Mr. A. N. Dillard's Account
(Joint Collection - see below)

(Dec)

It was on the night of the 16th of December, 1811, that the first shock occurred. The wather had been warm and pleasant, and the air was filled with that peculiar haze characteristic of the Indian Summer, except that it was more damp. About midnight, while the French, who constituted the bulk of the population at New Madrid, were engaged in dancing and frolicking, the first shock came on, and was of sufficient violence to shake down many of the houses and fences. The greatest consternation prevailed. The entire population rushed into the open air; and there, in the midnight darkness, and upon the rocking earth, Protestant and Catholic, side by side,

"knelt down,
And offere to the Mightiest"

solemn supplication; - for, in that fearful hour, human aid was unavailing.

The shocks extended over a period of twenty or thirty months. Sometimes, they would come on gradually, and finally culminate; again, they would come without premonition, and in terrific force, and gradually subside.

In, every instance the motion was propagated from the west or southwest. Fissures would be formed, six hundred and even seven hundred feet in length, and twenty or thirty feet in breadth, through which water and sand would sput out to the height of forty feet. There issued no burning flames, but flashes such as result from the explosion of gas, or from the passage of the electrical fluid from one cloud to another. I have seen oak trees, which would be split in the center and forty feet up the trunk, one part standing on one side of the fissure, and the other part on the other; and trees are now standing which have been cleft in this manner.

My grandfather had received a boat-load of castings from Pittsburgh, which were stored in his cellar. During one of the shocks, the ground opened immediately under the house, and they were swallowed up, and no trace of them was afterwards obtained.

castings "swallowed up"

I regard the region as still subject to these agitations. A few years ago I saw the effects sufficiently violent to shake the bark off the trees, and to sway their tops to and fro.

The region of the St. Francis is peculiar. I have trapped there for thrity years. There is a great deal of sunken land, caused by the earthquakes of 1811. There are large trees of walnut, white oak, and mulberry, such as grow on high land, which are now seen submerged ten and twenty feet beneath the water. In some of the lakes, I have seen cypresses so far beneath the surface, that, with a canoe, I have paddled among the branches. Previous to the earthquakes, keelboats used to come up the St. Francis River, and pass into the

Mississippi, at a point three miles below New Madrid. The bayou is now high ground.

Comments

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