

“Prometheus Vincetus” of Æschylus we likewise read of “rivers of fire that with ravenous jaws devoured the smooth fields of blooming Sicily.” Eruptions are also noticed, with careful details, by Thucydides and Diodorus.]

Ovid, Lucretius, Lucian, Seneca, Ammian Marcellinus, and all the ancient historians, describe events which are the faithful image, and, as it were, the exact anticipation, of events in our days. Lucian remarks that the earthquake completed the destruction of those pillars of Palmyra and Baalbec which time and the fury of barbarians had spared :—

“Etiam perière ruinæ” (The very ruins have perished).

It is certain that no destructive force of a more terrible character exists, or one which, in a brief moment of time, can involve a greater number of men in death and ruin than an earthquake. The towns of Syria, and those “isles of Greece,” so dear to poesy and legend,

“Where burning Sappho loved and sung,”

were almost annihilated, with their inhabitants, in the first centuries of the Christian era. Under Tiberius and Justinian, about the years 19 and 526 A.D., nearly 200,000 persons perished in Syria and Asia Minor. The mediæval chroniclers refer to catastrophes not less terrible which occurred in the following centuries. Sixty thousand men lost their lives in the earthquake of Sicily in 1693; in 1793—less than a century afterwards—80,000 were swept away in the same ill-fated island. The earthquake of 1755, which destroyed Lisbon, and shook the coasts of Spain and Northern Africa, counted 60,000 victims; in that of Rio-Bamba, in 1797, 40,000 perished. It would be a too easy task to prolong this gloomy death-roll.

[A popular belief has long prevailed that England is exempt from these awe-inspiring convulsions. Such is not the case: the British Islands have been visited by frequent shocks, even in historic times, though happily unattended by any very serious catastrophes.

It is true that Camden speaks of the town of Kenchester as having been swallowed up by an earthquake; and that Reginald of Durham asserts that at Mungedene Hill, near Norham-on-Tweed, the earth yawned and engulfed many thousand Scots who were sacrilegiously ravaging St. Cuthbert’s lands. But these are probably the sombre imaginations of popular superstition. As far as authentic records go, English earthquakes have had no more serious consequences than a crumbling wall or two or a shattered spire.

An earthquake which shook all England occurred, according to Roger Wendover, in 974. Others, in 1076, 1081, 1089, 1099, are described as attended with or preceded by “heavy bellowing.” The “Saxon Chronicle” reports that in 1089 there was “a mickle earth-stirring over all England;” and Florence of Worcester that, in 1110, “a very great earthquake” was felt at Shrewsbury. “The river Trent was dried up at Nottingham from morning to the third hour of the day, so that men walked dry-shod through its channel.” In 1119, 1133, 1142, 1158, many parts of England were shaken. In 1165 “there was an earthquake,” says Matthew Paris, “in Ely, Norfolk, and Suffolk, so that it threw down men who