

THE OLDEST INHABITANT.

THE "Oldest Inhabitant" seems to live, move, and have his being in the newspapers. He is exclusively their property. His appearance is inseparably connected with the disasters or moving accidents which they chronicle; hail-storms, high winds, high tides, wet seasons, dry seasons, are all duly recorded in their columns, and the experience of the "Oldest Inhabitant," as uniformly appealed to in support of each separate event being the most tremendous and terrific and astounding that has ever occurred. Griffins and unicorns live in heraldry. Generous thieves and heroic foot-pads are the heroes of modern novels: each class of fiction creates its own proper fictitious personages. But penny-a-liners, it is, who create "Oldest Inhabitants." No elixir of life preserves their vitality; no miraculous pills have kept them hail and sturdy while ages waned, and friends and neighbors and acquaintances waned with them. We know not how they became what they are: we know not how one succeeds the other, or when the stroke of death smote, and promoted the title the now "Oldest Inhabitant." We merely see them in black and white; we must take them upon credit, and take the surpassing violence of such a storm, or the abundance of such a harvest, upon their credit too.

The authority of most people is cited for what they know or remember. The "Oldest Inhabitant," however, is only cited by an authority when he does not remember. We only hear of him when his memory can bring no parallel to the matter in hand: he is remarkable for remembering nothing. If he remembered, he would be of no use—he would never be cited. He might as well not be the "Oldest Inhabitant." The paragraph concoctor works away lustily at an inundation, or storm of thunder and lightning. He soon exhausts all the common-places of his craft. He duly makes the storm "visit" the devoted city; he chronicles in good set phrase the "ravages of the destructive element;" but he wants a climax, a peppery wind-up for his lucubrations; he has made the waves roll, and the "electric fluid" flash; he wants something more forcible and pointed still, to bring before his reader in a word

the violence and the fury of the tempest; so, summoning up with a sketch of his pen, an "Oldest Inhabitant," manufactured expressly for the occasion, he bids him dive back into the recesses of past times, grope into the inmost cavities of his memory, and resting fruitlessly from the search, declare upon his honor that no similar visitation has occurred within his recollection.

After this who can doubt the overwhelming size of the hailstones, or presume to question the vividness of the lightening? Hath not the "Oldest Inhabitant" vouched for it? Hath he not bethought him of his sunny childhood, of his "hot youth when General Washington was president," of his strong-minded manhood, of the calm times of his declining years? and in all that long space of worn-out time, whilst dynasties were changing, new nations being born, and old nations dying away—there was no such storm, no such big hail stones, no such vivid lightning, no such loud thunder. One almost feels proud of his own age as he reads the fact, or the record of the fact. What were our ancestors, that they should speak? They had no such grand things as their descendants. Their storms must have been mere child's play. The elements are only growing up; they are getting stronger and stronger every day. Fifty years hence, no doubt the then "Oldest Inhabitant" will bear testimony to a storm, the extent of a crop of gooseberries, or the productiveness of a field of cabbages, as being each or all of them greater than any within his remembrance. The "Oldest Inhabitant" of the present day was the young man of half a century ago; the young man of the present will be the "Oldest Inhabitant" in half a century to come. Every natural event is more remarkable now, so says the "Oldest Inhabitant," than any he can remember. The next "Oldest Inhabitant" will say the same; and so on; from which it is to be logically deduced, that in every successive year natural phenomena are increasing in the splendor and vastness of all their attributes; that floods are getting deeper, hailstones bigger, lightning brighter thunder louder, and summers and winters warmer or colder, as the case may be.