

old ; whereas, if it was really found in situ at the base of the precipice, its age would more probably exceed 100,000 years, as I shall endeavor to show in a subsequent chapter. Such a position, in fact, if well authenticated, would prove that man had lived in North America before the last great revolution in the physical geography of this continent had been accomplished ; in other words, that our race was more ancient than the modern valley, alluvial plain, and delta of the Mississippi—nay, what is more, was antecedent to the bluffs of Port Hudson and Natchez, already described. Now that elevated fresh-water formation, as I shall by and by endeavor to show, is the remnant of a river-plain and delta of extremely high antiquity ; and it would follow, if the human race was equally ancient, that it co-existed with one group of terrestrial mammalia, and, having survived its extinction, had seen another group of quadrupeds succeed and replace it.

In our excursion through the forest, from Washington to the Mammoth ravine, I crossed the path of the last tornado, which occurred May 17, 1840, one of three which have devastated this region since the year 1809. They all came from Texas, moving along from southwest to northeast, and laid waste a long strip of country, about a mile wide. The courses of each of the three whirlwinds were within a few miles of the other, and the last threw down many houses at Natchez, unroofed others, and leveled to the ground a railway terminus, causing the abandonment of a scheme for a rapid communication between Natchez, Vicksburg, and the State of Tennessee. On each side of the path of the tornado the land was finely timbered ; but where its force had been expended, old trees lay uprooted, and a growth of young wood was rising. Many large trunks had been broken off ten or twelve feet above the ground, and portions of the solid wood, torn and twisted into shreds, were still waving in the air.

This tornado checked the progress of Natchez, as did the removal of the seat of legislature to Jackson ; but it has suffered still more, since steam navigation has been so much improved, by the all-absorbing importance acquired by New Orleans as the