

## THE EARTHQUAKE.

*Extracts from a letter to a gentleman in Lexington, from his friend at New Madrid, (U. L.) dated 16th December, 1811.*

"About 2 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 stirring: 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 neighbours' houses, all of them more or less injured, I attributed it to the dust and sut, &c. which arose from their fall. The darkness continued till 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 my neighbours had sustained. 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 you an accurate description of this moment; the earth seemed convulsed—the houses shook very much—chimnies falling in every direction. The loud hoarse roarings which attended the earthquake, together with the cries, screams and yells of the people seem still ringing in my ears.

"Fifteen minutes after seven 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 preceding shocks, but before it ceased 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 colouring of the picture—the screams and yells were heard at a great distance.

"One gentleman, from whose learning I expected a more consistent account, says that the convulsions are produced by this 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 quake 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, and thought the Day of Judgment had arrived, until he reflected that the Day of Judgment could not come in the night.

"Tuesday, 17th—I never before thought the passion of fear, so strong, as I find it here among the people. It is really 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 speak—others cannot hold their tongues—some cannot set still, but must be in constant motion, whilst others 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 in each.

"Tuesday, Dec. 24th.—The shocks still continue—we have had eight since Saturday—some of them very severe, but not sufficiently so to do much additional injury. I have heard of no lives being lost—several persons are wounded. This day I have heard from the Little Prairie, a settlement on the bank of the river 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, and many 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 shocks—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 edge, and as far 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 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

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had just assembled together, when the 11th shock came on, after which there was not perhaps a square acre of ground unbroken in the neighbourhood, and in about 15 minutes after this shock the water rose round them waist deep. The old gentleman in leading his family, endeavouring 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, sand & stone coal were thrown up the distance of thirty yards—frequently trees of a large size were split open, 10 or 20 feet up. After wading eight miles, he came to dry land.

"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 & swim 4 miles before he reached dry land. The Indian says the Shawanoe Prophet has caused the Earthquake, to destroy the whites.

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