

(Dec

EXTRACTS FROM A LETTER TO A GENTLEMAN IN LEXINGTON, FROM HIS FRIEND AT N. MADRID (O. L.) DATED 16TH DEC. 1811

About two o'clock this morning we were awakened by a most tremendous noise, while the house danced about, and seemed as if it would fall on our heads. I soon conjectured the cause of our trouble, and cried out it was an Earthquake, and for the family to leave the house, which we found very difficult to do, owing to its rolling and jostling about. The shock was soon over, and no injury was sustained, except the loss of the chimney, and the exposure of my family to the cold of the night. At the time of this shock the heavens were very clear and serene, not a breath of air flirting: but in five minutes it became very dark, and a vapour which seemed to impregnate the atmosphere, had a disagreeable smell and produced a difficulty of respiration. I knew not how to account for this at the time, but when I saw in the morning the situation of my neighbor's houses, all of them more or less injured, I attributed it to the dust and fut &c. which arose from their fall. The darkness continued until day-break; during this time we had eight more shocks, none of them so violent as the first.

At half past six o'clock in the morning it cleared up, and believing the danger over I left home, to see what injury had been experienced by my neighbors. A few minutes after my departure there was another shock, extremely violent - I hurried home as fast as I could, but the agitation of the earth was so great that it was with much difficulty I kept my balance - The motion of the earth was about twelve inches to and fro. I cannot give an accurate description of this moment; the earth seemed convulsed - the houses shook very much - chimnies falling in every direction. The loud hoarse roaring which attended the Earthquake, together with the cries, screams, and yells of the people, seems still ringing in my ears.

6:30 event

Fifteen minutes after 7 o'clock we had another shock. This was the most severe one we have yet had - the darkness returned and the noise was remarkably loud. The first motions of the earth were similar to the preceeding shocks, but before it receded we rebounded up and down, and it was with difficulty we kept our seats. At this instant I expected a dreadful catastrophe - the uproar among the people heightened the coloring of the picture. - the screams and yells were heard at a great distance.

7:15 shocks

One gentleman, from whose learning I expected a more confident account, says, that the convulsions are produced by the world and the moon coming in contact and the frequent repetition of the shocks is owing to their rebounding. The appearance of the moon yesterday evening has knocked his system as low as the Earthquake has levelled my chimnies. Another person, with a very serious face, told me that when he was ousted from his bed, he was verily afraid the day of judgment had arrived until he reflected that the day of judgment could not come in the night.

cause - world + moon coming into contact? "Judgment Day"

Tuesday 17th - I never before thought the passion of fear so strong as I find it here among the people. It is really

Gentleman in Lexington (Cont'd)

diverting, or would be so to a disinterested observer, to see the rueful faces of the different persons that present themselves at my tent - some so agitated that they cannot walk. Several men I am informed, on the night of the first shock deserted their families, and have not been heard of since. Encampments are formed of those that remain in the open fields of 50 and 100 persons each.

Thursday, December 24th. -The shocks still continue - we have had eight since Saturday - some of them very severe, but not sufficiently so to do much further injury, I has heard of no lives being lost - several persons are wounded. This day I have heard from the little Praire a settlement on the bank of the Mississippi, about 30 miles below this place, there the scene has been dreadful indeed - the face of the country has been entirely changed - Large lakes have been raised and become dry land - fields have been converted into pools of water. Capt. George Ruddell, a worthy and respectable old gentleman, and who has been the father of that neighborhood, made good his retreat to this place, with about 200 souls. He informs me that no material injury was sustained from the first shock - when the 10th shock occurred he was standing in his own yard, situated on the bank of the Bayou of the Big Lake, the bank gave way, and sunk down about 30 yards from the water's and as he could see up and down the stream. It upset his mill and one end of his dwelling house sunk down considerably; the surface on the opposite side of the bayou, which before was a swamp, became dry land; the side he was on became lower. His family at this time were running away from the house towards the woods; a large crack in the ground prevented their retreat into the open field. They had just assembled together when the eleventh shock came on after which there was perhaps not a square acre of ground unbroken in the neighborhood, and about 15 minutes after this shock the water rose round waist deep - The old gentleman in leading his family, endeavoring to find higher land, would sometimes be precipitated headlong into one of those cracks in the earth which were concealed from the eye by the muddy water through which they were wading. As they proceeded the earth continued to burst open, and mud, water, and stone coal were thrown up the distance of thirty yards - frequently trees of a large size were split open 15 or 20 feet up. After wading 8 miles, he came to dry land.

Little Praire

I have heard of no white person being lost as yet - Seven Indians were swallowed up; one of them escaped; he says he was taken into the ground the depth of two trees in length; that the water came under him and threw him out again - he had to wade and swim four miles before he reached dry land. The Indian says the Shawanoe Prophet has caused the earthquake, to destroy the whites.

} reference to Prophet

Saturday 28th Dec. - We have had a few more feeble shocks, in all sixty seven.

Gentleman in Lexington (Cont'd)

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