

Passing through Puteoli towards the east, you come out on a noticeable stripe of land between the precipitous cliff and the sea. By the marine deposits here found, mingled with the remains of human workmanship, it appears that this stripe, like the shore westward of Puteoli, has been successively depressed and elevated. On the sides of the cliff, 35 feet above the present sea level, the borings of lithodomi may be observed, and on the summit of the cliff are substructions of villas which once overhung the sea.

As you leave this narrow stripe, the road by which you travel passes through a massive stream of solid lava, which, in prehistoric times, flowed down from the Solfatara already visited, and here entered the sea in a stream one-fourth of a mile in breadth, and seventy feet in thickness.

You pass, also, on the left, some stone quarries, in which, exposed to the hottest rays of the sun, you see—for the first time perhaps, in your life—unfortunate human beings working in iron fetters. Alas! that the clank of those degrading links should be associated for ever in the recollections of any one with the name of Italy!—The labourers in the stone quarries of Epipolæ—whom, perhaps, your imagination may summon up—were more happy. The fortune of war had placed them there. But what is it that, in the Neapolitan states, according to the testimony of Mr. Gladstone, causes men, and perhaps some of these, to be thus condemned to chains?

Proceeding by the coast road homewards towards Naples, you remark, to the westward of the heights of Posilipo, a few hundred yards from the shore, a small island. This is Nisida, the last volcanic object in the neighbourhood of Vesuvius, which we have to notice. It is a cone with an extinct crater, into which, on the south side, the sea finds an entrance by a breach in the rim. A convenient little harbour is thus formed.—You may gaze on the island of Nisida with interest, for several historical reasons. Here Lucullus, the celebrated conqueror of Mithridates, possessed a villa, which, a few years after his death, became remarkable as being the place to which Marcus Junius Brutus retired after participating in the assassination of Cæsar, and where he left his Portia, the daughter of Cato, when he departed for Greece, destined never to return. It was here, too, that the interview took place between him and Cicero, of which the latter has left a graphic account, wherein the orator declares that he found the patriot “*nihil nisi de pace et concordia civium cogitantem.*” In yonder little volcanic isle we have, then, a memento of the final but unsuccessful struggle for Roman liberty. We, curiously enough, have before us in the same object the scene of the extinction of the Western empire itself in the person of its last chief.—In exile here, a pensioner on the generosity of Odoacer, the first king of Italy, lived and died the son of Orestes, Romulus Augustulus, the closing member of that series of puppets who, from A.D. 455 to 476, filled the throne and brought contempt upon the name of the Emperors of the West.

Since the great explosion of Vesuvius in A.D. 79, the craters of the Phlegrean fields appear to have become for the most part quiescent. The interruptions of their repose have been three, already noticed in passing: one in 1198, when the Solfatara emitted a stream of lava; one in 1302, when Epomeo, in Ischia, did the same; the third in 1538, when Monte Nuovo was thrown up.

The intervals which have occurred between the fifty-two eruptions of Vesuvius, since that of A.D. 79, I make out to be respectively the following—124 (years), 269, 40, 308, 43, 13, 90, 167,

194, 131, 29, 22, 12, 2, 2, 3, 6, 5, 5, 3, 8, 2, 7, 14, 3, 4, 2, 6, 1, 3, 6, 3, 5, 2, 1, 6, 10, 1, 4, 3, 1, 4, 3, 2, 6, 3, 3, 4, 6, 2, 3 (1850).

In the earlier portion of the Christian era, some eruptions may not have been recorded. The generations of men who could forget the sites of considerable cities may have neglected to record the activity of a volcano. If there have been no omissions, the eruptions of Vesuvius appear to have become more frequent since the year 1631.—It has also been observed that there is a degree of alternation between the movements of Etna and Vesuvius. In no instance have the two mountains been in active eruption simultaneously. Hence they appear to be escape-valves to one connected mass of igneous matter—the upward pressure of the elastic gases with which it is charged finding relief by the one, when the other is obstructed.

While standing on the summit of Vesuvius, and contemplating the enormous column of steam which is generally in the act of being blown off, one is inclined to rush to the conclusion that the molten rock which overspreads the surrounding scene far and wide, has been shot up by nothing more or less than the familiar force which, with such irresistible power, lifts the piston. But further reflection induces a correction of this opinion. It is likely that the steam is simply produced by the infiltration of sea-water on the heated mass within the base of the mountain.

When we consider the fact that the ground on which we tread is but the surface of a rind,—that by experiment this rind increases 1° Fahrenheit in temperature for every fifty-four feet of vertical depth,—that at the depth of twenty miles granite must be in a state of fusion—we cannot fail to see that it is probable that the seat of all volcanic energy is in some common central igneous mass with which all the volcanic vents more or less communicate; and that these vents are very possibly established and maintained in order that the globe may not one day fly to pieces like a Rupert's drop.

But what is it that determines the moment when those fierce ebullitions must occur which ruffle the surface of the Phlegethon below, and cause its molten waves to rise on high, and so rudely flout the roofs of the cavernous crypts over which men dwell, shaking them and their structures, “massy-proof,” from their propriety? What generates those expansive gases whose excess from time to time thrusts up before them the fiery fluid through which they seek to force their way?

These are queries which remain unresolved. Like the storms which observers notice, but cannot explain, in the magnetic world—these movements in the inner abysses of the earth must still, for the present, be classed as mysteries.

We doubtless here have glimpses of the forces, whatever they are, which, in the old foretime of our planet's history, burst apart the primitive crust; which tilted its strata in divers directions, as the uneasy polar sea bursts up its ice; which exposed huge sections of those strata with their contents, to the view, the use, and the delight of men; superinducing, apparently, at first, a scene of ruin,—harsh, sharp, bare, and confused; a scene, however, which resolved itself at last into what we now call mountain, hill, and vale; interspersed with river, cataract, lake, and sea; softened in outline by abrasion and disintegration, by slopes of alluvion and surfaces of mould, and coloured warmly over by mosses, lichens, herbage, and woods, and blue ethereal haze.

But though the seat of volcanic energy be at the core of the globe, and its force, as is most probable, supplied by chemical agency operating there on an enormous scale—may it not be