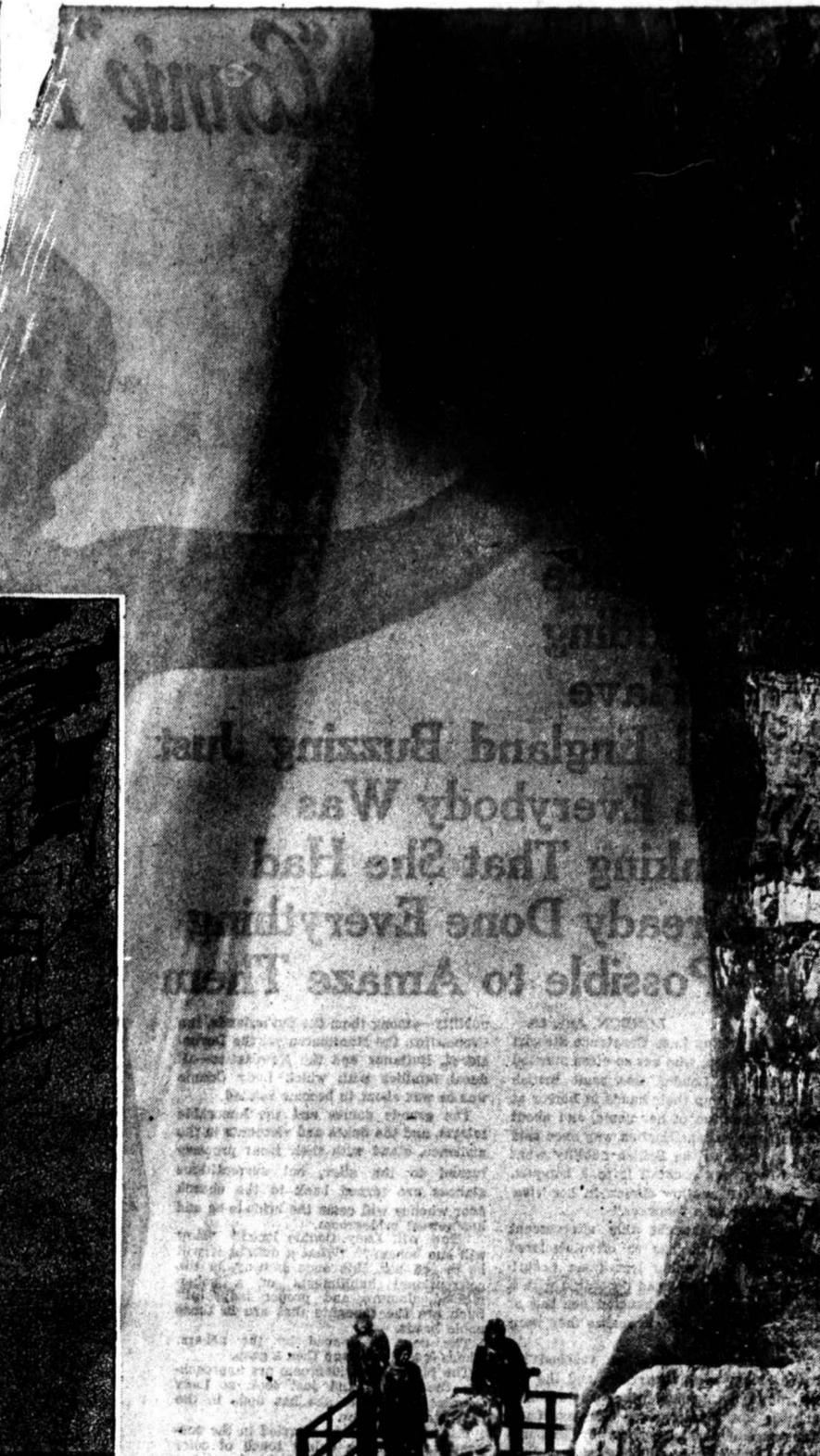
One of the best accounts of Kilauea in action is that of Major Wilfred Illingham, a British officer, who visited the volcano some years before American annexation of the islands.

"Imagine our disappointment," he writes, after having related that the volcano was inactive and was not expected to resume for some time, "to be told that Pele was sleeping and would not wake for some months, perhaps. D'Arcy argued in favor of turning back, to return at some more favorable time. But we determined to visit the crater, at least, now that we had won to the summit.

"Therefore, after a short rest, we set forth, D'Arcy and myself in the van, and the others strung out behind, with here and there a native carrier. The going was exceedingly difficult, though the footing was firmer than one should have expected, and our route was so circuitous, like that of goats on a mountainside, that when one looked up, after an hour's steady walking, it was almost startling to find the rim of the crater which seemed but a few feet overhead a crescent against the sky.

"On we went, until what seemed a stone's throw from the lake itself. We had halted to rest—indeed, we were expressing our disappointment in the lack of zest which had thus far attended the expedition—when suddenly there was a loud report, exactly like that of a battery of howitzers, and slow, oily-looking bubbles were visible on the surface of the lake. Pele had come to life! The old girl was greeting us.

"D'Arcy was tremendously cheered. He gave a loud huzzah and rushed at the double toward the lake. It was as much as



The Entrance to the Weird Cave of the Winds, Into Which Tourists Penetrate Behind the Wall of Water of Niagara Falls. The King and Queen of Belgium Are Shown Emerging from It.



we could do to drag him back, for we now realized that we were in for it and must make our retreat as quickly as possible. Steam was rising toward us, the bubbles of lava were heaving higher. I must record here that I had a curious apprehension lest one of these bubbles burst. Undoubtedly they burst, but it was in my mind that this would be a catastrophe which would annihilate us.

"As we fled to the rim of the crater we came across a native whose name sounded like Ouley, who, it appeared, had straggled from our ranks some time before, had wandered nearer the lake than we, and had been caught by the upheaval. We carried him with us and ultimately his life was saved. He had not been touched by lava, nor had the live steam stricken him. His hurts were all from heat alone.

"But what a curious heat! Blood oozed from him as from a scalded cat, so deeply was he burned. Yet the smock or shirt which formed his single garment was unscorched. Nor was his hair the least bit frizzled. There, under the untouched shirt, were great gaping burns, from which blood flowed copiously.

"The rest of us suffered mostly from the air, which was filled with red-hot dust or

fine particles. If the atmosphere had been, but slightly more impregnated with this dust we should no doubt have perished."

Thus the Major! Death would be terrible in the bowels of Kilauea. So is death terrible in such a mountain crevice as that in which the president of Purdue University recently met his fate.

But imagine death in the cauldron of the Cave of the Winds! The smothering mists, the roar of the Falls, the slimy rock wall closing in on one side and the sheet of rushing water on the other. A trembling, spidery bridge, spanning a sheer drop to jagged rocks.

And then, with the terror of thousands of years surging up to thrill the descendants of cave-dwellers, the tale of a geological epoch is completed, and tons of rock crash down, splintering away the bridge, tearing apart the young lovers, burying side by side, the old.