

of Herculaneum and Pompeii. The light of day disappeared while amid the deep darkness that prevailed, were heard the awful noises from the mountain. The solid crust of the earth shook with violence, and the unfortunate inhabitants, seized with deadly fear, fled in every direction.

Pliny the Younger, who was stationed at Misenum, has left us a striking picture of this terrible catastrophe. We quote from one of these letters addressed to Tacitus, to give an idea of the horror of the situation:—"A dark cloud precipitated itself on earth enveloped the sea and hid from our view the island of Capri, and the promontory of Misenum. My mother, entreating me, implored that I should seek means of safety for myself, but that she, weighed down with years and infirmity, would be unable to follow, adding that she would willingly resign herself to the last extremity, provided she should not prove the cause of my destruction. I declared, on the contrary, that I would never abandon her, and, after much entreaty, taking her by the hand, I pressed her to accompany me.

"Already the ashes commenced to fall upon us, although in small quantity. I turned round, and beheld behind me a thick smoke, which pursued us, spreading itself on the earth as a torrent. I cried to my mother, 'We must abandon the high road, or the crowd will trample upon us.' Hardly had we done this, than the darkness increased to such a degree, that it resembled one of those gloomy nights without a moon, or a chamber where the lights are suddenly extinguished. There were heard only the lamentations of women, the cries of children, the shouts of men. One called on his father; another sought his child or his wife. Some implored the succor of their gods; others believed that the final night had arrived which was destined to engulf the universe."

The eruption lasted three days. One historian relates that the terrified peasants imagined they perceived horrid giants moving in the chaos, their eyes raised towards heaven, which resembled a black funeral pall enveloping the earth.

The ashes were born by the tempest as far as Egypt and Syria. All the neighboring towns had disappeared. However, a great number of the inhabitants of Pompeii escaped destruction by flying from the city, as the excavations that have been made disclose only a small number of skel-