

deep mass of drift snow was covered by a stream of volcanic sand, which is an extremely bad conductor of heat; and thus the subsequent liquid lava might have flowed over the whole, without affecting the ice beneath, which at such a height (ten thousand feet above the level of the sea) would endure as long as the snows of Mont Blanc, unless melted by volcanic heat from below.*

24. HERCULANEUM AND POMPEII.—But all these phenomena are far surpassed in interest by the wonderful preservation of the cities, which were overwhelmed by the first recorded eruption of Vesuvius. In the words of an eloquent writer, “After nearly seventeen centuries had rolled away, the city of Pompeii was disinterred from its silent tomb, all vivid with undimmed hues; its walls fresh as if painted yesterday; not a tint faded on the rich mosaic of its floors; in its forum the half-finished columns, as left by the workman’s hand; before the trees in its gardens the sacrificial tripod; in its halls the chest of treasure; in its baths the strigil; in its theatres the counter of admission; in its saloons the furniture and the lamp; in its triclinia the fragments of the last feast; in its cubicula the perfumes and the rouge of faded beauty; and everywhere the skeletons of those who once moved the springs of that minute, yet gorgeous machine of luxury and of life.” †

* Principles of Geology, vol. ii. p. 126.

† The Last Days of Pompeii, by Sir E. L. Bulwer.