

and mouth fire proceeded, lay buried, as they fabled, under the neighbouring island of Ischia. In this legend it is not difficult to trace the memory of some old volcanic eruption in that quarter. Similar in origin, probably, was the classic fable regarding Lake Avernus, near Vesuvius, which pictured it as the mouth of hell, over which no bird could complete its flight, but dropped overcome by the sulphurous exhalations. Sir Charles Lyell believes this lake to have been the crater of an extinct volcano, from which mephitic vapours exhaled for a long period after an eruption. Thus does science explode the poetical and superstitious fancies of the ages of ignorance, to replace them with the far more wonderful poetry of truth and facts far stranger than fiction.

Vesuvius must then have been an active volcano at some unknown period before the historic ages, and must have given passage to streams of melted lava long before the year 79, when the volcanic fires were recalled to their old channel. Since that date, though long intervals of repose have occurred, numerous eruptions of the mountain have taken place during the last eighteen hundred years. The most celebrated since that which overwhelmed Pompeii was that of 1779, in which white and sulphurous smoke rose above the summit to the height of twelve thousand feet; and at times a fountain of fire was hurled aloft, casting so bright a light that the smallest object could be clearly distinguished within six miles of Vesuvius. The liquid lava mixed with stones and scoriæ, after having mounted at least ten thousand feet, fell all around, still red-hot and liquid; and with that issuing fresh from the crater, formed a complete body of fire two and a half miles in breadth, and casting an intense heat to the distance of seven miles. Another remarkable eruption occurred in 1793, after which the crater filled up by lava boiling from below, and instead of a cavity became a rough and rocky plain; but in October of 1822, a violent eruption set in, which, in twenty days, blew out the whole accumulated mass, leaving an immense gulf, three miles in circumference, and more than fifteen hundred feet in depth. By this tremendous explosion, more than eight hundred feet of the cone was carried away, and the mountain reduced in height from four thousand two hundred feet to three thousand four hundred. The appearance of Vesuvius has not greatly altered since this eruption of 1822. If we ask whence come those enormous forces which produce such results in the