

CURIOUS FREAKS OF EARTHQUAKE

Great Crevices Left in the Earth and Old Valencia Hotel Dropped Into the Street.

By some strange freak of fate, the most curious evidences left in the wake of Wednesday morning's earthquake are to be found concentrated in a little strip of land four blocks long and two blocks wide down in the devastated Mission valley. This strip reaches from Valencia down to Harrison and from Seventeenth to Nineteenth streets. Here are to be seen the most astounding testimony to the fearful power of the epoch-making convulsion.

The street for one block between Eighteenth and Nineteenth streets, on Valencia, defies all attempts at description. The same hand which gnarls the oaks seems to have been at work upon the car tracks, the curbing, the asphaltum, the very direction, in fact, in which the street is going. It is a distorted street, gnarled and twisted. Sharp turns in the car tracks, with accompanying spreading of the cable slot and broken open mounds of asphaltum, with running water down some ten feet under the surface, are to be seen.

At the corner of Eighteenth and Valencia streets is a hole perhaps ten feet in diameter. The asphaltum is spread open like the leaves of a calyx, while ten or a dozen feet below is a running stream of water which looks to be clear and sparkling. Whether this water comes from the broken mains or is the underground remnant of a creek which used to course down Eighteenth street is a puzzle which may never be solved. The old Willows creek, which used to be part of the attraction of Willows Park in the memory of the older residents of the Mission, once ran down what is now Eighteenth street. The fact that the street is on made ground most likely accounts for its little resistance to the force of the earthquake, although this explanation will not apply to the surrounding district, which furnishes its own phenomena.

The old Valencia Hotel, which stood at the corner of Nineteenth and Valencia, sank several feet and then pitched forward into the twisted street. When the mass of fallen bricks and timber was cleared away two days ago a huge mound of asphaltum, rising like the cone of a volcano, was discovered. The similarity to a volcano was marked especially by the crater-like crevice in the asphaltum at its apex. Here, also, was water to be seen running several feet below the surface.

Just what the earthquake did to the houses in the immediate vicinity of Valencia and Eighteenth streets cannot now be told, as the fire has since leveled them to the ground. Two blocks down to Howard street, between Seventeenth and Eighteenth streets, however, there is most eloquent evidence of the fierceness of the shock. Here a row of frame flats still stands, but their position has been shifted so considerably that they may scarcely be called a "row" of flats. One broken place in the line shows where a house once stood. The crumbled ruins lie in the street, mute evidence of the way in which the building must have been plunged into the street by the convulsion. Other buildings face the street at an oblique angle, while still others are turned on end.

There are other curious freaks to be seen. On Nineteenth street, between Valencia and Dolores, is a fissure extending for several yards, large enough for a man to fall in. Over on the corner of Seventeenth and Folsom streets is a hole in the pavement about six inches in diameter, from which cool water spouts continuously, very much like a spring in the mountains. Certainly the thirsty thousands who are without homes in the district find it so, although few of them, perhaps, ever tasted of the nectar of a mountain spring.

In a huge vacant area of ground between Eighteenth and Nineteenth streets, facing Dolores, are the untented poor who wend their way down to the asphaltum spring. They are all of the tenement class, for those who lived in the neighborhood with money enough to get out have effected an exodus. These people of the South Side flock around that block between Eighteenth and Nineteenth streets and speak in awed tones before the awful freaks of Nature which are to be seen there. Valencia's changed direction, the corkscrew effect of the cable slot and tracks with the mounds and little valleys where but a few days ago was a level, smooth street upon which cable cars ran constantly, seem to dull the sense of these people to the smoldering ruins and the scene of desolation about them.