

EARTHQUAKE.

Communicated for the Barilstone Repository.

In descending the Mississippi on the night of the 6th February, we tied our boat to a willow-bar on the west bank of the river, opposite the head of the 9th Island, (counting from the mouth of the Ohio,) we were lashed to another boat—About 3 o'clock on the morning of the 7th, we were waked by the violent agitation of the boat, attended with a noise more tremendous and terrific than I can describe or any one conceive, who was not present or near to such a scene. The constant discharge of heavy cannon might give some idea of the noise for loudness, but this was infinitely more terrible, on account of its appearing to be subterraneous.

As soon as we waked we discovered that the bar to which we were tied was sinking, we cut loose and rowed our boats for the middle of the river. After getting out so far as to be out of danger from the trees, which were falling in from the banks—the swells in the river were so great as to threaten the sinking of the boat every moment. We stopped the oarholes with blankets to keep out the water—after remaining in this situation for some time, we perceived a light on the shore which we left—(we having a lighted candle in a lantern on our boat) were hailed and advised to land, which we attempted to do but could not effect it, finding the banks and trees still falling in.

At day light we perceived the head of the tenth Island. During all this time we had made only about four miles down the river—from which circumstance, and from that of an immense quantity of water rushing into the river from the woods—it is evident that the earth at this place or below, had been raised so high as to stop the progress of the river, and cause it to overflow its banks. We took the right hand channel of the river at this Island, and reached within about half a mile of the lower end of the town, we were affrighted with the appearance of a dreadful rapid or falls in the river just below us, we were so far in the suck that it was impossible now to land—all hope of surviving was now lost and certain destruction appeared to await us! We having passed the rapids without injury, keeping our bow foremost, both boats being still lashed together.

As we passed the point on the left hand below the Island, the bank and trees were rapidly falling in. From the state of alarm I was in at this time, I cannot pretend to be correct as to the length or height of the falls—but my impression is that they were about equal to the rapids of the Ohio. As we passed the lower point of the Island looking up the left channel, we thought the falls extended higher up the river on that side than on the right.

There was one boat coming down on the same morning I landed; when they came in sight of the falls, the crew were so frightened at the prospect, that they abandoned their boat and made for the Island in their canoe—two were left on the Island and two made for the west bank in the canoe—about the time of their landing they saw that the Island was violently convulsed; one of the men on the Island threw himself into the river to save himself by swimming; one of the men from shore met him with the canoe and saved him. This man gave such an account of the convulsions in the Island that neither of the three dared to venture back for the remaining man. The three men reached New Madrid by land. The one man remained on the Island from Friday morning till Sunday evening, when he was taken off by a canoe sent from a boat coming down. I was several days in company with this man; he stated that during his stay on the Island, there were frequent eruptions, in which sand and stone coal, and water were thrown up. The violent agitation

of the ground was such at one time as induced him to hold to a tree to support himself; the earth gave way at the place and he with the tree sunk down; and he got wounded in the fall. The fissure was so deep as to put it out of his power to get out at that place—he made his way along the fissure until a sloping side offered him an opportunity of crawling out. He states that frequent lights appeared—that in one instance, after one of the explosions near where he stood, he approached the hole from which the coal and sand had been thrown up, which was now filled with water, and on putting his hand into it found it was warm.

During my stay at New Madrid there were upwards of twenty boats landed, all of whom spoke of the rapids above and conceived of it as I had done.

Several persons who came up the river in a small barge, represented that there were other falls in the Mississippi about 7 miles below N. Madrid, principally on the eastern side, more dangerous than those above—and that some boats had certainly been lost in attempting to pass them—but they thought it was practicable to pass by keeping close in to the western shore.

From what I had seen and heard I was deterred from proceeding further, and nearly gave away what property I had. On my return by land up the right side of the river, I found the surface of the earth for 10 or 12 miles cracked in numberless places, running in different directions—some of which were bridged and some filled up with logs to make them passable; others were so wide that they were obliged to be surrounded; in some of those cracks the earth sunk on one side from the level to the distance of five feet, and from one to three feet there was water in most of them. Above this the cracks were not so numerous nor so great; but the inhabitants had generally left their dwellings and gone to the higher grounds.

Nothing appeared to have issued from the cracks; but wherever there was sand and stone coal, they seem to have been thrown up from holes—in most of those which varied in size there was water standing—In the town of New Madrid there were four, but neither of them had vented stone or sand—the size of them in diameter varied from twelve to fifty feet, and in depth from five to ten feet, from the surface to the water. In travelling out from New Madrid those holes were very frequent, and were to be seen in different places, as high as Fort Massac on the Ohio.

MATTHIAS M. SPEED.

Jefferson county, March 2d, 1812,