

the same time an enormous opening was formed in the mountains of Cariaco, on the shores of the gulf bearing that name, when a great body of salt-water, mixed with asphaltum, issued from the micaceous schist. Earthquakes were very frequent about the end of the sixteenth century; and, according to the traditions preserved at Cumana, the sea often inundated the shores, rising from fifteen to twenty fathoms.

As no record exists at Cumana, and its archives, owing to the continual devastations of the termites, or white ants, contain no document that goes back farther than a hundred and fifty years, we are unacquainted with the precise dates of the ancient earthquakes. We only know, that, in times nearer our own, the year 1776 was at once the most fatal to the colonists, and the most remarkable for the physical history of the country. The city of Cumana was entirely destroyed, the houses were overturned in the space of a few minutes, and the shocks were hourly repeated during fourteen months. In several parts of the province the earth opened, and threw out sulphureous waters. These irruptions were very frequent in a plain extending towards Casanay, two leagues east of the town of Cariaco, and known by the name of the hollow ground (*tierra hueca*), because it appears entirely undermined by thermal springs. During the years 1766 and 1767, the inhabitants of Cumana encamped in their streets; and they began to rebuild their houses only when the earthquakes recurred once a-month. What was felt at Quito, immediately after the great catastrophe of February 1797, took place on these coasts. While the ground was in a state of continual oscillation, the atmosphere seemed to dissolve itself into water.

Tradition states that in the earthquake of 1766, as well as in another remarkable one in 1794, the shocks were mere horizontal oscillations; it was only on the disastrous 14th of December, 1797, that for the first time at Cumana the motion was felt by an upheaving of the ground. More than

Benzoni, *Hist. del Mondo Nuovo*, pp. 3, 31, and 33. James Castellon arrived at St. Domingo in 1521, after the appearance of the celebrated Bartholomew de las Casas in these countries. On attentively reading the narratives of Benzoni and Caulin, we find that the fort of Castellon was built near the mouth of the Manzanares (*alla ripa del fiume de Cumana*); and not, as some modern travellers have asserted, on the mountain where now stands the castle of San Antonio.