

CHAPTER XXIV.

VOLCANIC DISTRICT OF NAPLES.

History of the volcanic eruptions in the district round Naples—Early convulsions in the island of Ischia—Numerous cones thrown up there—Epomeo not an habitual volcano—Lake Avernus—The Solfatara—Renewal of the eruptions of Vesuvius, A. D. 79.—Pliny's description of the phenomena—Remarks on his silence respecting the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii—Subsequent history of Vesuvius—Lava discharged in Ischia in 1302—Pause in the eruptions of Vesuvius—Monte Nuovo thrown up—Uniformity of the volcanic operations of Vesuvius and the Phlegræan Fields in ancient and modern times.

I SHALL next give a sketch of the history of some of the volcanic vents dispersed throughout the great regions before described, and consider the composition and arrangement of their lavas and ejected matter. The only volcanic region known to the ancients was that of the Mediterranean; and even of this they have transmitted to us very imperfect records relating to the eruptions of the three principal districts, namely, that round Naples, that of Sicily and its isles, and that of the Grecian Archipelago. By far the most connected series of records throughout a long period relates to the first of these provinces; and these cannot be too attentively considered, as much historical information is indispensable in order to enable us to obtain a clear view of the connection and alternate mode of action of the different vents in a single volcanic group.

Early convulsions in the Island of Ischia.—The Neapolitan volcanos extend from Vesuvius, through the Phlegræan Fields, to Procida, and Ischia, in a somewhat linear arrangement, ranging from the north-east to the south-west, as will be seen in the annexed map of the volcanic district of Naples (plate 7.). Within the space above limited, the volcanic force is sometimes developed in single eruptions from a considerable number of irregularly scattered points; but a great part of its action has been confined to one principal and habitual vent, Vesuvius or Somma. Before the Christian era, from the remotest periods of which we have any tradition, this principal vent was in a state of inactivity. But terrific convulsions then took place from time to time in Ischia (Pithecura), and seem to have extended to the neighbouring isle of Procida (Prochyta); for Strabo * mentions a story of Procida having been torn asunder from Ischia; and Pliny † derives its name from its having been poured forth by an eruption from Ischia.

The present circumference of Ischia along the water's edge is eighteen miles, its length from west to east about five, and its breadth

* Lib. v.

† Nat. Hist. lib. iii. c. 6.