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A PHYSICAL CATASTROPHE TO AMERICA.*

“There is no sufficient reason why we should assume that the subterranean forces may not, in ages to come, add new systems of mountains to those which already exist. Why should we suppose the crust of the earth to be no longer subject to the agency which has formed the ridges now perceived on its surface? Since Mont Blanc and Monte Rosa, Sorata, Illimani and Chimborazo, the colossal summits of the Alps and Andes, are considered to be amongst the most recent elevations, we are by no means at liberty to assume that the upheaving forces have been subject to progressive diminution. On the contrary, all geological phenomena indicate alternate periods of activity and repose: the quiet we now enjoy is only apparent.”

THAT is what Alexander von Humboldt said in his work on the *Cosmos*, which I was reading in the spring of 1894—a youngster of twenty—in the city of Toronto, Canada—I, who, in this year, 1960, have almost alone of my contemporaries reached a ripe old age, and propose to give such account as I can of the great movement which, in a few dreadful seasons, changed the face of the earth.

It began without any premonition. There had been a period of great disturbance on the sun; huge sun-spots had come and gone during 1892 and 1893; there had been conjunctions of the planets; sundry small comets had appeared and vanished; singular auroral displays had testified to unusual magnetic activity on and around the globe; the summers had, in several countries, been abnormally dry and hot, while in others the winters had

been unusually cold. Violent storms of wind and rain had produced unwonted disasters. Financial troubles had testified to the over-population of many regions, the world's annual increase having reached ten millions of souls. The nations were uneasy, having great fleets and enormous armies in readiness for war. All mankind was in a state of anxious suspense, expecting strange developments of a political nature, instead of which the New Era was ushered in by physical occurrences of a most surprising kind.

Many of the steamships which entered the port of New York, then one of the finest and most thriving American cities, reported singular appearances at sea, about a hundred miles from shore. The ocean had, in places, a turbid look; in others it was seen to be blackish, while unusual currents were noticeable, as if some commotion were happening in the depths. In a few weeks alarm was transferred from the waters to the land, for it soon became apparent that the harbors along the whole Atlantic coast of the United States, now, alas, physically riven in twain, were rapidly shoaling. Steamers began to touch bottom in places they had been wont to pass over without hesitation. Dredges failed to maintain the required draught at important wharves. Bars and shoals began to block navigation, and the few

*This article is written by Arthur Harvey, Esq., and respectfully dedicated to Sir Henry Howarth.