

being covered with water, leaving an impression in miniature of a catastrophe much more important in its effects, which had, perhaps, preceded it ages before.

"One of the lakes formed on this occasion is sixty or seventy miles in length, and from three to twenty in breadth. It is in some places very shallow; in others, from fifty to one hundred feet deep, which is much more than the depth of the Mississippi river in that quarter. In sailing over its surface in a light canoe, the voyager is struck with astonishment at beholding the giant trees of the forest standing partially exposed amid a waste of waters, branchless and leafless.

"But the wonder is still further increased, on casting the eye on the dark-blue profound, to observe cane-brakes covering its bottom, over which a mammoth species of testudo is seen dragging its slow length along, while countless myriads of fish are sporting through the aquatic thickets."*

In the midst of this terrible convulsion, the first of western steamers was pursuing her way toward the south. But before mentioning her progress, the reader should be informed of the discovery of steam power, as likewise its application to utilitarian purposes.

In 1781, the invention of Watts' double-acting engine was made public, and in 1784 it was perfected.† Previous to this time many attempts had been made to apply steam to navigation, but, from want of a proper engine, all had been failures; and the first efforts to apply the new machine to boats were made in America, by John Fitch and James Rumsey.

The conception by Fitch, if the statement made by Robert Wickliffe is reliable, was formed as early as June, 1780, anterior to the announcement of Watts' discovery of the double-acting engine, though eleven years after his single engine had been patented.

This conception Fitch said he communicated to Rumsey. The latter gentleman, however, proposed a plan so entirely different from that of his fellow countrymen, (a plan which he is said to have originated in 1782 or '83,) that he cannot be considered a plagiarist. The idea of steam navigation was not new; it was the question—How shall we use the steam? which was to be so answered as to immortalize the successful respondents:—and to this question Fitch replied, By using Watts' engine so as to propel a system of

* Wetmore's Gazetteer, pp. 139, 140.

† Renwick on Steam Engine, 260.