

THE INSTRUCTOR.

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TRAVELS.

ASCENT OF MOUNT ÆTNA.

(Concluded from page 386.)

The minerals which have been extracted from this mountain are numerous—and the museums of Biscari and Givena, in Catania, afford us proof that, on this account alone, a chemist or a naturalist would find an ever-varying source of interest in the examination of the surrounding objects. To the ordinary spectators, the island itself, with the thought of its multitudinous productions, its never failing fertility, its unrivalled beauty, and the calm serenity which distance throws on the scene, strikes the mind with a sort of awe that it is, I think, impossible for any man who has been accustomed to think at all not to regard with admiration. Even the dull gaze of rustic ignorance is startled into something more than its wonted sameness. The coup d'œil of a shot, permitting the sight of objects which, when below a man has been accustomed to consider at a wonderful distance many of them out of sight of one another and others that he had always looked up to—to see these, so far below him that they seem within his grasp, cannot but awaken the attention of the simple peasant who is moved with any of the springs which animate the rest of the creation.

Having looked on all around and beneath me for some time, I entered the crater. I was certainly surprised at a sight so unlike what I had formed an idea of. It was perfectly walled round by its own ashes in every part except the breach by which I entered. The height of this wall I suppose might be from fifty to seventy feet. The bottom of the crater was a perfect level, except being interspersed with about twenty small hillocks, the largest very little higher than a good-sized hay-cock, all of them with proportionate craters, emitting smoke but no fire. The crater, by the imperfect guess which I could make, seemed to be at this time about three

miles in circumference, being nearly a perfect circle in form—and I am inclined to think I am not far from the mark in this estimate, as I made the circuit of it at the base, in which my idea of its size was confirmed. With regard to traversing the crater, I am convinced it might have been effected, and also that we might have inspected those minor volcanoes within, but it would have required great care. A single whiff of the nitrous smoke in your face might suffice to lay you senseless—besides the ground underneath which seemed to be of a sort coarse sand, was still hot. I never came prepared for such an exploit. To have reached the highest point in the cone, so as to be able to get a peep into the crater, was the boundary of my ambition, and I had timed myself to be back to Riposto by the evening. I was moreover so fatigued by the late efforts I had made, that I felt myself quite unable to make use of what would have been esteemed by many the most fortunate circumstance that could have happened.

The flatness of the bottom of the crater is clear proof, in my opinion, that there exists no vacuum underneath of any consequence. The moment the ebullition occasioned by the elements within ceases, the whole gradually subsides, finds its own level, and consolidates. It is only at the moment of the discharges that there is any depth of hollow below. This is clearly evinced by looking at all the old craters of Ætna (Monte Rossi excepted), where nothing of this sort is discoverable, but a solid mass now occupying nearly to the brim the mouths which only a few years ago vomited, from an immense depth, the most frightful emissions of fire.

I contented myself with taking one or two pieces of the ashes, hut out of one of the hillocks, and proceeded to go round the cone outside. This I found great difficulty in doing, since there was the same sort of hard metallic lava to go over again. Every step I took I had first to make fast a purchase with