

examined their written accounts, the Chinese cataclysm is therein described as interrupting the business of agriculture, rather than as involving a general destruction of the human race. The great Yu was celebrated for having "opened nine channels to draw off the waters," which "covered the low hills and bathed the foot of the highest mountains." Mr. Davis suggests that a great derangement of waters of the Yellow River, one of the largest in the world, might even now cause the flood of Yaou to be repeated, and lay the most fertile and populous plains of China under water. In modern times the bursting of the banks of an artificial canal, into which a portion of the Yellow River has been turned, has repeatedly given rise to the most dreadful accidents, and is a source of perpetual anxiety to the government. It is easy, therefore, to imagine how much greater may have been the inundation, if this valley was ever convulsed by a violent earthquake.*

Humboldt relates the interesting fact that after the annihilation of a large part of the inhabitants of Cumana, by an earthquake in 1766, a season of extraordinary fertility ensued, in consequence of the great rains which accompanied the subterranean convulsions. "The Indians," he says, "celebrated, after the ideas of an antique superstition, by festivals and dancing, the destruction of the world and the approaching epoch of its regeneration."†

The existence of such rites among the rude nations of South America is most important, as showing what effects may be produced by local catastrophes, recurring at distant intervals of time, on the minds of a barbarous and uncultivated race. I shall point out in the sequel how the tradition of a deluge among the Araucanian Indians may be explained, by reference to great earthquake-waves which have repeatedly rolled over part of Chili since the first recorded flood of 1590. (See chap. 30. Book II.) The legend also of the ancient Peruvians of an inundation many years before the reign of the Incas, in which only six persons were saved on a float, relates to a region which has more than once been overwhelmed by inroads of the ocean, since the days of Pizarro (Chap. 30. Book II.). I might refer the reader to my account of the submergence of a wide area in Cutch so lately as the year 1819, when a single tower only of the fort of Sindree appeared above the waste of waters (see Chap. 28. Book II.), if it were necessary, to prove how easily the catastrophes of modern times might give rise to traditionary narratives, among a rude people, of floods of boundless extent. Nations without written records, and who are indebted for all their knowledge of past events exclusively to oral tradition, are in the habit of confounding in one legend a series of occurrences and incidents which have happened at various epochs; nor must we forget that the superstitions of a savage tribe are transmitted through all the progressive stages of society, till they

* See Davis on "The Chinese," published by the Soc. for the Diffus. of Use. Know. vol. i. pp. 137. 147.

† Humboldt et Bonpland, *Voy. Relat. Hist.* vol. i. p. 30.