

# THE INSTRUCTOR.

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## TRAVELS.

### ASCENT OF MOUNT AENA.

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On arriving at the steep part of the cone. it was equally difficult, but less perilous. I should think that a fall upon such ground as I have described must be dangerous in the extreme, for though one's hands may be at liberty, they would but ill defend you. It was ten times more uneven than the deepest ploughed field I ever saw; and from the little purchase the foot has when it rests on the points of this lava the difficulty of retaining one's equilibrium is greater than seems possible to those who have never been there. The ground deceives you by not yielding to the pressure of the foot as you cannot help expecting it to do every moment. If ever you saw a cat pick her way along a wall, the ridge of which is fortified with broken glass, you will bring it to remembrance, and think that my passage at this juncture was neither more agreeable nor easy.

I can in some measure allow for the various and inconsistent accounts of this mountain which have been brought us by different travellers, all equally respectable in point of veracity, and yet different so widely in particulars. Every eruption alters the face of things. Sometimes this change or this eruption is not visible: for example, in the previous December a dull flame was described at the mouth of the crater, barely seen from Catania: - it only lasted three days and was thought nothing of. This we found had been an eruption, which had considerably altered the appearance of the crater, and were surprised no one had named the circumstance, though it must have required one who had known the state it was in before to have perceived the change. Our guide let us up the side of the cone, which he was certain was the easiest of ascent. I had seen a picture taken from the spot, of travellers on the cone of

Aena, and observed at the time that it must have been greatly exaggerated, as it would not be possible to ascend what resembled a perpendicular rather than a slope. I now, however, found that the picture was too true. The fatigue here became immense. Then there was a wind, which had all the bitterness of the winter wind in English, without any of that force and buoyancy which the air has in the colder regions, whilst the continual ascent made my legs and thighs ache intolerably. I could not stop to rest, for I was always up to my knees in ashes, which underneath were quite warm, or if not, it was because the surface of the ashes was supported by a bed of snow. Sometimes one leg was in snow and the other in warm ashes. All the pits are filled with snow. I felt my strength going sensibly, and notwithstanding I had come all the way on purpose to visit the crater, I entirely gave up the task, and therefore, though not fifty yards from the mouth, began to descend. I thought, however, though I could not go up I might go round the cone, and proceeded accordingly; when, on arriving at the south-western side of it, I found that the wall (if you may call it so) of the crater had been broken down by some recent violence and that the way was open for us to enter, without either the difficulty of climbing up to the highest ridge or the danger of descending inside, an exploit which few travellers, however great their thirst for knowledge, willingly perform. You may conceive my delight on being able thus to view, without risk or trouble, the great phenomenon which so many a modern Pliny has come here for, and in vain. Had I had any conception I should have been able to have explored the crater, as I certainly think I might, I would have arranged for it, and made some observations which I am not without hopes would have been serviceable to future travellers. As it was, I arrived there exhausted from travelling all night on horseback, among ruts and precipices, where I